

## **VILLAIN 531**

### Chapter 531: Till the Last Breath (3)

In a blink, Frey's blades tore through Dragoth without mercy, unleashing a torrent of destructive aura shells.

Fighting like a lunatic, Frey realized he was no longer sane ..life had pushed him far beyond that point. All he could do now was create illusions, sanctuaries of the mind.

Every time he fell into despair, Frey had forged a new version of himself ..stronger, fiercer, more unbreakable.

And this Frey—the current one—was the ultimate embodiment of all that accumulated suffering. A merciless beast.

"LOOK AT ME!! Look at the monster I've become!!!"

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

BOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!

With one devastating blow born of madness, Frey split the very world in half, obliterating Dragoth's body as he tried to resist.

"THIS IS WHAT YOU WANTED TO SEE, ISN'T IT?! THIS IS THE MADNESS YOU DEMANDED!!!"

Grabbing Dragoth's mangled face, barely holding together...

Frey dragged him across the battlefield, grinding his face into the ground and anything standing upon it.

"I am a killing machine! I was born to slaughter! Born to destroy! And yes...death and destruction! That's exactly what I'll deliver!!"

Frey screamed into Dragoth's face before tossing him away ..only to chase after him like a beast.

"The boy is dead... the weakling who cried and suffered from your games is gone! He no longer exists!!"

He hurled Dragoth's body again and again—then paused suddenly, gripping his opponent's shattered face once more.

"Look at me," he said, slamming Dragoth's face into the ground once again.

"LOOK AT ME!!!"

Screaming madly, Frey's body erupted, unleashing utter devastation.

"Ignition."

With a single word, a nuclear-level ignition shook the world once more, firing a colossal pillar of dark aura toward the sky.

From that blast, Dragoth's body was completely obliterated ..leaving behind nothing but his head... and a fragment of his chest.

Dragoth couldn't break free ..Frey's grip remained firm.

"What do you see when you look at me? What exactly do you think resides inside me? What is it that you expect of me?! There's nothing left... nothing but the void."

"The void—and a raging hunger... an unending thirst... a madness with no bottom!!!"

Frey's body trembled uncontrollably. His eyes lost their light and quivered in their sockets.

Everything... slipped away.

"DEATH! That's all that's left!!"

Hurling Dragoth's body toward the sky, Frey brought his swords down upon his enemy.

Words no longer came from his mouth—only meaningless, chaotic scribbles as he lost himself completely.

His sword unleashed a blazing violet arc that shook the world. He had lost the clarity of mind even to name his attack.

The Nameless Judgement became a wailing elegy ..mourning his current state.

Frey unleashed it once... then again... and again...

The sky turned violet. His hand burst from the sheer pressure, flesh and bone scattering across the battlefield.

But he didn't care. He kept attacking until nothing was left of his enemy but ash.

He walked across the battlefield, whispering words that held no meaning...

He had become the killing machine he once dreamed of.

The monster who could endure anything.

The monster who would never stop fighting ..no matter how brutal life became.

A beast who would fight... until death.

Frey started walking... then running... then leaping—flying.

With terrifying speed, and a black, ominous aura crawling over him...

He charged toward anyone who dared raise their sword against him.

"Kill them," said all the versions of Frey at once.

"Rip them apart. Annihilate them. Every single one who dared curse us with this life."

"Don't stop running. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl... but don't stop. Not until every last enemy is dead."

Leaving behind the crater of destruction he had created...

Frey abandoned everything and lunged forward ..toward where his enemies awaited.

He spoke rapidly, but what came from his mouth wasn't language... just whispers from the depths of hell.

He covered a monstrous distance in a blink ..threatening to obliterate anything in his path.

But his berserk advance was halted—

When a massive pillar of light descended from the sky, engulfing him mercilessly and obliterating everything around him.

Frey crashed violently to the ground, but he immediately twisted back up, scanning for the source of the attack ..

Only to see her floating high above in the sky... looking down at him with blatant contempt.

"Is this the answer you've chosen, Frey Starlight?"

Waving her wand, Beatrice prepared for battle.

"I've lived long and seen much... but I've never encountered anything like you..."

Even the eternal witch herself hadn't lived long enough to witness a creature so twisted and deranged as the one before her.

Frey crawled slowly along the ground—before vanishing entirely.

Even in that state of madness... he could still teleport.

He erased the distance in an instant.

Magic resistance triggered automatically, preventing Beatrice from reacting ..

And his swords threatened to erase her from existence.

But she didn't say much.

"He's all yours, Beleth."

At the moment she spoke his name.. just as Frey's blades were mere inches from her face ..

A colossal fist emerged from the void, slamming into Frey's right side and shattering his body.

One strike crushed his bones and tore through his flesh ..sending him flying away like a ragdoll.

The figure who struck him descended from the sky, charging across the ground toward Frey.

"This is the monster you're all afraid of?!"

His voice was harsh and gravelly. His body was massive ..well over three meters tall.

His hair was a wild, bloody red, and his eyes were consumed by shadow—only a cursed red gleam shone through.

He bore two horns—one of them broken—and his body was covered in some strange, black substance.



He collided with Frey, mercilessly crushing him.

"I came from far away just for the chance to enjoy a good fight! Don't disappoint me!!" he roared with laughter.

Beleth — Demon of the 18th highest rank.

One of the demons of the Black Faction.

He laughed maniacally as he raised his massive fist again, aiming to pulverize Frey further ..

But his smile vanished instantly...

When Frey disappeared ..reappearing behind him in less than a heartbeat.

One moment ..then hundreds of violet slashes tore into Beleth's body, shredding him without mercy.

"Don't underestimate him!! Fight him with everything you have!!"

Behind Beatrice, hundreds of celestial spheres materialized—bombarding the battlefield mercilessly, targeting Frey.

"I know, damn it!" Beleth growled.

Unaffected by his injuries, he charged forward, his fists blazing with seething dark aura.

He collided with Frey head-on, even as Beatrice's infernal barrage rained down upon him.

Amid the chaos, Frey never stopped talking.

He kept producing sounds from his mouth.. but they weren't in any language.

Just meaningless, guttural scribbles.

"What sort of curse are you trying to place on us, Frey Starlight?"

Chapter 532: Till the Last Breath (4)

With his bare fists, Beleth clashed against Frey's swords, forcing him back.

"Infernal Rampage: Eruption of the Chaos Lords."

Manipulating his aura, the demon Beleth formed two grotesque ghoul heads from his fists ..

Their jaws gaped open, ready to devour Frey whole.

The attack was so immense it swept through everything around them—leaving Frey trapped within the chaos.

"If this is the best humanity's pinnacle can offer, then there was no point in me coming here at all," Beleth laughed, crushing Frey beneath his fist.

But the response came swiftly.

A blinding violet light exploded from within the ghoulish mouths ..erasing them in an instant.

Frey didn't just block the attack.

He retaliated ..slashing through Beleth with such speed that even the demon couldn't hide his shock.

"Seriously...?"

Ignoring the foul black blood oozing from his wound, Beleth lunged at Frey again.

But Frey fought like a beast—utterly unconcerned for his body or the wounds inflicted on it.

He didn't want anything but to erase his enemies from existence.

He may have tried to speak, but no proper words left his mouth anymore.

He had lost himself entirely.

There was no trace left of Frey Starlight the human ..only a twisted, mangled creature so terrifying even demons paused in wonder.

Beatrice had come—the 17th-ranked demon.

And Beleth with her—the 18th.

Both stood at the pinnacle of SS+.

A combined force capable of turning the tide of war...

But for some reason ..they still couldn't stop Frey.

He tore across the battlefield like a madman,

His sword ripping through demonic flesh like paper.

His aura burned away faster than his blood.

And his attacks were more lethal than theirs.

