

## VILLAIN 471

### Chapter 471: The Starlight Requiem (1)

—Frey Starlight's POV—

There are only a few fragile threads separating life from death.

In this cruel world we live in ... a world that rewards the strong with greater violence and dominance while crushing the weak into misery .. encounters with life-and-death moments are all too frequent.

In a land where the strong devour the weak, one often finds themselves thrown into the jaws of fate—forced to endure trials of sheer existence.

I don't know how many times the average person is supposed to face such situations in their short life...

But unlike most, I've encountered them more times than I can count .. more than anyone else, perhaps.

And the one I found myself in now was definitely one of them.

Gvardiol, the most enigmatic half-demon of his kind, had finally unleashed his full power.

I had pushed him to that point .. forced him to reveal his true nature to the world.

His body had transformed in a strange and terrifying way. That dark, foreign metal that once partially covered him now wrapped around his form completely.

No... it's more accurate to say that his entire body had become that unknown black metal.

I had torn his previous form apart, reduced it to shreds... yet somehow, he rose again, reformed, reborn in a shell of unbreakable darkness.

Dark aura .. pure shadow coiled around the frame of that metallic body, enhancing his strikes and unveiling the raw brutality of an SS+ class.

In that monstrous form, he was far stronger than the previous Lord, Godfrey.

"Frey Starlight... do you know what drives an enemy more than anything else?"

Having completely cornered me, Gvardiol kept up the pressure, his voice deeper .. more monstrous than before.

His blows were impossibly fast, frequently bypassing my defenses. The sparks that erupted from our collisions spread like wildfire, igniting waves of magical flame around us.

Flames burned atop the ocean itself, unnaturally and beautifully.

This version of Gvardiol was nothing like the one I'd fought before...

"After fighting humans countless times, I've come to one conclusion...

The enemy driven by vengeance is always the most relentless."

BOOM!!

With a rocket-like punch that made my bones tremble, Gvardiol drove me further back.

"An enemy fighting for vengeance always puts on the best show before I kill them in cold blood."

"That has always been my greatest thrill here on planet Earth...

But you, Lord Starlight ..

You're the first enemy who's ever made me truly want to kill."

His smile had vanished, replaced by an overwhelming wrath.

Shadow aura swirled violently around his arms, each punch causing a massive explosion that shook the battlefield to its core.

They struck me like bolts of lightning, so fast I could barely track them.

Though I blocked most of his blows, my bones quivered with each impact.

In raw physical power... Gvardiol was on an entirely different level.

But I had expected at least this much from the beginning.

"I see... So you're angry, aren't you, half-demon?"

Accelerating my steps, I gathered more and more dark aura around my blades and began striking back ..slashing into Gvardiol and delivering a staggering wave of damage with each blow.

Yet no matter how hard I struck him, I couldn't make him bleed.

His metal shell absorbed the damage with disturbing ease.

Meanwhile, his attacks kept wounding me over and over ..until my blood pooled beneath my feet in a massive crimson lake.

Even so, every injury I suffered regenerated instantly. I didn't care much for the damage.

Despite Gvardiol revealing everything he had, I never once felt like I was truly losing.

His power was overwhelming, yes—but I blocked most of what he threw at me.

Level 3 Shadow Adaptation.

Max-level Swordsmanship.

These two together elevated my sword art to heights I never thought possible.

Even while locked in combat with Gvardiol, I kept one eye on both Gavid Lindman and V... and I realized something important.

I wasn't the same person anymore.

"To be honest, I used to think that when I finally saw you again, I'd be overwhelmed with rage... That I'd try to kill you on sight."

BOOOOM!

"For Danzo."

The hatred had been festering in me for some time .. ever since my training began, I envisioned this moment over and over again.

I wanted to use that rage as fuel... to destroy you.

"That was my only wish for so long. And truth be told... I expected to feel that way when I saw you standing beside Gavid Lindman and V."

I retreated from Gvardiol, bombarding him from a distance with a torrent of shadow slashes.

His armored body absorbed them all without effort.

At first glance, the fight seemed to have hit a stalemate: I couldn't hurt him, and he couldn't stop my regeneration.

But reality was far more nuanced than that.

"I thought I'd hate you even more, Gvardiol...

But when I look at you now, somehow... those feelings have faded .. replaced by something else entirely."

Raising my blade toward him, I offered one final smile.

"Unfortunately for you... I now see nothing but another enemy that must be killed.

A nuisance whose very existence taints this world.

It'll be a far better place once people like you are dead."

Standing there, surrounded by enemies...

As fire raged around me, and the thunder of war roared in my ears...

I felt nothing toward my opponent.

Nothing at all.

I didn't even feel the urge to avenge Danzo anymore...

I simply wanted to kill him .. like any other Ultras warrior.

And to do that...

To bring down monsters of his caliber...

I needed to unleash a single overwhelming attack.

One blow with enough destructive force to bypass his defense and bring him down.

But landing such a strike wasn't easy...

Especially in my current state.

Without warning, Gavid Lindman reappeared behind me with terrifying speed.

I instantly responded .. parrying his sword with the Dark Sister, then slashing through him with Balerion...

But my blade passed right through his body.

"Phantom Form, huh..."

I exchanged blows rapidly with Gavid Lindman, who used that ghostly state to phase through everything I threw at him.

At the same time, Gvardiol rushed in to join the fray.

Left and right...

They bombarded me with a barrage of deadly strikes, all aimed to finish me off.

The Aether Blade carved illusions in the air, slashing through me, while Gvardiol's punches shattered my body again and again.

I was completely surrounded.

I fought back with all I had, managing to block and counter several times—but the limits of what I could achieve in this state were painfully clear.

Both of them had reached SS+ rank.

The longer the battle dragged on, the more my Shadow Adaptation gave me a growing edge .. but I would be long dead before it fully took effect.

I already knew that ..

Which meant I couldn't afford a war of attrition.

I had no idea what hidden tricks they still had under their belts.

And just when I thought things couldn't get worse...

A volcanic eruption of black fire fell from the sky.

Chapter 472: The Starlight Requiem (2)

It devoured everything in its path ..

Including Gavid Lindman and Gvardiol.

V's fire attack consumed a massive section of the battlefield, ensuring I had nowhere to dodge.

His strike harmed his allies too ..

But Gavid Lindman used his Phantom Form to become fully intangible,

While Gvardiol's metal body simply withstood the flames.

Neither of them suffered any damage.

I, on the other hand, was completely incinerated.

The black flames scorched me so thoroughly that most of my body was reduced to charred flesh.

The stench of burning skin and meat filled my nose.

I must've looked horrifying ..

I realized that when I saw the reflection of my face on my blade.

I had been burned to a crisp.

And yet...

Even as a walking lump of coal ..



I kept fighting.

Dodging their attacks.

Returning damage with every clash.

The three of us moved so fast, the eye couldn't track our movements.

The clash of blades was the only sound that echoed through the battlefield.

A whirlwind of swords.

A blazing metallic inferno that consumed everything around it.

"He can still fight like this... even after all that?!"

Gavid Lindman, stunned by my tenacity, couldn't understand how I was still standing.

"Sorry, but pain doesn't mean much to me."

Continuing to fight them both while enduring V's scorching flames...

My enhanced senses registered everything happening around the warzone.

My awareness expanded ..

Taking in every detail, including the dire situation behind me, where the Empire's forces were struggling.

After taking massive damage from the Nightmare Beasts, the Ultras ships launched a full assault ..

Encircling the Empire's forces from all sides.

They had deliberately avoided the zone where I was fighting Gvardiol and the others ..

Instead focusing their power on the Empire's fleet.

