

## VILLAIN 551

### Chapter 551: Between Shadow and Light (3)

If they had been at full strength, it might have been a different story. But after a battle that had drained them to the brink, none could endure it—especially Phoenix Sunlight.

The man stood at the rear, staring at the beam of light that threatened to engulf him.

"I... am going to die"

There was no chance of survival

The miracle of the Sunlight family realized his life was about to be erased—killed not even by a true foe, but by a weapon wielded by someone else.

In his final moments, Phoenix laughed at the irony of it.

"What a pitiful way to die..." he muttered, closing his eyes.

But the death he awaited never came.

Instead, something else entirely cut through the light ..

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

Before the angel's beam of light could annihilate everything in its path, another overwhelming strike erupted from a different source—colliding with it violently and halting its advance.

A surge of dark aura split the beam in two, shielding everyone at the very last moment.

Frey Starlight had appeared out of nowhere, standing directly before the angel, stopping it in its tracks.

His blow cleaved the beam apart, yet it failed to touch the angel itself.

Frey could barely fight in his current state—forcing his broken body to unleash a devastating technique like Nameless Judgement.

Blood streamed endlessly from his mouth and nose. He had barely managed to repel the attack, taking advantage of the delay Beatrice's spell had granted them .. otherwise, he could never have endured those full three minutes against it.

The instant he miraculously deflected the beam, Frey vanished again, reappearing beside Phoenix Sunlight.

Grabbing hold of Phoenix's broken form, Frey clenched his teeth, resisting the pull of unconsciousness that gnawed at his mind.

His shattered body flared once more with that ominous violet light, enveloping them both.

"Frey! What are you trying to do?!"

"Get us out of here! Can't you see?!" Frey barked, frustration lacing his tone as his body refused to obey him fully.

The fight against the angel wasn't over—others were still battling it, given a second chance thanks to him.

But Frey had no intention of staying to witness the outcome.

Locking onto Snow and Ghost's locations through the Bond System, he poured the last dregs of his strength into completing the teleportation.

With my condition... this is all I can give.

At the very least, he intended to take Phoenix with him.

"Maekar Valerion... Sir Allon—your survival is up to you."

Those were Frey's final words before he and Phoenix vanished entirely from the battlefield, leaving the others to clash with that cursed angel—one capable of killing the strongest warriors with its light alone.

The teleportation took no more than fractions of a second. In an instant, both Frey and Phoenix materialized in the midst of the Imperial army, which had just concluded its own bloody battle against swarms of attacking angels.

Their sudden appearance—and in such a wretched state—sent ripples of fear through the soldiers, as if heralding another catastrophe.

But, fortunately... nothing pursued them.

Within seconds, Snow Lionheart arrived, placing the legendary sword Vermithor before them in an attempt to heal their wounds. Yet even the sacred light of the blade was not enough to immediately pull them back from the brink.

Phoenix, assured they had reached safety, collapsed at once ..his charred and mangled body falling still.

Frey lay beside him, staring at the sky with a grim expression.

"Damn it... I can't feel my body..."

It had been a long time since he had driven himself this far. How many times had he forced himself to unleash Nameless Judgement?

Two, at most. But today, he had far exceeded that.

"No more fighting today..."

Checking Ada's status through the system interface to confirm she had followed his orders, he finally closed his eyes once assured she was safe.

And so, Frey Starlight's struggle for that day came to an end.

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A full month had passed since the Empire's campaign against the Ultras began.

The war had taken an unexpected turn when the Church turned against the ruling family, declaring themselves a third force in the conflict.

Ultimately, the battle between the colossal angel and the gathered SS+ class fighters ended with both sides withdrawing—each too damaged to continue. The angel had taken heavy injuries, but so had the Empire's champions.

Maekar Valerion and Sir Allon escaped in critical condition, just as the Ultras retreated with their own losses.

By the end of the fight, all were shaken by what they had seen. If the Church possessed even one more angel of equal power to the one they had just faced, it would spell the end for them all.

The "Purging" lasted for hours, leaving devastation in its wake.

Every member of House Starlight and House Valerion within the Empire's walls was slaughtered, their lands reduced to ash by cleansing fire.

Countless Higher Blood warriors fell that day, along with a significant portion of the Imperial army.

Yet despite the carnage the Church had wrought, their work was far from complete—many of those named by the Lord of Light still lived.

Their failure to kill them all prompted Platier to issue another decree that same day—a message carried by angels to every corner of the world:

"To all soldiers of the Empire, heed my words carefully.

Our enemies are everywhere, and evil has flooded our land.

Among your ranks, the condemned hide—those whom the Lord has judged for death. Know this: anyone who harbors them becomes an enemy of the Church as well.