It only took a few exchanges for Beleth to realize the truth:

The monster before him... was stronger.

Left with no other option, he joined forces with Beatrice.

They fought together.

Attacked him with everything they had.

But Frey didn't fall.

He clashed with them without pause.

A monster who didn't care about pain.

A monster whose body shook from sheer madness.

A twisted being, clawing out of hell—targeting their throats.

And in that moment ..

Beatrice understood, if only a little,

Why Frey Starlight had become the center of everything.

"What's his secret?" she wondered, watching him.

"He hasn't reached SSS class... but he surpasses SS+... I've never seen a case like this before. If there were a rank between the two—it would bear his name."

Those were the witch's thoughts as she tried to unravel the mystery of the monster before her.

But that curiosity vanished instantly ..

When Frey launched another Nameless Judgement, targeting both her and Beleth in one go.

Beatrice immediately summoned the strongest shield in her arsenal ..

A shield capable of withstanding even SS+ attacks.

Beleth shielded her with his own body.

But even with their combined effort...

Frey's devastating attack shattered her shield .. and left a deep, gruesome wound across Beleth's chest.

They survived.

But that strike left them even more terrified of this distorted monster.

"Even after combining our powers... he still managed to wound me this badly," muttered Beleth, his tone finally serious.

"Beatrice, capturing him alive in this state is impossible. We have no choice but to kill him."

But Beatrice immediately refused.

"No. He must stay alive. That's Lord Wesker's command."

Gripping her staff tightly, the witch prepared to unleash everything she had.

"We'll defeat him here... and drag him back with us, even if we have to shatter him to do it."

And with those words, from either side of Frey ..



Two figures appeared in the blink of an eye, using powerful teleportation.

Both slashed into Frey with terrifying speed.

As if the battle wasn't hard enough already ..

Now Mergo and Gavid Lindman had joined the fray, surrounding him.

"We'll use everything at our disposal... and end it here," said Beatrice.

Following her lead, four SS+ level warriors surrounded a single man ..

A man who swore to shoulder everything alone... and fight to the bitter end.

A man who swore he would never lose again.

That his back would never touch the ground again.

It was a brutal battle... a sorrowful fight...

For a monster forged from agony and despair.

Frey's mind was utterly blank.

There was no way to bring him back.

Only one thing possessed him now—

An all-consuming desire to kill.

He clashed with them all.

Fought with every ounce of his soul.

He never looked back ..not once.

Never tried to escape ..not even once.

To the very end, he stood his ground ..

And showed them a hell unlike any other.

The battle raged for a long time.

The battlefield became molten with aura ..lava made not of fire, but raw aura.

That aura spread everywhere ..reshaping the land entirely.

And with every passing second,

His enemies grew more terrified.

More certain.

That this monster should never be allowed to live.

They began ignoring their orders.

They tried to kill him for real.

But even then—they couldn't do it.

The sky abandoned its darkness ..turning violet from the sheer pressure of Frey's aura.

It bled into everything,

Coloring the world in something new... something different.

Except for Beatrice who remained in the rear, Mergo, Gavid, and Beleth were all in horrific condition ..torn apart by his blades.

Even the witch herself had nearly exhausted her aura.

They threw everything they had at him—

And still, he didn't fall.

He had lost consciousness.

His eyes held no light anymore.

But he still stood.

His condition was worse than all of them combined.

There wasn't a single spot on his body left untouched ..

Except for that cursed black mask...

That mask alone sent shivers through their hearts.

Seeing him standing in that pitiful state...

They understood something:

This was a man who feared not death—but longed for it.

If his back ever touched the ground ..

It would be as a corpse. Not the living.

If they didn't kill him...

He would keep fighting forever if he had to.

That kind of will ..

That burning fire within him ..

Left them all speechless.

Because in the end...

The man standing before them...

Was just a boy.

A boy barely nineteen years old.

A miracle who had surpassed everyone before him.

Even his father now seemed like a flickering shadow in comparison.

Realizing the magnitude of the monster before them .. They struck together.

All of them.

Aimed for his life.

Eager to end his legend.

It was a vicious struggle, right to the end.

And that end... was just a beginning.

Because Frey... was never going to escape this life so easily.

From nothingness .. a storm of searing flame erupted ..

Encircling Frey and shielding him from harm.

From the heart of that flame... emerged Phoenix Sunlight,

Pulling Frey's broken body away ..

Dodging back as fast as he could.

The enemies reacted instantly ..targeting Phoenix at once.

But the sky flashed violently above them ..

As another figure descended ..

Raining hundreds of lightning bolts upon their heads.



Wearing the legendary Fume Knight Armor,

Maekar Valerion had entered the massacre.

Phoenix understood there was no running.

So once Frey was pulled far enough from the chaos ..

He turned back immediately, joining Maekar on the battlefield.

Terror was written on their faces as they saw what remained of the battlefield.

The sheer devastation...

Was why they had rushed here with such urgency.

They didn't fully understand what had happened.

But their minds focused on only one thing:

The enemy is in front of us.

Another battle was about to erupt.

A fight destined to tear this cursed continent apart once more.

Chapter 533: Rage Beyond SS+ (1)

After a suicidal assault by Frey Starlight against the enemy leaders, leaving behind massive destruction...

The chaos of that battlefield drew the eyes of the entire world. From afar, the powerful could feel the violent fluctuations of Aura erupting in waves.

The amount of aura unleashed in that last fight was on a completely different level. In his berserk state, Frey wasn't a mere warrior ..

he was a relentless killing machine that wouldn't stop until either he or everything around him was dead.

At one point, in the midst of that grueling clash against four SS+ rank opponents, Frey finally lost consciousness. His body had endured that hell, but his mind had reached its absolute limit.

In the final moments, Phoenix Sunlight and Maekar Valerion intervened, barely saving him before engaging the enemy themselves.

Phoenix hurled Frey's limp body as far away from danger as possible, then turned back without hesitation—igniting his flames to their utmost limit, ready for war.

His crimson eyes swept over the battlefield again and again... until they locked on his foes.

Two demons, and the two strongest among the Lords of the Ultras.

The battlefield had become a living hell, reaching a level of devastation Phoenix had never witnessed before.

“What kind of battle... could have caused this?”

And then he clashed head-on with the 18th-ranked Demon ..Baelith.

Gritting his teeth, Phoenix unleashed his Ember Form ..the state that instantly propelled him to the very peak of SS+.

His blazing fist collided violently with Baelith's own.

The resulting explosion obliterated everything in their vicinity.

In that single exchange, Phoenix understood the measure of his opponent's power. The impact alone sent a wave of pain tearing through his entire arm.

But Phoenix didn't falter. Ignoring the agony, his fiery Aura swelled rapidly, while Baelith's body was engulfed in an equally overwhelming shroud of darkness. Within moments, the two were trading blows in a savage, frenzied storm of destruction.

Realizing the caliber of the foe before him, Phoenix's expression darkened.

‘Another high-ranked demon... So it wasn't a lie. The seal really has been broken... and nothing's holding these monsters back anymore.’

Baelith's appearance was proof that the war humanity had been fighting had entered the unknown. At any moment, more of these higher-ranked abominations could arrive.

That thought could only bring despair—but Phoenix shoved the fear aside, focusing entirely on the fight.

Elsewhere, Maekar Valerion was locked in a blisteringly fast battle against Mergo and Gavid Lindman, both pressing him hard.

But unlike his weakened political position as Emperor, Maekar was an unquestionable force on the battlefield.

Wielding Sunfire Spear and Fume Knight Shield, having reached the pinnacle of SS+, he held his ground against both enemies at once ..unleashing lightning and fire in a relentless attempt to overwhelm and end them swiftly. But his foes' strength was formidable, and Beatrice was far from idle.