That must've been Gavid Lindman's plan ..

A command he gave at some point while I was busy battling Gvardiyol.

It had to be.

First, wear down the Empire's fleet with Nightmare Beasts and destroy most of their ships ..

Then finish off the rest with a massive final assault from the Ultras main fleet.

They had already guessed the Empire wouldn't send its full strength from the start ..

And would begin with a smaller vanguard.

That's why they sent 35,000 men, a force overwhelming compared to what we had.

As for me...

Despite being a potential threat,

They were confident I wouldn't survive a deathmatch against all three of them.

And what was happening now only proved them right ..

I had become a charred corpse, covered in dozens of horrific wounds.

Gavid Lindman and Gvardiol had beaten me to pulp, While V burned me again and again in perfect coordination.

Even though I kept resisting until the bitter end, It was becoming clear how this battle would end.

This was what it meant to face three warriors .. each beyond SS rank.

Even if I managed to unleash SS+ level power myself...

3 vs 1 was still nearly impossible.

'He's going to fall soon.'

That was probably what Gavid Lindman thought.

The fact I'd lasted this long was already a miracle in itself.

"In the end... how dull.

So this is all you've got?"

Gvardiol spoke, his voice tinged with disappointment as he began to lose interest in me.

He had expected to fight some kind of monstrous legend .. But his opponent had fallen faster than he ever imagined.

It made him realize that he had overestimated me...

Using one of his trump cards against a mere boy.

The battle was already over.

Abraham Starlight had been a special case ... And it was a mistake to compare his son, Frey, to him.

Miracles only happen once.

And the Starlight family... had already used up theirs.

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Frey Starlight had been completely defeated.

The young man whose very name struck terror into the hearts of the Ultras...

...was now on the verge of collapse.

"Your death will mark the beginning of the end... for the Empire, and everything it stands for."

As they ripped his body apart,

Gavid and Gvardiol continued to spit poison into Frey's ears.

"If this were Abraham Starlight, he would've handled the situation with ease.

But the son... is nothing like the father."

From the very beginning, comparing him to the Starlight family's greatest star had been nothing but a fantasy.

The Black Death?

A meaningless title .. earned only by killing a handful of the weak.

Frey Starlight built his reputation on a lie.

And that lie was finally about to collapse.

With his features burned beyond recognition, The so-called Lord Starlight had never looked more pathetic.

'Time to end this.'

Readying his blade once more,

The masked V prepared to deliver the final blow .. watching Frey from afar.

His opponent looked utterly defeated,

That much was obvious.

And yet, for some reason...

V couldn't stop staring into those eyes.

Those eyes of the Lord Starlight.

They glowed with a violet light,

The only thing still shining in his charred, broken form.

Eyes... calm, deep, and composed.

Eyes that made V question ..

What exactly was Frey Starlight seeing?

Was he even here in the first place?

He had held out well... longer than expected.

But that was all.

In the end, he would fall like the rest.

Still, V couldn't shake that gnawing feeling ..A strange discomfort that refused to leave him.

As if something was deeply, horribly wrong.

And right as that foreboding thought surfaced...

Frey ..charred and broken .. curled his lips into a pitiful smile, Before speaking, his voice strained and low:

"Abraham Starlight is Abraham Starlight.

And I... am simply Frey Starlight.

I'm not a copy of my father, Nor his second coming. I am who I am. That's all."

He said those words...

Then vanished.

Teleporting between Gavid Lindman and Gvardiol with seamless, perfect precision.

The movement was so clean,

So fast, That there was no way to perceive it at all.

Gavid Lindman scowled, narrowing his eyes at Frey's newly revealed skill.

'His spatial ability... it's on par with Mergo's...'

A teleportation of that caliber wasn't something one could just learn casually.

Yet Frey executed it as if it were second nature.

Chapter 473: Nameless Judgement

Raising both his swords...

A violet flame surged over his body,

Reconstructing it with terrifying speed.

The Lord Starlight's face appeared anew,

Clean and untouched.

"My apologies, gentlemen,"

Frey said with a renewed calmness.

"It took me a bit of time to come up with the right plan."

Releasing that ominous aura once again,

He shook the entire battlefield.

"A plan to deal with both of you...

And the fleet behind you."

The pressure emanating from Frey now ..



Was undoubtedly the peak of what he could produce.

Since mastering the third stage of Shadow Adaptation, He had gained full control over his aura.

As a result, His strikes had grown far deadlier.

But what he was about to unleash now...

Was on a whole different level.

A terrifying level that sent chills through the hearts of his enemies.

It drove them to attack immediately ..

But it was already too late.

Standing precisely where he had intended,

Frey targeted his next strike not only at them... But everything behind them as well.

'If I'm being honest, I could've continued fighting in better ways.'

There was more he could have done,

More tricks he hadn't used.

But Frey had taken his time ..

Planning the most optimal way to end this.

Understanding the dire position of his allies, He didn't have the luxury to prolong the battle any longer.

He also wanted to know exactly ..

How his current power measured up against his strongest enemies.

From deep within him, A dark aura fused with shadows exploded outward ..

A twisted, cursed energy wrapped in black flame.

That power coiled violently around Frey's twin blades, Like furious serpents ready to strike.

The pressure it radiated...

Was unmistakably within the SSS rank.

"The idea first came to me during my fifth month of training."

As his body surged with energy, drowning the world in darkness, Frey's mind drifted back to his days in the Eastern Nightmare Lands.

"Ignition had always been my strongest attack... But it was never efficient ..just a massive explosion that destroyed everything indiscriminately."

Ignition was powerful, yes,

But it was meant for large-scale battles ..

Situations where Frey was surrounded by weaker enemies.

It was never suited for one-on-one duels.

And so, Frey dedicated most of his time to creating something new.

"It shares the same core principle as Ignition."

An attack that channels all of his power into a single moment ...

But instead of releasing it chaotically,

He pours everything into his swords.

Just a single swing.

A simple, seemingly harmless motion ..

Yet space itself tore apart before that "harmless" strike.

In the past...

Frey Starlight spent long, agonizing months doing nothing but swinging his sword.

He swung again and again,

Until his arm cracked,

His fingers bled,

And the very cells in his hand died from overuse.

But he simply regenerated them... And repeated the process.

Again and again, He destroyed himself—

And rebuilt stronger each time.

A madman's training .. One no sane person could endure.

But Frey endured.

And by the end of those eight brutal months...

He had become something else entirely.

His blade cleaved through mountains,

Tore through forests,

Ripped the sky,

And scattered the clouds ..

All with a single swing that didn't even use aura.

A perfect swing.

Now...

Frey was about to pour SSS rank aura into that one swing.

And the result ..

Was catastrophic.

A natural disaster.

The earth itself seemed to shriek in terror at what it was about to witness.

That one swing...

It was more than enough to be the final stage Frey personally added to his ultimate style:

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow:

Frey Starlight's Technique — The Nameless Judgement."

A truly nameless strike.

A strike that carved Frey Starlight's name into history.

That single swing...

Marked the end for many.

The colossal wave of darkness Frey unleashed obliterated everything in its path.

Gvardiol, Gavid, and V were swallowed instantly ...

And as the dark slash continued, it tore the sea itself in two,

Ripping through the Ultra fleet that had launched the assault on the Empire's forces.

In their final moments, The soldiers of the Ultras saw nothing but pitch-black oblivion ..

A darkness that sent them to their graves without mercy.

The damage was on a cataclysmic scale.

The Nameless Judgement showed no restraint ... Threatening to consume everything in its path into oblivion.

But then .. As if by magic ..

The catastrophe vanished completely as it approached the Empire's ranks,

Revealing Frey's absolute control over his newfound power.