Remember, soldiers of the Empire—they are the sinners, not you. Remember that your families, your wives, your parents, your children are now in our hands.

Do not drag them into the abyss with you. Stand with the righteous! Deliver the condemned, and do not protect them. Only then will you and your loved ones be spared the cleansing flames.

House Valerion and House Starlight are dens of filthy demons that must be purged. Among these beasts, there are five with the highest priority for extermination—five monsters who must be slain without delay.

Any who aid in delivering them shall be rewarded with glory and wealth beyond measure."

With those words, a heavenly edict was issued—naming the five powers that had to be destroyed at all costs, regardless of the Ultras.

"Number 5 among the Special Powers: Sansa Valerion — (Demonic Powers)"

"Number 4 among the Special Powers: Aegon Valerion — (An Existence Whose Actions Cannot Be Predicted)"

"Number 3 among the Special Powers: Sir Allon Valerion — (A Lifetime of Experience and Wisdom Forged on the Battlefield)"

"Number 2 among the Special Powers: Maekar Valerion — (Exceptional Individual Combat Power)"

And finally...

"Number 1 among the Special Powers: Frey Starlight — (Unknown Potential and Limitless Abilities)"

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These five held the highest execution priority.

Anyone who colluded with them or dared to protect them would be deemed an accomplice and punished without mercy...

Especially Number 1 and Number 5.

The first was a monster who must never be allowed to grow stronger.

The fifth—a human who had turned into a vile demon.

Her mere existence was an insult to the Lord of Light, and thus, she had to be eradicated.

Days passed, one after another, and the tension in the air only grew heavier.

So much so that the commanders relocated every member of House Starlight and House Valerion present at the frontlines, keeping them apart from the rest.

With their families and loved ones held hostage by the Church's forces, nothing guaranteed they wouldn't turn on their comrades at any moment.

Among them—hidden inside a certain tent pitched at the edge of the camp—sat Frey Starlight.

He had regained consciousness some time ago and now stared at the list issued by the Church.

"Four from House Valerion... and only one from House Starlight. Looks like I'm the only one honoring my family's name," Frey remarked, surrounded by many familiar faces.

"It's only been a few days since they issued this decree, but the tension among the soldiers is already suffocating," Oliver Khan said from across the table.

"What about the Ultras?" Frey asked. Snow was the one to answer.

"They're completely quiet. Looks like they're discussing their next move... just like we are."

"We'll have to deal with the Church one way or another. We can't fight the Ultras with our backs exposed to an attack at any moment," Snow affirmed, gripping the Vermithor sword tightly.

"The Church no longer gives me any consideration. These extermination orders came directly from the Lord of Light himself. My word means nothing to them now—even if I'm his so-called messenger of God."

That was why he hadn't been informed about anything happening at present.

"We'll have to gather with the rest of the commanders to decide how to move forward," Oliver Khan suggested, noting the absence of the higher-ranking powers from their current meeting.

Sansa and Ghost were present, but both remained silent.

"But how exactly are we going to deal with them? Do we split our forces now and send part of the army back to the Empire? That would destroy us completely—and I doubt the soldiers would fight when their families are being held hostage..." Snow voiced their current dilemma.

The answer came from a predictable source.

"The answer is simple, Snow Lionheart. We're not sending an army to fight the Church."

The tent's flap was lifted as a group of blond-haired men entered.

At their head... stood Prince Aegon Valerion.

"Isn't that right, Frey Starlight?" His words were directed at Frey, who had sensed the prince's presence long before he arrived.

"The prince... and Ivar and Luc Valerion," Oliver Khan greeted them, but Frey cut him off, skipping the formalities.

"If you have a plan, spit it out," he said to Aegon, who chuckled lightly.

"No need for that tone. I'm willing to bet you and I have been thinking along the same lines."

"Don't compare yourself to me. We're nothing alike. Look—I'm first on the extermination list, and you're fourth. There's a difference in rank here," Frey said with a straight face that drew surprised looks from those around him.

The prince was the only one who laughed, clearly amused.



"You do have a talent for attracting your enemies' attention, Frey. I can't compete with you in that field."

Stepping closer to the table at the center of the tent, Aegon moved on to the real matter.

"Shall we get to the plan, then?"

Drawing everyone's attention, Aegon Valerion began.

"First, we can't split our forces in two. That's a stupid idea that will get us all killed. On top of that, we'll need at least three SS+ class fighters—or equivalents—nearby at all times. Our primary enemy in this war is still the Ultras."

No one objected to his first point, so he moved on to the second without pause.