With Frey Starlight ..and his potent anti-magic that had restrained her—now absent, the Eternal Witch unleashed her full arsenal, seizing control of the entire battlefield.

Celestial orbs flooded the skies, bombarding Emperor Maekar with an overwhelming barrage of multi-elemental blasts, while the ground beneath Phoenix split apart at her command, swallowing him whole.

The battle was not going in the Empire's favor. Four against two meant they were barely holding on.

If not for the fact that their enemies were already wounded and exhausted from the previous clash, Phoenix and Maekar wouldn't have stood a chance at matching them blow for blow.

"Not bad!!" Baelith snarled with a sadistic grin as he cornered Phoenix completely.

They were both monsters ..but Phoenix, in particular, had become a walking volcano, burning and charring the earth with every step, hurling torrents of molten fire in every direction.

At one point, his flames burned so hot they shifted to blue, the sheer output threatening to consume everything. Yet even in his full-powered Ember state, despite giving it everything he had, he was barely keeping up against the combined assault of Beatrice and Baelith, both still far from full strength.

Somewhere in the midst of the chaos, both Phoenix and Maekar found themselves thinking the exact same thought—

‘Frey Starlight... Are you telling me that frail-looking boy fought all four of these monsters alone... and not only survived, but pushed them this far?!’

For Maekar, it was a passing shock.

But for Phoenix Sunlight, it was a decisive moment.

The instant he understood what his pupil had accomplished, Phoenix made his choice.

“Frey... whatever it costs me, I’m getting you out of here alive!!!”

They had crossed into uncharted territory now ..there was no telling what horrors the future would bring.

Phoenix would not allow a talent like Frey to die here. He could be humanity’s only hope. And so, fulfilling his duty as a teacher one more time, Phoenix cast aside his own life, choosing to fight to the death—holding back these filthy demons until his last breath.

Drawing a deep, ominous roar from within his chest, he thrust both hands forward toward Baelith, gathering every ounce of his remaining power.

“Eternal Flame: Dragon’s Breath Barrage!”

Shock flashed across Baelith’s face for a fraction of a second before the inferno consumed him ..a searing beam of fire carving a path of blackened ash in its wake.

Blasting Baelith away, Phoenix forged a massive spear of fire and hurled it straight at Beatrice, targeting her as the greater threat.

But Baelith reappeared instantly in the path of the attack, knocking it aside.

“Your opponent is still here! Since when do you get to change dance partners so easily?”

Darkness coiled tightly around Baelith’s fist as he launched himself at Phoenix, leaving a trail of shadow in his wake.

Their collision sent both hurtling away, the momentum tearing the ground apart beneath them.

Phoenix took the brunt of the impact—it felt less like being struck by a demon, and more like being hit by a meteor large enough to crush his entire body.

Baelith was a tank in his own right ..just like him ..but the gap in raw physical ability between them was massive.

Not to mention Beatrice. Phoenix had been struggling desperately just to hold his ground against Baelith alone, leaving him no chance to attack anyone else.

As for Maekar, he wasn’t faring any better. With his blazing spear, he parried Mergo’s katana, while his free arm formed a spear of lightning to meet Gavid Lindman head-on.

“You shouldn’t have rushed here, Maekar Valerion,” Mergo said, unleashing dozens of hidden strikes through the ability of his Ōshigatana... all while coordinating perfectly with Gavid Lindman.

“You’re fighting a meaningless, hopeless war against an enemy you know nothing about—and here you are, completely surrounded by two opponents weaker than you.”

Despite the heavy toll Frey Starlight had inflicted on them, the Ultras' side could still fight. The vitality of those who had reached SS+ rank was not so easily spent.

"This cursed land will serve as your grave, Emperor," Gavid Lindman declared, channeling his Black Hole technique to make his blade sharper than ever.

He aimed to strike Maekar from a blind spot while the Emperor was preoccupied with Mergo ..

—but the Emperor of Mankind blocked it effortlessly with a quick motion of his spear.

With a roaring blaze fused with the power of lightning, Maekar blew both of them back, shattering the trap they had set.

"My grave? Do you think the likes of you could kill me?!" With each word, Maekar's aura swelled, building toward an eruption.

#### Chapter 534: Rage Beyond SS+ (2)

"I've been holding back... saving my strength to deal with that damned witch hiding behind you. But I see now this plan will get me nowhere."

The deadliest enemy on this battlefield was none other than Beatrice. As long as the witch remained, ignoring her was courting disaster—a lesson Maekar had learned the hard way in their last fight, when he fell into her magical trap.

That was why, even while battling both Mergo and Gavid, Maekar's eyes never once left the witch.

"Lightning Formation: Plasma Burst."

From within Maekar's body, electricity poured out in relentless torrents. Compressing it by force until the vast ocean of current was packed into a sphere no larger than his fist, the Emperor moved with terrifying speed.

Holding that sphere, he flicked it with his fingers—

—and it shot straight toward Mergo and Gavid.

Both of them raced against time to evade it. But the baseball-sized projectile swelled into a monstrous sun in the blink of an eye ..then exploded right in their faces.

The scene was apocalyptic—a colossal sphere of lightning engulfed the battlefield, devouring everything in its path.

Mergo instantly teleported away to escape its reach, while Gavid survived only thanks to his Phantom Form.

Even so, their evasion left an opening ..one Maekar exploited without hesitation.

In a flash, he was above Beatrice, the Sunfire Spear poised to strike her head.

The Emperor didn't hold back. He poured everything into that one blow, determined to erase the cursed witch who had tormented them for so long.

To deal with her amidst so many enemies, speed was the only solution.

That was Maekar's gamble. Phoenix, despite his strength, couldn't break past his foe ..but the Emperor could blitz past Mergo and Gavid in an instant.

And so, he finally reached the witch.

Before her, he unleashed the full might of his spear ..a weapon said to rival the sun itself ..seeking to crush her utterly.



“Annihilate! Sunfire!” Maekar roared, unleashing the spear’s wrath.

In the next heartbeat, a deafening explosion shattered the air, shaking even the void itself.

Maekar felt his spear strike something—but the strange sound of shattering glass by his ear made him freeze.

From nowhere, countless unseen serpents crawled over his armor, while something invisible began crushing his body with unstoppable force.

As for Beatrice, the woman he thought he’d struck ..she was still standing before him, untouched.

The witch turned her head slowly toward him, her deep violet eyes locking onto his.

“I’ve been waiting for you... dear Maekar Valerion.”

Drawing her staff, she prepared to cast. Maekar, however, was bound in place by the unseen force ..strong enough to hold him for at least a few seconds.

“Humans are far simpler than they appear—blinded by their emotions, letting their grudges lead them like mindless beasts. You hate me, don’t you... Emperor of Mankind?” Beatrice laughed softly, her body glowing with an ominous crimson light.

“I suppose what I did to you enraged you. That’s why I was certain you’d attack me first—and all I had to do was set the trap.”

The binding spell she had placed on him was the strongest in her arsenal ..more than enough to deal with SS+ opponents.

But it was only the prelude to what was coming.

“Maekar Valerion... do you know why I’ve only been using my weakest, most trivial spells against you so far?”

At that question, both Maekar’s and Phoenix’s expressions darkened as they felt what was about to come.

“The answer is simple... because I’ve been preparing this spell in secret!”

With a laugh as deranged as it was fitting, Beatrice unleashed her attack.

“Kill him for me!”

At her command, four Death Kings materialized from the void, their overwhelming presence pressing down like a collapsing sky.

Each stood over a hundred meters tall, and together they encircled Maekar Valerion, their massive shadows swallowing him whole.

Gripping their colossal swords, the four kings swung without mercy ..seeking to cleave the Emperor of Mankind apart.

