

## VILLAIN 441

### Chapter 441: Turning Point (1)

— Frey Starlight's Pov —

One day left.

Sitting atop one of the tallest buildings within the Shadow Sect, I gazed over the vast expanse with empty eyes and a face darkened by weariness.

The sect had grown massive .. larger now than Belgrade, the Imperial Capital itself.

High walls and towering defenses turned it into a fortress.

The Engineer had completed his work here, then vanished without a trace .. as if he had never been here in the first place.

His disappearance at this exact moment... I couldn't help but suspect it was intentional.

He'd helped me easily over the past few days, asking for nothing in return. But looking back now...

Perhaps the entire thing had been a setup. A carefully laid trap leading me straight into a pit of despair far deeper than anything I had fallen into before.

Or maybe... I had already fallen into it.

My relationship with the Engineer was never equal. He could appear before me whenever he wished .. but no matter how much I searched, I would never find him unless he allowed it.

But I was certain of one thing.

He was still near. Watching me.

He had always been close, from the very beginning.

In the end, every move he made, every question he answered, every moment of guidance he offered...

All of it served a greater purpose—a goal he had likely written out long before I ever crossed his path.

And now, it felt like my current situation was just another step on the path he had prepared for me.

It was as if a bottomless abyss had opened within me, devouring me from the inside, swallowing me in a storm of tangled emotions.

It was suffocating.

But somehow, my face showed none of it. Not a trace of the feelings that tore through my heart with every passing second.

I couldn't do anything except sit there quietly, powerless, unable to find a solution to this overwhelming dilemma.

But I couldn't sit there forever.

There was only one day left.

Time...

"If only I had more time..."

The thought crossed my mind, but I dismissed it just as quickly.

"No. Even if I did, nothing would change."

Either way, I was the one responsible for what happened to Danzo...

And I would be the one responsible for whatever came next.

It was a heavy burden, one that crushed my shoulders without mercy.

But I had no choice but to keep moving forward.

Because no one else could do it but me.

And so, I rose quietly to my feet, casting one last glance at the sect...

Then in the next second, I was gone .. vanishing into thin air as I teleported back to the Empire.

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That night, I visited Uriel at the temple.

The church's top Saint candidate, five full years older than me...

With her golden hair and noble aura, she shone as brilliantly as ever, drawing all eyes wherever she went.

"I'm sorry, Uriel. I keep coming to you for help, asking again and again without giving anything in return. And here I am, asking for your help once more... I truly am sorry."

I apologized sincerely, but she quickly waved her hands, cutting me off, concern written all over her face.

"There's no need to apologize. I'll help you anytime. So please... don't wear that face."

That's what she said.

What face was she talking about, I wondered? I had no idea. There was no mirror here to show me my own expression.

I thought I was keeping my emotions hidden... so I didn't know what she meant.

Still, I nodded to her in gratitude.

Uriel hesitated for a moment but soon steeled herself to help me once again.

And so, I unsheathed the Dark Sister.

My black katana.

"It's simple. I need you to infuse it with your holy power once more. That's all."

I gave her a faint smile.

"We've done it once before .. it'll be much easier this time and won't take long."

I was certain of that. After I'd used her power to save Sansa in the past, the Dark Sister had grown accustomed to her holy aura. This time, it would accept her power far more quickly.

Uriel Platini knew this too, though hesitation still flickered across her face.

"Can I ask... what are you planning to do with this power?"

She wanted the truth. It was a bit intrusive of her.

But I didn't mind. After all, she was the one helping me.

Last time, her power was used to save Sansa.

But this time...

It was for something very different.

"I'm going to kill a demon."

I answered simply, causing her eyes to widen in surprise.

My answer was vague .. but it was the truth.

I didn't want to give her any further details, and she didn't try to press the matter.

Instead, she simply did what I asked of her.

This time, it took barely an hour.

And soon, the Dark Sister gleamed with pure white and emerald light, radiating with sacred energy.

The Dark Sister amplified aura.

And with it, Uriel's holy power surged within the blade, multiplying in strength several times over .. just as I had intended.

"Thank you."

I thanked her sincerely before turning to leave.

But she stopped me, gripping my shoulder.



"What is it?"

"Let me come with you!" she said, her voice urgent. "You'll need holy power, right? Wouldn't it be better if I came in person instead of just lending you my power through the sword?"

Uriel sensed something was wrong. Her instincts told her as much.

Especially after I told her I was going to kill a demon.

I guess I shouldn't have said that.

"You really are kind, Uriel. That's why everyone loves you."

And that's why I love you ...

Gently removing her hand from my shoulder, I took a few steps back.

"But I'm sorry... this is something only I can do."

It was my responsibility alone.

I couldn't let her carry the burden of what I was about to face.

And so, I apologized. But she didn't give up.

Which left me no choice but to disappear—using the teleportation ability I'd recently acquired.

An ability that only reminded me of my failures.

In that moment, I left Uriel alone in the temple.

She stood there, staring at the empty space where I'd been, whispering softly to herself.

"...Will you really be able to bear this?"

She didn't know exactly what was happening, but what she saw in me was enough to tell her just how unbearable this weight was.

I was truly desperate.

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Outside the temple...

I wandered quietly, leaving its grounds behind and walking the streets of Belgrade.

"It's snowing..."

A warm cloud of breath escaped my lips as I stopped in place, staring at the cold snowflakes brushing against my face.

It was the heart of winter, so the snowfall wasn't surprising. It covered everything in white, blanketing the streets and rooftops.

This was the final night. Only a few hours remained, and night had already fallen.

But the air was peaceful. Calm.

No different from any other day.

The Empire was busy with countless matters: the looming war, the aftermath of recent events...

But I was unaware of any of it, having isolated myself from the world over the past month.

The only thing filling my mind...

Was my sick friend, who had only hours left.

Hours before the moment of truth.

Preparing for that moment, I met with my other friend, who was waiting for me.

In the empty, dark alleys where not even a breath could be heard...

I stood face-to-face with Ghost, who had come the moment I summoned him.

Ghost said nothing at first. He simply stood there, staring at my face, unable to find any words.

And that silence irritated me more than I thought it would.

"You're all looking at me like that... Is there something on my face or what?"

I asked with a faint smile ... one that couldn't hide the weakness behind it.

Ghost answered my question with one of his own.

"...What happened?"

Hearing that...

I couldn't help but laugh weakly.

So it was that obvious?

Chapter 442: Turning Point (2)

And here I thought I had learned to control my expressions perfectly.

I was completely wrong.

I was still the same person, after all.

No matter how much I suffered, no matter how much stronger I became, no matter how much more I understood of the world around me...

Nothing had changed.

If anything...

It had only gotten harder.

Face-to-face with Ghost, I opened my mouth and spoke a few words.

And in that moment, Ghost's eyes widened in shock.

His expression twisted in disbelief.

For the first time ever, I saw Ghost's face break into such raw emotion.

Unable to accept what he had just heard from me, he asked again.

"Are you serious right now?"

In response, I nodded.

"...Yes."

Lowering my head, I continued.

"There's no other way. This is the only thing we can do."

I spoke in a calm, quiet voice.

And that seemed to infuriate Ghost even more.

He lunged forward and punched me hard across the face.

The blow sent me stumbling backward, crashing into the cold wall behind me.

But he wasn't done.

Ghost tackled me to the ground, grabbing my collar as we rolled across the snow, soaking my clothes completely.

He was truly angry.

"...I don't understand you, Frey. I thought I did once. But now I realize just how wrong I was."

"..."

Slowly, a thin line of blood slipped from the corner of my mouth, the aftermath of Ghost's punch.

Tasting the bitter iron of blood, feeling his grip on my collar tighten, I met his gaze in silence ..unable to answer him.

His reaction was a result of what I had told him earlier.

I had asked for his help.

The Silver Dragon Guild was guarding Danzo, so if I wanted to get him out without anyone noticing, I needed Ghost's skills as an assassin .. and the influence of the Shadow Court.

With his help, we could extract Danzo without raising any alarms.

And once we were far enough away...

I would finish it.

I would end it.

I would kill him.

Truthfully...

I could have simply teleported directly to Danzo's room. But doing so would have risked triggering the demonic power sleeping within him, unleashing a catastrophe.

That's why I needed to take him somewhere remote and isolated, where no one would be caught in the aftermath.

And that...

That was what Ghost couldn't accept.



"Didn't you say you'd save him no matter what it took? That you'd do whatever it required? That's your specialty, isn't it? Turning the impossible into reality..."

"Surviving the Moonlight family, winning the Victoriad, journeying to Londor, staying alive alone in the Ultras continent when everyone thought you were dead... defeating a thousand men single-handedly... You've always found a way to win, no matter what.

So what's different now?!"

Ghost shouted, his voice raw and breaking .. something I had rarely, if ever, heard from him.

His relationship with Danzo had been rocky at first. They bickered endlessly.

But over time, Ghost came to respect Danzo. To see him as a friend.

And that was why he couldn't accept what I was saying now.

He'd watched countless people die in front of him before. But this time... it was different.

"I tried..."

I spoke quietly.

"I tried with everything I had.

I did everything I could..."

But in the end, I failed.

I underestimated the Devil's Seed—treating it like any ordinary curse.