"Now... while it's true that our main enemy is the Ultras, dealing with the Church has become necessary. But let me first correct your view of the current situation—you're wrong to think of those idiots who follow the Lord of Light as a 'third faction' in this war."

Pointing toward the angels who had previously swept across the world, Aegon explained.

"Let's not forget—the Church, in its normal state, is no more powerful than one of the major houses at best. What made them seem like a major force in this war came down to two factors: first, the angels that fought in their place; and second, the timing they chose to strike. Those factors made them look like the strongest side in this war—but that's not the truth at all."

Frey exhaled in mild annoyance.

"Those angels are nothing but tools. Burning weapons ..like the swords Snow and I wield."

"Exactly!" Aegon was pleased to see Frey following his line of thought, highlighting an important point.

"In other words, there's a single person controlling all of them. If he falls, they fall with him."

The moment he said that, everyone began to grasp his meaning.

"So all we have to do is take out the one controlling the angels... Joseph Blatier," Snow said, astonished at how simple it sounded.

"That's right," Aegon nodded with satisfaction—until Ivar Valerion interjected.

"Aren't you all being a little too optimistic? If your assumptions are correct... doesn't that mean Blatier will hide in the safest place he can find to ensure he never falls into our hands?"

Listening to his uncle, Aegon nodded once more in agreement.

"Yes, that's exactly what he'll do. And the only suitable place is their holy island... Sicily. That's where Blatier orchestrates all his schemes."

Aegon pointed at the map, his finger landing on the island lying south of the Empire.

"So? How exactly do we intend to get them? Just covering the distance from here to the Holy Island alone would take an eternity, not to mention the fight and defeating Blatier and his forces." Snow highlighted another critical point, and Aegon already had an answer.

"Well... the entire plan now depends on the number one among the Special Forces... the great Frey Starlight!" He gestured toward him in an almost theatrical fashion, as if announcing the entrance of a celebrity.

With playful ease, Aegon tossed the responsibility to Frey—only for the latter to feel even more annoyed when he realized his own idea matched Aegon's plan.

"Frey... you can use long-distance teleportation, can't you?" he asked.

Everyone immediately understood where this conversation was headed.

With a sigh, Frey answered.

"For distances that far, someone who carries my Mark must already be at the location I'm aiming for. In other words, to reach the Holy Island of Sicily, I need someone who meets that condition to already be there..."

He paused for a few seconds, and then a faint gleam lit up his eyes.

"And that condition... has already been met."

That final statement caught everyone in the tent by surprise.

He didn't tell them about the Affection System, instead weaving the story around the Mark to conceal the truth.

But it wasn't entirely a lie.

"Above the Holy Island, there's someone I can use my ability on... and that person is none other than the Saintess—Uriel Platini—who is, as we speak, on the Holy Island of Sicily."

"In other words, I can teleport there instantly... and take a few companions with me." Frey's lips curved into a sharp, dangerous smile.

"We can hunt down Joseph Blatier before he even gets the chance to hunt us."

In that moment, the Empire had finally found a way to strike back against their new enemy.

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## Chapter 553: The Spark of the Second Act (1)

With a hastily crafted plan from Aegon Valerion and execution by Fray Starlight...

The people present had finally begun to see a way to strike back at the Church's aggression.

Their situation was anything but easy. Enemies surrounded them on all sides, to the point that they even risked betrayal from within their own ranks—after all, the Church had taken their families and loved ones hostage.

But now, at least, they had a way to fight back.

Gathered inside a secluded meeting tent away from prying eyes, Fray Starlight declared that he could teleport directly into the enemy's headquarters and strike where they least expected it.

"Wait." Oliver Khan cut in before everyone could get too optimistic.

"Teleportation abilities aren't something you can just use freely. Fray Starlight—how many people can you take with you?"

Oliver's question was a fair one. In response, Fray raised two fingers.

"I can take two people with me at most. There's a way to bring more, but it would mean making multiple round trips until I run out of aura. That's not really an option—once we arrive, the Church will almost certainly sense us. They'll block me the moment I try to bring in more."

In other words... only three people could go.

Three against the full might of the Church.

It didn't sound favorable for the Empire at all, but Aegon didn't seem surprised.

"Alright. I figured this would be the case—no ability is perfect. In that case, we'll need to choose those three very carefully." The prince's words made everyone glance at one another.

Who would go? And who would stay?

Fighting the Church or fighting the Ultras... either choice was a nightmare.

But before anyone could volunteer or share their opinion, Fray stepped forward with a firm tone.

"Sorry, everyone. I'm sure you all have plenty of ideas... but I'll be the one to choose who goes. That's my only condition for carrying out this plan."

His words drew mixed reactions—some didn't mind, others were clearly unhappy, especially among the Valerion family. But Aegon spoke before they could say a word.