“Dodge it!!” Phoenix roared, still locked in his own battle against Baelith.

Taking such a direct hit would have been catastrophic for Maekar ..yet he couldn’t break free from the binding spell Beatrice had placed on him.

It held him for only a few seconds, but a few seconds were all Beatrice needed.

“It took me a while to finish this spell after that beast drained me,” she said with a sly smile, “but the end result isn’t bad at all... don’t you agree?”

The moment she finished speaking, a deafening explosion shook the world. The swords of the Four Kings came crashing down, swallowing Maekar's body...and everything beneath him ..whole.

Their blades sank deep into the earth, shattering it, and once again that cursed continent wailed under the horrors of the war it had been forced to cradle.

Even with the protection of the Fume Knight's Armor, taking such a blow was bound to inflict massive damage on the Emperor—and Beatrice had planned it with care.

The sight of the bloodied Emperor would have been a long-awaited delight to her eyes after all that had happened.

But the scene she had anticipated never came. At the very last instant, Maekar Valerion avoided the strike by the width of a hair.

No... he hadn't avoided it.

He had been saved.

Carrying Maekar in one hand, an old man appeared far beyond the reach of the attack, his body radiating a brilliant light that cut through the night's darkness.

With an annoyed sigh, he tossed the stunned Emperor aside and stepped forward, gripping two shining swords.

"My bones ache, my body's grown frail... I can no longer keep up with the younger generation," he muttered, voice edged with fatigue. "Never in my life did I imagine I'd be the last to arrive."

At his sudden appearance, Beatrice clicked her tongue in irritation.

"Sir Alon Valerion..."

The Iron Emperor had finally entered the battle, hoping to at least tilt the balance.

That damned old man is fast enough to slip past my senses...

Beatrice cursed inwardly, readying herself to fight an opponent said to strike at the speed of light.

“Father...” Maekar muttered, unable to believe that the old man had just saved him. But the Iron Emperor spared him not even a glance.

“Stop disgracing yourself ..and me. Get ready to fight.”

Releasing his full power, a terrifying surge of Light Aura burst from him, the Iron Emperor targeting Beatrice without hesitation.

“The enemy’s leaders are right in front of us! If we win here, the Ultras are finished!”

Unleashing a concentrated wave of light, Sir Alon illuminated the entire battlefield.

“Frey Starlight has already slain the human devil, Dragoth! The enemy is at its weakest! So fight! Do not hold back ... attack with everything you have! This war ends today!”

His words stoked the flames in both Maekar and Phoenix, urging them to fight to their last breath.

Neither of them knew the truth behind Dragoth’s death at Frey’s hands, but that news only deepened their resolve to crush what remained of their foes.

The battle shifted—four against three.

But their enemies were already wounded. In other words... the odds were nearly even.

With that fact in mind, the Empire's side fought with every ounce of strength they had left, turning the fight into a struggle of life and death.

Seven SS+ rank combatants clashed, unleashing a natural disaster that made the earth weep without pause. The sheer volume of aura they poured out bordered on madness.

Depending on the outcome, this battle could very well end the war today. All the greatest powers of both sides were here.

Knowing that, both sides played their final cards, aiming to erase each other from existence.

History would remember it as one of the fiercest battles ever fought on Earth.

#### Chapter 535: Runes of Twentyfold Wrath (1)

on its fringes, a single young man lay, his body propped against a jagged shard of debris left by the carnage.

After Phoenix Sunlight had thrown him far from the fighting, Frey Starlight had remained motionless for a long time, unconscious in the wake of his earlier frenzy.

But that stillness did not last.

Despite everything he had endured ..the pain, the bloodshed, the brutal battles ..his eyes opened once more from behind the black mask.

...

...

...

—Frey Starlight's POV—

"Ahh... what curse has befallen me now?"

The moment I returned to reality, a violent wave of searing pain tore through me.

It was as if every wound I had sustained until now had been waiting for this exact moment to hit me all at once.

It felt like my mind would burst from the sheer flood of nerve signals my body was sending.

I couldn't move a single muscle. My body felt as if it had lost every bone—like I was nothing more than a pile of flesh and skin.

"What... happened to me?" I muttered in confusion.

It took only seconds before I noticed the cursed battle raging nearby.

I recognized many of the powerful auras clashing there, and slowly, my memory of what happened before I blacked out began to return.

"I can't believe I lost control of myself..."

Forcing myself through the pain, I dragged my body until I could lean against the trunk of a dead tree ..unknowingly placing myself in direct view of the battlefield.

The last thing I remembered was trying to test my strength against Dragoth.

Then, everything flipped upside down, and I found myself transformed into a mindless killing machine, attacking everything in my path.

That loss of control wasn't an accident.

Yes, my mind was unstable... but breaking me required far more than that.

It felt as though my body had betrayed me.

Instinctively, I pulled back my tattered clothes, exposing bare skin to assess my current condition.

The wounds and injuries had healed at a visibly accelerated rate thanks to my regeneration ability... but alongside the blood, another color crept beneath my skin.

A deep, pitch-black hue—something unnatural that had taken root within me.

"Wesker's Shadow..."

That cursed thing was the direct cause of what happened earlier.

It was the reason I had lost control of myself in such a pitiful manner.

I found myself cursing under my breath.

"If I keep losing control of myself—and my power like this, it's only a matter of time before it ends in disaster..."

My current state was the perfect example.

I couldn't put this off any longer.

"I have to deal with it as soon as possible."

But before that, there was another pressing matter in front of me.

The war was still raging on, and a brutal clash that could decide its outcome was unfolding right before my eyes.

Four against three ..it was far too close to call.

"In this condition... there's no way I can support them."

Fighting was out of the question; I could barely lift a hand at this point.

So instead, I opened my system interface, activating the Third-Person Player's Perspective.

I'd been so fixated on what was happening in front of me that I'd forgotten about the ones I'd left behind.

Somewhere far from my current position ..tens of kilometers away ..another battle had erupted, one that brought with it its own flood of death and destruction.

Diving into the third-person view, my consciousness drifted away, peeling back the fog of war to reveal the true state of the battlefield.

...

...

...



Far from the slaughter between the SS+-class monsters...

In the rearguard, a completely different kind of battle was unfolding.

Through the blood-soaked mist that blanketed everything, the Imperial soldiers stumbled blindly, unable to locate their enemy ..let alone engage them.

They had held their ground well at first; Snow Lionheart had managed to clash evenly with the Nightmare Lord—the Cosmos.

As for the accursed Ludwig, they had dealt with him—somehow—by uniting their forces and trapping him.

But just when the Imperial troops thought they had a chance, the mist surged back once more.

And this time... dozens of horrors from hell itself crept forth, threatening to swallow them whole.

No one knew where that swarm of Mist Stalkers had come from, slipping like phantoms into the battlefield. There were dozens of them, each one projecting a powerful illusion that ensnared almost everyone in its grip.

The Mist Stalkers' haze, mixed with that of the Cosmos...

It was a blend that condemned hundreds of soldiers to an eternal nightmare from which they would never awaken.

Among the Imperial ranks, a lone blue-haired girl staggered through the chaos, everyone around her already fallen victim to the illusion.

Clutching a jagged, sharp rock, she trembled violently before stabbing it into her own flesh—using the pain to tear away the suffocating fog that threatened to strip her consciousness away.

In that way, Celene barely managed to stay awake, remembering Frey Starlight's warning about the Mist Stalkers from before:

"Close your eyes, and make pain your refuge."

It was the only way to survive the Stalkers' illusions.

But in the heart of this hell, Celene couldn't help but wonder... what could she possibly do, blind and bleeding by her own hand?

No matter how she turned it over in her mind, despair was all that filled her.

And in that moment of doubt, she made a grave mistake.

She opened her eyes.