But there was a reason why surviving it was impossible.

The one who created the Seed had already transcended the Law of Life and Death.

He made the Seed a living creature in its own right.

Separating it from Danzo was impossible.

They had become one.

To save him, I needed a power that could also surpass the Law of Life and Death—something that existed within Nameless's memories.

But acquiring that power was utterly impossible.

Because I was human.

To obtain that power, I would've had to do what Nameless did ... spending countless lifetimes studying every species and creature, slaughtering an uncountable number of beings just to complete his mad research.

And even if I had an immortal body and infinite time like him... I doubted I could've achieved what he did.

I was not Nameless. I didn't have his wisdom, nor a fraction of his power.

So how could I ever hope to acquire such a power, when I only had a few hours left until the Final Quest ended?

You cannot defeat a world-breaking ability unless you have another world-breaking ability of equal or greater magnitude.

That's what the Engineer told me.

It was impossible from the start. My failure was inevitable.

Maybe there was another way—something I could've found if I still had a question left for the System.

But I used that long ago.

That was why the Engineer said I would regret it.

That's what he meant.

"...Whatever happens to Danzo now, it's my fault. No one else's."

Hearing that, Ghost fell silent for a while before speaking again, his voice filled with bitterness.

"...Why Danzo, of all people?"

Even if the Devil's Seed was real...

He couldn't understand why it ended up in the hands of the Ultras.

A complete Devil's Seed was rare. Immensely powerful.

Its presence here on Earth made no sense.

And of all the people in the world... it ended up inside Danzo.

"Why?!"

He wasn't special.

He was just an ordinary human.

Nothing more, nothing less.

"...Most likely, I'm the reason for that too."

I once thought it was just bad luck.

But I was wrong.

Something like this doesn't happen by chance.

Whether it was the Engineer, the Demon King...

Or someone else pulling the strings behind the scenes...

This was planned.

And the reason Danzo became the target was because... he was close to me.

That's all.

It was a carefully crafted conspiracy, one designed to tighten this noose around my neck. And they succeeded.

We'd reached the point of no return.

Ghost stared at me for a long time, a storm of mixed emotions in his eyes. He was furious.

He wanted to call me a liar.

To claim that everything I said was nonsense—that there was no proof the Seed even existed.

But then...

He remembered.

All the bizarre phenomena he had witnessed while staying by my side.

And he knew.

I wouldn't say something like this without reason .

I saw a trace of contempt in his eyes .. fleeting, born of the heat of the moment.

There, in those desolate alleys, on ground blanketed by cold snow, we stood in silence for a long while, swallowed by a void neither of us could escape.

Then, after a few moments, Ghost stood up and turned his back to me.

"I'll help you."

His words caught me off guard.

I hadn't expected him to agree so easily.

"Ghost..." I called, unable to stop myself.

But he continued, his voice calm once more.

"I chose to be your shadow a long time ago.

That's why I'll share this burden with you. I'll carry this sin.

But, Frey..."

Turning to face me, his usual quiet resolve returned.

"You know what happens next, don't you?

Once we cross this line, there's no going back.

We'll carry the consequences, face the punishment when the time comes.

Are you ready for that?"

In response, I nodded.

"I am."

...But would I truly be able to live with myself afterward?

After killing Danzo with my own hands?

I stared down at them .. imagining his blood staining them.

And every time I did, the image shattered me. I couldn't bear to face it.

I didn't know what would become of me once I did it.

But I was certain of one thing ..

I wouldn't be the same person anymore.

I tried not to dwell on it. But the end was near.

It was only a matter of time now.

Ghost saw right through my turmoil, but he didn't say anything.

He simply turned and began walking away.

"I'll submit your request to the Shadow Court. I'll lead the operation myself.

Stay where you are until I contact you.

When the time comes... prepare to stain your hands with blood."

" ... "

I said nothing.

Ghost vanished, as if he had never been there in the first place.

And I was left alone, lying on the cold snow.

I wanted to leave. But my body wouldn't move.

All I could do was stay there quietly, waiting.

"The weak have no right to decide anything in this world."

Only the strong get to shape their lives the way they want.

Only they have the power to dictate the fate of others.

I was weak.

Pathetically weak.

And that weakness...

That's why the powerful swarmed around me, steering my life as they pleased.

It's why my father died protecting me.

Why so many others perished.



And now, why I was about to kill Danzo.

All of this... because I was too weak.

But...

"What kind of strength would it take to break free from this cage?"

Would I have to become a heartless monster like Nameless?

Or a tyrant like Agaroth, wielding overwhelming power?

If that was the answer...

What price would I have to pay to reach it?

And could I even bear it?

"I don't know..."

I didn't know anything.

I had always been this way.

And in the end, nothing had changed.

"Perseverance doesn't guarantee success."

No matter how hard you struggle, no matter how much you try,

success is never promised.

This is life.

It throws you wherever it wants, never where you choose.

"What a cruel world..."

Leaning against the wall, I sat there quietly.

Waiting for the moment of truth.

Chapter 443: Turning Point (3) -End of Volume II-

That night,

the snow fell endlessly from the sky, while the sun slowly rose on the horizon, announcing the beginning of a new day for the Empire.

[Time remaining until the final mission's deadline: 1 hour.]

The notification reflected coldly in Frey's eyes as he walked forward at a slow, steady pace, dragging a wheelchair up the slopes of a distant hill.

As expected, the Shadow Court had moved with flawless precision and terrifying speed, carrying out the task Frey Starlight had entrusted to them, with Ghost personally leading the operation.

Without any resistance, they infiltrated the Silver Dragon Guild's headquarters and extracted Danzo from within, bringing him to Frey's side.

Danzo remained unconscious in his wheelchair, his body wrapped carefully in warm clothing, thick blankets covering his paralyzed legs to keep him as comfortable as possible.

Frey figured this was Ghost's doing.

A quiet, considerate gesture.

Ghost himself lingered nearby but chose not to appear, leaving Frey alone with Danzo for what had to be done.

Elsewhere, the Shadow Court's assassins secured the entire area, ensuring that nothing would interfere with what was about to happen.

Even though they were far from the Imperial Capital, Belgrade,

the Silver Dragon Guild had already discovered Danzo's disappearance.

The capital was likely in chaos now, and it was only a matter of time before they tracked down their location.

There wasn't much time left.

And with every passing second, Frey's face grew darker and darker,

until at last, the summit came into view, where the morning sun cast its distant rays upon them.

Danzo looked terribly weak.

Throughout the journey, he would wake briefly, only to slip back into unconsciousness moments later.

It was probably the effect of the sedatives Ghost and his team had used .. ensuring everything would proceed smoothly.

Frey preferred it that way.

He didn't want to meet his friend's gaze.

But, as if fate was mocking him, with less than an hour remaining...

Danzo slowly opened his eyes, consciousness returning at the worst possible moment.

As his mind cleared, confusion spread across his face.

To Danzo, only moments ago, he had been asleep in his room.

Now, he found himself in a strange, isolated place he didn't recognize.

Then, in that moment, he caught sight of Frey pushing his wheelchair.

Seeing his friend eased his heart, reassuring him, if only a little.

"Frey... where are we?"

Danzo's voice was weak, still dulled by the lingering effects of the sedative.

It made him seem even more pitiful than ever before.

Receiving no answer, he tried again.

"Frey, what's going on? Why are we here?"

He kept asking, confused and growing more anxious by the second.

But Frey didn't reply.

He simply continued walking in silence, his face cast in shadows, dark circles heavy beneath his eyes.

He looked utterly broken. Exhausted.

When they finally reached the summit,

Frey released the wheelchair, letting it sit still in the snow.

He then paced back and forth for some time, walking in circles ...

lost.

Every now and then, he'd stop and stare at the sunrise, his mind clearly adrift,

burdened by a thousand thoughts.

Danzo noticed the faint tremors shaking Frey's shoulders from time to time.

That's when he realized ..

something was very wrong.

"Frey..." Danzo called softly, but Frey cut him off before he could say another word.

"The Demon Seed."

With his back turned, unable to face him, Frey spoke .. his voice shaking, unfamiliar.

"There's a malicious entity inside you.

A Demon Seed. It's fused with your body. You and it have become one."

Without warning, Frey laid it all out.

He spoke of the Demon Seed, and what had infected Danzo.

He spoke without pause, spilling the truth in its entirety.

Listening in silence, Danzo recalled all those times Frey had asked if he felt anything strange in his body.

He had thought Frey was simply worried about his health.

But now...

he understood why.

"The demon inside the seed is incredibly strong.

Once he fully awakens, he will seize control of your body and unleash a catastrophe that could kill thousands.

There is no cure. Once the seed takes root, it cannot be removed from its host."

Frey's voice stumbled from time to time, but in the end, he managed to explain everything clearly.

Drawing the Dark Sister, now radiating with holy energy, Frey stepped in front of Danzo ... face to face.

"I couldn't save you.

I couldn't find a way to cure you.

So now... there's only one choice left.

If I want to stop the demon inside you,

I have to kill you."

The moment those words left his mouth, Danzo's eyes widened .. but only for a moment.

Then his calm returned,

as Frey continued speaking in a rushed, breathless tone.

