

## **VILLAIN 44**

### Chapter 44 The Arena Master

Professor Sophia stood at the center of the massive training arena, gripping a practice sword.

We formed a circle around her, watching intently.

Her hair was tied back in a high ponytail, and her tight-fitting outfit accentuated her figure, making her look particularly striking.

I glanced at the others.

Unexpectedly, neither Danzo nor Ragna approached me.

I had expected them to attack the moment I arrived, yet they didn't. I wasn't sure why—until I realized what had happened.

After I left the arena, the true menace had descended upon them—Snow Lionheart.

He fought Danzo first, then finished off Ragna.

Even though both were formidable, they had suffered a crushing defeat.

That was enough to keep them quiet, at least for now. Perhaps the loss was harder to swallow than they had anticipated.

Well... in the end, it worked out in my favor.

I refocused on Sophia.

The lesson began as a powerful purple aura surged around her.

Her voice resonated across the arena as she swung her sword.

"All of you here are elites, so I assume you already understand this. However, after witnessing your performance in the duel, I have to address it—especially you, Feyrith Earlet."

From the farthest edge of the circle, Feyrith scowled.

I knew exactly what Sophia was pointing out.

At first, when she raised her sword, the aura around her body had been scattered, swirling chaotically.

She swung, releasing a crescent-shaped wave of purple energy that crashed violently into the far wall, leaving a deep, jagged scar.

I watched with admiration.

She wasn't a swordswoman—she was a wave controller—yet her swordplay was still this refined.

Ignoring the reactions around her, she turned back to Verith.

"What I just did... was the same foolish mistake you made, Feyrith Earlet."

Feyrith frowned.

What mistake? That was a powerful strike.

That was likely what he was thinking.

Sophia took the same stance, preparing to strike again.

"Watch closely... this is how it's done."

This time, instead of letting her aura scatter wildly, she concentrated it solely on her sword and the arm holding it.

The sheer intensity of the focused energy sent a chilling pressure through the air, making my skin prickle.

The raw power behind it...

It surpassed the combined strength of my most powerful attacks—along with Danzo's and Ragna's.

She slashed.

The energy wave that erupted from her blade carried an overwhelming force, surging straight toward the wall—no, it would have obliterated whatever lay beyond it.

"Damn it..."

Sophia realized she had overdone it.

Just as her attack was about to strike, a vortex of eerie green flames materialized, swallowing the purple wave whole.

A familiar voice echoed through the arena.

"I appreciate your enthusiasm for teaching, Miss Sophia Tan, but I'd be more grateful if you stopped wrecking my arena."

From the side, Choupo moting emerged, hands clasped behind his back.

Sophia chuckled upon seeing him.

"Sorry, Choupo... I guess I got a little carried away."

The Black-skinned man nodded as he stepped beside her.

"It's fine. That was an impressive strike."

"You say that, yet you blocked it so effortlessly."

Their casual exchange made me wonder about the nature of their relationship.

Eventually, Sophia gestured toward Choupo.

"Choupo moting, the arena supervisor, has been observing your duels. He's volunteered to give you some guidance, so be grateful."

Everyone nodded as Choupo stepped forward.

"Let's start with you two—Feyrith Earlet and Frey Starlight."

"What Miss Sophia demonstrated earlier perfectly highlights your situation."

He pointed at Feyrith.

"Your power is unrefined. Your aura control is sloppy, which means your attacks never reach their full potential. From the beginning to the end of your duel, only half of your strength was being used properly—the other half was wasted."

Then, he turned to me.

"On the other hand, there's Frey Starlight..."

Choupo's sharp eyes locked onto mine.

"Your aura control was exceptional. I monitored the flow of energy within you—you successfully funneled over 90% of your power into your attacks. You should be proud. Among all first-year students, you are the best in this aspect."

"Hoh?"

Murmurs rippled through the crowd—even Sophia seemed surprised by Choupo's high praise.

I nodded while cursing inwardly.

What's the point of saying that, you bastard?

Now, people would start comparing me to Snow Lionheart—exactly what I wanted to avoid.

Sophia clapped her hands, drawing everyone's attention.

"Alright, let's begin training. The arena and all its equipment are at your disposal. You'll be training here for the next few hours under our supervision."

Choupo tapped his staff, and the arena expanded. Various equipment appeared—training weapons, targets, and more.

"You may begin."

At her command, everyone grabbed their weapons and started training in their own way.

Some trained alone.

I spotted Danzo practicing with Ragna—they seemed to have developed a camaraderie.

Meanwhile, I noticed Sansa leaving the arena with Sophia.

"Hmm?"

