

## VILLAIN 421

### Chapter 421: The Aftermath (1)

#### The Demonic Sea...

— Shizclar Bay —

Upon those vast, restless waters, where the waves never calmed and relentless storms lashed the sea with howling winds and dense fog...

Even though a long time had passed since the battle between the Empire and the Ultras, this place still bore the scars of that conflict.

Lightning still cracked across the skies, striking down with fury, further stirring the turmoil below.

Few dared venture near the bay when the sea raged like this .. not even the nightmare creatures dwelling in these waters.

Yet, cutting through the raging waves was a single black ship, devoid of any flags or markings. Its origins unknown, but its crew... carried names that shook the world.

On an urgent mission to find Maekar Valerion and the others, this marked the seventh day of Vendrick's voyage through these treacherous seas.

Standing at the ship's prow, clad in his usual tattered garb, Vendrick let the harsh winds whip through his disheveled hair.

"..."

He remained silent, but those with him had long grown uneasy .. none more so than Blattier, the High Priest of the Church.

Draped in his pristine white robes, the archbishop scowled at the horizon.

"We've been in this cursed place for days, yet found nothing but ourselves adrift in these godforsaken waters. No enemies. No beasts. Nothing."

It was as if they'd stumbled into a place completely cut off from the rest of the world. Since entering Chizklar Bay, Vendrick's team hadn't encountered a single soul.

There were many strange places in their world, but Vendrick knew well .. this was no natural phenomenon.

"It's a labyrinth."

Those words, spoken by Mist Umbra who materialized silently behind him, broke the tense silence.

"A labyrinth?" the delegation from the Church and the Shadow Court echoed in confusion, glancing at each other.

Unlike Vendrick, Mist was generous enough to explain his thoughts.

"It's a closed loop. You may not have noticed, but we've been sailing in circles ever since we entered these waters."

He pointed toward a violent thunderstorm in the distance.

"That's the fifth time we've passed that same storm."

Realization slowly dawned on their faces as they started to grasp the situation.

It was hard to notice such patterns when lost at sea with nothing but endless waves in every direction.

But people like Mist, with sharp instincts, could piece the truth together.

Vendrick, of course, had realized it long ago.

"A Labyrinth Spell."

Vendrick spoke plainly. Having spent much of his life alongside Millicent, he was familiar with most of the world's magic.

But the labyrinth they were caught in... was on a whole other level. Nothing he had seen before compared to this.

A massive spell covered the entirety of shizclar Bay.

"A closed loop... keeping us trapped here, endlessly circling."

Every time they neared the bay's edge, they inexplicably found themselves back at the beginning.

Blattier frowned, his concern growing, placing all his hopes on Vendrick.

"How do we break such a spell? Should I try flying above its range?"

Vendrick shook his head.

"Won't matter. Whether by sea or sky, you'll end up right back where you started."

Having observed the waters for days, Vendrick had come to a single conclusion.

"These labyrinths are powerful... but not unbreakable. Of course, it would be a different story if the witch who cast it were still here."

For a labyrinth of this scale, its power source had to be inside it.

Vendrick was certain Beatrice wasn't present .. based on the reports of what had transpired on the Ultras Continent during their journey.

That could only mean one thing ..the key to breaking the spell was somewhere nearby.

"The source of the spell... is down there."

Vendrick pointed his sword at the ocean depths. Doubt flickered among those who didn't know him well.

But Mist and Blattier's trust in him was proof enough.

Vendrick knew .. somewhere below the waves, Beatrice had left them a trap.

It would be dangerous to dive into those depths. Who knew what horrors lay in wait?

But the Empire had no choice.

So, at that moment...

Three figures dove into the sea without hesitation.

Vendrick. Mist Umbra. Joseph Blattier.

The three of them plunged into the depths of the demonic sea, descending into the labyrinth Beatrice had prepared for them .. unaware of what awaited in the darkness below.

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Back on the Imperial side...

A full day had already passed since Frey and his companions returned home.

The entirety of their time spent on the Ultras Continent had only been seventeen days.

But for them, those were seventeen days of pure hell.

Upon their return, Frey was the last to step out of the portal, draping his cloak over the princess to conceal her demonic horns, shielding her from the curious eyes of those waiting outside.

Yet as soon as they drew near, Sansa vanished into the shadows without a sound, as if swallowed by darkness itself.

Frey knew that the princess would face a difficult road ahead within the imperial palace, having completely lost her humanity.

But his mind was far too drained to dwell on anything more.

The moment Ada embraced him ..and Carmen approached soon after... Frey felt his body finally relax, a weariness unlike anything he'd ever known before washing over him.

His entire body, and even his soul, were completely exhausted.

After fighting harder than anyone else, Frey Starlight had completed an impossible mission.

And another, far more difficult task still awaited him.

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Main mission: Survive the Pursuit (Completed)

Reward: 10,000 Achievement Points.

Final mission: Save or Kill Danzo.

Reward: [Screenshot] Skill.

Penalty: Half of the main characters will die.

Time Limit: 1 Month.

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Staring at the mission screen, then at Danzo's limp body being carried away—rushed to his only remaining family, his father who ran to his side without hesitation—Frey found himself unable to do anything but watch.

Resting his chin on Ada's shoulder, Frey leaned on his sister completely, surrendering to the exhaustion.

"Frey?"

Feeling her brother's weight lighten as his body relaxed, Ada realized that Frey, his eyes already closed, had finally fallen asleep.

He had stayed awake every single moment of their time on the Ultras Continent.

Now, at last, the young man had reached his limit.

He allowed himself a brief rest, a well-earned reprieve in the only place he could truly call home .. by his sister's side.

Despite all the hardships he had faced, and the trials yet to come, Frey had earned this one moment of peace.

Carmen took over carrying him as the Starlight family quietly withdrew from the scene, slipping away from the chaos stirred by the recent events.

## Chapter 422: The Aftermath (2)

Unlike the other times when he'd lost consciousness, Frey only slept for a single day before forcing his recovering body back into motion once again.

You could say that only Frey was capable of recovering from such a state in the first place.

After repeatedly detonating his [Ignition] and maintaining his Blood Form in constant battle, his body was a chaotic mess inside.

Yet he moved as though nothing was wrong.

After his brief rest, he spent the following day with Ada, recounting what had happened on the Ultras Continent .. carefully avoiding the parts about how many times he was stabbed, crushed, or nearly killed.

The Elite Class was the talk of the Empire.

Everyone was shocked that they had survived such a deadly trap, and most of the credit naturally went to Phoenix.

As expected, the Lord of Sunlight had done more than enough to earn their praise.

But even he wouldn't have survived alone in the Ultras Continent without the help of his fellow elite classmates.

The younger generation had proven themselves, showing the Empire—and especially their enemies—that they were no ordinary talents.

Stories of the boy who faced a thousand soldiers alone, the demonic girl who tore through armies, and the young man who wielded every element... spread quickly.

These feats earned them an early graduation from the Temple.

The situation had changed completely now, and war was inevitable.

Frey was well aware of this.



But for now, he didn't care much about the war.

His focus was solely on one person.

He had been asking about him nonstop.

Danzo.

Taken away by his father, Adam Smasher, who had turned his Silver Dragon Guild into a makeshift hospital, desperately searching for a way to save his only son.

Watching the giant, hulking Adam running frantically through the halls in desperation to save his boy was a pitiful sight.

But it was the harsh reality they were forced to face, especially for Frey, who couldn't stop trying to find a way to help his friend.

With the 10,000 Achievement Points he'd earned, Frey turned to the System's advice, hoping it might hold the answer.

Whether it was random... or direct...

The answer was the same as before .. three question marks, adding yet another burden to his already troubled heart.

The Complete Devil Seed.

Curing something like that was simply impossible for Frey, who despite his vast knowledge of the world and its many mysteries, still couldn't figure out a way to save his friend.

Drowning in despair, Frey found himself returning to the temple the next day, having hit a dead end.

The temple, now nearly deserted after losing its director and suffering through events that had completely ruined its reputation, was a hollow shadow of what it once was.

Ignoring the curious gazes directed his way, Frey searched for the only person left whom he could turn to for help.

Thankfully, she was still there.