"That's why I brought you here.

So I could end this... far from everyone else.

In a place no one can reach you.

With this sword... I'll end your life."

Gripping the Dark Sister tightly,

Frey stared at Danzo.

The latter remained silent for a few seconds, trying to process what he had just heard.

It was absurd, wasn't it?

For your best friend to suddenly appear out of nowhere, claim that some demon was living inside you, and tell you that killing you was the only way to stop it.

Who could possibly believe that?

But Frey had to tell him.

Whether Danzo believed it or not didn't matter.

He just...

wanted him to know why he was about to die by his hands.

Frey expected countless possible reactions.

Denial.

Anger.

Laughter.



Or perhaps Danzo calling him insane, telling him to cut the nonsense.

But Danzo did none of those things.

He simply gave a quiet reply.

"I understand."

Those two words, spoken softly and calmly...

They shook Frey more than any scream could have.

His shoulders trembled uncontrollably as he shouted without thinking ..

"What do you mean you understand?!"

Raising his sword, Frey screamed...

"I just told you I'm about to kill you!

How can you respond like that?!"

He couldn't understand it.

Why did his friend accept this so easily?

If only Danzo had fought back, yelled at him, cursed him...

it would've made things easier.

But to accept it so quietly ..

What the hell was Frey supposed to say to that?

Danzo remained calm, watching Frey's turmoil for a while.

Letting him speak his heart, Danzo gave a faint smile.

"It's simple, Frey. I believe you. And to be honest... this way might be better."

"What are you saying...?" Frey asked in a strained voice, but Danzo continued speaking, in that same quiet tone ..

.. a calm that didn't suit him at all.

"I've already died once. What's left of me now is just an empty shell.

I left myself behind on the battlefield."

Smiling faintly, Danzo glanced down at his paralyzed body ...

a body he could no longer even move.

"You know, Frey... ever since we returned from the Ultras Continent, I've always wondered... why did I survive?"

Out of all the elite students who perished,

why was he the only one who lived?

"I left everything behind .. my blood, my strength, my will, everything I lived for.

I lost it all on that battlefield. I was supposed to die there.

But somehow, I survived."

"Or rather... only a tiny piece of me survived."

Hearing those words, Frey understood exactly what his friend meant.

Who was Danzo Smasher?

A friend. A warrior. A man who always carried that explosive energy,

that unbreakable will of steel.

He was the one who challenged geniuses far more talented than him, relying solely on his relentless effort.

He was loud, strong, and an essential presence in Frey's life.

But now?

"I already burned the candle of my life... burned it to nothing but ash."

He was weak. Quiet. Bound to a wheelchair.

That will of steel? Shattered like broken glass.

The ambitious young man who once lived for the fight...

had nothing left to live for in this harsh world where only the strong mattered.

"I believe you, Frey. I'm just a ghost of who I used to be.

I should have died that day. But I lived."

And then, to Frey's surprise,

Danzo smiled .. a bittersweet smile.

"But you know... I'm kind of happy about this."

Frey unconsciously took a step back.

"Danzo..."

"If dying by your hand means preventing a disaster...

then I guess it's not such a bad way to go, is it?"

"Danzo..."

"Do what you have to do, Frey.

And thank you... for telling me the truth until the very end."

At that moment, their eyes met.

And that was what hurt Frey the most ..

for in his friend's eyes, he saw the gaze of a man who had already accepted his fate with open arms.

Danzo had come to terms with it.

But Frey...

he still couldn't bring himself to act.

Gripping the Dark Sister, glowing with sacred light, Frey trembled in place, unable to take that final step.

And he knew ..this hesitation,

this weakness...

was an insult to the resolve Danzo had shown.

But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move forward.

"Don't hesitate, Frey. This isn't your fault."

"I know you're hurting.

And maybe that pain will stay with you for a long time.

But you've always had the strength to move forward... haven't you?"

Danzo chuckled softly, trying to encourage him.

But Frey couldn't return the smile.

"End it, Frey.

Isn't this why you brought me here?

Do it!"

Danzo tried to shout with all his strength—

but even then... his voice was faint, fragile.

"Finish it, my friend."

...

The sun rose in the distance,

while snow continued to fall upon their shoulders ..

as if mourning what was about to happen.

Frey raised his sword, placing it gently against Danzo's heart.

The demon inside his friend had not awakened yet, so killing Danzo would destroy it as well.

One clean strike, using a weapon imbued with powerful holy energy.

And the Dark Sister was more than enough for that.

With the sword positioned over Danzo's chest, Frey trembled.

The Dark Sister itself trembled in his hands.

"Compared to your pain, my pain will end in a moment.

So don't hesitate."

There were only minutes left until the mission's end.

Knowing that,

Frey gritted his teeth,

his hands clenching the sword so tightly that his skin nearly tore.

Forcing himself to act, he slowly pushed the blade forward.

It touched Danzo's chest ..

piercing it, inch by agonizing inch.

Aiming for his heart.

Counting on this one strike to end his suffering.

At that moment, Frey was about to finish it.

But he couldn't.

The space around him suddenly froze ...

as if some hidden defense mechanism had been triggered by his actions.

Time itself stopped.

And then, without warning ..

the right side of Danzo's face, along with his neck and right shoulder, erupted in a violent explosion of blood.

A bloodstained black hand burst forth from within Danzo, aiming straight for Frey's face.

Everything slowed to a crawl.

Frey watched the hand expand in his vision, every detail clear thanks to his Hawk Eyes.

It was a hand filled with malice .. one that carried enough power to blow his face apart and end his life.

He knew it.

Perhaps the demon inside Danzo had sensed the danger and unleashed this as a final act of defense.



It wasn't fully awakened yet, meaning Frey could have easily dodged the attack.

But he didn't.

Frey stood there, motionless, as the hand reached for his life.

'This is fine...'

He thought for a moment.

It was fine.

Dying here, at Danzo's hand, wasn't such a bad fate.

It was far better than killing his friend with his own hands and bearing that weight for the rest of his life.

It was the easy way out.

And Frey took it without hesitation.

In that moment, he didn't care what would happen if he died.

Ignoring the entire world, he simply wanted to rest. To end it all, finally.

But fate would not grant him such mercy.

The dark hand stopped, mere centimeters from his face.

It tried to move forward—to kill him—but it couldn't.

And that's when Frey realized what had happened.

Even though half of his face had been blown apart ... Danzo, with what little awareness remained, was still staring at him with his one remaining eye.

With the last drop of his will, Danzo had stopped the hand, saving his friend's life.

Danzo couldn't speak in that state, but Frey understood him clearly.

"Finish it."

That's what he was telling him.

So, Frey smiled.

He gave him one final smile .. one he hoped would be the last thing Danzo would see, instead of his own pain-ridden face.

Then, he drove the Dark Sister into his friend's heart.

It happened in an instant.

The sword pierced cleanly.

Flesh tore, blood spilled.

And the light faded from Danzo's eyes, leaving behind only a broken body, half-consumed by that demonic arm still protruding from his chest.

As for Frey...

His world collapsed.

His chest burned and froze all at once. He felt an unbearable pain as he fell to his knees beside his friend's lifeless body.

Soaked in Danzo's blood, his body trembled uncontrollably.

In that chaotic moment, he heard screaming, sobbing, and crying.

And when reality slowly returned,

he realized all those sounds had been coming from himself.

Crumpled over Danzo's corpse, Frey wept.

He thought his tears had long since run dry...

But they poured freely now, mixing with the blood of his fallen friend.

And amid all that ..

the system notification appeared.

[The Final Mission is Complete.]

He'd succeeded.

But at what cost?

Collapsed beside Danzo, utterly broken,

Ghost finally appeared from the shadows.

The moment his eyes landed on Danzo's lifeless body ... and that monstrous arm protruding from his chest ..

a pained expression crossed Ghost's face.

In that moment, he knew:

Frey had been telling the truth all along.

When he turned his gaze to Frey,

he saw just how shattered, how destroyed, his friend truly was.

"We need to go, Frey. The Empire will find this place soon."

Ghost's voice was tight with sorrow,

but Frey didn't respond.

He just clung to Danzo's body, refusing to let go.

Seeing this, Ghost finally stepped forward and pulled him away by force.

And as he watched his friend in such agony, a sharp regret stabbed through Ghost's chest.

'I should've done it instead.'

He'd been used to losing people.

He should never have let Frey carry this burden.

But what was done was done.

With no choice but to comfort his broken friend, Ghost buried his own grief deep inside his heart.

And so, the two of them retreated, leaving Danzo's body behind...

his blood staining the pure white snow in vivid red.

They couldn't even give him a proper burial.

And as for Frey, the pain he carried now consumed him even deeper than before ..

an endless abyss tearing at his soul.

Whatever would happen next...

this tragedy would cast its shadow over the future.

And over Frey, most of all.

...

#### Chapter 444: Echoes of the Cataclysm (1)

The world had undergone countless changes, and even the smallest of events cast the darkest shadows, stretching far across the horizon to shape a grim future.

Danzo was dead.

No .. he was killed, brutally, his body left to freeze amidst the snow.