All of it...

Happened in a matter of seconds.

Just seconds ..

That redefined what true overwhelming power meant.

Seconds that reshaped the map itself—

As the Sea of Shezclar was cleaved in half.

Out of 35,000 Ultra troops...

Over 15,000 perished in an instant ..

Erased by the void that had come from nowhere.

Back on the battlefield...

Gavid Lindman was the only one lucky enough to survive the strike clean, Thanks to his ghost-like ability that allowed him to phase out of reality.

Staring at the aftermath, His expression turned grim ..

Especially as he saw Gvardiol's body, cleanly sliced in half, Despite the man's monstrous defense.

As for V ..

He survived only by activating his Berserker Shield at the last second.

Even so, Despite using an SS-rank artifact,

V suffered such tremendous damage that he lost consciousness on the spot ..

Removed from the fight entirely.

Of the three...

Two were taken down.

Of the 35,000 soldiers...

15,000 were gone in a blink.

With a wide smile,

Frey looked up at the sky.

"This... is my current peak."

That strike ..

Was everything he had.

Perhaps it was still insignificant compared to those above ..

But it was the first step he needed.

"Are you watching? I wonder..."

Were they still observing him from afar?

"If the answer is yes,



Then keep watching from the front row seats.

Watch as I rise .."

"Rise to a level that shatters every limit this world has to offer."

And on that day...

Frey Starlight declared his existence to the entire world.

Chapter 474: In the Face of War's Cruelty

What is the horror of war?

What makes war so terrifying to so many?

They say death is never closer to a human being than the moment their feet step onto the battlefield.

At any given second, you wouldn't even realize when your head had left your shoulders.

There are many perspectives one can take when trying to describe the horrors of war. But the truth lies within the reflections seen in the eyes of the soldiers themselves.

The ordinary soldiers .. those who lacked great power, who were not special in any significant way.

These unfortunate fighters become the perfect lens through which the true tragedies of war can be studied.

Among the soldiers of the Empire...

After their ship had been destroyed by the enemy, a girl crawled out from beneath the wreckage, trying to survive before the ruins of her doomed vessel swallowed her whole.

Her sky-blue hair was disheveled, and her pale skin stained red with blood.

She was in unbearable pain .. crushed by the debris that had fallen mercilessly upon her, threatening to bury her alive.

She was a Wave Controller. That meant her body lacked any significant physical strength to survive such a collapse unscathed.

As she pulled the upper half of her body free, the searing pain was unlike anything she had ever felt before.

When she looked down to identify the source of the agony, she found her legs horrifyingly mangled under the rubble of the broken ship.

Seeing the lower half of her body completely flattened .. accompanied by the steady pool of blood leaking from beneath her ..made her heart sink deeper into her chest.

She was beginning to realize, with growing dread, that she might have become crippled for life.

In that moment, she couldn't stop the panic attack from overtaking her. She screamed at the top of her lungs ..

but her cries were drowned out by the deafening roar of war around her, making her suffering invisible to the world.

She screamed for a long time, trying to shove the heavy wreckage off her legs.

But as the panic and blood loss took over, her vision of the surrounding massacre became blurred. The world she knew seemed to collapse around her.

Not long ago, she had shined among the first-year ranks of the Temple.

But now, somehow, a girl barely sixteen had ended up in the middle of a battlefield.

Fate had been cruel .. forcing her into a life-and-death situation like this.

Minutes passed .. each one feeling like an hour.

Eventually, she began to regain her composure.

"...Pain..."

She whispered softly .. her voice weightless in the burning hellscape around her.

"I can still feel the pain..."

Even after all that time, she could still feel her legs.

The pain was excruciating .. unlike anything she had ever imagined. But it brought with it a faint sliver of hope.

"As long as I can still feel them... it means I haven't lost them yet."

Her ability to feel pain was proof enough that she wasn't paralyzed.

It was the only good news she had.

But she had lost too much blood, and her condition was worsening by the second.

Taking a deep breath, she focused her remaining strength, conjuring celestial orbs that formed into violent spirals of wind.

Channeling the last of her power as a Wave Controller, she hurled the storms at the debris crushing her.

Her winds succeeded .. blasting away the wreckage and finally revealing the lower half of her body.

But what she saw made her grit her teeth in agony.

The bones in her right leg had been completely shattered—bent at an unnatural angle.

The left had been impaled clean through by a thick iron rod.

Blood gushed continuously, and she was on the brink of losing consciousness.

Explosions shook the area around her. She knew she had to move somehow or she'd die here.

The ship she was on could sink at any moment.

But her legs could no longer support her. She had no choice but to crawl.

Crawl across the blood-soaked deck, over the corpses of her fallen comrades...

Dragging herself along the floor, she left behind two long crimson trails. The only thing keeping her conscious was her primal instinct to survive.

The Nightmare Sea monsters were true catastrophes .. colossal beasts that had already claimed countless lives and sunk many of the Empire's ships.

After crawling a surprising distance without passing out, the girl clung to the edge of the ship, pulling herself up just enough to get a better view of the battlefield .. hoping to find a way to survive.

But the scene before her only deepened her despair.

Ships were being dragged down into the depths by massive tentacled creatures ... abominations seemingly pulled straight from hell.

Flames raged atop others, the result of unrelenting bombardment from the Ultras.

The fires were so intense that soldiers hurled themselves into the cursed sea, desperate to extinguish the flames consuming their bodies.

But diving into the ocean now was suicide. The Nightmare creatures devoured anything that touched those waters.

Those who escaped the flames weren't much better off ..many died from fatal injuries, while others, like her, survived only with devastating wounds that left their faces twisted in pain.

Severed limbs, spilled intestines, and scattered human organs covered the ground...

Endless screams and the terrifying roar of bombardment that refused to stop...

The girl who had lived a peaceful life until now couldn't help but ask herself ..

"Is this... war?"

Was this what they had come for? Was this truly the first round?

The first round of a war destined to last far too long?

If that was the answer... then what kind of hell had she thrown herself into?

For a moment... she completely lost hope.

Then, in the next breath, a third sound rose—one that wasn't death or bombardment.

A boy's voice. Shouting a single name.

"Selene!!"

He looked to be around her age, with short black hair, a handsome face, and striking crimson eyes.

The boy appeared genuinely frantic, gripping his sword as he leapt from ship to ship, clearly searching for someone.

The sight of him reignited a faint spark of hope in the girl's chest .. the one whose name he kept shouting.

"Max!"

With all the strength she could muster, she called out his name.

At that moment, the boy became her last glimmer of hope in the abyss of this hell.

And it seemed her voice had reached him ... because his eyes widened the moment he saw her.

When Max saw Selene alive, his expression finally broke, revealing immense relief... as if a crushing weight had just been lifted from his heart.

They had known each other for a long time. Max had always lingered near her, hopelessly in love.

Even if she didn't return his feelings, it didn't change the fact that he had always been close enough to be her final beacon of light.

"Hang in there! I'm coming!"

Surrounded by a dazzling aura of radiant light, Max charged toward her at full speed.

He too was a first-year student at the temple .. strong enough to have earned a spot in the elite class.

He was undeniably a capable fighter, with a bright future ahead.

Selene sighed in relief, thankful that it was Max who had come for her amidst this circle of hell...

But that relief .. and the soft smile that came with it .. turned into utter horror the moment a bolt fell from the sky.

No... it wasn't a lightning bolt.

It was a magical shell .. fired from one of the Ultras' cannons.

A random blast. She didn't even know who fired it. But that random shot came crashing down without mercy...right on Max, who didn't even know what hit him.

