

VILLAIN 501

Chapter 501: Among Monsters (1)

Time to act. Time to fulfill the commandments.

The Ultras, the Royal Family, and the Starlight Family ..

These were the three powers chosen by the Lord of Light to be erased from existence.

The Church hadn't chosen just one of them—it had chosen them all.

"By the end of this war, the enemies of the Lord of Light shall vanish from this world."

The Church's followers did not know why their so-called god had named those three factions in particular.

The Ultras were understandable ..they were demon worshippers, their very antithesis.

But the Royal Family and the Starlights... were something else entirely.

The situation was shrouded in mystery, but who were they to question the will of the god they had sworn to follow?

He gave the order.

And they would obey.

For the first time in 300 years, the Church was preparing to unleash its full might.

Against all of its enemies... and the chaos the world would witness would be of a scale never seen before.

...

...

...

—The other side of the world—

The Continent of the Ultras—

Day one of the war had finally resumed.

On the side of humanity, forces were divided into numerous units, all sent as forward vanguards. The main army followed from behind.

The Ultras, too, deployed many of their own .. both of the lower and higher bloodlines, and even nightmare creatures.

As a result, dozens of battles erupted simultaneously, with soldiers and monsters clashing across countless fronts.

The situation grew so complex that reports began pouring into the central command in a steady stream.

In just a few hours, twenty-one full-scale skirmishes had erupted along the front lines.

Scattered battles ..each with different outcomes.

The vanguards were merely probing forces ..sent to assess the enemy's strength and tactics.

The deeper they could go, the better.

But in many cases, those forces would retreat the moment they encountered a true threat.

Among those 21 engagements, the Empire won some, lost others, and withdrew from a few.

The squads had limited manpower, so venturing too far into enemy territory with such small numbers was sheer madness.

Among the commanders deployed by the Empire, many performed remarkably well.

Especially those under Phoenix Sunlight and the hero, Snow Lionheart.

They did their jobs to perfection ..facing the enemy, securing victories, and clearing the path for the main force, which remained intact and ready for the true clash.

But... among the twenty-one squads...

There was one unit that left the old man Iris Sunlight sitting in stunned silence at the command center.

Fury marked his face, and his fiery beard flared more intensely than ever before.

The people around him were anxious, while the reports continued to arrive one after another.

"Sir... they are still sending us regular reports and updates... but they're ignoring all orders. Also, their leader is threatening to stop communicating altogether if we keep 'nagging' him."

As soon as he heard the latest report, Iris Sunlight shot up from his seat, slamming his desk into splinters.

"What the hell are those fools thinking?! Do they think this is a game?!"

He was truly furious this time. Iris had never been fond of chaos and deviation on the battlefield—especially when it came from their own side.

"That damn bastard... Frey Starlight..."

Naturally, the subject was none other than Frey Starlight and his band of lunatics, the elite unit that had ventured so deep into enemy territory that they were now completely unreachable.

"He was given a thousand men... yet hundreds returned, fleeing in terror after spending just one day fighting by his side..."

Frey wasn't stupid...of that, Iris was certain.

He wasn't the reckless type who would throw himself into death blindly.

No matter how strong he was, he couldn't possibly survive alone in enemy territory. Even a fool would understand that.

"He knows what he's doing is irrational..."

Iris muttered, as his fiery beard blazed even more furiously.

"Then why the hell is he still going deeper into enemy lands?!"

He roared once more, the floor trembling beneath his feet.

Frey Starlight had become a force beyond control—unpredictable and wild.

He ignored all orders and acted completely on his own.

His actions were on the verge of ruining the Empire's strategy entirely, which left Iris with only one option: to pretend he didn't exist.

"We'll stick to the original plan."

As for Frey and those who followed him ..they would bear the consequences of their choices.

That was the conclusion Iris reached after enduring Frey's madness for several days.

...

...

...

—Empire Vanguard, Frey Starlight's Unit—

The unit that went further than anyone else.

The team of lunatics that pierced deep into enemy territory, now completely surrounded by Ultras from all sides.

For the eighth day in a row, they were still fighting.

The magic cannons hadn't stopped firing, and most soldiers had long since run out of strength and stamina.

But a particular group of fighters kept pushing forward, just as ferocious ..if not more so than before.

An old witch rained down lightning without pause. A terrifying assassin slipped through shadows, ending lives silently.

A demonic princess veiled the battlefield in her shadows... and many others.

But the most terrifying of them all ..without a doubt ..was the man who led them.

The man soaked head to toe in blood.

So much blood that he looked monstrous—except none of it was his. It was all from his enemies.

The exhausted soldiers watching from afar saw that the battle still raged on.

At the forefront, a specific man charged madly, swinging his massive sword.

Each strike turned dozens of enemies into mangled remains, while a crazed grin stretched across his blood-covered face.

Morval cried out in sheer exhilaration,

"Ahaha! You're insane! Lord Starlight!"

Panting heavily, Morval kept running, struggling to keep up with that cursed man's back.

In Morval's sharp eyes, only two colors remained ..the glowing violet aura of Frey Starlight, and the crimson blood pouring from his victims.

He could never understand how that young man could handle such a terrifying number of enemies with such ease.

"Just how many have you killed by now, damn it?"

—Slash!—

Even as he shouted, his voice was drowned by the thunderous blasts and destruction caused by Frey's blade.

That blade—soaked in blood—moved with terrifying precision, while a deranged smile stretched across Frey's face.

He kept slashing, decapitating his foes with random, brutal swings that left most of their corpses too mutilated to identify.

In many cases, his deadliest strikes didn't even leave a corpse behind.

Frey turned to Morval, who had been chasing after him.

"Pardon me. I didn't quite catch that."

His hand moved again on its own, slaughtering more and more, staining the battlefield red.

"Would you mind repeating it?"

Chapter 502: Among Monsters (2)

He asked with a soft smile...one that did not match at all with his blood-drenched face.

"N-No... never mind. Things are just fine this way."

With another sweep of his massive sword, Morval sent more Ultras flying through the air.

"But I do wonder... Lord Starlight, is it really wise to keep advancing blindly like this?"

Morval had been fighting beside Frey the entire time ..and he could barely keep up with Frey's insane momentum.

Most of the enemies they encountered seemed weak, whether they were of the higher or lower bloodline.

"What's wrong? Hitting your limit already, Morval? Didn't you say you were born for moments like these?"

Frey's words felt darkly ominous, especially as he casually sliced an enemy clean in half mid-sentence.

"Thinking of running away too?"

"Not at all~" Morval replied with a sadistic grin, his thirst for blood on full display.

"What I'm saying is... I fear the Ultras might send their main forces soon if we keep advancing like this."

They had gone too deep—far deeper than they should have.

"I wouldn't be surprised if one of their commanders showed up," Morval said.

To which Frey Starlight calmly responded..

"That's exactly what I'm betting on."

Putting an end to the spectacle, Frey unleashed a terrifying wave of dark aura that swallowed the remaining enemy troops.

A sweeping blast tore through everything in front of him, ending the battle in one brutal stroke.

"In this era, it's individual strength that determines the outcome of wars. The strong... the monsters that lead from above ...that's what truly matters."

Ordinary soldiers could fight all day if they wanted, but in the end, a single overwhelmingly powerful enemy could show up and wipe them out in an instant.

"That's why I'm here. To deal with enemies like that," Frey said, wiping the blood from his face.

This was their sixth victory in just eight days.

A terrifying number, to say the least.

Frey had shouldered most of the battles alone so far, allowing the other soldiers to conserve their strength and stamina.

That was how they had managed to endure up until now.

As Frey and Morval spoke, a pure green light enveloped their bodies.

A healing glow that washed away fatigue, injuries, and exhaustion.

When they turned around, they saw that Uriel had already activated her divine power, letting out a breath of relief alongside the others.

She had stayed at the rear with Celine, but since they had followed Frey, even positioning themselves behind the main fighters hadn't spared them from ending up amidst the enemy.