"I've got no problem with you picking the team, as long as you keep in mind what I told you earlier." Aegon smiled faintly.

"I know—you want at least three SS+ class fighters to stay behind, right? Relax. I never planned on taking any of them in the first place."

The Empire had only four true SS+ class fighters, with a few others able to temporarily match that level through external means.

Fray had already decided on his first pick—the young man sitting to his right.

"First, Snow Leonhart—you'll be the main fighter alongside me. Second..." Fray paused for a few seconds before pointing at someone no one expected.

"...You, Prince Aegon. You'll be coming with me. That's my first and only condition if you want me to carry out your plan."

The moment Aegon's name was spoken, the reactions were intense.

Everyone could understand picking Snow—the Church's own "hero" with overwhelming strength—but Aegon?

His abilities were a complete mystery to most. Few had ever seen him fight, as he usually took on leadership roles. Now Fray wanted to drag him into a direct battlefield. It looked more like an attempt to get him killed, which was exactly what angered Ivar and Luc Valerion.

"You've crossed the line, Fray Starlight."

"You think everyone in your generation is a monster like you? The prince's chances there are zero!" Ivar snapped, but Fray only sighed.

"Zero? Is that really what you think? Then you know less about your own family than I do." He locked eyes with Aegon.

If Aegon had truly been weak enough to die easily, Fray would have killed him long ago.

The prince had many hidden cards up his sleeve ..so many that Fray had tried to take him out more than once, but something told him it would end in disaster if he did.

Aegon Valerion was an unknown land—no one knew what lay hidden there.

To uncover the truth and put that serpent under the light, Fray saw this as the perfect opportunity.

On the sacred island of Sicily, surrounded by enemies with no guards or troops to shield him, the prince would be forced to reveal at least some of his cards. And isolating him that way would also make killing him possible.

These were Fray's thoughts—identical to the ones running through Aegon's own mind.

'So this is your way of putting pressure on me, huh, Fray? Your thoughts are written all over your face. Predicting you isn't hard.' Aegon's grin widened slightly as he shaped the answer he would give.

At that moment, Sansa Valerion finally stood. She'd been silent until now, but she couldn't ignore what had just been said.

"Fray... take me instead of him. There's no reason to drag someone like him along."

Leaving Oliver's side, Sansa's voice carried a note of urgency. She knew all too well what someone as cunning as Aegon Valerion was capable of—he could turn on them at any moment.

"You know how strong I am — I'll be an asset on the battlefield, without a doubt!" she pressed, but Fray shook his head.

"Sorry, Sansa, but I can't take you to a place like Sicily. Their holy power is the direct counter to your demonic power .. they're your natural enemy. The danger to you would be far too great."

"But—"

"It's better for you to stay here and fight alongside Oliver Khan against the Ultras. Your strength will make a difference here." Fray gave her a reassuring smile, then sent Oliver a subtle look ..one that clearly said he was leaving her in Oliver's hands.

One glance between them was enough for Fray to realize Oliver and Sansa had already mended the rift between them. This was the perfect chance for Sansa to regain herself, at least a little. If she stayed with him constantly, she'd only sink deeper into the darkness of the path he had chosen to walk.

Sansa didn't agree, but Fray insisted.

In truth, his original plan had included Ghost ..he had wanted to form the same team that went to Wendor.

But with the prince appearing out of nowhere, Fray didn't want to waste the opportunity, and changed his plan on the spot.

"You all here know exactly what Snow and I are capable of—we're not lacking in combat strength in any way. As for the prince, his achievements speak for themselves, and he can help in more ways than one. This lineup means we leave both the current and former emperors free to fight, alongside Phoenix and Sansa."

"In other words, the Empire will still have enough strength to handle whatever the Ultras throw at them, while we strike the Church quickly and deal with Joseph Plattier. What do you think, Aegon? Perfect plan, isn't it?"

Throwing the entire weight of the decision on Aegon, Fray put the ball in the prince's court.

If he refused, they would be back to square one.

If he accepted, he would be exposing himself completely—forced to face the unknown head-on.

It was an extremely dangerous position for a man who had always calculated his every step and planned for the smallest details.

The plan had its flaws, and some of those present suggested delaying the decision until Sir Alon and the Iris Sunlight statue returned ..both seasoned in military strategy ..in hopes of swaying Fray.

But he stood firm. If the prince refused, Fray made it clear he was willing to scrap the plan entirely.

After a long exchange of glances, Aegon Valerion's eyes lit up, and a broad smile spread across his face as he gave his answer.

"You'll have your way, Fray. I'll join this raid and fight by your side against the Church."