And there it was ..looming right before her.

A foul, hideous thing with a twisted face and an elongated body shrouded in a black robe.

One of the very Mist Stalkers they used to frighten children in the old horror tales.

Its maw stretched open, fangs jagged and dripping, as it prepared to swallow her whole.

Celene froze in place, unable to move a muscle. She was about to die, but she refused to believe it.

"I won't die... he showed me the future..."

Trying to convince herself, she repeated the words over and over.

She had seen a future where she stood beside him.

But the Stalker's gaping mouth had already closed in, ready to crush her body in a single bite.

With death mere inches away, Celene's will cracked for a heartbeat, surrendering her belief to the primal fear of dying.

But the end she feared never came.

At the last second, a massive beam of azure aura slammed into the Stalker, blasting it away.

The nightmare creature tumbled across the ground, howling in fury as it tried to regain its footing ..only for a colossal block of ice to crash down from the heavens, burying it completely.

A moment later, bolts of lightning and pillars of fire rained from nowhere, obliterating both the ice and the nightmare beneath it.

Celene was left stunned by the sheer destructive force on display... until a voice she'd never heard before snapped her back to reality.

Chapter 536: Runes of Twentyfold Wrath (2)

"Are you alright?"

A young man with black hair and crimson eyes extended his hand to her ..Dawn Polaris, the one who hadn't sustained so much as a scratch since the battle began.

But the real focus wasn't on Dawn.

He wasn't the one who had unleashed that devastating display.

It was the woman standing just behind him.

"Damn these filthy creatures... how many of them do I have to kill before this nightmare ends?"

She looked genuinely annoyed ..a strange witch moving through the battlefield, a strange aura coiling around her along with several crackling sparks of electricity.

What stood out wasn't just her power, but the strange runic symbols glowing across scattered parts of her body.

"We have to move quickly before the mist gets to us," said Dawn Polaris, mindful of the injured Celine.

As for the witch, Selena Hemsworth... she didn't even seem to acknowledge her presence.

All she wanted to do was move faster.

At once, the three of them ran, cutting through one battlefield after another.

Each time, Selena would annihilate any Nightmare Creature that dared cross their path.

Her body released magic instinctively, weaving every element at a level that was both high and incomprehensible.

Her aura had reached heights it was never meant to touch—she was shrouded in complete mystery.

Yet she handled dozens of mist-born abominations on her own. The fog seemed to have no effect on her, and Celine suspected it had something to do with the strange runes carved into her body.

They were scattered across her arms, legs, torso... even her neck and face.

It was as if glowing tattoos had been etched onto her with cursed ink.

Among the incomprehensible runes, there was one thing Celine could read—and so could anyone else who saw it.

On Selena's right side, just above her waist... a certain number was carved.

"x20"

What did that mean? Times twenty?

That's what Celine wanted to know ..especially after Selena unleashed more and more devastating attacks, slaying the mist-born at alarming speed.

"Next! Damn it!" the witch barked angrily, dashing about with Dawn and Celine following behind.

Then, without warning, Selena's body convulsed, and she coughed blood before collapsing onto the ground.

Dawn rushed to her side instantly, supporting her.

"That's enough, Selena. Your body can't take any more!" he said urgently, only for the witch to shove him away in irritation.

"And what do you know about my limits?"

Sitting on the ground, she groaned from the sheer pain she had to endure.

"I might have overdone it this time... shouldn't have pushed it to twenty times my power."

Slowly, Selena exhaled as the runes faded from her skin.

Hearing that, Celine could no longer suppress her curiosity.

"Twenty times... your power?"

"Hm?" Selena didn't even seem aware of the girl's presence until now, her expression twisting in annoyance.

"Who's this girl with the dumb face?"

"She's the one you saved earlier, don't you remember?" Dawn replied, earning a sigh from Selena.

"My focus was on the Nightmare Creatures. Looks like you had the time to pick up girls, huh, Dawn?" Selena grumbled—right before coughing up more blood, prompting Dawn to palm his face.

"We need to move soon. If we stay here, they'll surround us," Dawn pointed out, but Selena only chuckled at that.

"With you here? I doubt anything could happen to us ..even if the Demon King himself came down."

Clearly, she was referring to her comrade's bizarre survival ability.

"Not to mention, I'll be vomiting more blood the moment I try to move."

She had clearly reached her limit.

Trapped in the heart of the battlefield, their only option was to rely on Dawn's luck to keep the danger at bay.

The fighting raged on, and no doubt Snow was still clashing with Cosmos—they could still feel the colossal fluctuations of aura from their duel.

Selena wanted to help, but her limit had come faster than expected. At that moment, Celine hesitantly raised her hand.

"Excuse me... I think I can help."

Hearing that, Selena's doubt was evident.

"Help? How? Are you going to cry at the enemy until they feel sorry for us?"

"Be kinder to her, Selena," Dawn interjected, urging Celine to ignore the jab.

Celine summoned her power, and water began to form out of thin air around her.

"I can heal you enough to fight again," she said, making both Dawn and Selena look at her in a new light.

"That changes everything !! In that case, come here and help your big sis!" Selena said enthusiastically, while Dawn frowned.

"She doesn't look that much younger than us."

"Shut your mouth."

Celine just stared at them, baffled at how they could banter like this in the middle of such chaos.

Where... did they get this level of nonchalance?

She wanted to know.

But for Dawn, who knew his ability would protect him no matter what, and for Selena, who had witnessed that ability with her own eyes, staying calm beside him was natural.

"Come here, girl, and start healing."

"Ah—right!"

Celine rushed over, placing her hands on Selena's back, letting her power flow into her.

"My ability lets me turn the water I control into healing water. I can treat your internal injuries this way, but I can't restore your aura reserves," Celine explained.

"No need for that. Healing my internal damage is more than enough," Selena replied with a laugh.

At first, Celine didn't understand what she meant ..until she began healing and realized just how battered Selena's body truly was. The number of internal injuries was insane.

"Don't be shocked, girl. This mess is the price of my ability," Selena said with a smile.

"Since you told me about your healing, I'll tell you about mine!"

Forming a magic pen in her hand, she began writing over her skin.

"As you can see, I can grant myself different powers by inscribing runes onto my body. I can use this ability in many ways—like instantly casting spells or manipulating elements I normally couldn't use," Selena explained before her grin deepened.

"Or multiplying my power several times over."



The last sentence caught Celine's full attention ..she instantly remembered that "x20" mark.

"Does that mean...?!"

Selena nodded.

"That's right. Twenty is my limit... but I can multiply my power twentyfold. That's how I was able to slaughter all those Nightmare Creatures."

"That's incredible!" Celine gasped, unable to hide her awe. Selena laughed proudly in response.

"Yes, it is!"

Frey Starlight wasn't the only one who had honed himself through relentless training.

One of the story's main heroines ..Selena Hemsworth ..had also awakened her true potential.

Chapter 537: Snow Lionheart vs Cosmos (1)

The battlefield had descended into utter chaos, swallowed by a thick, all-consuming fog.

Nightmare creatures attacked without pause, and the Empire's side was the sole loser in this exchange.

While soldiers fell one after another, dropping like flies, the Ultras had done nothing but unleash the nightmare beasts upon them. In other words—despite the oceans of blood spilled and the savagery of the clash—

the Ultras had not lost a single life in the most recent engagement.

The Empire's situation was dire, and the miasma of the Ghosts, fused with the power of the Cosmos, only made things worse.

Unity was no longer an option—everyone was fighting their own desperate battle somewhere inside that fog.

Among them, Snow Lionheart's fight was surely the most grueling of all. He was forced to face the Nightmare Lord directly while fending off countless other abominations.

The Cosmos' fighting style was unlike anything he'd ever seen—appearing one moment, vanishing the next, like some kind of phantom.