"Thank you, Saintess Uriel. Your presence truly is a blessing."

Beside Uriel and Celine, the witch Zenith appeared with her usual crooked smile. She looked nothing like the terrifying sorceress who had just bombarded the battlefield with lightning moments ago.

Uriel didn't respond ...still focused on healing the wounded .. but Zenith didn't seem bothered in the slightest.

"So, what's the next move, Frey?"

From the shadows emerged Ghost Umbra.

The assassin who had already caused countless disasters for the enemy.

"We've come too far. Any further... and we'll reach the point of no return."

Though they had advanced deeply, retreat was still an option ..for now.

But once they crossed a certain line, they'd be trapped, surrounded by enemy forces from both sides.

Frey nodded. He had already considered that possibility.

"We'll stop here for the night and decide how to proceed from this point on."

Hearing that, Ghost narrowed his eyes.

Frey's vague answer made it clear ..he had no intention of stopping.

Ghost's earlier assessment had been both right and wrong.

If they were surrounded, many would die. But the strong ..those with true power might still survive and escape.

As for the weak... their fate was sealed.

Frey seemed ready to sacrifice them without hesitation. That's what Ghost had come to understand from watching him these past days.

Then there was that strange squad he had gathered.

Except for Celine, they were all monsters—beasts willing to follow him to the bitter end.

No matter how one looked at them, that was a death squad.

Sansa, too, seemed completely unfazed. As long as Frey was intent on marching forward, she would support him without question.

Or rather... she seemed to be enjoying every second of it.

A demoness like her thrived on despair, death, and destruction.

The only ones not thinking with such twisted logic were the regular soldiers... and a few select individuals.

Uriel Platini and Celine were among them.

They stood silently, staring at the corpses and blood all around them.

Celine was the first to speak.

"Lord Starlight... forgive my rudeness, but... is it really necessary to go this far?"

Merciless slaughter. Ruthless killing.

From the very beginning, Frey had made himself clear.

No mercy. We spare no one.

That's what he had told them at the start of the raid.

And he followed through with every word.

He had shown no mercy, not even to those who surrendered.

"I know the Ultras are the evil side here... followers of demons who deserve death... but I can't help but wonder if this is truly the right path."

Celine said hesitantly, while Ghost stared at her with his dead eyes.

She had voiced what many others had been thinking.

And Frey's answer came immediately as he approached her ..still soaked in the blood of those he'd killed.

"Your name's Celine, right?"

He asked gently, causing her to nod nervously.

"Very good, Celine... then allow me to correct a few misconceptions in your last question."

Staring at the corpses of the Ultras, he spoke:

"There's no such thing as good and evil here. You too, it seems, are blinded by the tales they feed you inside the Empire's walls."

"Huh?"

Celine looked puzzled, but Frey was kind enough to explain.

"Do you really think everyone we've faced so far were evil monsters who deserved to die? Sorry to disappoint you... but most of them were just ordinary people. Some may have lived more righteously than us."

True, the Ultras were demon followers ..but most of them were just victims, forced into that fate.

Many were simply humans born with demonic blood in their veins.

"There's no such thing as good or evil here. What stands before you are enemies.

Enemies you must eradicate. That's all."

Whether righteous or corrupt, criminal or kind...

It didn't matter.

"As long as they stand on the other side of the battlefield, that's all that matters. They won't hesitate... and neither will we."

That was the grim reality they lived in.

A reality Frey had accepted long ago.

"You'd best get used to it. This is just the beginning."

With that, Frey ended the conversation, leaving Celine in silent confusion.

Unlike her, the others didn't seem the least bit surprised.

In that moment, she realized...

She had been spending her days among monsters.

Chapter 503: Sweet Poison

— Frey Starlight's POV —

The eighth day since the second round of this war began.

"The Ultras are acting strangely this time. Their movements are vague, sluggish, full of openings... almost as if they're not taking the situation seriously at all."

Leaning with one hand on the simple meeting table the soldiers had set up for me, I sat there listening to the report of a certain young man.

He looked close to my age, though he was shorter, with long blond hair and a lean young man ..suited for an assassin.

One of the eight who had chosen to follow me that day. His role wasn't fixed, but thanks to his speed, I had been using him as a scout.

"Your name is Theo, right? I'd like you to elaborate,"

Ghost Umbra, who was also present, cut in. Theo nodded lazily.

"We've ventured deep into enemy territory, as you all know. We're so far from our allies that the enemies are technically much closer to us. Considering the damage we've dealt in the past few days and the growing reputation of Commander Frey Starlight, we can be seen as a legitimate threat."

He laid out the facts bluntly.

"Yet despite that, they haven't shown any significant response. They're letting us do as we please... When I scouted ahead to uncover their plans, I found that they were still advancing at the same pace as before."

As if everything we had accomplished these past days was just an illusion.

"When you put it that way, I can't help but agree,"

said Uriel, who sat to my right, turning to face me.

"The enemy's behavior is odd. And based on what you told me about that witch, Beatrice... I fear this may be yet another one of her games."

"A game even crueler than the last."

Uriel said those words with a hidden implication .. like she was trying to persuade me to pull back.

Staring at her, then into the void before me, I found myself pondering the current situation.

As was mentioned, things were progressing far too smoothly for us. Suspiciously so.

Uriel was right. This was most likely one of Beatrice's traps.

The way that demoness played her game—her strategies, her view of life, her preference to toy with others from behind the curtain rather than attack directly...

I couldn't help but compare her to him .. the other demon who used the same style.

Beatrice... a demon I hadn't written much about, and yet after clashing with her several times, I became fully aware of her existence.

She was similar to him... to Wesker, the fourth-ranked demon.

She felt like a smaller, lesser version of him.

But even a lesser version of that vile monster... was enough to cause this kind of devastation.

Beatrice alone had pushed the Empire to the brink multiple times. And this time, she wasn't alone.

The Black Faction of demons had sent numerous high-level figures to stand beside her.

'They won't join the war... not yet.'

Those were the words of Zibar, the Tenth Rank.

But thinking about it again... I couldn't help but wonder—when exactly will they?

There's another war raging behind the scenes right now. What we're fighting here is merely the outer layer...

A secondary event in a much greater spectacle.

I don't know who exactly leads the human side of this war, but what I do know for certain is that the demons are far, far stronger.

They are a unified race that the rest of the world once rallied against... and still failed to defeat.

So no .. I've never been optimistic about this war, not since the arrival of Zibar and Geppetto.

Their descent shattered everything—scattered all plans.

We're dancing on the edge of a cliff now. At any moment... it could all flip upside down.

Bringing my attention back to those around me .. Ghost, Uriel, and the eight members of my squad who patiently waited for my decision ..

"We'll resume our advance into enemy territory starting tomorrow."

The moment I said that, silence swept through the room. Expected, since I had just gone against the flow.

"You'll get everyone killed that way, Lord Starlight," said the old witch Zenith, a hint of confusion in her tone.

She didn't seem to oppose the decision itself—she had mentioned not long ago that she was simply searching for a place to die.

Still, she gave her opinion, likely being the most experienced among us.

"At least give us a reason, Lord Starlight... rather than asking us to walk blindly to our deaths,"

This time, it was Celine who spoke, her eyes reflecting the growing doubt within her heart.

Those eight—including Celine—had once shown their willingness to follow me into hell if needed.

But even they weren't immune to doubt...

And that was only natural.

She asked for a reason, but there was no way she'd ever understand the truth. So I could only respond vaguely.

"I can't explain my motives to you, but you all need to understand—this is the best decision we can make right now."

Looking each of them in the eye, one by one, I declared:

"I won't stop any of you if you wish to withdraw. I won't force anyone to follow me. The only thing I can promise... is that I'll always be the one leading this war from the front."

The first one the enemies will face. The first to take the blow, the spell, the strike.

All of it will come at me first, because I will always be the one charging ahead.