The impact obliterated him completely, hurling his once-radiant body deep into the ocean.

"MAX!!!"

Selene screamed, trying to summon her winds to save him...

But it was too late. The moment his body touched the demonic waters, nightmare creatures swarmed him, tearing him apart.

The last expression on his face... was a smile.

A smile that showed how happy he had been to see her still alive.

Chapter 475: The Ones He Saw (1)

But one second. Just a single second .. that was all it took to erase that smile forever.

The line between life and death... was razor-thin.

So thin in that cursed place...

"What now...?"

Selene asked, her face frozen in shock.

What was she supposed to do, when she barely had the strength to remain conscious, let alone stop her bleeding?

As she tried to make sense of the chaos flooding her mind, the war around her only raged harder.

More brutal. More violent. Stronger.

The Ultras' shells fell like rain .. hellish rain.

The nightmare creatures continued their assault from below, threatening to drag them all into the abyss.



Then, amidst the chaos...

A blazing comet streaked through the sky, hurling molten flames so intense they resembled volcanic eruptions from the heavens.

That fire instantly incinerated the nightmare creatures, annihilating them without mercy.

The comet... was just one man. A man who appeared, destroyed the monsters, and vanished as soon as his task was done.

But while his attack killed the enemy, the collateral damage caused the ship carrying Selene to catch fire, worsening her predicament.

Selene collapsed as the burning vessel beneath her began to sink.

Right after that fiery blast, a barrage of lightning struck .. followed by brilliant blue flames and chilling ice that froze everything it touched.

Someone was manipulating the elements as if they were nothing... destroying everything around them.

His strikes were so overwhelming, they showed no mercy .. neither to friend nor foe.

Trying to endure it, Selene watched it all with her own eyes.

Many were in her shoes... people trapped beneath the wreckage.

People who drowned in the sea. People who fought for their lives until the bitter end.

But some were killed not by the enemy... but by the reckless attacks of the very titans they had relied on to protect them.

Sure, those attacks killed the enemy too... but at what cost?

In the end, the ones who killed them were their own allies...

It was total chaos. And the death toll soared every passing second, reaching astronomical levels.

From the Empire's side, the elite squad held their ground fiercely, annihilating most of the nightmare creatures on their own ..

Especially that woman who tore everything around her apart with her shadow blades.

The enemy was strong.

But their allies... were just as strong.

Watching all of this with her own eyes, Selene couldn't help but grasp the painful truth ..

The law that ruled this world.

"The strong will always survive... and the weak will have no choice but to die. Die... as if their lives meant nothing."

Realizing the worthlessness of her own life, Selene once again began to lose the will to live.

Because even if she survived now, what awaited her was nothing but death later.

In that state... she couldn't help but wonder.. was strength truly the only thing that mattered in this world?

Was strength the sole measure of a person's value?

Surrounded by blood, fire, corpses, and death... Selene cried.

"This isn't fair..."

Why did they have to die, forgotten by all, while others lived on to be praised?

She never chose to fight in this war. She was only sixteen .. a mere child who knew nothing of the world.

But she had been forced to come, because of her weak lineage and lack of power...

When she saw Snow Lionheart deliver his speech, she had felt inspired ... thinking she would fight bravely and see her homeland win.

She wanted to be part of that epic... a childish dream, rewarded by a brutal awakening.

She hadn't even been able to fight .. falling victim to the horrors of war from the very beginning.

She had done nothing but sit inside a pit of death, witnessing the cruel truth of this world with her own eyes.

"This isn't fair..."

Why were they brought to this place?

Only to have their lives thrown away?

If the vanguard, led by monsters like Snow Lionheart, held such overwhelming power... then why bring them?

Why didn't they just handle everything on their own?

Why...

"Why did they play with our lives like this...?"

Many of the soldiers who died weren't killed by the enemy's brutality... but by reckless strikes that didn't distinguish between friend and foe.

Be it the Ultras or the Empire's elite squad ..

They were nothing but monsters. Monsters clashing above an anthill.

And they... were the ants.

Ordinary soldiers. Cannon fodder. Slaughtered in the first clash.

Pitiful souls... doomed to die in the most horrific way imaginable.

It broke her.

How her life had been priced so cheaply... condemned to die in a hell like this, without anyone even knowing she existed.

And just when Selene thought she had seen the worst horrors war could offer ..

More horns of war sounded in her ears.

Warhorns that marked judgment day... for her and every wretched soul caught in the titans' war.

After Snow Lionheart's team dealt with most of the nightmare creatures, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by Ultras forces emerging from the shadows.

It seemed the Ultras had used the monster attack and ongoing bombardment as cover... to sneak their ships into the heart of the Empire's army.

From the start, the Ultras outnumbered the Empire three to one. And now, after the nightmare creatures had decimated many of the Empire's ships...

The situation had grown even worse.

Fifteen thousand Ultras launched a frontal assault with their warships, while twenty thousand more flanked them from the east and west.

A perfect pincer move .. trapping the Empire completely.

Their pressure was overwhelming, threatening to wipe out Selene and everyone else to the last soul.

Collapsed where she lay...

Selene could only sit there, bearing witness to the final horror of war ..trying to be a witness to it all.

Her small, blurred eyes couldn't see much .. but she tried, at the very least, to record the final moments of those who had suffered like her.

Even if only for a while... she wanted to remember them.

She wanted to remember them... at least until her own life was lost.

"We're not cannon fodder."

As the second round began .. while the titans of the Empire and the Ultras clashed...

Selene remained where she was, holding on .. using her wind to keep her ship afloat as long as possible.

The battle had reached a new level of brutality. Among the Ultras forces were monsters ..some were Hollows, others even Lords.

The battles between them and the Empire's elite unleashed terrifying destruction...

And as a result... the soldiers continued to die, one after another, at a horrifying rate...

Selene saw them all.

A seasoned warrior lost his life to a sudden ambush.

A young duelist died after recklessly charging into the front lines, only to be caught in the crossfire of a battle between two monstrous beings.

Wounded soldiers bled out... simply because the holy light cast by Saint Yorasha and Uriel never reached them.

"We are human."

As tears and blood streamed down her face, Selene kept watching ..until the very end.

"We are human... just as much as they are. No, even more."

But no one saw them. Not once.

To the so-called "heroes" of this war, they were nothing .. insignificant, forgettable, disposable.

If their lives had held even a fraction of value, then surely the Saint and her candidate wouldn't have left them to die.

The only thing that separated them was power. Just power. Nothing else.

Chapter 476: The Ones He Saw (2)

"How much strength... does one need to survive in a world like this?"

Was survival only possible by becoming a monster like them?

Selene didn't want that.

"I'm going to die today..."

There was no doubt in her mind. This was her final day.

But even so... she didn't want to become like them.

Like those monsters... who dared call themselves the heroes of the Empire.

Snow Lionheart. Phoenix Sunlight. Raphael Bloodmader.

All of them ..

"They didn't even look at us..."

When those so-called heroes passed by, they didn't spare them a glance.

They simply obliterated everything in their path, then marched forward in search of the next enemy.

To Selene, there was no difference between them and the Ultras. Both sides were the same ..

"Monsters. The kind the world would be better off without."

In the end, Selene closed her eyes.

The Empire was about to fall.

The Ultras had completely surrounded them ..annihilation was only a matter of time.

They were just waiting to deliver the final blow.

Unlike her despair earlier... after witnessing the deaths of hundreds of soldiers just like her...

She closed her eyes this time... at peace with her fate.

She was ready to die... while still holding onto her humanity.

This was the end.

But sometimes... the end is just the beginning.



A beginning of something entirely different.