After a while, Sophia returned alone.

What's going on?

I considered asking but held myself back.

It's none of my business.

I grabbed a sword and began practicing Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow.

A dark aura engulfed my blade as I moved swiftly, unleashing waves of Dark energy.

My movements drew some attention, but I ignored it.

I trained alone for a while until a familiar figure approached, carrying a sword.

My cousin pointed her blade at me.

"Do you mind training together?"

I met her gaze and nodded.

"No problem."

"Good."

With a smile, she took a stance. A silvery-white aura surrounded her—the Stardust technique of our family.

"Shall we begin?"

"Come at me."

She lunged without hesitation.

Her sword aimed for my face, but I deflected it effortlessly with the back of my blade.

I countered, but she was quick enough to dodge.

Her strikes were swift yet forceful, primarily relying on precise thrusts infused with fiery aura.

"Not bad."

I stayed defensive, analyzing her style.

I had no intention of attacking.

Right now, I needed more battles.

I needed as many fights as possible to deepen my understanding of the mysterious power within me.

Shadow Adaptation: 0/7: 0/7

If I wanted to grasp even a fraction of this ability, I had to face more opponents and study different combat styles.

I continued sparring with Clana.

I hadn't expected her to approach me after everything that happened between us.

Perhaps she wanted to repay her debt through battle.

I welcomed the idea.

After exchanging blows for a while, we finally stopped.

Clana frowned, dissatisfied.

"Why did you only defend?"

I spun my sword absentmindedly.

"I wanted to see how long I could last without counterattacking."

She sighed.

"You're a strange one, Frey."

I didn't deny it.

Throughout the duel, I had been trying to understand her Star Dust technique—and I had grasped a few things.

"Your power is different from the others."

"What do you mean?"

I pointed at the white aura around her sword.

"I've fought Byron before and glimpsed Carmen's strength. You all practice the same technique, yet its intensity differs from person to person."

Clana nodded.

"It's simple."

She closed her eyes, concentrating.

A radiant white aura enveloped her body, and three shimmering stars appeared near her heart.

"Oh?"

With her silver hair glowing, she pointed at her chest.

"The Star Dust technique has ten stages—each represented by a star."

"I'm at the third stage. General Byron is at the fifth. As for Miss Carmen... she has reached the seventh. Naturally, they're stronger than me."

I nodded in understanding.

"Is there anyone above Carmen?"

Clana tilted her head, her expression filled with doubt.

"Why are you asking questions you should already know the answers to, Fray?"

Because I wasn't really Fray.

I scratched my head before replying casually,

"I forget things easily..."

Clana sighed, then patiently explained,

"Apart from Miss Carmen, the only other person to reach the seventh star is High Elder Leonidas."

Then, with a more somber tone, she added,

"There's no one beyond them... They all died long ago. The last was Lord Abraham Starlight—your father. He was a miracle, having reached the ninth star."

I continued drawing information from Clana, piecing things together bit by bit.

So that old fart Leonides is at the seventh stage, huh?

At last, I had a rough estimate of one of my enemies' strength.

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A short distance from the elite students who were training, two figures stood observing the scene.

"What do you think of them?"

Sophia asked as Choupo silently watched.

"This generation is far stronger than the ones before it... especially that boy from earlier."

Sophia nodded.

"Snow Lionheart."

Choupo confirmed her words before continuing,

"Yes, that boy is a prodigy. His current strength is enough to defeat most second-years, let alone first-years."

Sophia crossed her arms.

"That's good. Given our current situation, we need every talent we can get."

Choupo raised his staff, preparing to leave.

"My time with Class B is over. It's time to assist Class A."

Just as he was about to depart, he paused and turned back.

"Sophia... there's someone in your class who rivals Snow Lionheart."

Sophia raised an eyebrow.

"Are you talking about Fray Starlight?"

Choupo nodded.

Sophia couldn't quite grasp what he meant.

The dark-skinned man before her was one of the world's greatest martial masters—her own mentor.

His eyes saw far more than most, yet no matter how hard she tried, she simply couldn't see it.

Fray was strong, no doubt... but as far as she remembered, he was just an A-rank talent.

That meant he was nothing compared to the likes of Seris Moonlight or Sansa Valerion.

Choupo paid no heed to her thoughts as he disappeared down the hallway, leaving behind only his voice.

"I couldn't read his technique or movements... you know what that means."

Leaving Sophia Tan frozen in shock, Choupo Moting headed for Class A.

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Clana Starlight – B5

Class: Swordsman

Rank: D

Sophia Tan – The Temple's Prodigy

Class: Wave Controller

Rank: S