The soldiers behind me will only ever see my back .. and nothing else.

I will always shoulder the greatest burden. But...

"I won't guarantee anyone's life."

I felt the need to make that clear. We were in the middle of a war, after all.

The idea of saving everyone in a war was nothing short of utter foolishness. No matter how strong I was, no matter what I could do... people would die one way or another.

It might sound hypocritical coming from me, but it was the truth.

Perhaps I seemed like I was dragging all these soldiers to their deaths—but that wasn't necessarily the case.

If monsters like Zibar joined the war, it wouldn't matter whether someone was at the frontlines or the rear.

Death awaited them either way.

I couldn't face someone like him at my current level. That's why I had to grow stronger—fast.

That's why I was desperate to move forward. The path of blood was my only refuge.

I had no choice but to kill more... more and more enemies. That was my only option.

I didn't have any brilliant plans, nor any airtight strategies. Against absolute power... against monsters like Beatrice and Wesker, who surpassed me in cunning and intellect—plans were meaningless.

All I could do was keep moving forward and pour everything I had into gaining more power .. nothing else.

"That's all I have to say. Please relay my decision to the troops. To those who wish to continue, I'm grateful. And to those who choose to run away now, I won't blame or criticize you. I just want to make this much clear."

With everyone's eyes on me, including Ghost and Uriel .. both of whom were staring with mixed emotions .. I stood up and left the meeting.

Chapter 504: No Turning Back

When I stepped outside the simple tent that had hosted our discussion, I realized the sky had already gone dark.

Night had fallen.

After eight straight days of battle, the number of soldiers following me had dwindled drastically.

From the thousand I'd started with, barely a bit over a hundred remained.

This was no longer an army .. just a small battalion that had lost its way in enemy territory.

The rest had either run away... or died in past battles.

Their lives and deaths ..my decisions had clearly played a role in them. I was the one who dragged them here.

Maybe their souls would come to rest on my conscience.

Maybe that was why I felt this growing burden on my shoulders—this strange weight and pressure.

As I wandered through the few tents that remained in our crude camp...

A bitter smile crossed my face.

"What difference does it make now? I've borne far heavier burdens than this."

This was the price that had to be paid.

Unlike the past, the number of souls tied to me had grown immensely.

This time, I wasn't just haunted by the faces of my father, Clana, or Danzo...

The faces that appeared before me now were of people I never even got the chance to know.

"Darker than black itself."

So lost in my solitude, I'd forgotten I wasn't alone.

Having walked far enough from camp, I was now out of sight ..far enough for her to emerge.

"You've been so quiet lately, I almost forgot you were even here."

Those words were for the demoness who stepped out from the shadows.

"I felt this was the right time to appear again," said Sansa, with a gentle smile.

Her words brought me back to something she'd said before.

"Darker than black... What exactly did you mean by that?"

I asked, as we strolled together through the barren wastelands of the Ultras' lands.

The sky above us was the only living thing in this dead place.

With her hands clasped behind her back, Sansa took the lead. I followed without hesitation.

She took her time answering.

"Do you remember what I told you a long time ago? When I defeated you and the others in our friendly spar?"

She answered my question with another question.

To be honest, I couldn't recall it clearly.

But after thinking it through... I realized she was talking about that match I'd lost alongside Snow and Demon.

"That's quite an old memory you've dug up. If I'm not mistaken... your hair was still blonde back then."

She was still the human princess whose connection to me I couldn't quite define.

And I was still trying to find some meaning in my life after winning the Victoriad.

I remembered that much.

But the exact words she said back then escaped me.

"Your darkness is lukewarm and weak. Those were my words to you."

Sansa didn't give me time to respond. She said it herself.

"But now... it's darker than black. The abyss inside you has grown so vast... I fear it might consume you one day."

That much... I already knew.

"I don't know exactly what your demonic eyes see, but nothing has changed. Not now, not in the past... and not in the future either."

That abyss would only grow... until its shadow stretched far and wide.

"Are you even capable of carrying that weight?" she asked.

"What I know is that I will carry it .. whether I have the strength or not. Come on, it's not like I'm going to collapse or something."

I chuckled, pointing at her.

"You're here, after all."

Hearing that, she nodded.

"That's exactly why I chose to appear now."

As I drew closer to her, I began to realize just how important it was to have Sansa by my side.

I wasn't sure what exactly I felt toward her.

But whatever it was... she felt like a sedative.

A potent drug that threw me far from reality, even if only for a moment ..

Something that made me forget all the burdens crushing my shoulders.

It might sound cruel of me to say this, and perhaps unfair to Sansa, who was willing to do so much for me.

But that's simply what I felt toward her right now.

I couldn't call it love. Like I said before...

She was more like a sweet-tasting narcotic .. One that helped me hold myself together just a little longer.

That's how I viewed her.

And from the looks of it... she already knew that.

And accepted it.

Maybe, alongside her own feelings, she too had developed the same twisted perspective about me.

Perhaps I was her drug ..

Her own escape from the shadows of life.

She understood her role.

That's why she showed up before me in this moment.

Sansa... my gentle sedative.

—ULTRAS CONTINENT—

At the very heart of the continent, on the main side that housed the strongest forces of the Empire's enemies, stood the central base of the Higher Blood.

A city swallowed by wastelands like many others... but it was still in far better shape than the rest.

With towering walls and dazzling lights that made it glow amidst the desert—

This city had become the beacon of the war effort for the Ultras.

It was known as Nitheos.

Most of the Higher's forces were present.

It was always alive.

Its flame never dimmed, neither day nor night.

As soldiers marched back and forth throughout the streets ..

Two men watched everything from atop one of the taller buildings in the area.

They stood side by side, gazing down at the very men who had chosen to follow them blindly.

The first was an old drunk, dressed in tattered rags. Nothing about him stood out—except the cursed sword on his back.

The second was his opposite.

A composed and elegant man, whose only similarity with the old drunk was the fact that he too carried a blazing weapon.

Silence loomed between them for a long while...

Until it was finally broken by Mergo, whose eyes never left the faces of the soldiers below.

"New faces come every day... and the old ones leave.

Funny how quickly I forget them."

Hearing this, Gavid Lindman responded flatly, not even looking at him.

"That's normal.

They leave to fight.

And besides, I doubt a senile old man like you even remembers faces to begin with."

Mergo had never seemed particularly sane to anyone.

The drunk smiled slowly.

"War, huh?

Do you really think that's what we're fighting?"

"You think we're playing games then?" Gavid grumbled, clearly annoyed ..

This was how every conversation with the old man went.

"Maybe we are, Lindman...

Because to me, it all feels like a grand show ..

Not a war."

That made Gavid turn to face him.

"A play to some,

A war to others.

It all depends on how you look at it."

A war tangled in clashing currents ..

Or a theater with no one truly knowing the script.

To Mergo, there wasn't much difference between the two.

But there was one thing he was certain of.

"We're dying, Lindman...

Dying slowly."

His words carried many meanings.

Most notably, the recent deaths of so many of their people on the battlefield.

"We made a deal with the devil," the drunk murmured.

Gavid nodded.

"We did... with more than one."

They both knew ..

There was no turning back now.

Not since the day they created that gate that allowed those demons to come through.

"I keep wondering...

Did we make the right decision?"

"I don't know," Gavid said.

"But I know this much ..

At the very least, if I die this time...

I'll die because of my choices.

Not someone else's."

Even if it all ended in ruin and death .

At least this time...

They were the masters of their own fate.

Gavid Lindman, the man who had once broken his demonic contract and turned on beings like Astaroth...

He had always fought for what he called freedom.

And to achieve his twisted goals, he'd made deal after deal ..

Deals that turned this war into a dark stage play.

Despite knowing far more than most, both he and Mergo were still utterly clueless about how it would all end.

Whether it was a pact with a vile demon, a strange prince, or an unnameable entity...

There was no going back now.