In one corner of this bleak scene, you could see Frey Starlight, dragged away by his friend Ghost... broken, unable to hold himself together after killing Danzo with his own hands. Now, he was forced to live on, bearing the consequences of his actions.

What a wretched soul .. Frey, a man who didn't even have the freedom to die, yet was forced to kill those dearest to him with his own hands.

The weight of that reality crushed him.

But Frey's tears were not the only ones shed that day.

Elsewhere, an hour later, the Silver Dragon Guild finally reached the same place.

There, before the eyes of all his guild members, Adam Smasher embraced the lifeless body of his only son.

Adam wept and wailed, feeling the coldness of the life that had escaped his son's body.

Danzo was disfigured, a monstrous, demonic hand having burst from within his body, destroying half of his face. With a gaping hole in his chest, he was unmistakably dead.

Like a wounded beast, Adam Smasher let out a heartbreaking cry that made even the strongest among those present turn their faces away in pain.

That towering man had just lost everything.

His wife was gone. His closest friend, Isaac Cloud, was gone.

And now, his only son, the one he loved above all else, was gone too.

Torn between deep sorrow and raging fury, Adam could do nothing but scream until his voice gave out. His eyes burned red with hatred, vowing to hunt down whoever was responsible for his son's death.

An eye for an eye. Blood for blood.

In the end, someone would have to pay the price.

And so, the curtain fell on that bloody night, giving way to a new day in the empire, one shaken by these devastating events.

News of Danzo's death spread quickly, and a grand funeral was held in his honor.

Many high-ranking officials attended, along with Danzo's friends, including Snow Lionheart—the hero of the church—who had been secluded in solitary training ever since surviving the ordeal in the Ultras Continent.

Who could have imagined that the first thing awaiting him upon his return would be the news of Danzo's death?

It was a painful blow.

Most of the surviving elite students gathered at the funeral.

No one was allowed to see Danzo one last time. Adam didn't want anyone to witness the monstrous state his son had been left in.

Everything was done in silence .. amidst hearts grieving, and others burning with hatred toward whoever was behind this tragedy.

But among them all, Danzo's closest friend was missing.

Frey Starlight was nowhere to be seen.

Everyone came to pay their respects, whether close or distant. Even Ada Starlight herself was present.

But the one closest to Danzo was absent, nowhere to be found.

Ghost, too, was missing, raising even more questions.

Yet since they were Danzo's closest friends, many assumed they simply couldn't bear the pain, retreating from sight to grieve in silence.

But the truth was far removed from that simple explanation.

In the end, Danzo was buried. And with him, the final mission that had broken Frey's heart and left his suffering to linger on.

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Time moved on.

And the turmoil within the empire continued to grow.

In the western reaches of the empire, specifically in the territory under House Moonlight's command, the emperor's delegation gathered .. led personally by Sir Alon ... waiting at Winterfell's Grand Port.

The port was vast and heavily fortified, functioning as a military base in its own right.

It was from this very place that Maekar Valerion had launched his ill-fated raid, the one that ended in disaster, leaving the empire's main forces missing in action.

The consequences of the defeat at Shizkclar Bay were massive. Losing the empire's primary military strength was only one of the many crises shaking the nation.

Now, Sir Alon was forced to face the anger of the people, who had finally broken their silence.

Previously, when the Ultras invaded and slaughtered countless citizens and their children, the emperor made no move.

But now .. only because his own sons and the children of the great noble houses had been kidnapped—Maekar immediately rallied all forces for a raid many described as suicidal and reckless.

How many fathers left their families to answer the emperor's call?

How many parents said their tearful goodbyes to their children, praying for their survival in the coming battle?

And how many ambitious men had their dreams crushed, now listed among the missing?

All of this weighed heavily on the hearts of the people, especially after the latest widespread assault by the Ultras.

This is why the mission entrusted to the Sword Saint, Vendrick, carried such critical importance. There was no room for mistake.

Standing there, accompanied by many veteran warriors who once again raised their swords for his sake, Sir Alon Valerion watched from afar as a broken ship slowly drifted toward the harbor, carried by the waves.

In mere moments, the vessel docked .. and one by one, the survivors disembarked.

And first among them was the Sword Saint himself, alongside the Grand Assassin, Mist Umbra, and the Church's Bishop, Joseph Blatier.

All of them looked exhausted and wounded.

As if they had just survived a long, grueling battle.

"Vendrick..."

Sir Alon spoke softly as he approached his old friend.

For a moment, Sir Alon feared the mission had failed, given that the Sword Saint's ship was the only one to return.

But Vendrick surprised him, pulling a black cube from his torn robe.

"Here. This is what you were looking for."

Tossing it toward Sir Alon, Vendrick walked past him without another word.

Holding the cube in his hands, Sir Alon was momentarily confused .. until he realized what it was. His son, along with the others, was sealed within it.

The Sword Saint had succeeded.

Sir Alon turned to call out to Vendrick, wanting to finally speak the words that had weighed on his heart.

But the Sword Saint simply raised his hand.

"I know... she's dead, isn't she?"

Stunned, Sir Alon froze, staring at Vendrick, wondering how he knew of Millicent's death.

But there was nothing left for him to do but apologize.

"I'm sorry."

It was his mistake, after all .. he was the one who had sent them back into battle in the first place.

Yet Vendrick did not blame him. He said nothing at all, his face void of expression, as he walked away slowly, gazing up at the sky.

"We cannot escape the chains of fate."

He had known this would happen. It was inevitable.

But even knowing that, he could do nothing but bury his sorrow and continue living.

Ever since the blue-eyed one had shown him the future long ago, the Sword Saint had prepared himself for such tragedies.

#### Chapter 445: Echoes of the Cataclysm (2)

As Vendrick walked away, both Mist Umbra and Joseph Blatier stared at his back, awe and dread written across their faces.

"Sir Alon... who is that man, really?" Joseph Blatier asked, his voice low as he recalled the events of the past days.

When they tried to retrieve the cube imprisoning Maekar and the others, they were forced to dive into the ocean.

Waiting there was one of Beatrice's puppets, armed with a terrifying array of deadly spells.

And alongside it, thousands of nightmare sea creatures.

The sight was horrifying.

But before Vendrick's sword... none of it mattered.

His swordsmanship was unlike anything they had ever seen, even in all their years of battle.

Every strike he unleashed seemed capable of cutting the sea itself .. obliterating the nightmare beasts and destroying Beatrice's puppet before she could even cast a spell.

He was overwhelming.

Sir Alon could only nod.

"That man... is the sword with which I built my glory and cut down my enemies."

It wasn't surprising to him that Vendrick had succeeded.

The Sword Saint was already stronger than him.

And yet, after all these years of fighting side by side, Sir Alon had never truly understood his old friend.

And he doubted he ever would.

But right now, the cube in his hands was his top priority.

"What exactly is this thing?"

"It's a magical prison .. a high-level spell unlike anything we've seen before," Mist Umbra explained. Behind him stood three sorcerers, each so powerful that even the weakest among them had reached the S+ rank.

Hearing this, Sir Alon assumed breaking the cube would be a monumental task, but the sorcerers quickly dispelled that thought.

"This prison contains a vast internal space. From the outside, it seems small, but within, it's enormous."

"After analyzing it for days, we've decided to call it the Prison Cube. It's so strong that even SS+ rank fighters the most powerful on earth .. wouldn't be able to escape from it."

Sir Alon raised a brow, astonished by what he was hearing.

The strongest warriors alive were all in the SS+ rank.

"So, if the Prison Cube can withstand their attacks, doesn't that mean breaking it is impossible?"

"Yes and no."

Mist Umbra replied again, explaining the situation fully.

"It's impregnable from the inside, making escape impossible. But from the outside, we've discovered it's far weaker. If we apply enough destructive force, we should be able to break through it."

In other words...

It would be simple enough .. as long as the cube was already in their hands.

But that didn't comfort Sir Alon Valerion. Instead, it filled him with unease.

"I don't understand. If that's true, then why didn't the enemy bother to take the cube back?"

If he were in their place, Sir Alon would have locked the cube away in the most secure corner of the Ultras Continent, where the empire would never recover it.

But Beatrice had simply left it within their grasp.

"Why?!"

The Iron Emperor couldn't comprehend his enemy's way of thinking. This was the first time he had faced an opponent like this.

As if they never saw them as true opponents, but merely playmates to pass the time with ... companions for their amusement, nothing more.

But what on earth was that terrifying witch thinking during the battle?

Sir Alon could not find the answer.

Nor could Mist Umbra or Joseph Blatter, who shared in his ignorance.

"...Well, that doesn't matter now."

Grasping the cube, Sir Alon's body began to glow.

"What matters is freeing our forces trapped inside."

Relying on that hope, Sir Alon and his men evacuated the harbor completely, placing the cube at its center, knowing how many soldiers were sealed within.

In the sky above ..

Sir Alon, Mist Umbra, and Blatter soared into the air.

Then, without warning, the three of them unsheathed their weapons and unleashed their auras at full force.

With a joint attack containing an overwhelming amount of destructive power, they struck the cube.

Under the pressure of an SS+ rank fighter and two others in the SS rank, the prison cube couldn't withstand the force. In just a few seconds, its outer shell began to crack.

And then, the cube finally exploded.