In the darkest moment of the war, when all hope had faded...

Everyone in Shizklar Bay heard his voice.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Frey Starlight's Style : Nameless Judgement!"

When Selene opened her eyes again... she didn't understand what she saw.

What was that thing?

That overwhelming force?

Power strong enough to shake the heavens and turn the world upside down.

Before Selene's celestial gaze, the entire Shizklar Bay was split in two.

The strike known as Nameless Judgement was like divine punishment .. unleashed upon every sinner and every fool who dared stand against that man.

It was an apocalyptic slash that consumed everything in its path, erasing the entire front fleet of the Ultras in mere seconds.

Fifteen thousand men.

That was the number Frey Starlight killed with that single strike.

But Nameless Judgement didn't stop there.

It kept going .. its path of destruction threatening to engulf the Empire's forces as well.

Faced with such power, Selene could only stare in awe, silently awaiting the divine judgment to claim her life too.

And the violet flames did reach her.

They engulfed her... and every other Imperial soldier nearby.

Every last one of them.

But somehow ..miraculously .. despite being caught in the very heart of the blast that had destroyed Gavid Lindman, Gvardiol, V, and fifteen thousand Ultras...

Those violet flames didn't harm the Empire's side at all.

Not a single wound.

Not a hint of pain.

Instead... they felt cool.

Gentle.

So strangely comforting that Selene could only sit in disbelief, waiting for a death that never came.

And then .. he appeared.

The man who caused that calamity.

The man who split a space the size of a nation in two.

She had heard him clearly when he called out his name.

That was Frey Starlight . the most terrifying being on the battlefield.

And yet... Frey Starlight didn't frighten her at all.

His eyes glowed with a violet light. Selene didn't know what exactly he saw in her.

But she knew one thing ..

He was looking at her.

He didn't ignore her.

He saw her.

The same terrifying power that had wiped out thousands in an instant... now felt warm and kind.

That young man possessed a strength unmatched by any of the monsters who had ignored her and the others all this time.

And yet, despite all of that...

He did not ignore her.

Frey walked quietly past her.

Then gently placed his hand on her head .. his touch calm and kind.

From that single touch... Selene felt it.

Her aura ..broken and weakened by the chaos of war .. was suddenly restored to its peak condition, as if healed by some divine force.

Her wounds began to mend on their own.

In that moment... Selene understood.

Frey hadn't just looked at her.

He had seen every single soldier of the Empire.

After training his senses to the very limits of perfection, Frey had become aware of everything happening around him.

He could perceive it all .. every wound, every cry, every flicker of life.

That was why he had endured all those past injuries on purpose.

Because he had been trying to find the perfect method.

A way to save as many as possible.

A way to save the soldiers who had struggled so desperately to survive.

He had burned alive... for them.

Endured countless wounds... for them.

Bled... for them.

And most importantly ..

He had seen them.

He had acknowledged their existence.

He had given value to their lives.

He had seen them.

Realizing that truth, Selene's eyes filled with tears.

Her cheeks flushed red as she stared at the hand that had gently touched her head.

That man ..who didn't even look much older than her ..suddenly felt so distant... so far beyond reach.

And yet, she tried to raise her hand toward him, as if to hold him back.

She didn't want him to leave.

She wanted to reach him the man who had carried the burden of war on his shoulders alone.

The true hero of the human Empire.

If it was him...

Selene felt that she could keep going.

That she could survive this nightmare.

But he was already too far ahead. Her injured legs wouldn't allow her to catch up.

And yet, in that final moment ..

From the very spot where Frey's hand had touched her head...

A strange violet spark burst across Selene's body, making her flinch in surprise.

And then... she saw it.

A vision unlike anything she had ever seen.

A world swallowed by fire and ruin.

And in the heart of that devastation...

She saw a masked man in black, standing tall .. after bringing death to millions.

It was Frey.

Beside him stood others.

Figures who had followed him.

Each of them unique. Each of them powerful.

But among them ..

There was a girl with soft, sky-blue hair and a gentle face.

She stood close to the masked man, quiet but resolute.

She looked stronger... older... different.

There was no mistaking it.

That girl... was Selene.

A future version of herself.

In a bleak and desolate future where many had died...

And yet ..

A future that felt strangely warm.

A vision so gentle...

It brought a quiet smile to Selene's heart.

## Chapter 477: The Man Who Turned the Tide (1)

Shizkclar Bay...

The place that witnessed the first round of the War of Darkness .. those cursed waters that became the grave for countless wretched souls.

A battlefield of misfortune where the Empire had lost much. Whether in the past, when Maekar launched his assault on the Ultras and was utterly defeated by Beatrice...

Or now, as war began anew and the Imperial forces found themselves trapped in a masterfully laid ambush set by the Lord of the Ultras, Gavid Lindman.

But unlike the previous time... this battle did not end in a complete defeat for the Empire.

Because by the end of it, the entire world witnessed an overwhelming display of raw power .. when Frey Starlight split the entire bay in half with a single strike.

Allies and enemies alike could hardly comprehend what they had just seen.

After bringing down Gavid Lindman and his allies, Frey Starlight immediately returned to the Empire's fleet using his teleportation.

Standing among the crumbling soldiers of the Empire, he passed through them one by one, channeling his power to transfer aura to each of them.

Thanks to his SSS-rank aura reserves, Frey possessed more than enough strength to support them all.

With every touch, a gentle violet glow flowed calmly, refreshing those who had been moments away from death.

That violet glow was strange. Though it carried an ominous, cold, and deadly nature...



It brought a completely different effect to the Imperial forces.

He wasn't just transferring aura .. he was giving them much more.

With each pulse of that strange energy, the soldiers of the Empire began to understand him...

They began to understand the young man who had declared his name to the world before his devastating attack—Frey Starlight.

Unlike those monstrous warlords who fought blindly, treating the soldiers as cannon fodder... as worthless lives ..

He saw them. He acknowledged their existence. He gave meaning to their lives.

He was a mystery. Once known as the filthy Lord Starlight, the disgrace who should've died long ago...

The odd champion of the Victoriad, who was blamed for countless deaths the very day after his victory... the man who publicly insulted Emperor Maekar Valerion during his trial.

One of the vanguard squad's fighters .. Frey Starlight.

Until now, he was nothing more than a monster in their eyes... a small monster with far too much potential.

A criminal who should have perished, but was kept alive by the Empire's rulers, to exploit his power... to act as a shield .. and die when the time came.

Every single Imperial soldier present had their own negative view of him.

But strangely enough... all of it vanished in mere seconds.

The hatred, the resentment, the disdain—it all transformed into something entirely different.

With teary eyes .. some bleeding tears ..

The soldiers of the Empire stood one by one, their bodies lifted by the sheer force of Frey Starlight's aura.

Even if their limbs had been torn off... their guts spilled... even if they were burned alive...

Even if the pain was so unbearable it made them long for death...

They forced themselves to stand ..and followed him.

Through wreckage and ruin, they could not look away from him... as if bewitched by some unknown magic.

Even Selene was among them, trying to stay with them until the very end, even though she could no longer walk.

All she could do was push herself forward using her wind aura, dragging her body along the ground without a care for how she looked.

If that's what it took to stay near him .. then that much, she was more than willing to endure.

Out of 10,000 Imperial warriors, after the grueling battle they had fought against both the Nightmare Beasts and the Ultras ..

Only 4,000 barely remained.

Out of the 121 ships that formed their war fleet, 64 were lost.

Some were dragged under by nightmare creatures, others destroyed by enemy artillery.

The surviving vessels were in no better shape, and the waters they now sailed were no longer the cursed sea...