At the very least,

they had earned the right to choose the place they would die.

Or at least...

That's what they chose to believe.

Chapter 505: A Throne Built on Blood

The Imperial Capital – Belgrade

On the other side of the world, far from the battlefield...

The citizens of the Empire lived their lives as usual, far removed from the horrors of war.

That, in itself, was a blessing ..one they hadn't been granted during the last war that unfolded upon their own land.

Ordinary people like them were the easiest prey for the enemy.

It was true that all humans had gained the ability to manipulate aura centuries ago, but the majority never made any significant progress in strength. Millions remained stuck in the lower ranks for their entire lives.

Only a chosen few were destined to rise and shine at the top.

Now that these ordinary people had been spared the suffering of war, that alone had lifted a tremendous burden off their shoulders.

Still, the tension hadn't vanished completely. This was just a temporary calm.. what truly mattered was how the war would end.

In the worst-case scenario, if the Empire's army lost, it would mean the end for many of them.

Prince Aegon Valerion was well aware of this. He knew that his people wouldn't sleep soundly if left in the dark.

So, he ensured a continuous broadcast of the war's events .. always with just enough delay to give him time to manipulate the facts.

He showed them only the victories, occasionally mentioning a few defeats to make the coverage feel more realistic for those still capable of critical thinking.

By combining his skills and terrifying talent for manipulation, his plan succeeded flawlessly, turning an entire continent into spectators who saw and heard only what he allowed.

Ever since the hard-won victory at the Bay of Shezclar .. where Frey Starlight alone had turned the tide .. the war had entered an entirely new phase. The best way to describe it: The Calm Before the Storm.

Forces from both sides clashed daily on the battlefield, and naturally, hundreds died each day.

The Ultras began using nightmare creatures, while the Empire responded by assigning at least one high-ranked combatant to every unit .. enabling them to survive so far against both the beasts and Ultras alike.

Yet, despite the bloodshed, this was merely the beginning.

The real war would only begin when both sides committed their full power.

All of the leaders—both imperial and ultras—knew this well. That's why they held back for now, engaging with caution and avoiding major risks.

Of course, this excluded one reckless suicide squad that kept plunging deeper into Ultras territory without rest...

The leader of that squad was none other than Frey Starlight, whose name had recently spread like wildfire.

He became a symbol of inspiration to many... and a constant headache for people like Iris Sunlight, who no longer knew how to keep him under control.

And yet, even in such a volatile situation, Prince Aegon Valerion had still managed to exploit Frey .. using his name to manipulate the hearts of the Empire's people.

No matter how you looked at it, that infamous young man... Frey Starlight was writing his own legend before their very eyes.

In times of war, achievements and tales of battlefield heroes held the greatest sway over the masses ..and that was exactly what Aegon Valerion had gambled on.

At this moment, the prince wandered alone through the countless halls of his family's Imperial Palace.

Reviewing the latest war updates with great interest, more and more of them mentioned Frey Starlight.

"Like father, like son... isn't that right?" Aegon chuckled.

Who would've thought that Frey Starlight would grow strong enough to become a monster akin to his father, Abraham Starlight...

Perhaps even greater. After all, in the War of Light, Abraham had already surpassed the age of thirty .. while Frey had thrown himself into this war at only nineteen.

"If he's given more time, he might even surpass him."

Frey truly did resemble his father... in more ways than one.

Just as the father had been used during the War of Light, the son was now fated to follow the same path in the War of Darkness.

A devastating weapon on the battlefield, a symbol and hero off it...

"The Starlight family really has provided some excellent material all these years," Aegon muttered, stopping in front of a particular door.

Without warning, he reached out to open it.. only for a violent bolt of lightning to form out of nowhere, aimed straight at his head.

A devastating strike carrying horrifying power .. but Aegon casually deflected it with the back of his hand.

Then, before it could crash into the ground and cause destruction, he swiftly extended his hand and conjured a black vortex that absorbed the lightning entirely.

"My foolish father really went all out hiding and fortifying this place..."

It had been concealed by high-tier magic—dozens of traps and barriers.

That final lightning trap had been the last obstacle Aegon faced.

He seemed annoyed .. not only because he had to bypass these defenses, but because he had to disable them without leaving a trace.

Not only that, he had reconstructed them afterward, making it seem like the room had never been breached.

To do so, Aegon had demonstrated an immense level of power ..wave manipulation, magic, and more.

Had anyone else witnessed what he had just done, they would've been utterly shocked. The prince's abilities were truly inscrutable.

With a flick of his hand, Aegon pushed the door open and stepped into the frigid room.

A room that no one even knew existed.

It contained nothing but ice... and a single glass coffin at its center.

Aegon walked inside calmly.

"My father never left this room, annoyingly enough... which made it impossible for me to enter. As if he were hiding the world's greatest treasure in here..."

Throwing a glance at the man inside the coffin, Aegon's eyes gleamed for a moment, revealing an unreadable scowl... but it quickly shifted into a smile.

"Abraham Starlight... sleeping in such a dark place. You, who were supposed to be the brightest star of all mankind... what a joke."

Aegon chuckled lightly, continuing to explore the place.

"But that man's obsession with you truly went too far. To the point of preserving your corpse for all these years... I'm starting to question his preferences."

Maekar Valerion had been utterly obsessed with Abraham Starlight—an obsession that made him view the man unlike anyone else.

Abraham had been the blade that defended the legacy of the former Emperor, Maekar.

The man whose very presence kept enemies from breaching the Empire's walls. The one who won wars and battles in his name.

Their relationship had been purely transactional. Maekar used Abraham many times...

And the Starlight family's shining star always executed the mission to perfection.

He was flawless ..perhaps that's what drove the obsession.

"You never disappointed me, Father... no—Maekar Valerion. Having you recover this corpse really was the right call after all!"

Aegon couldn't help but laugh—laugh at how easy it was to manipulate the people he lived among.

"Humans really are fascinating creatures... driven by such trivial urges and emotions. Be it a maddening obsession with someone, blind faith in a false god, or shallow desires .. they act just like animals, willing to do anything for them."

The current war was the perfect example.

"An Empire fighting with all its might, believing they're the righteous ones. Humans siding with demons, desperately trying to prove they are the true humans..."

Aegon paused for a moment, his smile deepening.

"A church, waiting for the right moment to strike and fulfill the will of their so-called god... and many others moving in the shadows, driven by goals and motives of their own."

So many factions, so many variables—it truly entertained Aegon.

"This war will become the ultimate canvas of chaos! A masterpiece worthy of being remembered for ages!"

Placing his hand atop the coffin and gazing down at the sleeping man within, Aegon laughed.

"A masterpiece can't be complete without its brightest stars, can it?"

As his words echoed, a strange dark aura shimmered from Aegon's hand, slowly creeping across the glass surface of the coffin.

"I wonder how Frey is faring on the other side..."

That young man who had endured so much, unaware of the truths unfolding behind the scenes.

The future still held many stories for the warrior who continued to push forward...

Chapter 506: The Executioner Chosen by God

The Ultras Continent – Eastern Region.

...

Somewhere deep inland, hundreds of kilometers from the coast...

A certain squad was locked in battle against enemy forces.

This marked the fourteenth day since the second phase of the war began.

Frey Starlight and his comrades had pushed far forward... but with every terrifying advance he made,

Their numbers shrank drastically.

From a thousand men, only a few dozen remained.

The reckless decisions of their commander .. his strange, relentless choices ..

Had driven many to flee, and most were already dead from the previous clashes.

Now, Frey and the remnants of his unit were deep in enemy territory.

They were under constant attack, day and night.

From the front, the back, the right, the left...

The brutality of the Ultras hunted them endlessly from all directions.

Frey Starlight was a true monster.

Despite their unfavorable situation, he slaughtered every enemy in the end—no matter how many.

By the time each battle ended, not a single Ultra survived .. this was an undeniable truth.