The Saintess Candidate of the Church... Uriel Platini.

She had remained behind in the temple, spared from participating in the last war because the bishop refused to let her endanger herself.

She was already chosen as the next Saintess after Yurasha, and thus they couldn't afford to risk her safety.

But by staying behind, Uriel remained unaware of most of the terrifying events that had unfolded over the past few days.

And then, Frey appeared before her out of nowhere, prompting her to instinctively greet him with a long embrace.

"Uriel..."

Frey spoke with a grim expression, and Uriel slowly loosened her grip on him.

"Welcome back... Frey."

Her smile was like something sacred in itself. But that smile gradually faded as she registered the state Frey was in.

"What kind of battle did you fight to end up like this?"

"I'm fine," Frey answered briefly, but Uriel immediately rejected that claim.

"No, you're not! Your internal organs look like they've been trampled several times over."

Summoning her holy power, Uriel reached out to heal him, but Frey stopped her by grabbing her hand.

"I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I'm not the one who needs your power right now."

Even though they were standing in the middle of the temple courtyard under the gaze of countless onlookers, Frey didn't hesitate to ask Uriel for help.

"I know I already owe you, but please, Uriel... I need your help again."

Frey was desperate.

Even more desperate than when he had come to her for Sansa's sake.

You could say he was a man who had hit a wall so hard that he had no idea what his next step should be.

Seeing him like this, Uriel didn't play around. She became serious too.

"How exactly can I help?"

She asked directly, and Frey let out a tired sigh.

"We'll need to leave the temple first."

Hearing that, Uriel gave a small, weary smile.

"Don't tell me you're going to make me put my holy power into another sword, are you?"

Frey smiled as well, unable to help himself as he recalled the time when she helped him save Sansa.

He truly wished their situation now was as simple as it had been back then.

"I want you to try and heal one of my comrades. I think there's something demonic inside him. Maybe your holy power can help."

Uriel was the destined successor of the Saintess, a girl whose power was said to far surpass even Yurasha's.

Blessed with the purest form of holy energy, Frey believed she might just be able to help Danzo.

Without hesitation, Uriel agreed to follow him to the Silver Dragon Guild's headquarters.

The sight of the two walking side by side attracted countless stares, especially since both were well-known among the public.

But neither of them cared.

"You know, Frey, you already owe me one favor. How are you planning to repay me this time? This makes two, you know."

Uriel tried to lighten the heavy mood, speaking to him as she used to in the past.

But Frey answered immediately, his voice steady with resolve.

"I'll do anything you ask."

Hearing the tone of his voice, Uriel realized just how serious he was.

"Anything...?"

She repeated softly, her mind wandering as she wondered what "anything" could possibly mean.

But Frey interrupted her train of thought when he suddenly stopped walking.

"We're here."

The Silver Dragon Guild wasn't far, and before they knew it, they had arrived.

Without further delay, the two of them stepped inside.

Frey had already explained Danzo's situation to Uriel, so she knew exactly why she was there.

On the other hand...

Adam Smasher wasn't letting anyone near the room where his unconscious son lay.

But Frey was an exception ... as Danzo's friend and the one who had endured that same hell alongside him.

Adam couldn't refuse him, especially when he had brought Uriel Platini, the Saintess candidate, with him.

Despite his enormous frame and terrifying presence, Adam Smasher couldn't hide the signs of collapse written all over his face.

For all his physical might and brutal strength, Danzo was his only family. His wife had passed long ago, leaving him with no one but his son.

Adam had tried every method imaginable to heal his child, but Danzo hadn't opened his eyes once.

When Frey and Uriel followed him, Adam led them to a secret chamber .. the most secure place in the entire guild.

The moment he opened the iron door for them, the sharp scent of medicine hit their noses, filling the air as they stepped inside and surveyed the room.

It was a vast, sterile chamber, where Danzo lay unconscious on a bed, his body connected to dozens of wires and tubes.

His gray hair was a mess, and his face bore an unprecedented weakness, dark circles painting his features.

The once muscular body he had honed through years of training was now covered in scratches and wounds.

Gvardiol had crushed every bone in his body, leaving him completely paralyzed and unable to summon even the faintest trace of aura.

The moment Uriel placed her hand over his chest, her expression darkened. A deep frown settled on her face before she looked up, her eyes filled with sorrow at the boy's condition.

With his core and aura channels utterly shattered, Danzo was left crippled.

Forget fighting .. he wouldn't even be able to walk again.

Perhaps she might have been able to heal him if he could still draw on his aura, but in this state...

There wasn't much she could do.

Channeling a massive amount of holy energy into him, Uriel Platini gave it her all, restoring some color to Danzo's pale face and healing the internal injuries Adam's medical team couldn't reach.

But even after she had poured every ounce of her power into him, scanning his body again and again...

She found nothing of what Frey had warned her about.

Turning toward him, Uriel shook her head regretfully.

But she said nothing in front of Adam Smasher, who showed genuine gratitude, thanking her and Frey repeatedly, his relief palpable.

Frey, however, only frowned deeper.

As soon as they left the room, leaving Danzo behind, Uriel immediately apologized.

"I'm sorry, Frey... I couldn't find any trace of the demonic power you spoke of. I checked him several times, but... there's nothing."

She wanted to ask if he was sure.

But looking at Frey Starlight's expression, she realized he wasn't speaking from doubt or fear. He knew.

Yet even so, there was nothing she could do. Her holy power was useless against whatever was afflicting Danzo.

And that was what pushed Frey closer to the edge, unable to find any way to save his friend.

Twenty-eight days remained before the deadline.

It was a race against time .. a race that threatened to break something deep inside him.

Chapter 423: A Dark Fate (1)

- Frey Starlight's POV -

Barely two days had passed since we escaped that cursed land of the Ultras, yet I already found myself at a dead end when it came to saving Danzo.

Sitting on one of the temple's benches, staring at the small indoor pond before me, my thoughts wandered far away.

Apparently, my brooding expression bothered Uriel, who sat beside me. She eventually broke the silence.

"Frey, forgive my question, but how can you be so sure that your friend has a demonic power inside him?"

Hearing that, I stared at her for several long seconds before sighing heavily and turning my gaze away once more.

There was no way I could explain the system to her .. not even to Uriel, who had helped me time and time again without asking for anything in return.



"Let's just say I have my ways..."

I gave her a vague answer. Uriel didn't seem too satisfied with it, but she chose not to call me out on it.

She was always considerate like that.

"Should we try again later? Maybe my holy power will work next time."

I shook my head in response.

"There's no need. You've already done enough, Uriel."

If someone as pure as her couldn't detect the seed, then no one else in the church could either. That alone ruled out the entire holy faction.

"So what do you plan to do now?"

"I don't know."

I was completely in the dark this time, unable to find a way forward no matter how hard I tried.

Uriel wanted to help. I appreciated that.

She was one of the main heroines of my old novel. I knew well that everything she did came from her kindness. If she saw someone in need, she would never hesitate to help. Even her earlier words about me owing her something... they were just her way of making me feel less guilty for receiving her help. She was always considerate like that.

Without realizing it, a faint smile crept onto my face.

The saintess, Uriel...

The cold princess of the Moonlight family, Seris...

The mysterious witch, Selina...

The Empyrean Maria...

And finally, the miracle... Audrey.

Each of the five main heroines had something unique that set them apart from the others. Their abilities made them destined to become great powers in the future.

Especially the last one.

"...Audrey."

Thinking of her, I wondered if she had been here, would she have found a way to save Danzo with her special powers?

But she wouldn't be appearing anytime soon. I had no way of reaching her. After all, she wasn't even on this planet.

Knowing that only deepened my despair.

Noticing the darkness surrounding me like a suffocating aura, Uriel tried to shift the subject.

"So, what will you do now?"

She was referring to the ongoing war between us and the Ultras, subtly reminding me of the looming future.

"I heard the current emperor is working tirelessly to rescue the missing soldiers from the bay. Once he succeeds... the war is expected to erupt again, fiercer than ever."

Sir Alon Valerion.

A veteran warrior, terrifyingly strong, with vast experience and abilities that put him on par with Dragoth.

Uriel was asking me indirectly if I planned to participate in the war.