A mere touch from it was enough to melt human flesh to nothing, leaving behind nothing but bone.

Snow Lionheart was suffering heavily against such a maddening foe. He unleashed the War King form without restraint, bringing forth his entire arsenal of elemental might.

Harnessing black lightning in great quantities, Snow lunged at the Cosmos, sending a furious bolt crashing toward the beast. But the devastating strike simply passed through its body, which vanished in a strange blur, only to reappear behind him without warning.

The Cosmos lashed out with hundreds of long, whip-like arms, trying to crush his body. Snow barely evaded the blow by using Void Step—a skill that allowed him to erase the space between them in the blink of an eye.

Using that momentum, he tried to smother the Cosmos in a massive flood of azure fire—rabid, raging flames erupting from both his sword and his body in such volume that they should have consumed the creature completely.

Yet once again, the attack simply passed harmlessly through the Nightmare beast's body before it faded like a ghost and struck from behind.

Snow kept evading by the skin of his teeth, but no matter what he tried, he couldn't lay a finger on the Cosmos.

The battle became a game of chase—an endless loop where Snow's most powerful strikes phased through the Cosmos, and in turn, the Cosmos' relentless counterstrikes were narrowly dodged with Void Step.

It repeated so many times that they were trapped in a meaningless cycle.

Snow was beginning to lose his composure.

"This will turn into a battle of attrition..."

Engaging in this kind of fight was never to his advantage. Unlike him—who was burning vast amounts of aura with every grand display of power—the Cosmos used nothing but its long limbs and that absurd ghostlike body.

"Its ability... it's similar to that of Gavid Lindman, Lord of the Ultras. But unlike him, there are no weaknesses in the Cosmos' case..."

The Phantom Form was indeed a formidable power, but it came with flaws. For Gavid, if he neither saw nor sensed the attack, he couldn't phase his body to avoid it.

But with the Cosmos, no matter how fast Snow struck, no matter how many blind angles he attacked from, he simply couldn't touch it.

Worse still, other nightmare beasts kept interfering in their fight, forcing him to split his awareness across multiple fronts.

"Where the hell are all these cursed creatures coming from?!"

Unleashing three elements at once—fire, lightning, and gravity—Snow became a natural disaster incarnate, annihilating anything foolish enough to approach him. Yet despite holding his ground so far, his light was beginning to fade.

For all his lethal powers and the War King form pushing him to his peak, his aura reserves were modest compared to his enemies’.

Vermithor had been feeding him a massive supply of energy, but even that wouldn’t let him fight forever.

The longer the battle dragged on, the tighter the noose around Snow became.

"The Cosmos isn’t affected by anything I throw at it... the nightmare creatures just keep coming from that fog without end... and I can’t tell what’s happening inside its range."

The unnatural force within the fog had completely crippled his senses. He had no way of knowing how his allies were faring.

He was especially worried about the Hollow, Ludwig—Ghost Umbra and several S-rank fighters had taken on the task of stopping him.

But the fog had cut them off entirely, leaving Snow blind to their struggle. Ludwig was an SS-rank combatant with completely unknown abilities—in other words, there was no guarantee Ghost and the others could hold him back.

And then there was the sheer scale of the bloodshed, the corpses piling up in every direction thanks to the nightmare assault.

Little by little, under the War King form’s side effects, Snow was losing his balance—realizing that every soldier who had followed him here might well be annihilated.

Gripping his sword tightly, he bared his teeth in fury and charged at the Cosmos with even greater speed.

"You're telling me I'm still powerless to change anything, even after all these years?!"

Shrouding himself in Starlight Aura, Snow chased the Cosmos with a relentless flurry of light slashes.

The ferocity of his assault severed the Nightmare Lord's limbs with ease, yet he still couldn't touch its true body. With no other choice, he pushed himself harder, trying to finally reach it.

Nightmare creatures closed in to trap him again, but anything that entered his range was reduced to dust.

Calling upon six elements at once, Snow Lionheart pushed himself beyond his limits.

The fog worked its sinister magic, hallucinations gnawing at his mind.

That curtain of smoke had hidden the fates of every soldier who had followed him blindly—and now he was beginning to picture the scene: the fog lifting, revealing nothing behind him but corpses, blood, and death.

From the start of this battle, nothing had emerged from that fog but monsters.

Not a single human had appeared—only nightmare creatures whose numbers did not diminish, but instead continued to grow.

"Am I truly this weak...? So powerless that I can't change a thing, even with all the talents and blessings granted to me?"

His blessed body, the overwhelming talents and abilities that had placed him above his peers...

He had been born with gifts no other human before him had possessed, yet even so, Snow Lionheart was still losing miserably in the face of his very first true challenge.

The hallucinations intensified to the point where he began to see old, buried memories resurfacing within his heart.

As he dashed across the battlefield, striking down anything that dared approach, he would, from time to time, catch glimpses of children running around him—only for flames to ignite and consume them one after another.

From afar, he saw their silhouettes—an entire group of children standing behind a single man, hiding behind his back, all casting upon Snow every shade of disdain.

Especially that cursed director... the monster who had left a scar on Snow's life.

Snow knew well that this was nothing more than an illusion conjured by his enemy...

But he could not stop the boiling fury inside him, for what he was facing now was nothing less than a brutal reminder of his own weakness.

#### Chapter 538: Snow Lionheart vs Cosmos (2)

"If it were him, he wouldn't have struggled for even a minute against an opponent like this..."

Surrounded on all sides, the Vermithor Sword blazed without pause, its glow like a cry for help, as its wielder found himself in a hopeless situation.

Snow, his face smeared with blood and his golden eyes dimmed, fixed his gaze far ahead—at the Cosmos, the creature weaving its web around him.

"If Frey Starlight were here... none of this would be happening."

Once, there had been a time when Frey was far beneath him. In the blink of an eye, he had caught up—becoming his equal. Snow had been content with that.

But without realizing it... Frey had advanced far ahead, leaving him behind.

Snow Lionheart had never slacked—not once—and had trained just as hard as Frey. Yet for some reason...

The one beloved by light could no longer advance, no matter how he tried, as if he had slammed into some invisible wall keeping him from catching up to his peers.

He had everything it took to become the strongest; his talent was the highest among all humans.

Every resource had been placed at his disposal, every path prepared and paved for him... he was the one beloved by the heavens.

And yet—

"I'm still powerless to do anything!!"

Snow roared, releasing every ounce of pent-up frustration he had carried until now.

"Since the start of this war—no, since the day I was born—I haven't achieved a damn thing!!"

The chosen hero meant to lead all of humanity—the blessed, the chosen, the... the... the... The titles piled up, endless in number.

But...

What had this hero actually achieved?

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing..."

Whether it was in the distant past, when he was just a boy watching his home burn to the ground and everyone around him die...

Or now, when he had become the so-called hero.

He hadn't defeated his enemies. He hadn't saved his comrades. Every obstacle he met, he lost.

He lost to V.

He lost to Frey.

He lost in Londer; he couldn't win his battle in the chase, and would have died if not for Lara's intervention.

"Loss after loss... loss after loss!" Slash after slash, strike after strike, Snow tried to shatter the invisible chains wrapped around his body.

"Lose and lose... and here I am losing again!!!"

Burning with hatred for his situation and his weakness, the Church's champion fought with reckless ferocity, caring nothing for what might happen to him.

"I don't want to lose anymore! I don't want to sit on the sidelines, powerless to change a damn thing!"

The chains around Snow tightened further, trying to crush him—but he kept pushing, kept straining, desperate to break free.

He bit his lip hard enough to spill blood down his chin, turning the pain and the heat of battle into something that jolted him awake from his illusions.

He didn't know why he was still stuck, nor could he find any way to break his restraints.