But even with his overwhelming strength, he was still only one man.

He couldn't stop everything alone.

Many soldiers would often die before Frey could even reach them with his blade.

Even the strongest individuals in their unit couldn't always save them in time.

After every fight, Frey would order the burial of every fallen comrade.

The process often took a long time, as their bodies were mixed with those of the enemy ..making the task exhausting and undesirable.

Yet Frey did it himself .. so no one else could object.

Once they were done, they'd rest for just one night ..before marching again under their commander's orders.

This cycle repeated again and again...

To the point that some began to lose themselves, trying desperately to keep up with his relentless momentum.

Too much blood...

That's what the Saint Candidate, Uriel Platini, thought as she witnessed it all with her clear blue eyes.

At the end of yet another brutal battle

.one that claimed the lives of many ..

Uriel wandered among the corpses, after healing all those who remained alive.

In that field of death and blood... she often had to choke back the nausea rising in her chest.

She wasn't accustomed to scenes like these... Even though she had somewhat expected them, reality and imagination were never the same.

Uriel would always walk among the corpses at the end of every battle, making herself a witness to all that had happened.

That was her way of adapting .. to move forward as if nothing had occurred.

Like Frey. Like Sansa. And like the others from the mad squad who followed them.

They could kill without blinking. Continue without their hearts flinching.

But no matter how hard she tried... Uriel couldn't do the same.

Realizing this was only the beginning made it even worse.

"What exactly are you trying to prove here... Frey?"

Where was he leading them?

Uriel Platini... she was the girl chosen to be the next Saintess.

She came to the war following in the footsteps of her predecessor—the current Saintess, Eurasha.

Then, when the time came, Uriel escaped... following Frey.

She had already known, vaguely, that he would make such a move.

That's why she came with him.

"With you... I felt like I could run away. Run away from them."

But now, she found herself trapped in this land of blood and death...

It felt like she'd escaped one dark fate, only to fall into something even darker.

There, among the corpses, Uriel drowned in her thoughts... clutching tightly at her sleeves, trying to suppress the growing pain that had been getting worse lately...

Completely lost in her own world, she was finally pulled back to reality when she heard a voice nearby ..

"O Hollow One before all creation,

Grant me silence, and drench me in forgetfulness.

Let my shadow consume me,

And let my eyes see nothing but the end."

Someone was reciting a prayer... a kind Uriel was quite familiar with—one only uttered by the devout of the Church.

Unknowingly, her feet moved her toward the source.

The man reciting it... was someone she had seen quite a lot in the past few days.

A man with terrifying features that set him apart from other humans.

She had never seen a man with such an absurd amount of muscle...

Standing well over two meters tall, shirtless with a torso covered in scars, he sat quietly reciting prayers in front of both allies' and enemies' corpses.

Uriel recognized him as one of the Eight Strangers who followed Frey—the heretic, Grim.

Grim noticed her presence and paused his prayers to greet her.

"Ah... Saintess Platini. What an honor."

He said it with a repulsive smile that sent chills down her spine.

"The sun will soon set, and with it, the souls of these poor souls will fade. Some will find paradise... others, torment. Saintess Platini, let us pray for them together."

He smiled as he invited her, but Uriel couldn't say anything. Her tongue failed her.

Still, for some reason, she never felt comfortable around this man.

Grim, the heretic... a former servant of the Church ..specifically the Inquisition Division.

He had been excommunicated long ago and was banned from ever entering the Holy Island again after causing a massacre that left dozens dead.

Among his victims were reportedly children... not even ten years old.

Children, men, women .. all slaughtered brutally.

When asked about his motives later, he claimed he was merely following the orders of his so-called god... the Lord of Light.

He was labeled insane, sentenced to death multiple times... but always managed to escape.

And somehow... now he stood at the vanguard of the war.

"What's wrong, Saintess Platini?" Grim asked.

Uriel answered with a faint smile.

"Forgive me, I was lost in thought for a moment."

Sitting beside him, she began reciting her own prayers, prompting Grim to smile even wider and join in.

It didn't take long, but by the time they were done, night had already fallen.

As Uriel caught her breath, she found her gaze drifting to Grim, who remained in deep prayer...

For a moment, he looked like a devout believer.

But she couldn't help remembering the truth... the truth of the monster who crushed enemies' skulls with his bare hands throughout the past days.

Grim the Heretic ..renowned for his physical strength and iron-crushing grip.

He never lost his smile, even when splattering brains.

In terms of body count, Grim had killed more enemies than anyone else, second only to Frey Starlight.

But what set his victims apart... was the horrific state he left them in.

He seemed like a beast who genuinely enjoyed blood and slaughter.

And that same beast now sat beside her, praying for the souls of his victims.

That man... was anything but normal.

Once he finished, he stood as well.

"Thank you, Saintess Platini. Let us continue purging this world of evil and follow in the footsteps of the hero, Frey Starlight."

"Ah... of course," Uriel smiled, giving a slight nod. But she couldn't ignore a certain detail.

"Perhaps I misheard... but did you just say 'the hero Frey Starlight'?"

The word "hero" could be interpreted and used in many different ways. Anyone in this world could be called one.

What Grim had said wasn't necessarily strange.

But... for the followers of the Church specifically, that word held a very particular meaning.

It wasn't used lightly—it referred to only one person: the Promised Hero, the one chosen by the Lord of Light.

For a devout servant of the Church to use it to describe Frey... was unthinkable.

Grim, with his eyes still closed and that ominous smile on his face, turned back toward Uriel.

"Is Frey Starlight not a hero of this world?"

"Excuse me?" Uriel asked, puzzled. But Grim continued:

"The Lord of Light is the one who grants us humans our blessings and grace. He guides us. He gives us strength to carry on.

Frey Starlight was born with immense gifts ..power beyond comprehension. And that power could only come from the Lord of Light himself."

"Heroes aren't always radiant... Sometimes, they're born in the dark."

Grim spoke with absolute conviction

.. entranced by the man he followed.

"He is the executioner placed upon this earth by our Lord to sever the necks of all heretics. Even if he denies it, Frey Starlight is one of the Lord's chosen heroes... a true one, who delivers justice through blood and fire."

Grim was entirely captivated by the portrait of carnage Frey had painted.

He truly believed that such overwhelming power couldn't have emerged from nothing .. that it was a divine gift from his so-called god.

That was why... Grim had chosen to follow Frey .. because to him, Frey was the true executioner.

Uriel listened to this madness in silence, only further confirming the twisted nature of the squad that followed Frey.

The man himself never believed in the Lord of Light, not even once ..yet Grim insisted he was one of the Lord's heroes.

Grim wasn't a devout believer. He was simply a lunatic .. one who delighted in death and bloodshed.

A beast who justified his atrocities in the name of the god he claimed to follow.

Standing beside such filth, remembering the vision she once saw in the past...

Uriel couldn't help but wonder—what kind of future awaited them?

And what exactly was Frey Starlight trying to reach?

For now... he continued to walk ahead.

Slowly, quietly, he followed a path that led him toward an entirely different breed of monsters.

Chapter 507: When Corpses Touched the Sky (1)

– Frey Starlight's Pov –

How is a warrior supposed to wage war?

That question had haunted me these past few days.

It had been half a month since I recklessly charged into enemy territory...

I'd pushed so far in that we were now surrounded on all sides.

Since the tenth night, we've been unable to advance any further. The enemy kept attacking without pause.

Many have already died, and only a few dozen remain from my original special unit.

We've fought thirteen battles so far, and we've won them all.

Yet, we paid a heavy price .. a price paid with the lives of our men.

"Lord Starlight... I beg you... Let's retreat. We've already accomplished our mission! No... we've achieved far more than expected! No one would blame us if we pulled back now."

On the fifteenth night... a soldier .. one whose name I didn't even know .. clung to me, pleading with every ounce of his being.

He was far too weak to escape on his own, not when we were surrounded by enemies.