My answer was simple.

"I don't know."

I had no problem returning to that continent and fighting until my body gave out. Maybe I'd find some kind of release if I did. Maybe I'd find that bastard who did this to Danzo.

But right now, I felt no desire to do so. All I wanted was to save my friend lying in the Silver Dragon Guild's infirmary.

Without realizing it, I trembled every time the thought crossed my mind.

'What if the thirty days run out... and I still can't save him?'

Then, I'd be forced to kill him... with my own hands.

Staring at those hands, I couldn't accept that outcome no matter how hard I tried.

The system was pushing me toward that moment .. the very thing I was desperately trying to avoid.

And so, I spent most of my time lost in that dark mental space, sitting quietly beside Uriel, unable to utter a single word.

But everything changed a few minutes later.

When I received an unexpected message from Ghost.

The moment I read it, I shot up from my seat.

"What happened?" Uriel asked, startled.

"Danzo... he woke up."

It was an ironic twist.

We'd been at his side less than an hour ago.

Looking at him in that state, unconscious and broken, I thought he'd remain like that for a long time.

But he shattered that expectation immediately, waking up on the second day.

I was surprised, but Uriel seemed as though she had expected it all along.

"I healed most of his internal injuries with my holy power. Once his condition stabilized, it wasn't surprising that he woke up sooner than expected."

Still, she hadn't been able to cure his paralysis or restore his ability to use aura.

Even so, I was grateful to her.

And so, I found myself rushing back to the Silver Dragon Guild without delay.

When we arrived, I found several familiar faces waiting.

"Frey... you're finally here."

It was Snow.

Standing with him were Ghost and Dawn.

This was the first time I had seen them since we parted ways at the teleportation gate.

"Why haven't you gone in yet?" I asked, a bit rushed, seeing them all gathered at the entrance.

"Well... it seems the guild master is causing a bit of a scene right now," Snow said with a faint smile.

It looked like Adam Smasher hadn't been able to control himself after his only son regained consciousness.

The others seemed relieved too, thinking Danzo had already overcome the worst.

I was the last to arrive, along with Uriel, who had come of her own will, wanting to check on Danzo one last time.

But we didn't have to wait long. As soon as Adam Smasher heard we were there, he personally came out to greet us.

When that massive man appeared, grabbing my hand with his enormous grip, tears welled in the corners of his sharp eyes as he thanked me.

"Thank you... thank you so much... thank you."

His gratitude was directed at both me and Uriel, standing beside me.

To him, we were the ones who saved his son.

But in the face of his gratitude, I could only offer a hollow nod.

Adam didn't dwell on it and quickly allowed us inside to see Danzo.

And then, the long-awaited moment finally arrived.

The moment we stepped into his room, that sharp scent of medicine filled my nose once again.

But whether it was me or the others, we all froze at the doorway, staring at the figure lying on the bed .. leaving an awkward silence between us.

Chapter 424: A Dark Fate (2)

"What's with those faces? You look like you've seen a ghost."

It was Danzo himself who spoke first, with a faint smile and dark shadows under his sunken eyes.

Fully conscious now, he looked at us from his bed, unable to move his body.

Everyone rushed to his side immediately.

"It's good to see you awake, Danzo," Snow spoke first, with the others quickly following his lead. Even Ghost, who was usually quiet, offered a few words of encouragement.

But among them all, I found myself sitting at the back, silently staring at him in a daze.

All the way to the end, Danzo kept speaking with a smile, his voice calm—so different from the sharp tone he used to have.

Barely able to lift the upper half of his body, paralyzed as he was, he looked weak.

Too weak.

He wasn't the same lively Danzo I knew.

The explosive aura that used to surround him was gone, replaced by the stillness of a sick man who could collapse at any moment.

I was sure the others felt the same as me, but they did their best to speak to him as if nothing had changed. After all, Danzo himself was suffering the most from his condition.

That smile he showed us hid so much. Perhaps regret... sadness... anger...

In just one night, he had gone from a proud warrior to a cripple who couldn't even stand.

Thanks to the Affection System, I could clearly sense the emotions swirling inside him.

And that only made me respect him more. To face all of us with a smile, despite the pain gnawing at his heart .. what kind of iron will did it take to endure that?

The Affection System allowed me to share in his pain.

And those feelings were suffocating. They weighed heavily on my chest.

So, I couldn't bring myself to say a single word. I just sat there, staring at him from afar.

After some time, Uriel gently urged everyone not to stay too long, mindful of Danzo's condition.

She placed her hands on him one last time, flooding him with holy power, healing his internal injuries completely.

Her power was indeed effective. After she used it, Danzo's pale face regained some color, and his body looked healthier than before.

Then, when the visit was over, everyone got up to leave.

But I found myself unable to move.

I asked them to go ahead.

"I'll catch up later, guys."

I said it briefly, and they understood immediately that I wanted some time alone with him.

They were considerate, leaving without hesitation.

And once the room was empty, I stood again and walked over to Danzo, sitting in the chair beside his bed.

"It's been a while."



"Yeah... I guess it's been about fifteen days? Maybe more..."

Danzo kept speaking with his faint smile, unlike the others who had spent most of their time together.

I had been away from them for a long while during our time in the Ultras Continent, making this reunion feel like it happened after a lifetime.

"Don't look at me like that, Frey. I'm still here."

Now that we were alone, Danzo finally spoke the words he'd been holding in his heart.

Maybe everyone tried to act normal around him, but sometimes, the look in your eyes could say more than words.

That look of pity and sorrow .. it cut deeper than anything else.

"I know, my friend. Even in your state, you're still stronger than me."

I spoke with a sincere smile, acknowledging the strength he held despite the suffocating darkness clawing at his mind.

From that alone, I was reassured.

Danzo wasn't the type to succumb to something like suicide.

"This is my fate. I have no choice but to accept it... but it hurts, Frey."

"Stop."

I cut him off before he could continue down that path.

"Sorry, but I don't want to hear that."

I didn't want to hear his pain, his regrets, his sorrow.

Maybe that made me a terrible friend. But I wanted to preserve his strong image, and I didn't want to dive too deep into the weakness he was showing now.

I figured that would be easier for both of us. If he needed to vent, his father, Adam Smasher, was probably a better listener.

"You really are selfish, Frey."

Danzo sighed tiredly, and I gave him a half-hearted smile.

"Sorry, but I've always been that kind of scum. You shouldn't have gotten close to me in the first place if you didn't like it."

Danzo shook his head with a frown, sitting a little straighter as if to argue back.

"You were right about one thing, though. You are scum. I still remember how they used to beat you up in the Moonlight family."

"But I beat them in the end, didn't I?"

"With my help, of course."

Without even realizing it, we slipped into reminiscing about the past, letting it distract us from the harshness of the present reality.

It was refreshing .. for both of us.

Whether it was me, weighed down by countless burdens, Or Danzo, who quietly mourned his own fate in his heart.

From the start, I didn't need to hear him complain. I already felt his pain through the Affection System.

I didn't want to sound arrogant and say I understood his suffering, but at least I had tasted a fragment of the darkness eating away at him.

Even though Uriel had warned me not to bother the patient, I ended up sitting there with Danzo for a long time.

Since I came to this world, he was probably the only one who ever made me talk this much.

Then, after what felt like an hour, we both fell silent.

Realizing it was time to wrap up this aimless but comforting conversation—a brief escape from reality.

In that long stretch of silence, I made up my mind, staring at him seriously.

"Danzo... have you felt anything strange in your body since you woke up?"

It was a strange question.

Danzo didn't answer right away. He just stared at me quietly for a few seconds before finally breaking the silence.

Raising his hands, unable to move his body properly, he gave me a weak smile.

"Nothing at all. I can't even feel my legs. Guess I'm just half a man now."

Danzo chuckled softly, but I couldn't bring myself to laugh at a joke like that.

He kept that smile for a moment, then turned his gaze to the ceiling.

"Honestly, I think the only thing that's changed in me... is this darkness that's grown inside my heart."

The moment he said that, I found myself listening more closely, without meaning to.

"What do you mean?"

In response, Danzo finally shared what was truly on his mind.