At those words, Fray's eyes widened for a split second before he immediately regained his composure.

"Very well. We leave at dawn, so get yourself ready by then." His words made Aegon chuckle.

Fray had chosen such a near departure time so the prince wouldn't have a chance to prepare in advance.

He'd expected Aegon to demand more time—but the prince didn't. Instead, he agreed to all the conditions without hesitation.

Silencing all dissent, the prince set the plan into motion, declaring that he wouldn't back down. As Supreme Commander of the War Council, his word was final.

At that moment, an unusual team was formed ..three fighters from the new generation.

#### Chapter 554: The Spark of the Second Act (2)

Three young men, none older than twenty, entrusted with the task of taking on an immense entity like the Church.

The mission would be anything but easy, and everyone spent the following hours planning the raid.

"The Church has many angels, but the one worth noting is the one that appeared alone in the battle of the elites," Fray said, recounting what he had seen.

"That angel has only one attack—but it's enough to kill SS+ class fighters. It can fire for three minutes straight, then stops for five minutes to recharge before repeating. That will be our biggest obstacle alongside the High Bishop in this raid."

A diagram of the angel's form was laid out, and the prince nodded.

"From the reports, that angel hasn't returned to the Sacred Isle. It's somewhere in the Devil's Sea. If we strike quickly enough, we might be able to avoid clashing with it."

Aegon made a good point. As always, he had deep knowledge of his enemies and allies alike.

"But the real problem," Aegon added, "is if the Church has another one—or more."

"I doubt they have another weapon like that," Fray replied. "If they did, they wouldn't hesitate to use it to wipe us all out. The last battle was the perfect chance to get rid of every SS+ fighter on both sides."

It was a fair point—if two of those great angels had appeared, they would have been completely annihilated. But Aegon didn't look entirely convinced.

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you. Your reasoning makes sense, but there's still the possibility they're holding a second angel in reserve to defend their stronghold."

"That conclusion came from flipping the chessboard," Aegon explained.

It was a tactic he often used—reversing the board to put himself in his enemy's position.

Thinking about the battle from their perspective, he would try to guess their moves.

"If I were the Church, I would never play all my cards at once. They can't predict what might come their way, so it's better to act as if they might have at least one more weapon in reserve."

Aegon's strategic insight was sound, and Fray didn't object—he nodded in agreement.

"I see your point. It's best we account for every possibility."

In agreement, Fray and Aegon moved on to discussing how to attack, their back-and-forth smooth and calculated.

It made everyone else in the room fall silent.

Those two were like oil and fire—putting them in the same room was usually enough to make the air tense. Just minutes ago, they had been glaring at each other with looks sharp enough to kill.

But now, it was as if they were in perfect sync. Many of those watching realized this might be the birth of a terrifying team—one made up of an unpredictable fighter and a cunning prince whose plans no one could foresee.

The meeting dragged on for hours, until the time for departure was close. With only an hour left, most agreed to get some rest before setting out.

As the long meeting wrapped up, Prince Aegon turned to Ivar Valerion and raised an important point.

"What about my father and grandfather?"

It was a fair question ..their absence until now made no sense.

Aegon had already asked his uncle to look into it, and Ivar had done so.

The latter sighed in irritation before sharing the information he had recently gathered.

"I don't fully understand what's going on, but the report from our men stated that Maekar immediately left the battlefield the moment he learned about the Church's assault on the Empire... The path he took showed that he headed toward the Demon Sea, so he could be far away by now. And Ser Alon has gone after him to bring him back... That's why he's absent as well."

"Ah, I see..." Aegon said, now aware of the current situation.

Maekar Valerion must have panicked the moment he heard about the complete destruction of the royal family's palace.

For the treasure he kept hidden from the entire world lay within that place. In other words... Maekar had likely set out to cross the Demon Sea himself to return to the Empire.

"My father really does go mad when it comes to that man," Aegon chuckled mockingly, before Ivar asked in confusion.

"What are you talking about?"

"Ah, nothing, nothing. I'm just talking to myself."

Leaving the tent alongside his family members, Aegon smiled and issued new orders.

"This situation might work in our favor. Tell my grandfather to return as soon as possible. As for my father, let him continue toward the Empire and have him take command of the Church's forces there... His appearance will definitely turn the tide."

"This doesn't sound like a wise plan to me," Ivar said, unconvinced.

"It's not supposed to be a wise plan. We want chaos."

Armies clashing across the Continent of Ultras...

A single madman throwing the Empire into upheaval...

And one unit fighting against the Church...

It was complete chaos, exactly as the prince intended. His mind was racing against time, searching for the most optimal path for the events to unfold.