But he refused to fall—even if it meant using only whatever he had at hand right now.

"My current strength is more than enough to deal with the likes of you."

Maintaining his War King form, the golden runes across Snow's body flared brightly as he leapt high into the sky—away from the poisonous mists below.

"Focus!!"

Sweeping his gaze across the battlefield from above, Snow searched for any method to fight this untouchable creature.

Even after climbing that high, the fog never once allowed him to check on his allies. All he could see in the distance were dozens of lights of varying colors—auras and elements flashing, proof that the fighting still raged on.

But Snow paid no attention to the others now; his eyes were locked entirely on the Cosmos.

"There's no such thing as a perfect ability in this world."

No matter how powerful or flawless an ability might seem, there had to be at least one weakness.

Snow bet everything he had on finding it.

The runes across his body shone even brighter, and his eyes burned as he forced them to their absolute limits.

For a moment, it was as though the world Snow saw through those eyes was completely different from what other humans could perceive.

His vision expanded greatly—until there was nothing left in his awareness but the auras around him.

His mind erased the existence of everything else; there was only him and the Cosmos upon this earth.

As his body fell from the sky, the Cosmos seized the opportunity, sending its long arms shooting upward, aiming to crush him before he could land.

Yet Snow showed no sign of moving—even when faced with such a direct, lethal attack.

He simply kept staring, as if possessed by some phantom, his gaze fixed in madness... to the point where a thin line of drool slipped unconsciously from the corner of his mouth.

That unblinking focus let him see what no one else could.

He saw... another world—one that revealed the truth of his opponent at last.

"So that's your secret, you filthy creature."

A terrifying grin split Snow Lionheart's face as he raised his sword high, his entire body blazing with light.

"Great Cosmos Formation!"

Obedying his command, twelve elements swirled around his body, fusing together into a single, cataclysmic detonation—a nuclear-scale explosion that struck the Cosmos and erased every nightmare creature from existence.

The colossal pillar of light his attack unleashed shook the entire battlefield to its foundations... yet even an assault of that magnitude failed to leave the Cosmos so much as scratched.

Even so, Snow did not flinch.

The moment his feet touched the ground, his body flashed faintly—and black lightning serpents coiled around him.

Using Void Step, he vanished from his position, surging away from the battlefield and leaving the Cosmos behind.

It looked like he was retreating... surrendering to his foe.

But the shrill, cursed cry that erupted from the Cosmos was all the proof anyone needed that this was not the case.

It charged after him at once, the ground quaking beneath the pounding of its countless legs.

But no matter how it tried, it could not match Snow's speed—he had already crossed an immense distance in the blink of an eye.

With a grim smile, he drew every ounce of power his sword could muster, preparing to end their struggle once and for all.

"So that's why you've been hiding in the fog all along, you damned beast."

Unlike the fog conjured by the Mist Stalkers, the Cosmos' mist didn't produce illusions—it dulled the senses.

The hallucinations Snow had suffered earlier had only been the result of numerous Mist Stalkers mixing their power with the Cosmos' own.

In other words... the Cosmos itself did nothing more than numb its enemies' perception.

It seemed like a useless ability at first—but Snow had finally uncovered the truth behind it.

"That fog is nothing but a cover to hide your real secret. That grotesque form of yours is nothing but a decoy. Your true body is somewhere else entirely!"

Snow had spotted it before—the thin thread of aura linking the Cosmos' body to a distant location.

A location very far away.

But thanks to his enhanced vision, he had seen it clearly.

Just one glance had given him the answer to every question.

"That's why I couldn't land a hit on you no matter what I tried!"

The body he'd been fighting all this time was nothing but a substitute ..

A puppet controlled by the real one.

Using Void Step, Snow ripped through the distance, and in mere seconds found himself face-to-face with the true deal.

"So this is where you've been hiding all along, you cowardly nightmare!"

Chapter 539: Crimson Chains of the Father

Snow roared, striking without hesitation.

For the first time in history... a human had laid eyes on the Cosmos' true form.

In stark contrast to its towering, monstrous shell, the real Cosmos was eerily human-like—barely two meters tall, with a twisted frame and unnaturally long limbs.

It looked... almost ordinary.

Its long hair fell over its face, but Snow could still make out the raw fear carved into its features.

The Cosmos instantly tried to flee, its body flaring with chaotic aura in an attempt to drive him back.

But Snow dodged with ease, coating his blade in the last reserves of his aura.

"One-Sword Style: Supreme art..."

Concentrating every element and every scrap of his strength, Snow's body vanished for a heartbeat, and time itself seemed to halt.

When he reappeared, he was already behind the Cosmos.

For an instant, it seemed as though he hadn't done anything ..

And the Cosmos believed that lie.

But without warning, the world before it inverted, and its upper half slid away from the rest of its body, collapsing to the dirt.

"Silent Rend."

A single strike that transcended time itself, tearing apart everything in its path in the span of a heartbeat.

Snow had cleaved the Cosmos clean in two, its upper body toppling from the rest, staining the ground beneath.

It began to scream at once—howling in manic, grief-stricken wails—but Snow appeared before it in a flash, driving his sword into its mouth and forcing it into submission.

"Your real body is far weaker than your former shell. No wonder you hid it in the fog—so no one would ever know just how pathetic you truly are."

It was said that the Cosmos was one of the Nightmare Lords of the SS+ rank... but in truth, that was a lie.

The reality was far less impressive—it was merely a nightmare creature that had been gifted an SS+ class ability.

Its actual self... was pitiful. But almost impossible to find.

No one had ever defeated it before. Its other form could not be touched, and so the world had trembled at its name for years unchallenged.

"I lost... and lost... and lost again," Snow murmured, exhaling at last.

"But today... I won."

Gathering what little strength remained, the Hero of Humanity prepared to end the wretched nightmare once and for all—

—when his enhanced senses screamed a warning from nowhere, forcing him to whirl around toward another monster targeting his neck.

They were far from the battlefield now ..

Which was why Snow had never expected the accursed Ludwig to appear before him, swinging his massive scythe straight at his throat.

With no time to spare, Snow was forced to redirect his blade—pulling it away from the Cosmos at the last instant to intercept Ludwig's scythe.

Steel met steel with a deafening clash, Snow barely deflecting the weapon so that it whooshed past his head by a hair's breadth.

He immediately stepped back, ready to reengage ..

But to his surprise, Ludwig didn't even bother to attack him again.

Instead, the Hollow scooped up half of his mother's remains and bolted away without a word.

It seemed he'd heard her final wail and rushed here, abandoning everything else.

Snow's mind swirled with questions at the Hollow's sudden appearance.

Does this mean Ghost and the others—?!

The thought chilled him to the bone... but he forced it aside.

Summoning what strength he had left, Snow lunged after the fleeing Hollow.

"You're not going anywhere."

Ludwig wasn't in his best shape—beneath his plague-black garb, blood poured freely, proof that his previous battle had been far from easy.

This was the perfect chance to kill him.

Snow sought to crush him in a single, overwhelming strike—

But the instant he tried to unleash the Warlord Form again, a ripping agony tore through his entire body.

That brief hesitation was all Ludwig needed.

He vanished from sight, using some unknown skill that rendered Snow completely unable to track him.

"Damn it! Have I already reached my limit?!"

Now, the Warlord Form was nothing but a living hell—every extra second in it threatened to shred his very soul.

Still, Snow endured, relying on his enhanced senses to search for Ludwig... but it was useless.

The Hollow was gone—taking the last remnants of his mother's body with him.

As for the Cosmos... Snow had left it on the brink of death, but he hadn't dealt the killing blow.

Whether it would live or die—he had no answer, and that uncertainty burned him with frustration.

"They all run from me in the end... haha... what a pathetic sight I am."