At that moment, it expanded wildly, covering the entire harbor in an ominous light.

From within, shattered ships and people began falling from the sky as they were released ..

Crashing violently into the ground, the explosion caused devastating destruction, and corpses were scattered everywhere.

And after only a few more seconds, the true horror of what had been inside was revealed.

It was this sight that caused the faces of Sir Alon Valerion and his companions to darken instantly.

One after another, the captives fell from the cube .

But they were no longer the same fighters they had once been.

They were nothing but skeletal remains, stripped of flesh and skin, collapsing across the battlefield.

Staring at this nightmare, Sir Alon Valerion could only clench his fist so tightly that the pressure of his aura nearly destroyed everything around him.

"What the hell is going on here?!"

No matter where he went, no matter how much he searched through the wreckage of the shattered ships, all he found were skeletons...

They were all dead.

And then, after a grueling search, a group of survivors finally appeared before them.

There... sitting atop the wreckage of a ship, was the Emperor .. Maekar Valerion.



Wearing his battered Fume Knight armor, the once-mighty Emperor now looked so frail that his supposedly perfect body barely filled the armor anymore.

His eyes were completely dark as he sat there, staring into the void, utterly drained of strength.

Around him, many of the empire's strongest warriors had collapsed as well, their bodies weak and nearly lifeless.

Iris, Lord of the Sunlight Family, and his brother Gal...

Melina lay unconscious in one corner, and the Emperor's brothers, Ivar and Luc Valerion, were both sprawled helplessly on the ground.

Standing before them, Sir Alon remained silent. Maekar was the only one who still retained consciousness.

Lifting his head slightly... Maekar now seemed several years older.

When he saw Sir Alon, a strained smile appeared on his face.

"...Father."

He spoke with difficulty, but Sir Alon Valerion's rage flared instantly.

"You Fucking Disappointment"

Grabbing his son by the chestplate,

Sir Alon lifted Maekar effortlessly with one hand.

"You dare show your wretched face to me, still alive, when everyone around you died because of you?!"

A surge of light gathered in Sir Alon's fist, ready to crush Maekar then and there.

Yet despite this, Maekar only laughed in response.

"Disappointment? Those are big words coming from you, old man... Kihihhi..."

Sir Alon was truly about to end his son's life, but Mist Umbra and several soldiers quickly intervened to stop him.

"Calm down, Sir Alon! Do you even understand what you're about to do?"

"He's an SS+ rank warrior .. and your son!!"

That frail man, despite everything...

Remained one of the empire's strongest weapons.

Losing him would be a disaster.

Reluctantly responding to his soldiers' pleas, Sir Alon hurled Maekar's body aside violently, unwilling to look at him any longer.

"Throw that useless fool somewhere out of my sight. I don't have time to deal with such a disappointing son."

Turning away, Sir Alon shifted his focus to the others collapsed on the ground. But Maekar wasn't finished speaking.

"Old man... I see your back's still straight, despite all these years."

Maekar's voice was faint, almost a whisper.

But it reached Sir Alon clearly.

"If you still have all that strength, maybe you should've remained Emperor until the day you died, instead of tossing your mantle onto me... filthy old man."

Maekar sneered, but Sir Alon didn't even bother to turn around.

To him, his eldest son was no longer anything more than an insect.

And an insect was no longer enough to warrant his attention.

Just like that... Maekar was dragged away.

Meanwhile, Sir Alon turned his gaze toward the other survivors.

Chapter 446: Echoes of the Cataclysm (3)

They were all in a pitiful state... but alive, thanks to their SS tier vitality.

"What happened to them?!"

Turning sharply, Sir Alon questioned Mist Umbra.

"How long have they been trapped in here?!"

In response, Mist gave him the exact number.

"Counting today, it's been 58 days inside the cube."

Fifty-eight days...

"They had plenty of supplies... and that amount of time isn't enough to bring SS-ranked warriors to this state. That's impossible!"

But in that moment, Sir Alon's eyes fell on the wall Maekar had been leaning against earlier.

What he saw made him freeze.

The wall was covered in carvings.

Tally marks. Day after day, one after another.

So many... far too many, covering the entire surface of the ship.

This was no mere 58 days.

"...Two years and 231 days."

With great effort, Iris Sunlight spoke, his hollow eyes meeting Sir Alon's gaze.

Hearing the words of the aged Iris, the terrible truth finally sank in for everyone.

It had been 58 days outside the cube.

But the passage of time inside the cube was entirely different.

For those trapped within, 58 days had stretched into two years and 231 days.

Days turned to weeks, weeks to months...

They exhausted all their supplies and were left to be devoured by hunger and thirst.

It broke them to the point where, eventually, they began to consume one another.

The flesh of those who died first... just to survive.

They ate human flesh. They drank blood...

They became monsters .. the very kind they once despised .. just to cling to life.

This was the witch's game.

Gazing into the distant horizon...

Sir Alon finally began to understand his enemy, even if only a little.

He could almost swear he heard her laughter.

The laughter of Beatrice.

She was toying with them.

Everything, to her, was nothing but a game.

And that alone made the Iron Emperor's blood boil.

"The witch's game, huh? ... Fine then. Let's play."

With his body radiating intense light, Sir Alon Valerion stood at the forefront, igniting his thirst for war.

"We'll play... but this time, by my own rules."

The Ultras wanted war.

And war is exactly what they will get.

There was no turning back now.

"This will be a war of annihilation."

He would spare neither young nor old,

Neither men nor women.

Sir Alon had sworn ..

He would slaughter them all.

By the end of this war, either the Ultras or the Empire...

One of them would vanish from the face of the earth.

Catastrophe was inevitable.

And as Sir Alon Valerion turned away, leaving with those he could still save—

The sky above them cracked open, answering his will with a terrifying cry, a dreadful omen.

A warning that hell itself was all that awaited them.

On that day, at that hour ..

The whole world looked up at the sky...

And saw creatures descending from the void, screeching without end,

As if the end of the world had arrived.

They looked like colossal black ravens, their immense wings blotting out the sky as they soared through the air, crying endlessly.

Their screeches were terrifying, carrying countless emotions within them.

At times, they sounded mournful, at others joyful.

Sometimes furious, sometimes ecstatic.

The world trembled beneath their cries.

Yet they did nothing... simply circling the skies without purpose, crying without end.

Massive black birds, as if they had crawled straight out of hell.

Reactions varied, but among them ..

Frey Starlight gazed at the birds, his face shadowed with darkness.

From his lips, he whispered their name—

"...Chaos Eaters."

The disaster was inevitable.

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The world continued to change with every passing second.

As shocking events tore through everything, one after another...

Meanwhile, within the Human Empire ..

Emperor Maekar Valerion was returned to his castle, completely withdrawn from public view.

He was in a miserable state, driving away anyone who dared approach him, demanding to be left alone.

His body was frail and weak after all he had endured.



And so, he found himself staggering between the walls of his castle, his steps faltering as he wandered through one corridor after another.

The deeper he went...

Maekar Valerion finally reached his private sanctuary ..

A place he had never allowed anyone else to approach.

Opening the door to that secret room,

Maekar stepped into a chamber completely frozen over.

An empty room, filled with nothing but ice.

And within mere moments, he collapsed, leaning against a massive ice coffin that stood at the center of the room.

The moment he fell, he began laughing like a madman, his body trembling violently.

[illegible]

He cursed over and over, sobbing all the while.

Everything had fallen apart for him overnight.

"Why... why did it all come to this?!"

He cried out, then burst into hysterical laughter once again, turning his gaze toward the coffin behind him.

"If only time could turn back... to those days... back then, everything was fine."

Times when he had lived in peace, and everything had been as it should.

"Why did you leave me?!"

Maekar continued sobbing like a madman as he clung to that coffin.

"Everything was fine when you were here..."

With a trembling body, Maekar stared at the coffin.

And within it... the face of a man was revealed.

A man who had long since closed his eyes to this world.

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Chapter 447: Whispers in the Darkness

— Frey Starlight's POV —

The room was dark.

Here in my lonely chamber, the place where I first opened my eyes in this world.

How many days had passed? I found myself wondering.

Sitting on my bed, I stared at the system interface with a face that no longer reflected any sort of expression... or emotion.

Every time, I thought I had reached my limit.

I told myself .. this is it, Frey. You've reached your peak.

You've endured the greatest suffering and torment, and each time, somehow, I found a way to get through it and keep moving forward, convincing myself that everything was fine.

That I had already seen it all. After everything I'd been through, I believed I had experienced every possible form of suffering, and that nothing could surprise me anymore.

But every single time ..

Life proved just how foolish I was, dragging me into a brand-new hell.

And most likely, all of this was part of that Engineer's plan... along with whoever else stood behind him.

This was the kind of fate prepared for me. A destiny I seemed unable to escape.

And perhaps this system interface stretched before my eyes was the very reflection of that cursed fate awaiting me.

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Final Mission: Save or Kill Danzo (Completed)

Reward: 15,000 Achievement Points

Skill: Screenshot (SS Rank)

The Screenshot skill allows the user to release a powerful type of aura that manipulates the reality around them. When the skill is used, it captures everything within the user's surroundings .. freezing time for everything inside the screenshot's range for one second.