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At the same time the prince departed, Frey Starlight also slipped away on his own, seeking solitude.

From his pocket, he took out one of those magic crystals used for communication during times of war. He infused it with his Aura, connecting to the other side.

It only took a few seconds before the other party answered, and a familiar holographic figure appeared before him.

It was Carmen.

"It's been a while, Carmen. How are things on your end?" Frey asked with a gentle smile, genuinely relieved to see the woman safe.

Sitting atop a massive crate, Carmen glanced around to check her surroundings before answering.

"We're alive and well thanks to your instructions... Your sister and all the key people are safe," Carmen said, to which Frey nodded.

"Glad to hear that."

"But Frey... how did you know the attack was coming?"

Carmen still remembered what Frey had told her before he set out for war. He had stressed the importance of preparing multiple escape routes in case anything happened.

Thanks to his persistence, they had managed to flee before the main command center was destroyed, and were now hiding underground in a concealed spot amid the ruins of the Oclas Mountains.

However, the less fortunate members of the family who had been in the Starlight region... most of them perished in the flames of the purge.

"Ada's in bad shape. She's supposed to be the family's Lord, so she blames herself for what happened..."

The sudden annihilation of the majority of their family had cast a heavy shadow, and Ada was far from fine.

Frey already knew about that—he had checked on her condition through the system several times.

"I didn't know about the Church's attack, but I expected you'd be targeted during the war one way or another—especially since I've been making a lot of enemies lately."

Even if the blow hadn't come from the Church, it would've come from other factions, like the Ultras, who might have used his sister against him.

Frey could teleport to her location at any time, but there were cases where he'd be pinned down on the battlefield, like during the last fight. That's why he had to make preparations in advance.

Thanks to that, his sister and Carmen, along with everyone in the main headquarters, had gotten out alive.

### Chapter 555: The Spark of the Second Act (3)

"Carmen... soon I'll have to fight another battle, and this time the enemy will be the Church. I'll be far away, so I need you to stay with Ada and protect her. Stop her if she tries to do anything stupid. Break her legs if you have to, but don't let her leave your current hideout," Frey said, his face devoid of expression, while Carmen sighed in unease.

"Frey... what Ada needs right now is you, not me. Too many have died already, and if she loses you too, I don't think she'll recover from it. Your return is probably all she wants right now."

"You know I can't do that, Carmen. My presence has become necessary in this war," Frey replied with a bitter smile. Overnight, he had gone from a worthless weakling to the main combatant for the Empire's side as a whole.

"I know... I really do," Carmen said, a certain memory surfacing in her mind.

"You've become like him... like your father."

Just as the father had shouldered the burden of the War of Light, the son now walked the same path in the War of Darkness.

"I suppose it's a curse placed upon our family," Frey laughed, and Carmen smiled faintly.

"It's wonderful to become a great man like your father... But don't die, Frey. Don't let this war take away the most precious thing you have."

"And what might that be?" Frey asked.

"Your life."

"My life... huh?"

Frey gazed up at the sky, while Carmen pulled out a cigarette and placed it between her lips. She had been smoking a lot lately.

"Given the situation right now, I'd probably take one of those cigarettes from you if I were beside you," Frey said with a laugh, but Carmen shook her head.

"You won't learn to smoke from me. Find someone else for that."

"I see you still treat me like a child even after all these years."

"You're nineteen, Frey. You are a child."

Perhaps his power and achievements so far had made some forget the truth, but whether it was Frey, Snow, Sansa... or many others, they were all still just young people at the very start of their lives. It was a cruel reality—burdening them with the weight of an entire war and the fate of countless lives.

Since the beginning of the War of Darkness, hundreds of thousands had already died... whether on the Ultras continent, or within the Empire under the Church's purges.

"Maybe I really am just a kid... Normally, people my age are supposed to just live their lives—eat, sleep, find a beautiful girlfriend, and live comfortably without the pressures of the world."

"Is that your ideal view of life? Eating, sleeping... and by 'girlfriend' you clearly mean sex. That sounds very close to how you were before your personality changed."

Carmen wasn't wrong—Frey had always lived making full use of his privileges, except for the brutal torture he used to indulge in. But whether it was the old Frey or the current one, deep down, they both longed for the same thing.

"I'm a much simpler man than I look. And for the record, I didn't necessarily mean sex when I mentioned having a girlfriend. Your old brain has clearly gone rotten with perverted thoughts."

"No need to deny it—only gays pretend otherwise."

"And that mindset of yours is exactly why you're still alone at your age," Frey said with a smirk, before the two fell into silence.

Frey stared at the sky, Carmen focused on her cigarette.



That lighthearted conversation, brief as it was, managed to push away the shadows of war hanging over them... if only for a few minutes, before reality came rushing back.