"When I think about that battle against him... all I can do is curse reality. Curse my luck, my fate, for putting me against someone like that."

He could have fought anyone else. But Beatrice made him face Gvardiol—the most mysterious one of them all.

And that sealed his fate.

"I know this is the excuse of the weak. I only lost because I wasn't strong enough.

But no matter how much I try to reason with it, those thoughts keep creeping in...

This darkness... it's eating me alive."

That sadness in his eyes was undeniable.

And me... I could only remain silent.

I didn't know whether this darkness he spoke of came from the demonic seed. But I was sure Danzo himself still didn't realize it was there.

Seeing him like this...

I wanted to save him, no matter the cost.

No matter what it took.

I wanted to keep him alive. Because someone like him was the anchor that kept a part of my humanity intact. A part I couldn't afford to lose.

I had never truly realized how much Danzo meant to me.

But now, without even meaning to, I started to understand.

Unaware that these feelings could one day become unbearable pain.

After we talked a little longer, I finally stood from my chair, giving him a quiet farewell as I left the room.

Leaving him behind.

I left the Silver Dragon Guild that day with my mind in turmoil, unable to figure out what I should do next.

I didn't feel the passage of time at all. I only regained my sense of reality when I found myself back home .. returning to the Starlight Estate.

After exchanging a few hollow words with those around me, including Ada and Carmen,

I often withdrew to my room alone, where the light faded as the sun disappeared beyond the horizon.

Sitting on my bed, I waged a war within my fevered mind, searching desperately for some kind of salvation.

Then, after a few more minutes...

I stared at the dark corner of the room with a faint smile and spoke softly:

"I know you're here. Come out already."

It might have looked like I was talking to the wall, but within seconds, the darkness thickened, and a pair of black horns emerged from the shadows, followed by Sansa herself, stepping out of the darkness wearing a black dress that perfectly matched her dark eyes and long horns.

"Well done noticing me,"

Sansa said with a smile, but I shook my head.

"I wouldn't have noticed if you hadn't let me."

And that was the truth.

Her ability to conceal herself within the shadows was absurdly powerful—spotting her without permission was nearly impossible.

The demonic princess had changed into something entirely different in such a short time...

But my feelings toward her hadn't changed at all, which was probably why she hovered around me so often.

And like that, the two of us sat side by side on the giant bed in that vast, familiar room where I always found myself returning.

#### Chapter 425: The Demon Princess (1)

- Frey Starlight's POV -

On the second night after we returned home, a demon came to visit me.

It was well past midnight, making it an odd time for her to appear.

But I couldn't bring myself to say that to her.

She sat quietly beside me, her gaze lost on the ceiling. And no matter how much I tried, I couldn't take my eyes off those demonic horns of hers.

Without realizing it, my eyes drifted to them every time I looked at her.

"You stare too much,"

Sansa rolled her eyes playfully, smiling as if she hadn't been staring at the ceiling at all.

"Sorry."

"No need to apologize. I catch myself staring at them too whenever I look in the mirror."

She gently touched her right horn, sparking my curiosity.

"Can't you hide them? Like you did with your wings?"

She shook her head.

"That's impossible. The wings are made of aura, but these horns... they're a living part of my body now. Just like any other limb."

Cutting them off wasn't an option either.

In fact, I could feel a massive amount of her aura concentrated there.

I was still trying to get used to her new demonic form... and she was doing the same.

"How did things go with the new Emperor?"

Without any warning, I asked the question that had been on my mind.

"Ah... my grandfather? I guess he wants to kill me right about now."

She laughed bitterly, speaking with no care at all.

"You should've seen his face when he found out his only granddaughter turned into a demon. Hilarious, really."

Even though she brushed it off, I couldn't help but stare at her seriously, which quickly caught her attention.



"What's with that look? Worried about me?"

"Kind of... I mean, we're talking about Sir Alon Valerion here."

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say he was the strongest SS+ on the planet, right alongside Dragoth.

To have someone like that targeting her life... it was no laughing matter.

"Don't worry. It's not like he's going to kill me right away. The Imperial Palace is still in chaos, and they haven't decided what to do with me yet. Besides, they'll have to catch me first."

With a light snap of her fingers, Sansa stirred a gust of wind that shook the room.

"Don't forget .. I'm really strong now. I bet I could secure a high rank among the demons. 'Upper Demon Sansa'... has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?"

She laughed, showing her usual carefree attitude.

She didn't care about anything around her. She just did whatever she wanted, without a second thought.

I found myself seeing a new side of her.

Sansa the Demon was completely different from the gloomy princess she used to be.

"You're thinking I've changed, aren't you?"

As if reading my mind, she said it first. I couldn't deny it.

"I can't deny it..."

I sighed softly.

"I've never lived life from a demon's perspective, so I don't know what it's like... I guess it's not exactly pleasant."

I tried to be considerate, but she shook her head.

"Not at all. Honestly, being a demon feels pretty great."

"...What?" I blurted out.

"Becoming a demon lets me live off the aura around me. My body's practically made of it now. I don't need food, or sleep, or even a bathroom. I don't sweat anymore, and I'm strong enough to bend steel with my hands."

Listing off the perks of becoming a demon, I found myself staring at her, unable to form a proper response.

She lowered her gaze to the floor.

"But that doesn't change the fact that I've become a monster. With my constant absorption of aura, I'll bring death wherever I go."

That was the truth.

That's why demons were considered evil beings.

Their endless consumption of life energy destroyed the world they once called home, forcing them to invade others in search of sustenance.

Demons could live forever, as long as they fed on the energy of life itself.

That's why they were at war with all living things.

And now, Sansa was one of them.

I already knew all of that... but even so...

"I don't think a single demon is enough to doom the world."

I spoke seriously.

"I bet you could absorb this planet's aura for thousands of years and it wouldn't make a difference."

Maybe it sounded like I was just trying to comfort her.

But it was the truth.

The reason demons brought death wherever they went wasn't because of one or two individuals.

It was because there were too many of them.

"If it's just me, then it's fine... is that what you're trying to say?"

She read my thoughts again and laughed softly.

"You might be right, Frey. But that leads us to something else."

Leaning her face close to mine, I instinctively leaned back slightly.

"Now that I live on this power... I can feel the enormous aura hidden within you."

Sansa spoke as if she were eyeing a fine meal rather than a human being, causing me to frown instinctively.

She had effortlessly discovered my SSS-rank Aura Sea.

"So, it was a secret?" she asked playfully, while I sighed, brushing it aside.

"No... I've been using it openly lately, so it was only a matter of time before people found out."

Sansa nodded.

"I won't ask how you got it, but right now... you're looking very tempting to me. Tempting enough that I might accidentally kill you."

"Please don't."

"I'm joking. No need to make that face."

With that, she flopped onto the bed, resting her head on my right knee, leaving me speechless.

She really did whatever she pleased.

"You know, Frey, after becoming one of them, I discovered that demons prefer negative emotions from other beings ... things like sadness, anger, hatred, and resentment. We feel those emotions so vividly... and they feel wonderful. So much more than positive feelings like happiness."

Lying there on my lap, she spoke while gazing up at me from below.

What she said wasn't new to me. But she wasn't finished yet.

Her eyes locked onto mine with quiet intensity, as if she could see beyond my human facade.

"You're a walking ball of misery, Frey."

In that moment, I finally understood what she was trying to say.

"So now you can see more than just facial expressions," I said with a hollow chuckle. But Sansa didn't smile back.

"Your negative emotions make being around you... strangely pleasant. They bring me joy at times... and pain at others. What weighs on your heart so much, I wonder?"

She asked a simple question.

But one with too many answers I couldn't bear to voice.

I was trapped on all fronts:

A demon king watching my every move.

A madman engineer hellbent on turning my life into hell.

And a friend... a friend I might have to save .. or kill.

I stayed silent for a long time, until Sansa slowly lifted her head from my lap, sadness crossing her face.

"It's Danzo, isn't it?"

She spoke his name out of nowhere, surprising me even more with what she said next:

"What a cruel fate he's suffered. I never thought I'd meet another soul besides myself who carries the same cursed seed."

The moment she said "seed," my mind froze.

I grabbed her almost desperately.

"You know about it?!"

Seeing my reaction, Sansa nodded calmly.