\*Ding!\*

Missions Updated

Main Missions:

Kill 10,000 Ultras soldiers: 5,000 Achievement Points.

Defeat one of the Ultras' major powers: 5,000 Achievement Points.

Final Mission: Eliminate Wesker's Shadows.

Mission Description: ??? (Will be revealed when the time comes).

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Without realizing it, a bitter smile appeared on my face as I read the mission list.

The system had already begun weaving my new path, guiding me toward the fate it had prepared for me.

This time, the final mission was issued right from the start.

And reading it only made my smile deepen.

"Wesker?"

Was the system talking about that demon? The fourth-ranked one, often called the filthiest demon to ever exist?

For his name to appear on the system interface... meant, one way or another, that monster was nearby.

But I had to say... the system had completely lost its mind this time.

I mean, I'm supposed to face the Fourth Seat?

"Do you even realize the scale of his power?"

Even if he were to face both the Empire and the Ultras alone, he'd slaughter them all in a single day.

I found myself unable to believe that such a monster could be my enemy.

"Wesker's Shadows..."

What I needed to focus on wasn't Wesker himself .. but the term "shadows."

The secret behind the final mission lay there.

Once I understood what those shadows meant, I'd know what to do.

But...

"What's the point?"

Despite the weight of these missions, and all the chaos that had swept through the Empire ..

From what happened to Maekar and the others after falling into Beatrice's trap,

To the sudden appearance of the Chaos Eaters...

Those colossal birds soaring through the sky, shrieking as if the end of the world had arrived...

After shaking the world with their first appearance, they had now fallen silent, flying aimlessly through the sky.

Many tried to reach them, to attack them.

But no one could even touch them.

Not even Sir Alon himself.

Fortunately, the Chaos Eaters paid no attention to humans. All they did was fly without purpose.

Even so, humanity was forced to live in fear, watching those creatures above.

And they had every reason to be afraid.

Many believed the Chaos Eaters were some new kind of nightmare creature.

But they weren't.

Despite their overwhelming numbers, the Chaos Eaters were merely fragments of a single entity.

A higher being belonging to one of the most mysterious races in existence ..

The Great Ones.

Of course, I knew them. I remembered they were supposed to appear at the end of the story I once wrote, back when I was a novelist.

As their name implied, the Chaos Eaters fed on chaos.

Throughout history, they had appeared many times in various corners of this vast world.

Every time it appeared, without exception, a catastrophe would follow .. one that shook the entire world to its core.

That cry it let out each time... was the warning bell.

A clear sign that disaster was inevitable.

And that chaos... was the very sustenance of that mysterious entity.

And now, it had appeared once again, right here on this earth.

In other words, disaster was coming .. without a doubt.

Thinking about it, I began to realize just how hopeless this situation truly was.

The Chaos Eaters... who had witnessed every massacre in the history of this world.

Wesker...

The Ultras...

The Engineer...

The Shadow Sect...

Something was about to happen.

Something far too great to comprehend.

And this Empire... was simply the stage upon which it would unfold.

Humans were nothing more than pawns and players in this grand event.

And here I was, sitting in the middle of all that chaos ..

Staring at a system that expected me to deal with it somehow.

That's why I couldn't help but laugh... It gave me this ability, "Screenshot," or whatever it was called.

So what?



"What do you expect from someone who couldn't even save a single friend?"

When I looked at these hands of mine, I could see it clearly ..

Danzo's blood still clinging to them.

No matter how much I washed them, no matter how much I scrubbed them...

The blood never faded.

I knew exactly how great the coming disaster was. I knew how dark the future looked.

But honestly?

I found myself not caring much anymore.

Because from the very beginning... I had never moved on from the past.

Curled up in my own despair...

I couldn't even close these eyes.

Because every time I did... I saw him.

Danzo, smiling at me as that demonic hand burst from within him.

Even in his final moments, he did everything he could to save my life.

And in return, what did I do?

I drove my sword through his chest and stole from his eyes the light of life that kept him in this world.

His ghost had haunted me every day since.

And so, once again, I found myself laughing bitterly at my own foolishness.

I, who thought I had lost all emotions, found guilt gnawing at my heart without end.

Placing my hand over my chest, I listened to the steady beating of my heart...

I felt my veins burning, drowning in those hateful emotions.

I saw myself as a sinner deserving punishment.

For what I had done, I was ready to accept whatever fate awaited me.

And at the same time, I was angry—furious—and filled with hatred.

Hatred for those who tampered with my fate and Danzo's, manipulating us from the shadows until it all ended like this.

Hatred for the Ultras, the enemy from whom this curse had come, the ones who caused so many deaths.

Hatred for Gvardiol, the man who planted that demonic seed inside Danzo...

"Sons of bitches..." f.(r)eeewe/bnov\ll.com

All of them. Without exception.

I had no idea what I was supposed to do, no plan to face all these horrors.

All I had was an endless guilt that ate away at my soul without pause.

And a raging anger that made me want to draw my sword and kill as many of those bastards as I could.

Ten thousand Ultras soldiers...

Is that what the system wanted from me?

Fine. Let it have what it wants.

But I wouldn't stop at ten thousand. I would go beyond that.

I would kill them. Tear them apart. Bury them all if I had to.

The war was coming, and I would be at the very front of it.

There—only on the battlefield—could I unleash these feelings.

Only in the heat of battle might I find my release.

And if, when the time came, I met my punishment on that battlefield... I was fine with that too.

Drowning in darkness, with bloodstained hands,

I continued to wrestle with myself, waiting for the time to come ..

The time for the War of Darkness to begin.

I wanted to wield my sword as soon as possible.

"Please... let it begin."

Let the war break out.

Let the slaughter begin. Let the killing festival start.

Let me kill them.

Let me tear them apart.

My body trembled without stopping, while the blood on my hands thickened.

"Kill... kill... their blood..."

The blood of the Ultras.

Only when I soaked my hands in their blood would Danzo's blood finally wash away.

Only then... might I find peace from this torment.

So please... let it begin.

Trembling endlessly, I hallucinated about blood that wasn't even there.

I was slowly losing myself...

The edge of madness was drawing near.

And then, in that moment ..

From within the darkness...

A pair of slender, pale hands wrapped gently around my chest from behind.

I felt a warm body press softly against my back.

"The darkness doesn't suit you, Frey."

She whispered those words calmly beside my ear, as the ivory horns extended from her crown.

"...Sansa."

Chapter 448: A Demon's Embrace

Looking at her with tired eyes, I found myself losing all strength in her embrace.

Letting her do whatever she wished with me.

With a gentle smile, she continued holding me close.

"Life has never been kind to you, my dear Frey... This is the first time I've ever seen you break like this."

"I'm tired, Sansa. I'm tired, and I can't keep going anymore. This life has taken so much from me... all that's left inside is emptiness, alongside a burning flame that keeps devouring me. And I don't know where to unleash this searing fire..."

Listening to every word I spoke ..

Sansa held on to me even tighter.

"Why didn't you let me finish it?" she asked softly. "I could've given him a merciful death. Then you wouldn't have needed to stain your hands with your closest friend's blood."

Hearing that, I found myself laughing again...

She really had tried to end it instead of me.

More than once.

But I never allowed her to.

"What happened to Danzo was my fault. Mine alone... and the responsibility is mine to bear. No one else's."

"Why, Frey? Why do you torture yourself like this?"

"Because I'm a sinner. And this is my punishment."

"Even if it means losing yourself... and surrendering to the fate you've been running from all this time?"

"That's right."

I answered without hesitation.

As I lay down on the bed beside Sansa,

I stared at the ceiling, lying on my back, while she lay beside me, gazing at my face.

"Tell me, Frey... would you die with me?"

Hearing that strange question, I turned toward her.

"Die... with you?" I asked unconsciously, and she nodded softly.

"Look at me. I'm a filthy demon who finds pleasure in the suffering of others. Even your agony right now, tearing you apart, I find it enticing... and beautiful."

Placing her hand over my face, Sansa smiled warmly.

"For me... I've already lost everything.

To the world, Sansa Valerion is already dead.

But there are still some eyes that see me as I truly am."

Her cold fingers wiped my tired eyes, and she let out a light laugh.

"You're the only reason I keep going, Frey.

Even when I'm a filthy demon contradicting all that is alive...

So if you ever find yourself unable to go on .. If life tortures you beyond what you can bear .. Then let's die together !"

"I can drown us both in my shadows.

We'll die at the same moment...

A peaceful, gentle death.

An escape from the horrors of this world."

"Die together..."

I repeated quietly... and smiled as well.

What she said really did sound beautiful. free\NovelBin.c o(m)

A perfect escape from all this suffering and torment that had torn me apart until now.

"We could do it someday... somewhere far away, where no one can see us."

Without realizing it, I followed along with her suicidal thoughts, causing her to nod.

"Someday... but not today, right?"

"..."

I didn't answer.



I just stayed silent.

Dying now, here with Sansa...

Was that even possible?

To begin with, the Engineer would never allow me to die. So there was no point in even trying.

But for some reason, I felt that wasn't the real answer.

"You can't die, can you?"

As if seeing right through me, Sansa spoke quietly.

It was as though she had known this from the very start.

"That's only natural, Frey.