So he had no choice but to stick with me and the others... but even that was reaching his limits.

He looked terrified... hopeless.

"So many have died... We're dying every day, and I no longer understand what we're doing this for... You refuse to tell us anything... Lord Starlight, we followed you because we believed in you, in your overwhelming power... But all you do is butcher the enemy, indifferent to everything else."

His words were painfully true.. the others clearly agreed. I could see it in their eyes.

"Please... Let's retreat and regroup with the others. If we keep going like this, there will be no one left but you... We'll all die!"

As that nameless soldier trembled in my arms, begging for his life...

I remained silent for a while.

The rest of the soldiers shared his fears, and the only ones unaffected were the criminals I had deliberately chosen to include in my squad.

Among them, I saw the apostate Grim step forward .. and from the way he moved, it was clear he intended to do something to the soldier kneeling before me.

There was no doubt. He wanted to kill him.

I had no choice but to stop him with a simple hand gesture.

Thankfully, Grim obeyed my orders without question, halting in place with that sick smile still plastered across his face.

Truly, a troublesome squad I had assembled for myself.

Back to the poor soldier...

I gently placed a hand on his shoulder and gave my orders.

"We're staying here. If the enemy attacks, we'll fight. If they don't... we'll go to them ourselves. Nothing has changed."

The moment I uttered those ruthless orders, I saw the light leave many faces .. as if I had just pronounced their death sentences.

The soldier before me tried to protest, but he froze as the killing intent from several people behind me descended upon him.

He couldn't take another step forward.

Many couldn't accept what I was doing now.

Only a few madmen actually enjoyed it.

I saw the hesitation clearly in Uriel... and in Ghost too.

Even Sansa Valerion couldn't grasp what I was trying to accomplish.

Yet each of them had their reasons for staying by my side...

Ghost .. my partner in crime who chose long ago to carry my sins with me...

Sansa .. who decided to support me no matter how great the atrocity my hands might commit...

As for Uriel... I honestly didn't know why she was still following me.

Her nature should've made her stand against me, but she didn't. Instead, she kept helping in silence.

Even when I read her thoughts, I couldn't tell what was happening in her heart...

But since she never blocked my path, I had no choice but to thank her .. and silently apologize to her again and again.

At night...

I would often isolate myself.

Sometimes, Sansa would join me .. my only solace in solitude.

Other times, I sat alone... reflecting on the changes happening within my body.

Sitting atop the scorched sands of the Ultras continent... I could feel every cell of mine trembling.

Under the veil of night, I breathed heavily as I watched the bloody circuits glow fiercely beneath my pale, fragile skin...

Just as that strange book had instructed me .. I had spilled plenty of blood.

I had killed thousands. My sword had become death incarnate on the battlefield.

My thirst for blood had grown .. and I spilled so much of it.

In return, I began to feel like I was losing something important within myself.

And yet at the same time... I was gaining something.

"Power..."

The power I sought...

The Path of Blood was bizarre. The more I killed, the sharper my blade became.

My body began evolving, absorbing aura faster than ever. My muscles grew stronger, and my level increased gradually.

It felt like I was absorbing the souls of those I killed .. stealing from them not just their lives, but whatever awaited them after death.

This strange evolution came with excruciating pain that sometimes left me paralyzed...

But I've been used to pain for a very long time. That's why I endured it .. and kept moving forward, unfazed.

As long as I was gaining power, nothing else mattered.

That night, I wandered alone in the darkness, haunted by ghosts bearing faces I had never seen before...

...

...

...

— Day Sixteen —

As expected...

The Ultras attacked again ..an early strike before the sun had even risen.

It was a coordinated assault. They unleashed nightmare creatures alongside a significant number of knights who controlled those beasts with terrifying precision.

Their numbers were immense, overwhelming, enough to drive despair into the hearts of the surviving soldiers still with us.

As for me...

When I drew my blades and threw myself into the fray...

When my heart pounded and my muscles trembled uncontrollably...

I found myself tearing through dozens of them in an instant.

Mercilessly, I stole the light from their eyes .. human or monster, it made no difference.

Before my blade, the only fate awaiting them... was death.

They kept coming, tightening the siege around us.

Their numbers were terrifying .. thousands against mere dozens.

And in such a situation, what I felt wasn't fear. It wasn't despair.

Many had died already, yet I felt no sadness, no anger.

I was... pleased.

Pleased that they had sent so many.

Chapter 508: When Corpses Touched the Sky (2)

"Ah... this means I get to kill plenty today as well."

It was a brutal battle.

I deliberately went for their strongest, leaving the weak to my companions.

That way, Ghost and Uriel wouldn't be in real danger .. they were strong enough to handle the rest.

As for Sansa, she was a monster in the same league as myself, so I had no reason to worry about her at all.

With the battlefield set, I could fight freely—ignoring the other soldiers on purpose.

Whatever emotions threatened to surface because of them, I drowned them in bloodshed.

My sword was too fast, my strikes too heavy and devastating for the enemy to handle.

No matter how they tried to surround me, they couldn't stop me.

At times, their blades and spears did find me.

I'm not invincible. Taking some damage is inevitable, even if my opponents were much weaker.

But the wounds they inflicted...after all their desperate efforts...healed almost instantly.

Their struggle was meaningless.

I saw despair wash over their faces because of that.

But I forgot their expressions just as quickly as I stepped over their corpses.

Drenched in blood, I would often feel nauseous.

As if I were about to lose consciousness...

Sometimes, it felt like I was dreaming.

And when I finally woke from that dream, the battle would already be over.

Wiping the filth and blood off my face, I'd turn to check on my companions .. only to find the sun had already set on the horizon, and behind me lay nothing but corpses and severed limbs.

Today too... we had lost many.

Burials had become a hassle. Our numbers had dwindled so much that we no longer needed to bury many.

Death had already claimed most of us.

"Rest tonight. But don't lower your guard... the next battle could begin at any moment."

After giving that hollow order, I would leave, abandoning the rest behind.

Then, just like the nights before, my body would begin absorbing that strange power crawling beneath my skin.

Sansa often came to me. She had noticed what I was going through.

But she never said a word.

Sometimes, she would hug me from behind, holding me for hours.

Other times, she would just sit beside me, waiting for my suffering to pass...

I still couldn't kill my emotions completely, and that made it harder to find the will to continue.

But it was never about what I loved or hated.

It was about what I had to do.

The hours passed swiftly, ushering in a new day.

...

...

...

— Day Seventeen —

Once again, the Ultras attacked.

According to the reports we had received so far, numerous skirmishes had broken out between the two sides across the front.

That made me wonder .. how had the Ultras managed to gather all these forces and focus them here, specifically on my location?

The campaign they launched today was the largest yet.

Standing at the front, I watched that overwhelming tide of enemies approach—enemies whose war cry shook the heavens...

In front of their endless legions, I drew my swords and took the first step .. just like always.

"Stay close to me."

I gave the order as I pulled out that black mask from inside my clothes.

Wearing it, hiding my face behind its cold surface...

I stomped the ground, shattering it beneath my feet, launching myself into the enemy ranks.

Once again, I found myself drowning in that endless cycle of death and blood.

Through the eyeholes of the Nameless mask, it felt as if I was seeing the world from a different perspective...

Behind that piece of black metal, I felt a strange peace of mind. All unnecessary thoughts vanished the moment I put it on.

That's why I came to prefer fighting with it on.

It comforted me ..and terrified my enemies, who died at the hands of a monster whose face they never even saw.

The battle dragged on for hours, and as expected... it was brutal.

When I finally killed the last soldier, I raised my head toward the sky ..only to find it completely swallowed by darkness.

Night had fallen.

I felt an unbearable heat radiating from every muscle in my body... the fire and fatigue born from endless combat, from cutting and slashing without pause.

Removing the mask from my face, a hot cloud of steam escaped my lips as I exhaled, then turned around to assess what remained behind me.