"I'll hang up now. It's time," Frey said, drawing a puzzled look from Carmen.

"You're not going to call her?"

In response, Frey shook his head.

"I'd rather not. I'd only end up making her suffer more."

Especially once she found out about the raid he was about to undertake.

"That's... really cruel," Carmen said quietly, as Frey bid her farewell.

"Take care of yourself, Carmen... and of Ada."

Carmen nodded, flicking the last of her cigarette away. They both hung up at the same moment.

"Don't die... Frey..."

It was the last long conversation they would ever have—both oblivious to what the war had in store for them.

...

...

...

—Frey Starlight's POV—

"Time to deal with that damned Shadow..."

I made my way back to camp, occasionally checking my body along the way.

That cursed Engineer... Gehrman had been right—in one way or another, the war had shifted so much that I now found myself heading into the Church's territory.

I was counting on finding the answer to dealing with the Fourth Shadow once I reached that place.

I still remembered the way I'd lost control of myself in the last battle, how that black substance had crept under my skin. Losing control like that would be fatal in the battles ahead, so eliminating the Shadow had become my top priority.

The second problem was Uriel herself.

She was still active on my system's interface, but I couldn't see anything through her via the third-person perspective.

That meant she was unconscious, preventing me from spying on her or learning her situation. Considering what the Church had been doing lately, I doubted a delicate girl like Uriel would willingly take part in such acts—even if it was in the name of the being she followed as her god.

In other words, it was possible she'd been attacked or imprisoned by those hypocrites.

Knowing that, there was nothing I could do but hope I wasn't too late.

Her request from that day still echoed in my mind—she had asked me to save her, and I had promised I would.

"I haven't forgotten our promise, Uriel."

I'd get her out of that place, even if it meant bringing the whole building down on their heads.

"Wait for me..."

There was little time left before the raid began. When I returned, I'd thought I would be the first to arrive—but someone had beaten me to it.

Sitting alone, staring up at the sky, lost in thought... was Snow.

Approaching him quietly, he turned when he noticed me.

"Frey... you're back."

I nodded, taking a seat beside him.

Chapter 556: The Spark of the Second Act (4)

"Am I interrupting something?"

"Not at all."

"I can see you've got a lot on your mind," I said, trying to prompt him into speaking.

He stayed silent for a while before voicing the question that had been on his mind.

“I’ve been wondering, Frey... why did you choose me of all people to accompany you? I mean, I know your reasoning—you see me as the Church’s champion, an asset in battle—but for some reason, I don’t think that’s the real reason.”

Snow had voiced his true thoughts—and it seemed he’d seen right through me. Our bond must have deepened after I last possessed him.

“You’re right. The reason I chose you goes much deeper than that,” I said, deciding to be honest with him.

He fixed his eyes on me as I began explaining the real reason.

“Simply put, I couldn’t leave you to fight the Ultras in your current state. If I did, you’d definitely keep walking the path of demons .. and that path will destroy you, nothing more.”

Hearing my words, Snow stayed silent. He knew I was right.

“It’s true that following Yusefka’s method gave you extra strength... but that’s still just a borrowed power, Snow. Power granted by the demon blood running in your veins. If you keep devouring your own kind, you’ll hit another wall sooner or later.”

In Snow Lionheart’s case, neither the human path nor the demon path was right for him. Both had given him some strength, yes... but it was far too limited.

“So what exactly am I supposed to do? I’ve been stuck, unable to grow stronger no matter what I tried—until I finally broke through thanks to the demon path you showed me. And now you’re telling me to stop, after I’ve tasted the power I’ve always wanted?”

Snow was hungry for strength ..to surpass what he was now.

If devouring his own kind could achieve that, he wouldn’t hesitate.

“All I have to do is consume my enemies’ corpses. Then no one will complain,” Snow said, wearing the expression of an obsessed addict.

Seeing him like that, I almost regretted telling him about his demon blood.

With a quick smack to the back of his head, I forced that deranged look right off his face.

Groaning in pain, he shot me an angry glare.

“Why the hell did you do that?!”

“I figured you needed it, so I hit you.” With a heavy sigh, I took the matter seriously. I couldn’t risk letting my so-called ‘promised hero’ stray from his proper path.

“Listen closely, Snow. Like I said, the demon path will give you strength—but it’s a small strength, with limits. The path that truly suits you is something completely different... a path that will let you reach your full potential and push your talent to its absolute limit. That path is tied directly to the being that gave you your holy sword.”

I looked him straight in the eye, making him furrow his brow in surprise.

“You mean... the Lord of Light?”