You still have so much left to live for...

So much, really..."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, trying to deny her words, but she was already several steps ahead.

"You have your sister, Ada."

"You have other friends .. just as precious as the one you killed with your own hands."

"You have a dark fate waiting for you in the future, and a destiny you'll battle against, trying to change it..."

You have so many things that keep you from dying, don't you?"

I stayed silent.

Because I couldn't deny her words.

Even if I lied to myself, claiming the Engineer wouldn't let me die...

I couldn't lie to her.

Because deep down, somewhere within me...

I refused it.

I refused to die.

"Then live, Frey.

Just as you've always done.

Perhaps the future still holds tragedies far darker and crueler than anything you've faced before...

But you'll endure. And you'll keep moving forward."

"...Sansa."

"You'll suffer greatly, Frey. But at the very least... you won't be alone."

"I'll be with you, always. I'll be your strength .. and your demon who torments your enemies."

"The Ultras? Let's kill them all! Let's go to the battlefield and slaughter them one by one!"

"We'll keep moving forward.

And if one day, you decide you can't go on any longer ..

Then you can reconsider my earlier offer.

Dying together in the end wouldn't be so bad.

But let's find a beautiful place for that, shall we?

I don't want to die in the middle of a battlefield, covered in blood from head to toe."

Sansa kept talking without pause, pouring out all her wild thoughts.

I suppose, in her own way, she was getting back at me ..

After I had unloaded all my misery on her these past few days.

But hearing her ridiculous talk about suicide now...

I found myself laughing unconsciously.

The trembling that had overtaken me eased slightly, And for a brief moment, I regained a part of myself that I thought I had lost.

"You really are a demon, Sansa."

Perhaps others saw her as nothing but a filthy creature, spreading death wherever she went.

But to me... she was like a sedative.

A calming presence that kept me whole through the darkest nights.

I was truly grateful to her.

Because of her ..

I could still keep going.

It seemed she could see my thoughts clearly, Because she smiled at me and nodded.

"Finally... you should really stop showing me this weak side of yours. Otherwise, you won't like what I'll do next."

In response to her playful warning, I could only sigh and smile at her.

"Yes, my lady..."

In that moment, I realized how tightly Sansa was holding onto me.

Lying side by side, she wrapped me in a firm embrace.

"You're not running away this time..." she whispered, as we slowly drew closer.

"I won't,"

I replied softly, as our breaths intertwined one last time before our lips met for the first time ..

Bound together in a long, stolen kiss.

Sansa was fierce... as if she had been yearning for this moment for a very, very long time.

As if she were trying to draw something out of me.

I didn't have the strength to push her away,

So I simply let her do as she pleased.

And so we kissed, passionately, for a long while...

A first kiss, then a second... then a third...

"Come to me."

Without even realizing it,

Sansa had become something irreplaceable in my life.

Chapter 449: The Brother I Once Knew

The hunt, war, death, pain...

All of these were things the Human Empire had begun to experience one after another.

From the kidnapping of their most promising talents, to Maekar's disastrous raid, and finally the last battle where Frey and his companions were rescued ...

Or rather... what remained of them.

Since then ..

Since the sudden death of the Silver Dragon Guild Leader's son, Danzo ..

Eight full months had passed.

Long months filled with skirmishes between the Empire and the Ultras.

During this time, the Empire worked on rehabilitating its most prominent warriors, who had been trapped inside the prison cube, hoping to make use of them in the coming war.

Under the leadership of Sir Alon, whose battlefield experience was unparalleled, and Aegon Valerion, who had demonstrated sharp strategic brilliance ..

The Empire had managed to close its gates throughout those eight months, withdrawing into itself to repel the Ultras' aggression.

Even so, the Ultras never launched a full-scale assault, making the situation increasingly clear.

The battlefield for the coming war would not be the Empire .. But the cursed land of the Ultras themselves.

It took the Empire eight full months to prepare, and the Ultras had willingly given them that time.

As if saying, word for word:

"Take all the time you want.

The result will be the same."

It was obvious that some hidden conspiracy was at work, and invading the Ultras on their own soil was likely a terrible idea.

Sir Alon knew this, of course.

But he didn't care.

War was inevitable.

And this time, the Empire would be the challenger .. Unlike the war eighteen years ago, which they won through the sacrifice of Abraham Starlight.

This time, history would repeat itself .. But on a different battlefield.

A cursed land where death had long since claimed dominion.

...

...

...

— Starlight Estate, Eastern Ocklas Mountains —

Inside one of the magical forging chambers of the Starlight family, two women stood at the edge of the room, watching the mages prepare the long-range teleportation array.

"Eight months have passed..."

Ada Starlight spoke with a face that reflected both longing and anticipation. Carmen Starlight, standing beside her, nodded.

"The war summit is finally happening... it will be a massive event, gathering all the major powers of the Empire to formally launch the war."

The Belgrad Summit.

It was an event traditionally held every year to discuss the Empire's state of affairs, attended by the heads of the great families and other notable figures.

But this time, the summit had transformed into a war council, where the final touches would be made in preparation for the long-dreaded conflict.

"They ended up appointing me as the deputy commander of this entire council..."

Ada sighed in frustration, recalling the moment Sir Alon chose her as second-in-command for the upcoming war.

"Am I even worthy of such responsibility in the first place?"

She had wanted to refuse at first, but the decision wasn't hers alone anymore.



She now represented an entire family.

Her fall would mean their fall.

With a gentle smile, Carmen patted Ada's shoulder.

"I'm sure you'll do well. Sir Alon might seem like a senile old man, but he knows how to judge people and their capabilities. If he placed you in this position, it's because he sees that you're capable of carrying it."

Ada Starlight had proven her worth before ..

When she wisely refused to join Maekar's disastrous raid, making the Starlight family the only one to preserve its full strength.

Later, she devised a strategy that convinced the Iron Emperor himself to follow her without hesitation, further proving her competence.

"I don't see anyone else more deserving of this position... but the real problem lies with the commander you'll be serving under."

At the mere mention of him, Ada's face darkened slightly.

"Aegon Valerion..."

"It seems the prince has already secured his place on the throne.

He even managed to convince his grandfather to give him full command of the coming war."

Sir Alon had entrusted the entire command to the younger generation, led by the brilliant Aegon Valerion.

While veterans like Alon and the elders would supervise from afar, they would enter the battlefield only as devastating weapons of mass destruction.

Speaking of the prince deepened Ada's frown, but Carmen was there for her.

"Don't worry. If anything happens, I'll be right there beside you.

Let this old woman be your shield."

After months of training, Carmen Starlight had nearly reached her full potential, on the verge of entering the SS Rank.

Normally, someone like her would have been sent to the battlefield without hesitation.

But an exception was made this time, allowing Carmen to stay behind and protect Ada in case anything went wrong.

With a faint smile, Carmen remembered the day Ada was appointed as Aegon's deputy commander.

It happened eight months ago, right after the Imperial soldiers trapped in the cube were freed.

"That was the condition he set for you, wasn't it?

Otherwise, he never would have agreed."

Ada let out a soft sigh... remembering him.

"Frey has changed a lot since his friend's death...

In the past, he never involved himself in family affairs."

Her brother had always struggled ..

Rising and falling, again and again.

She had often seen him broken,

As if he were fighting against the entire world alone.

But every time, he rose again ..

And this time was no exception.

Yet unlike before, Ada felt something different in her brother...

Something dark enough to send chills down her spine.

He was like a wounded beast, consumed by rage, Unable to hide his murderous intent anymore.

There was no room for doubt.

Frey wanted to fight this time—more than ever before.

He wanted to kill, to slaughter the Ultras until their blood flowed like rivers.

His achievements were no secret, especially the story they told about him.

A tale describing how he defeated an army of one thousand men .. alone.

His burning desire for battle made it clear that Frey would be at the very front of this war.

Even if no one ordered him to go, he would march into battle on his own.

And there would be no stopping him.

"He's really going back to that hell he barely escaped from..."

Most of the elite students would struggle with the idea of returning to the Ultras Continent, where they had suffered so much.

But Frey was different.

"He left home eight months ago, saying he would isolate himself to train... and not to disturb him until the war began."

He gave them the coordinates of where he was headed ...

The Eastern Nightmare Lands .. And from that moment on, Frey Starlight disappeared from sight.

During his absence, Ada regularly checked his life signal through the device she had planted near his heart, Just to make sure he was still out there.

And throughout all that time, nothing happened.

Frey wandered alone in the Eastern Nightmare Lands.

And since then, no monsters had attacked from the east, leaving the borders eerily quiet.

"He wanted us to call him when the time for war arrived... and now, that time has come."

That's why Ada and Carmen were in that chamber now.

"The warp gate is ready, my lady."

One of the mages spoke with deep respect, bowing before Ada.

Before them, a bright blue portal glowed intensely, releasing waves of aura so powerful that it was clear the mages had used an immense amount of energy to activate it.

"This gate will take you directly to Lord Frey's coordinates. Finding him there shouldn't be difficult for Lady Carmen."

Another mage explained, and Ada gave a brief nod.

"Let's go."

Skiping any further formalities, Ada stepped into the portal, with Carmen following close behind.