"Yes. I could feel it in him from the start. He might be a more perfect vessel than I am, but we both come from the same origin."

The second she said that, a new possibility opened in my mind.

A way through the wall I'd hit when trying to save him.

But for the third time, Sansa read my thoughts before I could voice them .. and crushed my hope where it stood.

"I know what you're thinking, Frey. But I'm sorry... I can't save him."

Her words hit like a child having their candy taken away.

I instinctively pulled away, deflated.

## Chapter 426: The Demon Princess (2)

"The seed has fully merged with his body. Now... it's only a matter of time before the will inside it awakens. All I can do is suppress it for as long as possible."

Apparently, Sansa had already snuck into where Danzo was resting.

Using her powers, all she could manage was to keep his human side alive for as long as she could.

But when the time came, Danzo was destined to become that monster.

In that instant, I finally understood where the one-month time limit had come from.

It was her.

Sansa looked at me with quiet sadness.

Danzo had been a rare kind of friend .. even for her, someone who hadn't spoken with him much until recently.

"I think you already know... but when the time is up, we'll have no choice but to—"

"I know."

I cut her off before she could finish.

Maybe she went to see him intending to end it, but she just couldn't bring herself to kill him.

Instead, she gave him as much time as possible to live on as the Danzo we all knew.

In the blink of an eye, a small spark of hope had appeared .. then died just as quickly.

I didn't know if she sensed my disappointment... or something else.

But then Sansa stood, pulling me into a tight embrace, burying my face against her chest.

Her grip was too strong for me to break, even if I tried.

So, I let myself go with the flow.

Her body was incredibly strong... yet impossibly soft.

A strange contradiction.

I had deliberately avoided her gaze, yet she kept staring at me even now.

Then, silence fell.

Sansa no longer had a human heart, so the only sound in the room was my own heartbeat.

A few seconds later, she broke the silence again.

"When I turned into a demon, I think a part of me rejected it. That's why I tried to kill myself on the battlefield... to end the disgusting thing I'd become."

She was recalling the end of our battle against the Ultras.



I remembered how she had fought Beatrice and Gavid Lindman alone, acting like she was having the time of her life.

But who would've thought those kinds of thoughts were swirling inside her all along?

"I knew a demon couldn't live among humans. Even Oliver gave me that look of pity the moment he saw me."

Maybe his mask had hidden his expression, but Sansa could read those feelings through his eyes alone.

The same eyes that now looked at her like she was a monster.

"And yet, you're the only one who didn't look at me that way... I want to know why."

"Why didn't I treat you like a monster?"

I chuckled softly, recalling everything.

It wasn't like I did it on purpose.

"I could never treat you like that, Sansa. After all... the real monster here is me."

If she was a demon, then this body of mine was far from human too.

With bizarre powers... and the looming presence of some otherworldly being inside me.

If anything, I fit the title of 'monster' better than she did.

That alone was why I never changed the way I treated her.

Because I simply didn't have the right to.

I didn't know how much of that Sansa understood from my thoughts, but she didn't ask.

Maybe she was waiting for the day I'd tell her myself.

So we left it at that embrace.

For a brief moment, it felt like something else was about to happen .. especially when our eyes met again.

But neither of us moved.

Not with everything at stake.

I guess she was being considerate, otherwise she would've done whatever she pleased.

Then, after a moment of awkward silence, she finally let me go.

To break the silence, I spoke up, realizing she'd been here far too long already.

"I'll talk to my sister about it later. You can stay here for now."

Given that she was probably being hunted by Sir Alon right now, it seemed right to hide her in the Starlight Estate for the time being.

"Are you sure about that? You might end up on the receiving end of my grandfather's wrath if he finds me here."

She laughed again, regaining that playful tone of hers, but I wasn't particularly concerned about Sir Alon.

When the Demon King himself was already breathing down my neck, what difference would adding one more threat make?

"I'll worry about that when it happens."

"I see. Then I guess I should thank you."

"For what? All I'm doing is giving you a room in this house."

The moment I said that, Sansa narrowed her eyes mischievously.

"Hmm... a separate room, huh?"

"Yes, a separate room," I said firmly.

Realizing what she was trying to do, I quickly pulled away.

After all, if I stayed with her in the same room any longer, even I wouldn't be able to control myself, and things would escalate far beyond a mere embrace...

We both wanted it .. that much was clear. But this wasn't the right time. Not with everything I was dealing with right now. I couldn't afford to think about Sansa properly. Not yet, at least.

Until then... it was better to draw the line.

"Alright then."

With a wide grin, she stood up, the darkness thickening around her until it swallowed her whole.

"But remember, Frey .. walls don't mean much to me ~"

And just like that, she vanished completely into the shadows.

Placing a hand over my face, I sighed quietly.

"She really picked up an annoying ability..."

Lying back on my bed, far too large for one person, I realized just how late it had gotten after spending so many hours with the demon princess.

So I closed my eyes, trying to fall asleep, knowing full well how much awaited me in the days to come.

That night, for the first time in a while, I managed to fall into a deep sleep .. something that had eluded me recently.

Her presence, oddly enough, had been comforting.

And so, another long day came to an end.

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Final Deadline: 27 Days Left.

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The days passed quickly after that.

I kept visiting Danzo whenever I had the chance.

But no matter how many times I looked at him...

He was no longer the same person.

The energetic, explosive man I knew had turned into a quiet, frail figure .. confined to his bed, drained of his strength.

As painful as it was for Danzo himself, it was equally painful for me to witness.

Still, I tried my best to hide those feelings from him, while preparing myself for the final plan my mind could come up with.

I waited until my body fully recovered, and in the blink of an eye, another five days flew by.

But now that I was back at my peak, it was time to take the next step.

Fully equipped and armed with a dimensional ring packed with everything I could carry, I stood alone atop the eastern peaks of the Oaklas Mountains, overlooking the Nightmare Lands ahead.

After exhausting every option I had on this planet, I came to a bitter realization.

The answer I sought didn't exist among humans.

To save Danzo, I needed a power far beyond anything found here.

A power that existed on another world entirely.

Staring at the system interface, I confirmed what I was about to do.

"You won't tell me how to save Danzo... but you will show me the way to leave this planet."

Spending all my achievement points, I steeled myself for a journey into the unknown, a quest that might lead me to Danzo's salvation.

Time moved much slower here on Earth than on other planets .. that was something I'd already learned during our trip to London.

So I wasn't too worried about the countdown.

I had found a way to bend the system's rules to my favor.

With that, I ventured alone into the Nightmare Forests, heading toward the Shadow Sect .. the starting point of my journey.

Whatever answer I was searching for...

I was certain I would find it there.

And with all my heart, I prayed that the future waiting for me... would be just a little less dark than the one fate had written in stone.

Chapter 427: More secrets (1)

- Frey Starlight's POV -

"Hoooff..."

Letting out a deep breath, I took a sip of water while sitting on a fallen tree trunk.

Once I quenched my dry throat, I wiped away the blood that stained me from the battles, then cast a quick glance downward.

There, beneath me, lay a horrifying number of Nightmare Beast corpses .. the aftermath of my journey.

It had been five days since I set out on this journey to the Shadow Sect.

This trip had taken much longer than usual, since I was forced to take the hard way, crossing the entire Nightmare Lands from one end to the other.

"I guess my father must've done the same thing once."

But the difference between us was staggering. He had to face one of the Nightmare Lords back then, and thanks to that, the road was now paved for me.

After a long journey, I was finally about to reach the Shadow Sect .. the starting point of my next path.

If I wanted to save Danzo, I had to leave Earth and search for a way to save him elsewhere.

Within just a few days, I had realized that the answer I sought wouldn't be found among humans.

Unwilling to accept a fate where I'd have to kill one of my closest friends, I was now heading into an adventure where I had no idea what awaited me.

All I knew was that I had to move faster.

Leaping from tree to tree, my body was wrapped in a glowing violet aura as I dashed at full speed.

Cutting through the eastern Nightmare Lands, I finally reached my destination.

If I wanted to leave Earth, the sect was my only option.

I was still far too weak to leave on my own, so once again, I had no choice but to rely on the System.