But had turned deep crimson from the horrifying amount of blood spilled by both allies and enemies alike.

Among corpses and devastation, the Imperial forces stood .. all behind Frey Starlight, following him blindly, entranced by a kind of sorcery none of them could understand.

Frey had his back to them... but then he suddenly turned around, his black eyes still glowing with that terrifying violet light.

"Soldiers of the Empire, the war is still raging. It is far from over."

Gripping his swords, Frey pointed Dark Sister to the right... and Balerion to the left.

Surrounding what remained of the Imperial forces .. the enemy was still there.

Frey's attack had only wiped out the forces positioned in front of them. He hadn't touched those to the left and right.

In other words, even though he had annihilated 15,000 enemies...

The Ultras still had 20,000 troops lying in wait.

10,000 to the right... and 10,000 to the left.

In short, the enemy still had twice the forces of the Empire.

Not to mention, the Empire had already lost 6,000 men...

The Ultras had merely stopped attacking for the moment .. likely because they hadn't yet recovered from the shock of what just happened.

They had witnessed it with their own eyes ..

A moment in history so awe-inspiring, it would one day be passed down not in reports or books, but in legends.

Only a rare few in this world could annihilate 15,000 enemies with a single strike.

And unfortunately for the Ultras...

one of them stood with the Empire.

A monster of the same caliber as Abraham Starlight himself once was.

Standing at the front, the man seemed capable of marching forward for eternity.

"Soldiers of the Empire,"

"I stand before you now as someone who's endured the same hell each and every one of you has faced."

"The enemy outnumbered us.

They are more savage than us.

More ruthless than us.

They've slaughtered countless of our brothers and sisters."

"Standing here, looking into your faces ..

I see despair. I see sorrow. I see fury... and I see regret."

"I've seen it all.

I have witnessed the struggle of every last one of you."

"I may not know your names.

But I know something far deeper."

"I am a witness to the story of fierce men, and unbreakable women ..

Warriors who chose to die standing on their feet, Not kneeling on their knees."

"Behind us is a homeland. Wives and husbands. Brothers Sisters waiting.

And before us .. an enemy who thinks he can steal away everything we lived for."

"Let this day be remembered.

In my name .. Frey Starlight, son of Abraham Starlight ..

Let the sky rain down hell upon them!"

"They outnumber us?

Then so be it!"

"Here and now .. I'll prove to you that a single one of you... is worth a thousand of them!"

"You are not mere soldiers.

You are the stars in the night sky of this world.

And we .. we are the ones who will write history."

"Follow me now .. not toward victory,

But toward immortality."

"Let the earth quake beneath your march,

And let our enemies learn...

The meaning of fear."

With his thunderous speech concluded, Frey Starlight raised his black sword—Dark Sister .. to the sky.

And once again, the world witnessed a breathtaking scene...

In the midst of the night,

upon a battlefield drowned in fire, blood, and death...

Frey's sword blazed like a beacon of light,

guiding the way through the darkness.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow."

Everything slowed down.

Each word Frey spoke carved itself into their memories.

"Frey Starlight's Style: Nameless Judgement."

It was the same technique.

The same world-splitting move that had cleaved Shizklar Bay in half.

Now .. he was showing it again.

Proving to all that his words were not empty boasts, but a promise fulfilled.

With a single swing of Dark Sister,

the very fabric of reality shook.

And once more, the world turned upside down.

His attack had not weakened.

It had become even stronger.

As if the very gates of hell had burst open in the face of the Ultras stationed to the right ..

Faces frozen in horror.

Frozen by the death that now loomed above them...

a death they could neither sense nor flee from.

Once more, Shizklar Bay was split apart.

And 10,000 more Ultras warriors were erased from existence.

Chapter 478: The Man Who Turned the Tide (2)

"What... what kind of power was this?"

What kind of greatness?

What were they witnessing?

The birth of a legend .. right before their very eyes.

Frey Starlight had destroyed the entire right flank of the Ultras' army ..



sending them all into a merciless hell.

And as the second Nameless Judgement ended, Frey smiled .. ominously.

But then he dropped to one knee, trying to regain his strength.

In front of him, a second massive rift split the sea in two...

But Frey himself was no longer in peak condition.

Still .. he didn't allow the Empire's forces behind him to notice his moment of weakness.

"We all know... that a single warrior of the Empire is worth dozens of them."

It had started with 35,000 Ultras vs. 10,000 Imperials .. not counting the nightmare beasts.

Now, it was 10,000 vs. 4,000.

Even after launching Nameless Judgement twice, the Empire was still outnumbered.

But the difference in morale?

It was vast.

The Ultras had fallen into chaos and despair, terrified by a monster whose power could shake the heavens.

The Empire, on the other hand, had witnessed the birth of a living legend...

A hero they would speak of to their children .. and their children's children.

"Forward, soldiers of the Empire...

Let's give death something to write about .. for eternity!!"

Frey roared one final time.

And that roar ..

it made the hearts of every soldier behind him nearly explode in their chests.

Their tear-filled, bloodshot eyes stared at him with awe...

with a blazing fire they could no longer contain.

The man who fought for them.

The hero who destroyed their enemies for them.

The one who recognized their worth.

He now stood at their head, offering himself as a shield.

And all of it... all of it ignited at once ..

Unleashing the dammed flood of emotion in their chests.

They say that on that day...

the scream of the Empire's soldiers was heard for thousands of kilometers.

It was as if they had all become monsters,

driven by a power beyond human comprehension.

They ran, ignoring their injuries.

They fought, unshackled from pain.

And as they did .. they shook the world...

With a war cry that would echo through time.

Before the eyes of the Imperial Vanguard, led by Bloodmader...

Snow and the others could only stand in silence, watching the breathtaking display unfold before them.

From beginning to end, they didn't understand a thing about what just happened.

The Imperial soldiers had charged forward, ignoring them entirely, following Frey and targeting the left flank .. what remained of the Ultras' forces.

Those weak soldiers who once had no significant role suddenly transformed into terrifying beasts that shook both land and sea alike.

At that moment, they looked ready to follow Frey to the deepest pits of hell if need be.

Even their own allies felt a chill run down their spines.

Let alone the enemies...

Enemies who had just endured two consecutive Nameless Judgement strikes .. merciless and absolute.

"This is terrifying... who would've thought a monster like that existed on the Empire's side?"

Standing at the bow of one of the ships, Emperine Maria gazed at the Imperial forces mercilessly slaughtering the Ultras .. so brutally that they made the Ultras seem gentle in comparison.

In that moment, Maria remembered something Mergo once said...

That perhaps the answer they had long searched for lay on the other side.

Now, the Ultras were in total disarray. They had no idea when the next Nameless Judgement might descend and end their lives.

That fear and despair made them easy prey for the Imperial army, now burning with unshakable morale.

The Ultras suffered massive losses the moment the two sides clashed.

Magical artillery shells never stopped raining down from start to finish.

The Imperial soldiers poured out their strength until the very last drop, fighting no matter the condition of their bodies.

As long as Frey stood before them ..they would keep moving forward.

No matter the obstacle. No matter the enemy. No matter the danger.

Many died in that madness.

But one thing was certain: the number of Ultras who died at their hands far exceeded that.

Within the Ultras' command, their leaders could do nothing but watch as the first round of war ended in total catastrophe for their side.

"How terrifying... that boy .. I'm not sure I could even defeat him if I faced him."

Positioned on one of the command ships, the Hollow Smough spoke grimly. His appearance was ragged ..torn clothing, scattered wounds across his body.

Unfortunately for him, Smough had been positioned on the right flank, which took the Nameless Judgement head-on.

Thanks to his resilience, he survived.