The number of corpses was greater than ever before.

As for the survivors... they were fewer than I had hoped.

Sansa's voice brought me back to reality.

"Frey... all the soldiers are dead. Only eight remain... along with you, me, Ghost, and Uriel."

Ah... so they all died after all.

"Let's bury the dead and prepare for the next battle."

I gave the order again, then helped with the burials of our fallen comrades...

The unlucky ones who were dragged into this path of death I had chosen.

When the exhausting task of burying them was finally over... after being forced to look at the hollow expressions of dead soldiers..

Some had lost their heads. Others had their limbs torn off.

Some were burned alive by stray fire attacks...

They all died with fear and despair etched into their faces.

They must have tried to follow me into the battlefield, hoping I would save them.

But my focus had been locked on the enemies ahead, leaving me completely unaware of anything behind.

After all, the Ultras had sent many of their strongest warriors. Dealing with those monsters had been my priority.

As a result, I had no time to save anyone.

Those men died because of me.

That's a fact I cannot deny.

Standing before their graves... there wasn't much I could say.

So I simply walked away.

On my way out, I noticed the bizarre walls and mountains being constructed from enemy corpses...

Morval and Grim were the ones gathering the bodies and building all sorts of things with them.

Somehow, they had become close friends without me realizing.

Thanks to them, our encampment had become a place that struck fear into the heart of anyone who dared approach it.

Walls built from severed limbs. Mountains of corpses numbering in the thousands.

It was certainly not a pleasant sight.

But I didn't mind. In fact, I welcomed it.

Maybe now... the Ultras would start sending their true elites.

And then, the real war would begin.

Chapter 509: When Corpses Touched the Sky (3)

— Day Nineteen —

"Frey... why do you wear that mask?"

Ghost asked me this during the next battle against the Ultras.

He fought through my shadow, so he was always very close to me on the battlefield.

"It helps me suppress my emotions."

That was my answer.

I don't know when exactly it started, but the Nameless mask I once feared... had somehow become like a sedative—one that numbed all the unnecessary thoughts that had been plaguing my mind lately.

It helped me... a lot.

When I said that, I noticed a hint of pain flash across Ghost's face.

But he didn't say a word.

He simply kept supporting me from the shadows, as we slaughtered more and more enemies.

The battle flowed smoothly.

All eight of the remaining soldiers .. except for Celine ..had surpassed the S+ rank, which made them capable of surviving on their own.

Since Sansa and I always handled the strongest foes, the survival of the others was almost guaranteed, so long as they knew how to maneuver the fight.

But even they began to suffer injuries once the enemy swarmed them with overwhelming numbers.

It seemed... they had finally reached their limit.

...

...

...

— Day Twenty —

Between mountains of corpses and walls made of the dead...

I stood with the remaining survivors of my unit, watching as waves of enemies marched toward us.

It seemed the Ultras had finally decided to focus all their forces on us.

“Lord Starlight... thank you. Thank you for preparing the perfect stage of death for this old woman.”

Standing beside me, Zenith smiled at death as she spoke.

The rest of the squad looked just as ready.

Seeing their final resolve, I gave a nod and placed the Nameless mask over my face.

“At the very least... kill as many of them as you can before you die.”

Harsh as my words might’ve sounded, every single one of them shouted in unison...

“Understood!”

They were a true group of madmen.

Uriel pulled the trembling Celine close to her side, while I ..as always—took the front.

Today... we would unleash another massacre.

With a dented shield, a torn cloak, and a mask stained with blood...

With cursed black swords that brought only death and ruin...

I charged again, letting this dead land of the Ultras soak up even more of its people's fresh blood.

But this time, the battle was on a completely different scale.

It felt like the entire Ultras vanguard had been summoned here... even the candidates for the rank of Emperion had arrived.

I fought with everything I had, unleashing Ignition alongside Nameless Judgement multiple times...

Sansa, too, extended her shadows and drained all her energy...

I saw Uriel push her sacred power to its limit, manifesting a strange angel behind her .. any who approached her were burned alive by the mysterious light it radiated...

The rest of my squad fought like monsters, delivering a breathtaking display of brutality.

This was without a doubt... our longest battle. A painful, merciless war.

...

...

...

Falling to my knees, I stabbed my swords deep into the ground...

I fought the violent trembling in my body, panting nonstop, desperate to breathe in even a sliver of air...

But all that filled my lungs was the thick, bloody mist .. more fog than air.

The battle... had finally ended.

It had lasted until morning.

We held our ground for yet another day.

But once again, our numbers had dwindled.

When I turned around to check what was left behind me, I found myself surrounded by so many Ultras corpses that locating the surviving members of my squad took a great deal of time.

The only ones near me were Sansa and Ghost. So I struggled to find the rest.

Through the slits of the Nameless mask, I checked them one by one...

Just as she wished... Zenith had died on the battlefield, lying there in a pool of her own blood, a massive crater tearing through her chest.

Of the eight who had chosen to join me, five were dead, and three had survived.

I found Grim sitting alone, whispering prayers.

His body was covered in countless wounds .. one so severe it had split his face and destroyed his right eye.

And yet, despite everything, he sat peacefully among the dead... praying in silence.

Morval had also survived, but had collapsed from blood loss. He had lost an arm and a leg...

Grim and Morval were the strongest among the eight .. so their survival didn't surprise me.

But what did surprise me... was Celine still being alive, protected by Uriel.

The latter had managed to fend off every attacker thanks to that strange angel she summoned from nothingness.

Her power exceeded my expectations by far... but I was genuinely relieved she survived.

Taking a deep breath, I spoke, my voice heavy with exhaustion ..

"Get ready. I doubt the Ultras will launch any more attacks. So we'll be moving out again soon."

After launching such a massive assault, it was unlikely they would continue attacking.

This was the perfect chance to advance after being stuck in this cursed place for far too long...

So long that the mountains of corpses seemed to threaten the sky itself...

But then, I felt Ghost's hand on my shoulder.

"We won't be able to go any farther, Frey... the main forces have already caught up to us."

His words snapped me out of my daze, and that's when I realized they had arrived.

“The Imperial Forces...”

“We killed so many of them, Frey, that the Ultras were forced to focus all their vanguard on us... which meant there was no one left to stop the Empire from advancing.”

While we held them off here for days... the Empire pushed forward without needing to fight.

“We’ve carried the weight of this war alone.”

Ghost said, just as the Imperial troops drew closer and closer...

That night...

A new legend spread across the world.

The tale of a single squad... that held off the Ultras’ vanguard for twenty full days.

Chapter 510: The Nameless Slaughterfield (1)

The Imperial forces had dispersed in an orderly formation across enemy territory, following the plans their commanders had meticulously crafted after much thought and preparation.

The Empire’s vanguard was divided into multiple units .. each penetrating deep into enemy territory while the main army advanced slowly behind them, maintaining its full strength.

There were many vanguard units, each led by a commander strong enough to withstand whatever the enemy might throw their way.

One of those commanders was Snow Lionheart, the Church’s chosen hero.

Following orders with unwavering discipline, Snow led his unit forward at a steady pace, clearing the path for those behind him.

In the first days of the campaign, he and his companions faced countless brutal battles against the enemy's forces—monstrous legions that deployed Nightmare creatures.

But they held their ground thanks to the overwhelming strength within their ranks .. particularly the saintess Yurasha, who had reached SS+ rank.

Many elite students had also been assigned to Snow's unit, including familiar names like the witch Selenia and the swordsman Dawn Polaris.

It was their first real war .. but they endured impressively well.

Despite suffering casualties due to inexperience, things were going relatively well. At least, until everything began to change.

Just one week into the campaign, Snow and his unit noticed something deeply unnatural.

Despite their continued advance, the enemy never attacked.

At first, they assumed it was a psychological tactic .. an attempt by the Ultras to wear them down through suspense and tension.

And that's precisely what happened.

The Empire's forces began moving forward on edge, unaware of when or where an attack might come.