Despite everything that had happened, Ada couldn't hide her longing to see her troublesome little brother again.

It had been eight months.

She wondered if he was still the same as when she last saw him.

Was he eating well?

Was he sleeping enough?

Was he hurt? Was he okay?

Had his appearance changed?

His birthday had already passed. He was nineteen now.

Surely, signs of maturity had begun to show on his face by now.

Ada wanted to see him.

She wanted to see him so badly.

And now, she was about to fulfill that desire.

"Stay close to me once we reach the other side. Don't forget, it's still Nightmare territory."

"I know."

Carmen's warning was valid.

Even though the coordinates were precise, there was no guarantee they would land exactly where Frey was.

Nightmare creatures could attack at any moment.

Carmen was ready to handle whatever might appear before them.

"Let's go."

And with that, both women stepped through the portal, initiating the teleportation process.

As the light engulfed them and the scenery rapidly shifted before their eyes ..

Ada and Carmen prepared themselves for several possibilities upon arrival.

Perhaps they would find Frey right away.

Perhaps Nightmare creatures would attack them.

Or maybe, they would simply arrive in an empty, barren place.

All were possibilities.

But reality... told an entirely different story.

When Ada stepped out of the portal behind Carmen, The ground beneath her feet was not solid earth ..

But a thick, viscous liquid that made her instinctively recoil.

What hit her nose wasn't the pungent scent often found in the Nightmare forests...

But something else entirely.

Something sharp.

And repulsive.

The smell of blood.

A lot of it.

And the stench of death and rot.

Chapter 450: The Return of the Black Death

What entered her field of vision...

Was a scene that could only be described as a nightmare.

"What... am I seeing...?!"

Even Carmen was not immune to the shock.

In all her long years of life ..

She had never seen such a massive number of corpses gathered in one place before.

The sky was dyed red from the sheer amount of blood spilled here.

The blood had formed a giant lake, so vast that both Ada and Carmen found themselves submerged up to their knees.

Before them ..

Mountains of corpses were piled one upon another, Stacked so high they looked like towering hills.

Colossal Nightmare creatures, some of them surpassing the SS- rank...



Mist stalker... Cursed Blades... Magma Golems... Grave Birds...

All of them were terrifying Nightmare creatures that had wrought destruction for countless years.

And yet now... so many had been slaughtered that their bodies were no longer even recognizable.

Amid this sea of death and blood, the corpses of the Nightmare creatures weren't the only ones.

Upon closer inspection, the two women noticed other bodies...

Human bodies.

Their heads had been severed and mounted on tall spears, decorating the area like a grim warning.

Hundreds of human corpses lay scattered across the land, while the Nightmare beasts numbered in the thousands.

Whoever killed those men had deliberately displayed their heads this way ...

To serve as a message for anyone who dared approach.

It took Ada and Carmen a long moment to process what they were seeing.

In this heart of death, even breathing became a difficult task.

The only sound that echoed in this place was the cawing of ravens, feasting on the corpses of the Nightmares, enjoying their meal.

And just as Ada and Carmen began searching for the one responsible for this massacre ..

Death itself came to greet them.

Without warning, Ada collapsed into the blood-soaked ground, while Carmen dropped to her knees, unable to stand.

Their faces filled with terror, the two women fell under the crushing weight of an aura that came from nowhere.

An overwhelming pressure that made the earth itself tremble beneath their feet.

It was so suffocating that Ada nearly lost consciousness, If not for Carmen spreading her own aura, trying to shield her from the worst of it.

But even with her efforts, the aura pressing down on them was something neither of them had ever experienced before.

In horror, Carmen raised her gaze to the peak of the corpse mountain ..

The place where the monster behind this aura stood.

"Just how much power does one need to release such an insane amount of aura?!"

It was a strange aura... yet familiar at the same time.

Cold... and deadly... yet somehow gentle. Familiar.

'SS+ rank? ... No. It's far beyond that. Even Sir Alon has never unleashed something like this...'

At first, Carmen thought it was Frey responsible for this terrifying pressure ..

But she dismissed the thought immediately. There was no way Frey's strength had reached such a level.

'I need to get Ada out of here...'

Even Carmen struggled to stay conscious.

Keeping Ada in this place any longer was far too dangerous.

Ready to dash away with everything she had, Carmen ignited her eight stars, casting one last glance at the figure standing atop the corpse mountain.

And at that moment, Carmen realized something terrifying:

If this person wanted to kill them...

They wouldn't survive even a single minute.

That sudden realization only deepened her despair... and fear.

But her fears were misplaced.

Without warning, the crushing pressure vanished the moment the young man withdrew his aura, finally allowing them to catch their breath.

"...Sorry. I've been having trouble controlling my aura lately."

The voice... was familiar.

It had been a long time, and his voice was much deeper now ..

But it was still him.

The young man stepped forward, standing atop the mountain of corpses.

At last, the figure revealed itself.

Holding a pair of black swords, wearing nothing but a torn black pair of pants, barefoot, his chest exposed ..

With snow-white hair that had grown much longer .. He finally appeared before them.

With trembling eyes, and a face stained by the blood of Nightmares, Ada stared at him, unable to comprehend what she was seeing.

"Frey...?"

She called his name, Only for her brother to vanish without warning ..

And reappear directly before them in an instant.

Carmen could only stare at him, unable to track his movement.

How could she?

He hadn't moved at all .. He had simply teleported.

He was covered in blood as well, but a faint smile crossed his face when he finally reunited with his one and only sister after all this time.

"It's been a while, Ada."

Frey extended his hand to her.

And as Ada looked at that hardened hand,

She realized how foolish she had been to come here thinking she'd find the same person she once knew.

Eight months might seem short .

But it was more than enough to change everything.

The young man standing before her was the one the Empire called the Second Coming of the Great Abraham Starlight ..

The warrior the Ultras feared so much, they named him the Black Death.

This was Frey Starlight.

Staring at him, Ada hesitated before finally taking his hand, Standing up once again, glancing around at the horror surrounding them.

"Frey... what happened here?"

Just standing there was suffocating for her.

But Frey seemed perfectly at ease, as if he were standing in his own home ..

Not in the middle of a sea of corpses.

Staring at the mountains of bodies around him, Frey answered plainly:

"This is my hunting ground.

I've been hunting Nightmare creatures here for the past few months."

Hearing this, both Carmen and Ada finally understood why no Nightmare beasts had attacked from the eastern borders during all these months.

Looking closely at the terrain around them,

They could see sword marks and destruction left behind by Frey as he hunted the Nightmares.

But the Nightmare beasts were not the only bodies in this place.

"What about those human heads...?"

"They're Ultras."

Frey answered immediately.

"They showed up here four months ago. I think they were planning something, but unfortunately for them... they ran into me.

They kept sending more forces ..

And I kept killing them."

It seemed the Ultras had been trying to carry out some kind of operation in the Eastern Nightmare Lands ..

But their plans had ended in complete failure. .

Ada understood that much...

But she couldn't stop herself from looking at those heads mounted on spears.

Heads decorating this canvas of death.

"Why... why did you go this far?"

She asked without thinking.

Killing enemies was understandable.

But to go so far as to decapitate them and mutilate their bodies ..

That wasn't something her brother—the one she knew—would do.

But Frey showed no reaction, answering calmly as if he had just been asked a foolish question.

"I did it so my enemies would understand what I'm capable of.

And so more of them would come seeking revenge."

"Revenge?"

"Yes—so I can kill even more of them."

Hearing those words, Ada didn't know what to say.

By placing the Ultras' heads like this, he had planted fear into his enemies,

And at the same time ...

He had fueled their rage, driving them to seek vengeance.

Frey knew well that the high Blood of the Ultras were very different from the Lower Blood.

They were much like ordinary humans.

They had emotions.

They lived normal lives.

When their comrades were defiled this way, it was only natural that their anger would explode.

And that was exactly what Frey was counting on.

This is how he had killed hundreds of them during his time in the Nightmare Lands.

"After torturing several of them, I learned what they were trying to do recently."

Frey spoke with chilling indifference, his gaze fixed on the severed heads he had mounted himself.



"It seems they're trying to use the Nightmare creatures in the coming war by taking control of them.

Unfortunately for them, they ran into me here...

But they might have succeeded in the southern and northern Nightmare Lands."

Frey continued speaking, but soon fell silent when he noticed both Ada and Carmen staring at him in complete silence.

"...What's wrong?"

Killing...

Torture...

Somehow, these words had become ordinary to him now.

Things he could do without hesitation,

As if they meant nothing.

"...You've changed, boy."

Carmen finally voiced what was on her mind, wiping some blood from Frey's face.

"In the past, I could always tell what you were thinking ..

But when I look at you now...

I see nothing."

The boy named Frey had become someone entirely different now.

No one could predict how far he would go from here on.

Whether that change was for better or worse ..

Ada stepped forward, wrapping him in an embrace, Uncaring of the filthy blood that stained them both.

"I'm glad you're okay, Frey.

As long as you're safe... nothing else matters."

Whether he was her naive little brother ..

Or a merciless monster ..

Ada Starlight didn't care.

That young man would always be her only family.

And Frey saw those thoughts clearly through his Affection System,

Which made him hug her tightly in return.

"I'm back, Ada."