But even though the attack wasn't directly aimed at him and was launched from afar, he ended up severely wounded.

"He's worse than his father... I can't believe one man managed to completely flip the tide of battle so easily..."

Seated nearby was Baylor Moonlight, the new Lord of the Ultras, witnessing the rise of a new star within the Starlight bloodline.

In this critical moment of the war, even Lords and Hollows were hesitant.

They feared facing that merciless sword... and the overwhelming power unlike anything they'd seen before.

But what the Ultras didn't know... was that Frey had already reached his limit for using Nameless Judgement.

It was truly a transcendental attack ..Frey's current pinnacle.

But it wasn't something he could repeat, not even with his SSS-rank aura reserves.

After countless hours of ruthless training, Frey had confirmed: he could only unleash that attack once per hand.

Once with the left. Once with the right.

Any further attempt would cause his arms to explode from the sheer strain.

But his enemies didn't know that .. and that ignorance was what made Frey smile darkly as he continued fighting the Ultras head-on, with the entire Imperial army at his back.

He alone had turned the war upside down, saving the Empire from a catastrophic defeat.

The vanguard squad, led by Bloodmader, also joined Frey without hesitation, taking on the strongest of the Ultras.

Although the Ultras had superior numbers in the beginning, their forces were utterly annihilated.

Their soldiers fell one after another like flies before the fury of Frey and his allies.

Witnessing this dramatic shift in the tide—and calculating the staggering losses—the supreme commander of the Ultras, Gavid Lindman, found himself issuing an order he never imagined he'd utter:

"Retreat!!!"

With a roar infused with aura, Gavid Lindman declared the end of the first round of the War of Darkness ..with a crushing defeat for the Ultras.

As if they'd been waiting for that order, the Ultras began retreating instantly ..fleeing from the monsters that had devoured them alive.

But the Imperial soldiers gave chase for hours, without pause, without concern for their condition.

As long as Frey pursued the enemy, the Empire's warriors ran with him, relentless.

The magnitude of Frey's impact was immeasurable ..but undoubtedly immense.

"Kill them!"

"Wipe them out .. and avenge all those who left this world because of them."

"Tear them apart!"

"Spill their blood, rip them to shreds in the most brutal way imaginable ..just like they did to your loved ones!"

"Destroy them!"

"Show them what true terror means .. make them feel what it's like to be hunted."

"No mercy! Show them none!"

Every word Frey shouted became an absolute command to every single Imperial soldier.

And that was what drove them to madness .. devouring everything in their path.

That night, countless lives were lost.

Too many souls drowned the Devil's Sea in red.

The death toll was insane, and the slaughter went on for hours.

In the end, after a long and relentless chase...

The Imperial soldiers finally reached their limit, having burned their very souls dry in that battle.

Even Frey himself had pushed past his limits .. but none of it showed on his face.

Once they no longer had to fight, many soldiers collapsed on the spot, unconscious...

Some dropped into sleep where they stood, overwhelmed by exhaustion ..others simply died where they stood, their strength gone after forcing themselves to keep going for so long.

The final battle and the pursuit lasted eight full hours.

The first round of the war had lasted twelve.

Half a day in which the world witnessed unfathomable destruction .. and even more death.

Surrounded by piles of corpses, shipwreck debris, and the remnants of war...

Only 21 ships remained from the Empire's once-majestic fleet.



The number of survivors barely reached 2000.

Out of 10,000 proud Imperial warriors, 8,000 were dead.

As for the 2,000 who survived ..most had suffered horrifying injuries, with many left in states between life and death.

It could be said that the Imperial vanguard would no longer be able to fight in any battles anytime soon.

On the other hand, out of the 35,000 soldiers brought by the Ultras, along with 3,000 nightmare sea creatures...

Every single nightmare creature was slain .. and 29,000 men were exterminated.

Lord Gvardiol had suffered a fatal blow, cleaved in half, and whether he would survive or not remained completely unknown.

Although both sides suffered heavy losses, the difference between them was crystal clear.

The Empire had won the first round.

And it was all thanks to him ..

The man who single-handedly turned the tide of war...

Frey Starlight.

Chapter 479: The Cost of Victory

The first round had ended in a hard-fought victory for the Empire, but the war was far from over.

After securing that victory, Frey wandered among the remaining imperial ships.

Lord Starlight .. despite carrying the entire battle on his own shoulders .. had not wavered, not even once.

With steady steps, he walked like a king among what was left of the imperial forces.

This was the worst phase of the war: the aftermath.

After they had won... after the fire that had kept their bodies standing burned out...

The soldiers of the Empire collapsed, one after another, unable to go on.

Some broke down from the pain and sheer exhaustion.

Others wept bitterly for the souls they'd lost .. loved ones who would never return.

They had paid a terrible price.

Even though they had won, they could not rejoice in their victory.

All that could be heard across the waters of the Shizclar Bay... was the sound of sobbing, of silent mourning... and the caws of crows descending from the sky, as they always did, ready to feast on the banquet mankind had prepared for them.

Above it all, the giant birds that had once appeared from nowhere were now circling silently overhead, their eyes ..galactic orbs .. gazing down at the blood-soaked land of men.

The Chaos Eaters seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the sight.

The eyes of the imperial soldiers looked lifeless... void of all spark.

They resembled hollow souls .. mere bodies that had nothing left to move them forward.

At the frontlines stood the special squad, still trying to process what had happened.

Snow Lionheart and the Saintesses, Eurasha and Uriel, went from ship to ship, healing soldier after soldier with the sacred power granted to them by the Lord of Light.

That blessed power saved many from the brink of death. Yet, even though their wounds were treated...

The soldiers showed no reaction to Snow or the others.

They didn't even look at them. Their hollow eyes simply stared into the void.

Snow Lionheart hadn't said much since the start of the battle.

He had fought relentlessly, cutting down both Nightmare Beasts and Ultras alike.

It was his first true war .. and the impact it left on him was undeniable.

He had never seen so much death and blood gathered in one place before.

So many had died... and so many more would die in the future.

He had known that... and still, he couldn't help but curse under his breath.

"We would've been annihilated out there..."

Aegon Valerion's plan had put them in this impossible situation.

The first round was bound to end in disaster for the Empire .. the enemy had outnumbered them three to one, not to mention the nightmare creatures they had unleashed during the battle.

No matter how he looked at it, it had been a one-sided fight.

Even if they gave it everything they had, they would've been surrounded and killed—helpless to do anything.

That's what would've happened... if not for one person.

In that moment, Snow turned his head and looked at the man who had changed the tide of history.

Frey Starlight.

The man was moving from ship to ship, checking on each and every soldier.

The warriors of the Empire had endured far too much... so much that the light had vanished from their eyes.

But the moment they saw him ..

The moment they laid eyes on him approaching ..

Snow witnessed something strange.

The wounded knights, the Wave Controllers, the seasoned veterans .. even the lowly assistants whose names no one remembered.

They all rose .. men and women, young and old ..

They all rose again, gathering around him from every direction.

Their lifeless eyes lit up as if by magic, and tears poured from them uncontrollably.

An old warrior .. an aged veteran of the Empire .. shuffled toward Frey with hesitation.

The man was in terrible condition: one of his arms had been severed, and his body was covered in serious wounds.

He reached out to Frey... only to remember his bloodied, filthy hand. Ashamed, he quickly pulled it back.

But an unseen force made him freeze.

Frey grasped the hand with both of his own .. firmly, without hesitation.

He didn't say much.

He had seen it all... understood everything they'd been through.

"I'm sorry.

If only I were stronger than I am now...

Perhaps it wouldn't have ended this way."