Days passed. But what they feared... never came.

The Ultras never confronted them. It was as if they had vanished from the map entirely.

The Empire's scouts often found clear traces on the ground .. proof that enemy armies had indeed been there. Yet for reasons unknown, the Ultras had changed course, deliberately avoiding contact.

It was baffling. And so Snow attempted to communicate with the other vanguard units, only to discover they were experiencing the exact same phenomenon.

"What the hell is going on?"

Tension spread through the soldiers' camps. Confusion reigned.

"Isn't this supposed to be a war? Aren't we on enemy soil?"

Then where is the enemy?"

Those were the questions on everyone's lips.

The Empire remained stationary for several days. But given the bizarre circumstances, high command finally ordered the forces to continue deeper into enemy territory.

It was risky .. dangerous even to venture that far into a vast unknown. They lacked the numbers to cover such a wide area, which meant the risk of being surrounded by enemy forces was high.

Still, the Empire had no choice but to trust their mages to detect danger in time—and press forward.

And so...

The scattered units regrouped and advanced together.

Trying to uncover the mystery.

Eventually, after a long and exhausting march, they began to notice the signs—

Signs of battle.

No .. signs of massacre.

The land had been dyed crimson. Souls extinguished. Monsters slaughtered.

Before them were the remnants of a brutal war they were meant to fight.

But someone else had fought it first.

“What kind of battle happened here?”

One soldier asked, stunned by the scale of destruction that had torn through the landscape.

Especially the massive sword marks carved into the earth .. as if an ancient giant had unleashed its wrath and scarred the world in its fury.

The corpses weren’t hard to identify. They belonged to Ultras... and to the Nightmare beasts.

And just as they were making sense of the scene, a report came in from the Empire’s scouts:

“Sir... we found freshly-dug graves near the battlefield. We believe they belong to our own soldiers.”

The report spread. It was relayed from one commander to another until every soldier knew what had happened.

Among all the Empire's forces, there was one unit that had not been with the others.

One unit had fought the battle that left behind this trail of carnage.

And so, the Imperial army pressed onward, haunted by the sights they'd witnessed.

They thought they had seen everything.

But just hours later, they realized how wrong they were.

As they advanced, they stumbled upon another battlefield.

Another repeat of the same scene.

Hundreds of corpses. Torn ligaments. Severed heads. Burnt bodies. Crushed bones. Every possible kind of mutilation lay scattered across the earth.

"They fought again here... won... and kept moving forward."

The conclusion wasn't hard to reach, given the number of enemy corpses compared to the soldier graves left behind.

By now, the truth was no longer a secret.

They all knew which unit was responsible:

Frey Starlight's.

He had ignored all orders, cut off communications completely, and charged headfirst into enemy lines alone.

He didn't rely on clever tricks.

He didn't need tactical maneuvers.

He fought from the front .. with steel, fire, and overwhelming power.

For the days that followed, they tried to catch up with him. But the deeper they advanced, the more they stumbled upon signs...

Signs of a real war.

In just a matter of days, Frey and his team had plunged into hell itself—outnumbered, alone... but they won. Every time.

They buried their dead.

And they kept moving forward.

At first, the imperial soldiers hadn't paid much attention to the first battlefield they discovered. Despite how gruesome and terrifying it was, it didn't seem like such a big deal. After all, most of them had experienced something similar in the early days of the campaign.

But then came the second scene... and the third... and the fourth...

As the blood-soaked sights continued to repeat themselves, silence fell upon the soldiers. Their mouths closed shut. Their faces darkened. And finally, they began to understand.

They had run with all their might, for days...

But they never caught up with Frey and his group. All they found was blood and death in his wake.

It seemed like that would be the only thing awaiting them for the days to come. But in the end... Frey and his group were still human.

And humans have limits.

No matter how strong they were, they would eventually be forced to stop ..and that's exactly what happened.

The Ultras had cornered Frey Starlight's squad, surrounding them from every direction.

The enemy's spears were pointed at their throats, and there was no escape.

Outnumbered, exhausted from the relentless battles they'd already endured, many of Frey's soldiers had lost the will to fight. Their morale had been shattered before their bodies even gave out.

The Ultras besieged them again and again, day after day.

They launched constant attacks against Frey's group—but no matter what the Ultras tried...

They couldn't break them.

At that exact moment, Frey and his few remained bore the full weight of the war alone, enduring the onslaught with nothing but sheer force of will.

Then, the Imperial army finally arrived. They reached the place where Frey and his companions had made their stand.

The morning sun of the twenty-first day crept slowly across the sky... revealing everything.

Thousands of Imperial soldiers reached the battlefield at last.

But despite their numbers and valor, not a single one of them uttered a word.

They stood there in stunned silence, as if they'd forgotten how to breathe .. let alone speak.

And their eyes... they couldn't look away from the nightmare that unfolded before them.

If the previous battlefields had been terrifying, then this... this was hell incarnate.

At first, from a distance, they thought they were looking at mountains.

But as they drew closer... they realized the truth.

What they saw were corpses ..stacked atop one another ..forming hills that threatened to pierce the heavens themselves.

All around, walls had been built from severed limbs and torn flesh... scattered skulls littered the ground like gravel.

The blood was so thick that it had turned into a lake, swallowing their feet.

The blood-mist was so dense that even seeing became a struggle.

Before such a horrific sight, many of the soldiers collapsed on the spot. Some vomited. Others turned away, unable to look any longer.

Even the toughest among them—Phoenix Sunlight, Snow Lionheart...

Even veterans of war, like Bloodmader...

Their faces all darkened as one.

It was in that moment they finally understood.

Why the Ultras had suddenly disappeared...

Why they hadn't been attacked at all in the past days...

The Ultras had taken heavy losses—so heavy, in fact, that they had been forced to send their entire vanguard to stop Frey and his team.

As a result, this war was no longer one between the Empire and the Ultras...

It had become a war between a single squad and an entire continent.

Many of them were confident in their strength... in their abilities...

But none of them could picture themselves surviving what Frey Starlight's squad had endured.

Surrounded by tens of thousands of enemies, cut off for days on end, assaulted day and night by monsters and men alike...

Could they have endured it?

The answer was obvious.

For a long, long while, the soldiers stood still, unable to approach the graveyard of corpses before them.

For death itself lingered there.

And then... it happened.

A shift.

From amidst the mountains of death, a small group of people emerged.

Only a handful remained—so few they could be counted on one hand.

And among them... their leader.

At first glance, he looked pitiful.

Wearing a strange black mask, a dented, broken armor, and a torn, tattered cloak...

His body was drenched in blood—so much that his once-white hair had turned crimson.

But despite his miserable appearance...

Dread seized the hearts of all who dared look his way.

His aura... his presence alone made their bodies tremble where they stood.

A murderous, clinging aura crept over their skin .. slow and suffocating.

And they finally realized...

He hadn't just survived.

He had endured. He had conquered.

He had become death itself.

Somehow, everyone understood it .. he was the one responsible for the bloodstained painting behind him.

As he approached, all the legion commanders stepped forward, surrounding him as they quietly placed him under arrest, dragging him away without a word.

As for his remaining comrades, they received medical treatment and the care they deserved after all they had endured.

Frey did not resist. He simply obeyed orders. And though he was arrested, he was never treated as a prisoner.

Despite disobeying orders and leading his squad into what was essentially a death march, he was also the hero who bore the horrors of war in everyone else's stead.

Before a presence like his, no one truly knew how to treat him.

He didn't look like a hero. He looked like an executioner—a reaper sent to carry out divine judgment.

The Ultras were monstrous, bloodthirsty beasts that ravaged the land... and to deal with them, the Empire birthed monsters of its own.

This was Frey Starlight.

And the battlefield in front of them was proof enough.

Later, that place was named The Nameless Slaughterfield.

A place where rivers of blood were formed... where bodies piled high enough to reach the heavens.