Once I left Earth, I figured Ada would panic. The device she had linked to my heart wouldn't work anymore.

"Sorry, Ada... But this is the only way."

Unlike every other journey I'd taken before, this one was completely reckless.

It wasn't forced on me by the System, and I had no idea what awaited me on the other side.

The odds of dying were terrifyingly high. Even though I was strong by Earth's standards, I was still nothing but an insect compared to those who lived beyond.

A mere speck in a vast universe filled with countless horrors.

To save Danzo, I would probably need the help of one of those monsters who defied logic itself. Which meant, sooner or later, I would have to face them.

In the end, all I could do was pray I'd somehow succeed .. and return in time.

After several more hours of running nonstop, lost in my thoughts...

I finally reached the place I had been searching for.



The Black Mountain.

Long ago, humans had built the sect within this mountain, but now it had become home to beings far from human.

Step by step...

I climbed the marble staircase, heading upward.

I expected the place to be empty as usual. I'd gotten used to that by now.

But to my surprise...

I stopped climbing as I neared the summit, finally spotting them.

"You two..."

At the top of the stairs, they stood like silent sentinels.

Two statues .. one with a smiling face, the other with a sorrowful one on the verge of tears.

Smiley and Sad were there, radiating a crushing dark aura.

"...SS rank..."

I narrowed my eyes at both of them.

Back then, I couldn't grasp the full extent of their strength. But now, having reached a comparable level, I could finally estimate their true power.

"You two were holding back against me, weren't you?"

I felt slightly embarrassed. I had trained with them for a whole year and only now did I realize how much they had been going easy on me.

Cautious and fully prepared, I approached them.

Were they standing guard over the sect? Or were they here for me?

I wasn't sure. Their stone-like faces showed no emotion, and the purple light glowing in their hollow eyes gave nothing away.

"Will you let an old friend pass?"

I spoke cautiously, ready to fight if I had to.

Unlike before, I now had enough power to take them on, even if it would be a brutal battle.

But my fears were unnecessary.

After a few tense seconds, the two of them exchanged glances, then silently stepped aside, clearing the way for me to pass.

Suspicious, I paused, wondering if they really intended to let me through so easily.

Standing between them, I glanced at each of them in turn.

"You're not going to attack me the moment I turn my back, are you?"

"..."

My question was met with gloomy silence, but their eyes stared at me with what could only be described as silent irritation.

As if they were saying, "Get lost already."

"How rude..."

Ignoring them, I turned my attention back to the sect.

And then I froze in place, my eyes wide in shock.

"What the hell happened here?!"

Lifting my gaze toward the sky, I saw dark skyscrapers piercing the clouds, built from the same mysterious black metal whose origin I still didn't know.

Hundreds of new structures filled the landscape, and the sect was now several times larger than when I last saw it.

"It's barely been two months..."

And yet, the place had transformed into a vast city rather than a mere sect.

It looked like a dark fortress fit for an evil lord from the medieval ages, prompting me to turn toward the statues again.

"Did you two build all this?"

"..."

In response, they simply stared at me in silence before turning away, clearly uninterested.

"Guess I'm not getting any answers from them..."

Sighing in defeat, I took my first steps deeper inside.

As I took in the new architecture, I couldn't help but feel a strange awe for the place...

But at the same time, a deep sense of dread filled me.

The dark aura the sect now radiated sent chills down my spine, warning me that something ominous was going on.

"What exactly are they trying to build here?"

Was it a city? Some kind of grand sect?

No matter how much I looked, it didn't feel that way.

The way it was built... it looked more like a...

"Fortress."

A stronghold. Whoever was behind this place was preparing for war, reinforcing the entire sect with relentless determination.

Trying to ignore all that...

I followed the System's direct advice, focusing on the plan I came here for.

Despite the ominous feeling growing inside me, I tried to push it aside and finish what I came to do quickly.

The System's hint had led me here, but strangely...

The usual obstacle it would place in my path never showed up, making me uneasy.

Still, I had no choice but to press on.

Step by step, I made my way past the towering buildings.

And after several more minutes of walking...

I finally arrived at the temple where it had all begun.

"This is where I got this strange body, alongside Balerion. And where I left for Londor for the first time."

But the temple looked very different now.

A giant gate, over ten meters tall...

The place was far grander than before, covered in strange, dark engravings.

Standing before the door, I pushed with all my strength, forcing it open...

Eager to see what was waiting for me on the other side.

The door was incredibly heavy, but I managed to open it, casting light onto what lay within.

The inside was pitch black and empty...

But unlike last time...

The altar where I had once lain still stood there, and sitting upon it was a familiar figure, clad in black, with piercing blue eyes staring straight at me.

"You've finally arrived."

Chapter 428: More secrets (2)

He spoke in an icy tone, calm and collected. But on my end...

With bloodshot eyes, I immediately drew my swords in fury, my body exploding with violet aura, ready to lunge at him in an instant.

"You finally showed yourself, you son of a bitch!"

I was about to shatter the floor beneath me and hurl myself at him with everything my body could muster.

But in less than a second, a crushing weight slammed down on my shoulders, freezing me in place.

A tremendous aura pressure, the strongest I'd ever felt, paralyzed me completely.

Surrounded by that blue aura radiating from the Engineer, I realized it was coming from him.

"Did you learn nothing from last time?"

He spoke with the same frigid tone, rising from his seat as he approached, radiating that overwhelming aura.

"You know you can't defeat me."

"Shut your damn mouth!"

Struggling against him, I tried to move in any way I could.

But it was pointless.

My dark aura was nothing but a tiny speck against the ocean of absolute power he unleashed.

Face to face with him...

I tried my best to calm myself, gradually suppressing my aura.

Normally, I wouldn't have been able to keep my cool in front of him, but things had changed after all I'd been through.

As much as I wanted to rip that mysterious face of his apart, now wasn't the time.

I simply didn't have the strength to take him down .. not yet. Besides, I knew he wouldn't kill me. This bastard wanted me alive more than anyone else.

So, bit by bit, I forced myself to calm down under his cold, blue gaze.

"A wise choice... this will do."

With those words, he retracted his aura, allowing me to finally catch my breath .. and reminding me once again of the vast gap in our power.

In front of that kind of strength... I had even forgotten how to breathe.

The Engineer ignored me completely, walking past as he left the temple.

"Where do you think you're going ?!"

Leaping from my place, I chased after him immediately.

This was probably the longest time I'd ever spent in the same space with the blue-eyed bastard. There was no way I'd just let him disappear again.

But, contrary to my expectations, he didn't leave.

With a single motion of his lone hand, his power swept across the entire sect, and in an instant, more dark structures materialized from thin air.

At that moment, I finally got my answer—the one I'd been wondering about since I arrived.

So he was the one who built this place.

Staring at his back, I felt a tangled mess of emotions surge within me .. most of them a burning hatred that made me want to kill him on the spot.

But tangled up with that hatred... was the weight of countless unanswered questions. Questions I was sure only he could answer.



"Ask, if you've got questions. This is your chance."

As if reading my mind, the blue-eyed man spoke calmly, still manipulating the terrain like it was nothing. I let out a dry laugh without meaning to.

"Now that's unexpected. Since when are you feeling generous, Engineer?"

I said coldly. But as usual, he said nothing.

There was no reason for him to lie to me. If he wanted to escape, I'd never be able to find him anyway.

With the door open before me, a hundred questions flooded my head. All the things I desperately wanted answers to.

But above them all...

I asked the one question that brought me here in the first place.

"How do I save Danzo?"

I asked firmly, giving it my full focus.

The final mission gave me two choices: save him, or kill him.

And if anyone knew a third way, it would be this son of a bitch.

I waited for his answer. A few seconds passed.

"There's no clear answer to that question."

The veins on my forehead twitched like worms as rage welled up again.

"What the hell do you mean by that?! Aren't you the one who said this question would require using the System's Inquiry Skill?! And that I'd regret it if I used it too soon?!"

I shouted without thinking, frustration spilling out of me.

He was supposed to know the answer. He was the one who hinted at it through the system interface that day.

But the Engineer showed no reaction. He turned toward me calmly.

"You seem to misunderstand something, Frey Starlight."