Perhaps... they wouldn't have suffered like this.

Perhaps... they wouldn't have lost their loved ones and comrades to war.

Frey apologized ..genuinely.

He didn't blame them for being weak.

He didn't scorn their helplessness.

He didn't seek glory or recognition.

He blamed only himself.

And that hit them harder than anything else.

The soldiers all heard it clearly.

And all of them thought the same thing:

'What is this man saying...?'

'He's apologizing?

Him, of all people?'

His apology brought them no comfort.

No...

It did something else entirely...

A deep, overwhelming feeling of guilt and helplessness filled the hearts of the soldiers.

The man standing before them had fought the war alone.

This was not the Empire vs the Ultras.

It was the Ultras vs Frey Starlight.

He had taken full responsibility for the war upon himself, dragging them out of a deadly siege .. a siege that would have killed them all within mere hours.

Frey was the one who prevented that.

He was the one who bore it all .. and he did so flawlessly.

Out of the 3,000 nightmare creatures, he had slain 1,250 with his own hands.

Out of 35,000 Ultras soldiers, he had wiped out 25,000 of them by himself.

He gave everything he had .. no, far more than anyone could have imagined.

The man before them was a miracle on the same level as Abraham Starlight.

The one who should be apologizing wasn't him...

It was them.

"Raise your head, hero," said the old man with tears in his eyes and a trembling smile.

"There is nothing to apologize for."

"It was an honor to fight by your side, Lord Starlight. I followed your back through this war, and I'll continue to follow you until the day I die... I don't think I could ask for a better end."

Even if the world seemed to collapse before them...

Even if their enemies were a hundred .. no, a thousand times stronger than them...

As long as Frey Starlight was the one leading them .. they would follow him to the very end.

"We'll fight by your side, Lord Starlight!"

"We'll follow you to the end, Lord Starlight!"

"We'll die for you, Lord Starlight!"

Suddenly .. even though exhaustion had long since consumed them .. the soldiers began to shout once more, shaking the entire Bay of Shezclar with their cries .

Chapter 480: Echoes of the Battlefield

They surrounded Frey from all directions, chanting and roaring until their throats ran dry and they could shout no more.

Through it all... Frey never said a word.

He simply walked among them .. a faint smile on his face.



But this smile was unlike the bitter ones he had always worn.

It was different .. confident, resolute .. the smile of a warrior standing at the peak.

"...So this is the strength of that man's son."

From a distance, watching silently, Bloodmader spoke with an unreadable expression.

He had been meant to be the supreme commander of the vanguard.

But now, he didn't even bother giving out orders anymore.

He knew .. the soldiers wouldn't follow anyone else now.

They would only follow Frey Starlight.

The hero who had shown them miracles today.

"He really is like his father... when it comes to overwhelming power."

The one who answered him was none other than Phoenix Sunlight .. the man who had once been Frey's teacher.

His burning eyes had just witnessed the return of an age of miracles.

"To be honest, I've never fully understood Frey Starlight... nor that monstrous power of his.

But today, he demonstrated a level worthy of Abraham himself.

In terms of destructive might, the two are practically equals."

Both possessed a similar kind of strength .. strength powerful enough to turn the world upside down.

"They're alike, yet different at the same time."

Abraham was radiant .. dazzling.

A star among stars.

A man one could only call an uncrowned hero.

A hero not chosen by the Lord of Light .. but by the people themselves.

Frey, on the other hand... his power was different.

"He's more of an executioner than a hero."

"An executioner who crawled out of the abyss to exact punishment upon all who dared stand in his way.

A beast among beasts .. a monster whose true limits the world has yet to comprehend."

Unlike Abraham, the radiant hero,

Frey was the monster forged by this twisted world.

That's why he earned that title.

"The Black Death."

A calamity that brings death and destruction wherever he goes.

Staring at the wreckage left behind by Frey's ultimate attack, Phoenix stood in silence,

his thoughts still caught on the lingering echoes of what he had witnessed.

He had seen The Nameless Judgement before .. the second time it was unleashed.

Even though it wasn't aimed at him... even though they were on the same side...

He couldn't help but feel a creeping terror from the aura it released.

It was unlike anything Frey usually emitted .. as if it belonged to someone else entirely.

The soldiers couldn't understand it .. their level was too low to even sense such a thing.

But Phoenix had glimpsed a part of it.

It was... Strange.

Cold. Dark. Ominous.

No matter how hard Phoenix tried to find the right word to describe it... he couldn't.

And who could blame him?

He had never witnessed anything like it before.

But one thing was clear .. it had left its mark on him.

It made him ask himself a question he never thought he'd ask.

What exactly is Frey Starlight?

He was a comrade .. a student Phoenix had personally trained.

A great warrior fighting by his side .. for now.

But what kind of future awaited them?

Phoenix didn't know the answer.

Frey possessed a magic of his own. He had made all the soldiers loyal to him.

There was no longer any trace of the hated Frey. He had become the idol of hundreds...

Without a doubt, they were now under his mercy. Whatever he decided from this point on would determine the fate of the vanguard unit.

The war wasn't over yet, and their mission was still far from complete.

After chasing the Ultras deep into enemy waters, the imperial fleet had stopped the pursuit some time ago. And yet, they were now closer than ever...

Closer to the lands of the Ultras, lying just beyond the Devil's Sea.

In other words... the second round was about to begin .. a round that would surely bring even greater horrors.

From the start, ten thousand soldiers were never enough, and they were never given the power they needed. This raised more than a few questions about Crown Prince Aegon Valerion's so-called plan.

It all seemed as if he had sent them to be slaughtered.

But they had survived — even won — which made it look like Aegon had succeeded.

A great victory... with minimal forces.

But that wasn't the truth. Their triumph today was the result of one man's effort alone.

And yet, life had never been fair. In the end, the credit still went to Aegon.

Now, with barely 2,000 survivors, the Imperial forces continued their slow advance toward the continent of the Ultras... awaiting the start of the second round.

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Time passed quickly, and the first night since the battle of the Shizclar Gulf came to an end.

The Imperial fleet was still sailing slowly, but steadily, toward enemy soil.

Aboard the vanguard's ship, beneath a night sky studded with stars...

Frey Starlight staggered down the steps of the vessel, one hand gripping the wall for support, heading toward his private quarters.

The Lord of Starlight had kept himself composed until now. He had fought the war, led the soldiers, stood at the frontlines... and won.

Even after that, he stayed among the troops. He walked through every corner of the fleet, shared his aura with the injured, helped them, gave them everything he could offer.

Then came a long meeting with Bloodmader and the others, where they discussed their current state... and whether they should continue forward.

That meeting lasted hours .. and ended with a decisive conclusion.

After such a victory, they couldn't afford to waste their efforts and return to the Empire, giving their enemies time to recover.

And so, the decision was made...

They would risk everything .. all 2,000 men .. to try and establish a foothold for the Empire on the land of the Ultras.

If they succeeded, the Empire's real army could follow, and the true war would finally begin.

Their role, therefore, was crucial... pivotal.

Frey had given everything until the very end. He hadn't wavered once.

But now, alone and away from all eyes... those shoulders finally collapsed as he opened the door to his room, stumbling inside with the last bit of strength he had left.

With clumsy steps, he entered the small cabin .. nothing but a bed and a plain desk inside.

He tried to throw himself onto the bed, but his legs gave out before he could, sending him crashing toward the floor.

Yet at the last second .. just before his head hit the hard surface...

Frey found himself landing on something far softer than expected.

Then, when he saw the slender white arms catching him, he realized he wasn't alone.

With a hollow chuckle, he muttered weakly,

"Nice catch."