Snow's words dripped with bitter self-mockery, but he didn't stand idle.

Gripping Vermithor's Blade, he channeled holy power into his battered body and began dragging himself back toward the battlefield where his allies fought.

"The battle's not over yet... I have to return."



But despite his words, his pace was sluggish—reduced to nothing more than a walk.

From the very start, he had fought against the Cosmos' impenetrable form and the Nightmare Army for hours, draining himself to the brink.

Now, his only hope of returning to fighting condition lay in Vermithor's healing power, praying it would restore him enough to fight again.

"I wonder what happened to the others..."

Ghost, Dawn, Selina... all of them.

"I doubt anything could take Dawn down... but the others... Ghost..."

Snow drew in a sharp breath, forcing himself onward.

"I have to go back... I have to help them."

Step by step, he closed the distance.

He wanted to give more—what he had achieved so far was nowhere near enough.

He wanted to prove something—both to himself and to everyone else.

He pushed harder.

He wanted to shed his weakness... to change his fate.

He didn't want to be cast aside.

He wanted to stand at the very front—right where he was meant to be.

There, where people like Frey Starlight stood.

Snow no longer wished to linger in the shadows.

A blazing fire had ignited in his chest, fueled every time he'd been thrown aside.

He had never understood this feeling—only that it was far from pleasant.

It hurt him every single time.

Chains still coiled around him like snakes, and he had yet to find the key to break them.

But until he did...

He had no choice but to keep moving forward.

"Even knowing full well you're nothing but a filthy, deformed monster... you still try to play the hero?"

The voice came like a devil's whisper in his ear.

Snow froze mid-step, shock and hatred twisting his face.

Slowly, with eyes wide open, he turned.

And there he was.

"Tell me, runaway son... do you see yourself as a hero?"

From nothing, the man appeared, walking toward him at a measured pace.

A well-built figure, with long reddish hair and tanned skin...

Reading glasses balanced on one side over his right eye...

And the same simple, fatherly clothes as always.

In that unexpected moment, Snow came face-to-face with the man he had searched for so long.

He was certain—this was no hallucination.

Not another illusion born of the fog.

The man before him was real.

Real enough to look exactly as Snow remembered him from his childhood.

The orphanage director.

The man responsible for the Yosefka tragedy.

The Hollow... Smough.

Chapter 540: Possession

"It's been a long time since I last saw you, my boy. I let you wander and grow... until you became what you are now.

But with those same golden eyes, I can see you haven't changed much."

Smough's words reflected in Snow's mind as his body reacted on instinct—

He unleashed the Warlord Form at full force, ignoring the agony, and lunged without hesitation, aiming straight for the man's neck.

"You haven't changed either ..but you're no longer the obedient child I once knew."

Clang!

Without warning, a crushing wave of pain slammed into Snow Lionheart's mind, shaking him to the core.

His sword bit into Smough's neck... but the man's body was so impossibly solid that the blade stopped halfway through, cutting only part of it.

In turn... Smough's massive fist drove deep into Snow's chest, punching through until it burst out of his back.

"The child I raised would never have attacked me... but you're no longer that obedient boy. You've rebelled, my son, and it's time to come home."

Clutching at Smough's fist, Snow coughed up blood, swearing through the agony.

"Burn... to hell!!!"

From within Snow's body, more power surged into his sword as he tried to cleave Smough's head off, but the latter remained unmoved by his struggle.

Veins crawled across the Hollow's skin, his body hardening manyfold.

"You can't win. In your current state, you wouldn't be able to swat a mosquito."

Pulling his hand from Snow's chest, Smough left a gaping, bloody crater in his son's body.

Snow writhed on the ground, screaming in pain.

Vermithor was still lodged in Smogh's neck, irritating him. The Hollow wrenched it free and tossed it aside.

"Annoying sword," he muttered, wiping away the bleeding wound. That blade was a bane to those who wielded demonic power.

His gaze returned to Snow, who was still writhing on the ground, trying to clutch the hole in his chest.

No matter what he did, the wound refused to stop bleeding.

Snow tried to rise, but Smogh's foot came down hard on his head, forcing him back into the dirt.

"I don't want to mutilate you any more than this. Be a good boy and stay down, Snow. Be a good boy, and everything will be fine."

Those words were a curse in Snow's ears.

He was racing against time, his mind spiraling into chaos.

'Damn it... is all of this my blood?'

He kept trying to press against the void in his chest, but all his hands found was more blood—far too much of it.

He felt his consciousness slipping away.

His sword was gone. His strength completely spent.

'It's fine... it's fine... I'll be okay.'

He spat out more blood, sobbing beneath Smogh's boot.

'I just need to circulate my aura... just focus, and the wound will heal on its own... I'll be fine... I'll be fine...'

Snow's breathing was ragged.

Inhale... exhale... then a hacking cough, splattering more blood around him.

'I'll be fine.'

Breathing became a task in itself. Blood filled his throat entirely, and his vision began to dim.

'I'll be fine...'

He kept repeating it blindly, unable to process that his blood had already pooled around him.

"It's truly pitiful..." Smough said, a look of disgust twisting his face.

"You think yourself a noble hero, pure and righteous... unlike me, the monster who devours humans. Isn't that so?"

The Hollow whispered into Snow's ear with a faint chuckle.

"How naïve you are, my son. You and I are no different at all."

Dipping his hand into Snow's blood, he smeared it across the boy's face.

"The same blood runs through your veins... I injected it into you myself."

"Demon's blood."

Patting Snow's white hair—now stained crimson—Smogh continued to pour his venom.

"And not just demon blood... but the blood of all the other children who lived under the same roof as you."

Those final words made Snow's head boil with rage... but he could do nothing.

"Your body was always the most perfect. That's why I chose you as the ideal vessel for all that blood. So don't hold it against me... my son!"

Smough laughed loudly, as Snow's consciousness slid into darkness.

He couldn't speak in this state... but inside his mind, he cursed.

He cursed the man standing before him, and he cursed his own weakness—the weakness that had once again left him powerless to do anything.

The man he'd searched for years to find was right in front of him... and he'd lost to him in a single blow.

Pathetic. Truly, utterly pathetic.

And so, Snow fell completely—defeated before the Hollow, Smogh.

The latter reached out to take him.

"Seems you've finally fallen."

The Hollow had chosen to appear at the worst possible moment, after Snow had drained himself completely.

He knew full well that if he'd fought Snow at his peak, no one could say how things might have turned out.

That was why he struck when he did. And his plan had worked flawlessly.

Now, all that was left was to claim the body.

But the moment his hand extended—

—the pressure around them shifted from nothingness into something crushing, and Snow Lionheart's eyes snapped open once again.

The Church's hero slapped Smogh's hand away, and with a flick of his wrist, Vermithor came flying back to him.

Gripping it, Snow plunged the sword deep into his own chest, unleashing a brilliant radiance that engulfed the battlefield.

With quick, deliberate steps, he retreated from Smogh, who stared, baffled by what he was seeing.



"You?!" Smogh barked, as Snow smiled.

"Ah... damn, that hurts more than I expected."

With the sword still buried in his chest, Snow stood face-to-face with the Hollow.

"You really are a cursed bastard, Smough—attacking your enemies like this? Pathetic..." Snow laughed, while Smough's brow furrowed.

The man before him had changed entirely. As if...

"Someone else..."

"Ah... you caught me."

Smiling faintly, a ghostly image of another figure appeared behind Snow.

\*Third-Person Pov: Target possessed (Affinity insufficient, possession will be

canceled shortly) \*

Glaring at the system's notice, Snow gripped Vermithor tightly.

"I don't have much time... so let's finish this quickly."

It was Frey Starlight—speaking through Snow's body—ready to face the enemy who had tormented his friend for far too long.