Coldly, he spoke words more confusing than anything I'd heard from him before.

"Did you really think I was the one who created the system you've been using all this time?"

His words made me furrow my brows in disbelief.

"What are you talking about?"

"Wake up already. There's no way I could give you a power like that."

Continuing to spew this nonsense, my mind only filled with more questions instead of answers. I couldn't help but yell in frustration.

"What the hell are you saying?! If you didn't create it, then who did?!"

"That power was inside you from the start. All I did was shape it into a system interface so you could use it more easily. That's all the system is ... your own power, nothing else."

Each word felt like a hammer pounding my skull.

No way... this couldn't be true.

There were too many contradictions.

If the system was my own power, how did he manipulate it in the first place?

"What kind of bullshit are you trying to sell me?! Weren't you the one who issued missions? Weren't you the one who gave me answers after the Victoriad?!"

I kept screaming, while he calmly continued reshaping the sect.

"I don't issue your missions."

"What?!"

"And as for the system inquiry... all I did was tell you the answer because I happened to know it at the time. Unlike now .. when I genuinely have no clear answer."

His words hit me like relentless blows.

Suddenly, memories of the system's sarcastic remarks, its cryptic missions, and everything else came flooding back.

Covering my face with my hands as my expression darkened, a terrible realization crept over me.

"That wasn't the Engineer..."

"It seems you've finally caught on."

As his voice echoed in the temple, I collapsed onto the ground without meaning to .. realizing I'd just opened a door to an entirely new nightmare.

"If it wasn't you... then who?"

I asked once more, staring up at him.

He opened his mouth and answered flatly.

"I won't tell you."

"What?"

"Why so surprised? I said I'd listen to your questions. I never said I'd answer all of them."

Hearing that smug response again, especially now of all times...

I found myself drawing my swords, unable to control my rage any longer.

"You really are a son of a bitch, damned engineer . The filthy engineer ..that title suits you perfectly!"

Exploding the ground beneath my feet, I shot toward him at blinding speed, ready to blow him to pieces with every ounce of power I had.

"Take your cursed nonsense and go to hell!"

Swinging my sword, I slashed at him with terrifying speed .. my blade was mere inches from cutting him down.

But then, in that moment...

Time froze, in the strangest, most unnatural way.

Only the engineer moved, unaffected. Calmly, he placed his hand .. glowing with an overwhelming blue light .. right on my chest.

"Sleep for a while. Maybe it'll help clear your head."

Even though time itself was frozen, I could hear his voice with perfect clarity.

Then, without warning, his fist released a destructive wave of aura that tore through my body, hurling me backward until I smashed through the temple wall, shattering it completely and breaking through to the other side.

I collapsed on the ground, defeated in a single blow.

With one strike, the engineer had knocked me out cold, leaving me buried in the abyss of darkness.

The gap between our powers... was beyond measure.

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I don't know how long I remained unconscious. But when I finally awoke, night had already fallen outside.

With heavy, dragging steps, I stumbled out of the temple, wounded far more in spirit than in body.

And there he was .. the damned Engineer .. still standing there, calmly continuing to build the sect.

Facing him once again, I realized something clearly.

My time with those piercing blue eyes was far from over.

"You truly are a damned son of a bitch... cursed engineer."

Chapter 429: More secrets (3)

— Frey Starlight's Pov —

After night had fallen, I found myself standing there like a fool, facing the Engineer.

That damned man was still expanding the sect, building it larger and larger with every passing moment.

I had thought he would disappear the moment I woke up, but once again, he shattered my expectations.

Since the day I reincarnated as Frey Starlight, this was the longest time I had ever spent with that cursed Engineer.

Yet despite that, he didn't pay me much attention. He simply continued to build the sect with some strange power I couldn't begin to comprehend.

"What are you trying to create here?"

I asked without even thinking.

The Engineer, fully aware of my presence, answered calmly.

"It's for the future."

The future...

Staring at his back, I realized then .. those blue eyes of his were playing some kind of game with me again.

Usually, it took going through hell itself just to get a single answer from him after endless suffering.

But here he was now, answering my questions out of nowhere.

Of course, there were still things he refused to answer. And even when he did, I couldn't be sure whether what he told me was the truth.

After all, he could lie at any moment if it served his own interests.

Still, I decided to set my emotions aside for now and extract as much information from him as possible.

"Do you really know the future?"

That was a question that had haunted me for some time. I could never escape the Engineer's grasp because of that cursed ability of his .. to predict everything I knew.

"That's right," the Engineer confirmed.

"Is that why you showed parts of it to my sister Ada? And to others as well?"

The Engineer nodded again.

"That's also true."

"Why are you doing this?"

"To create the future I desire."

"And what kind of future is that?"

"I won't answer."

Another dead end.

I sat down on the ground, lost in thought, searching for the right question to ask next.

Then, after a brief silence, I simply voiced the question that had been weighing on my mind.

"What am I to you? Am I just a vessel for the king you serve? Is that your goal? To resurrect your so-called king?"

Upon hearing that, the Engineer turned his head slightly, locking eyes with me for a second ... then turned away .

"I won't answer."



Another roadblock.

Frustration welled up inside me, but I knew. I knew I couldn't force him to reveal anything he didn't want to.

The Engineer was a cunning being who never did anything unless it served his own selfish goals.

His appearance before me now, allowing me to ask these questions, was probably part of his preparation for some future event.

He knew I wouldn't be able to resist the chance to clear away some of the mystery surrounding him .. and he was using that against me, as always.

So I decided to use him in return, as much as I could.

"You said before that saving Danzo has many possible answers. What did you mean by that?"

I shifted the conversation back to my friend, who was still on the verge of death. He was the reason I had come here in the first place.

This time, the Engineer gave me an answer.

"A complete Devil Seed is like a cursed object that fuses with its host's body. To deal with something like that, you'll need abilities far beyond human comprehension .. something that can be obtained from several sources."

I already knew that much.

"It's for those very abilities that I was planning to leave this planet. Humans simply aren't capable of reaching them."

As I stared at his back, something clicked in my mind.

"You're not going to let me leave, are you?"

"That's right," he answered calmly.

My expression darkened.

So that's why he was here.

In that moment, I remembered the obstacle the system's direct advice always warned me about.

Perhaps this time, the obstacle... was the Engineer himself.

He turned to face me once more.

"There's no need for you to leave. The knowledge you seek is already within your grasp."

I knew exactly what he meant by that.

I slowly extended my hand, and a black metallic mask appeared in my palm.

The Nameless Mask, its hollow eye sockets staring back at me like the eyes of a hawk.

"What kind of trick are you trying to pull now?"

I had avoided putting on this mask, partly out of fear of the will that once took control of me..

And partly because I was unable to comprehend what lay inside it.

I still remembered what happened when I wore it in London .. the flood of information that tore through my mind at that time.

Knowledge as vast as the universe itself.

I would've died right then if he hadn't stepped in and forcibly removed the mask from me.

But he simply shook his head.

"You won't suffer any harm if you put it on now. Your body has already adapted to it. Though... how much knowledge you gain from it will depend entirely on you."

"What the hell do you mean? Explain yourself, damn it!"

I asked again, impatience creeping into my voice, still uneasy about the Nameless Mask.

This time, the Engineer continued, satisfying my curiosity for once.

"Shadow Adaptation."

He spoke the name of my strongest ability, shedding light on something I hadn't even thought to ask about until now.

I wanted to question him about the origin of that overwhelming power, but he began speaking on his own, leaving no room for interruption.

"In this vast universe, there are countless mysterious laws that bind it .. laws like causality, inevitability , life and death, chaos... and many more. You won't even perceive their existence until you reach a certain level of power and understanding. But there are special abilities that transcend those laws. These are the powers that break the world's fundamental laws."

Continuing his explanation, the Engineer delved deeper.

"Abilities like my foresight. The future I see is absolute, inevitable. That is inevitability. Then there are other abilities, like one possessed by your friend... the Last Survivor."

"That one reshapes the causes and effects of reality itself, creating sharp turning points that ensure his survival no matter what. That is causality. Abilities of this caliber do not simply appear out of nowhere. They are either inherited, bestowed, or created by the individual."

Listening to him, I felt my mind expanding involuntarily.

Of course, I already knew about the existence of such laws, though my understanding of them was still vague—this realm of power was far beyond anything I could fully grasp.

And as for Dawn's ability, I was aware of it as well. I had written about it once before.

It had been given to him by ..

In that moment, just as I was about to speak the name...

A sharp wave of pain shot through my skull, forcing me to clutch my head in agony as my eyes widened in shock.

'Who gave that power to Dawn?'

I questioned myself, unable to recall the answer no matter how hard I tried.

I knew I had known it.

I was certain I knew it just seconds ago... but now, no matter how much I searched my mind, I couldn't find it—and the harder I tried, the worse the pain became.

"What the hell is happening?!"

I screamed unconsciously as the migraine tore through my mind. I felt as though I was just a breath away from seeing that being's face, whoever they were .. but every time I got closer to remembering, a strange fog blanketed the image, hiding their features behind a mysterious smile.

"Forget it," the Engineer spoke, his voice low, an uncharacteristic fear in his tone. "That's one of his powers. When you forget him, you'll remember. And when you try to remember, you'll forget. A filthy creature, as always."

He spoke of someone.

Someone terrifying enough to unsettle even him.

But it wasn't Agaroth.

I knew the abilities of the Demon King all too well.

Even though he possessed more law-breaking abilities than anyone else, this wasn't one of them.

And that drove me to ask:

"Who is this being?"

Who gave Dawn the Last Survivor?

At that moment, the Engineer's eyes lit up, and he opened his mouth once more.

"I won't answer."

With those words, I realized that the fog surrounding that person's face would remain for a long, long time.

Chapter 430: More secrets (4)

Accepting my ignorance, the Engineer resumed his initial explanation, ignoring Dawn's mystery entirely.

There was no point in forcing the issue. No matter how much I tried, I wouldn't uncover that identity.

This was the law of Nothingness.

"Among these powerful abilities, some follow the law of Chaos. These are powers centered on destruction and close combat... like your Shadow Adaptation, or your father's Absolute Manipulator."

"My father?"

Ignoring everything else he had said, my mind zeroed in on those final words.

He mentioned my father out of nowhere.

"He had a power like that too?!"

I asked, and the Engineer nodded.

"Abraham Starlight was special in his own way. He far exceeded my expectations time and time again. Using the system that served him, along with his own strength, he forged a brand-new path of power that belonged solely to him."

"He created the Absolute Manipulator—an ability that destroyed every aura pathway and core within his body, transforming his entire being into a chaotic sea of aura. He embodied the law of Chaos completely, pushing his body beyond its limits in both speed and strength, wielding an aura manipulation I had never witnessed before, even in all my long years."

The Engineer spoke at length.

In fact, far too much .. so much so that it almost felt unreal.

And yet, I found myself drawn in.

"My father... created something like that..."

"Abraham was destined for greatness. No human ever possessed the traits that he did. He was the pinnacle of your wretched species, without a doubt. His ability died with him. What he achieved can never be replicated. But his fate... was a dark one."

In that moment, something resurfaced in my mind.

"Wesker..."

The Fourth-ranked demon.

I still remembered how the Engineer had panicked back then, the moment that demon appeared...

"But that doesn't make sense. Didn't you say the future you see is absolute and inevitable? What happened that day, then?"

The Engineer simply shook his head.

"That's what happens when two law-breaking abilities collide."

In that moment, a wave of understanding struck my mind out of nowhere.

And suddenly, I grasped something incredibly important.

"The King's Eye..."

That was Wesker's ability, granted to him by Agaroth.

An ability that sees fate itself .. no different from what the Engineer possessed, perhaps even surpassing it.

Both of them fell under the concept of inevitability.

"So, you finally understand," The Engineer said calmly.

"When two law-breaking abilities clash, irregularities occur, and the future we see becomes uncertain. This is the first way to counter these kinds of powers."

Listening to him, my heart pounded relentlessly in my chest.

I couldn't believe what he was giving me.

The way out of that destiny.

He was handing it to me himself, leaving me completely bewildered.

But he continued speaking anyway.



"The first way to fight against a world-breaking ability... is with another ability of the same level. That's what happened between me and that Fourth-Rank Demon."

"And the second way is to become a being who breaks the world's laws yourself .. to reach a level of power so great that those laws no longer apply to you. Such beings are rare; very few have ever reached that height of greatness."

Gazing up at the sky, the Engineer spoke with quiet melancholy.

"The most notable example of that... is the Demon King himself."

Then his gaze returned to me, sharp and serious.

"That's why I can't allow you to leave this place and head into the unknown. You're far too weak. Out there, beyond this world, is a realm teeming with beings who wield such powers."

The Engineer turned and began to walk away, but I immediately followed after him.

"So that's it, huh? You just don't want me to go and die up there because you cannot guarantee the future you see when there are beings with abilities similar to yours .. like Wesker"

"That's right. I can handle things here... or in Londor. But the rest of the world? That's another story."

He stared at his single hand .. the one ravaged by cracks and weakened by time.

The Engineer's blue eyes... they were so ancient.

And countless questions began swirling in my mind about the purpose he had lived for all this time.

If what I saw through the Nameless Mask was true, then the Engineer was one of the people the Nameless once saved—so powerful that he became his right hand.

And after the Nameless' death, He had lived on, striving to accomplish something.

Wandering for thousands of years, never resting, never faltering... in a vessel that slowly deteriorated over time, continuing to pursue whatever mission he lived for.

For the first time since our twisted relationship began, I felt something other than hatred and contempt toward the Engineer..

Curiosity.

Curiosity about the iron will that had driven him to continue this long.

But I knew he wouldn't speak about himself, so I asked something else instead.

"By what you just said, I'm supposed to die if I go up there, right? But I find that hard to believe..."

After all, there was a being who could reach me no matter where I was.

"Agaroth has already reached me twice. If he wanted me dead, it wouldn't matter if I was above ground or beneath it—I'd be dead for sure. So what's the point of keeping me here?"

I laid it out plainly.

Agaroth was a being who broke the world's laws himself.

Those cursed laws meant nothing to him.

The King's Eye, which had shaken even the Engineer, was only one of dozens of abilities the Demon King possessed.

So what was the point of all this?

And in that moment, the Engineer spoke words that sent an even sharper pain through my head.

"What are you talking about?" he said.

"...What?"

"Agaroth won't kill you. He needs you alive just as much as I do. Perhaps even more."

"Your survival is necessary to the Demon King. Like you said yourself—if he wanted you dead, you'd already be dead. Haven't you wondered about that?"

He was right.

This was Agaroth we were talking about.

A monstrous power that constantly haunted my mind. I was naive to think the Engineer had done something to keep him away.

The Engineer couldn't even approach him, let alone oppose him.

But still...

"Why? What does he want from me? What the hell am I to all of you?!"

Why would the Demon King himself care this much about me?

The Engineer returned to his usual cryptic self, leaving me in darkness once again.

"I won't answer."

He said it flatly, walking away from the subject and returning to where this entire conversation had begun.

"Your Shadow Adaptation is one of those law-breaking abilities we spoke of. It lets you adapt to all phenomena and powers of every kind. It has made your mind strong enough to withstand the mask now. So go... and try to save your friend."

"But remember this—"

His voice grew colder.

"The future is dark, Frey Starlight.

Know that I didn't give you this power without reason. That is my warning to you."

Unlike all the random people he used to visit before...

This time, he came to me.

He had just given me the way to escape my fate... and yet, I still couldn't grasp what he truly wanted from me.

Most likely, he would continue manipulating me, just as he always had.

The feeling of helplessness in the face of such overwhelming powers remained the same.

All of these mighty beings... each harbored some vague, incomprehensible desire for me.

And I had no choice but to walk along the current of fate.

But at the very least ..

Now I knew how to break it.

Determined to find the answers to all these unknowns, I felt the will to fight burning within me once again.

Placing the Nameless Mask over my face,

I resolved to stand against this current of destiny once more. And it all began with saving Danzo, whose life now rested in my hands.

In that moment, beneath the Shadow Sect—now vast enough to resemble the capital of a mighty nation ..

I continued forward, ready to face whatever the future still concealed from me.