“That’s right.” I nodded, then explained why I wanted to bring him along on my upcoming raid.

“Whatever this so-called path is, you’ll most likely find it on the Holy Isle of Sicily. That’s probably the only place where you can interact directly with that being. Only then will you find what you’re looking for—and discover all the secrets of your chaotic body.”

I gestured at him with distaste.

“Part human, part demon, and another part of unknown origin... How the hell are you even alive with all that chaos inside you?”

Hearing my mockery, he showed a rare, faintly irritated look.

“I didn’t choose to be born this way. Since the moment I opened my eyes in this world, I was in a cursed orphanage—with no father, no mother... nothing but a curse hanging over me.”

He said that, then turned toward me.

“But, Frey... how do you know so much about me? How did you learn about my demon blood, and that other side you refuse to tell me about?”

Honestly, I’d known he’d ask that sooner or later.

“Let’s just say, Snow... you and I share the same curse. I also have a cursed body whose origin I don’t know. That’s why I understand your struggle—I’ve been through it myself, and still am,” I said with a strained smile.

At that moment, we both caught sight of one of the massive black birds gliding through the sky—Chaos Eaters, silently observing this war from afar.

“You know, Snow... in this vast world, alongside us humans and demons, there are countless other races—more than can be numbered—living just as we do,” I said, gazing beyond the sky.

“Among those races... there’s one that’s truly unique. They’re called the Great Ones.”

Listening as if I were an old man telling a fable, Snow seemed intrigued.

“The Great Ones?”

“That’s right.”

“But their reality is completely different from the stories. You see, the Great Ones aren’t actually a race—they’re a rank.”

“On every planet, there are countless living beings forming the ‘lower’ forms of life that fill the vast universe.

But alongside them, on each planet, a single creature is born at a time—one that serves as the ruling power keeping its world in balance, standing alone at the top as the highest form of life.

These are the Great Ones. Each species has its own Great One.

Very few know this shocking truth, a truth that would reshape the balance of power if it got out. The Great Ones are unimaginably strong, with abilities beyond understanding—so much so that some are worshiped as gods.”

“Gods? That sounds like a fairytale. How are these Great Ones even born in the first place?”

“A fair question,” I said with a faint smile.

“The answer is simple... They’re born from the wishes and desires of their own kind. In other words, a Great One’s appearance and abilities differ from one to another, shaped entirely by the wish their people long for.

Some wishes create destructive powers that bring only ruin and death—making their Great One capable of annihilating countless lives.

Others are the opposite ..bringing prosperity and peace, giving their Great One the power to spread joy and suppress evil.

And then there are other cases, entirely different—sometimes a Great One is born to fulfill the wish of a single person, not an entire race. That makes their abilities completely abnormal, following no logic or balance at all.”

I paused, pointing at those aimless black birds drifting in the sky.

“Believe it or not, those strange birds are one form of the Great Ones I’m talking about—and a living example of the last case. That Great One lives and feeds on chaos.”

That’s why it’s called the Chaos Eater.

“I’m having a hard time believing you, Frey. And even if you’re telling the truth, it only makes me more suspicious of you. How can you possibly know all this?”

“I don’t blame you, my friend. And I promise I’ll tell you everything someday... this burden has grown too heavy to carry alone,” I said, looking up at the sky.

“You know, Snow... like I said, the Great Ones are born from the wishes of their people. And sometimes I can’t help but wonder... about the Great One of Earth—the Great One of humans—who didn’t lift a finger even when his own kind faced extermination.”

Snow’s eyes widened. He clearly hadn’t expected humans to have their own Great One.

But that Great One was a mystery even to me ..I couldn’t remember anything about him.

“I wonder... what is that Great One doing? And what kind of wish could have shaped their existence?”

That was a question I had truly longed to know the answer to.

Chapter 557: Paradise at the Edge of War (1)



A week had passed since Blattier declared his vengeance against both the Starlight and Valerion families.

Turning the entire Empire into his hunting ground, he took the families of soldiers hostage, splitting the Empire's forces in half. Many tried to betray their comrades to protect their loved ones.

Given the current situation, the elder, Iris Sunlight, took command—placing the members of House Starlight and House Valerion on one side, and the rest of the soldiers on the other.

This move reduced the skirmishes between the two groups, but it did nothing to ease the seething rage or the miserable morale of his men.

The Starlight and Valerion side burned with fury and hatred after news reached them of their homes and families being wiped out. The other side was gripped by tension, fearing what might happen to their loved ones if they dared oppose the Church's enemies.

In this way, chaos spread through the camp, and the Empire's side lost all semblance of order.

Things worsened drastically when soldiers began killing one another as tensions boiled over.

High-ranking officers constantly intervened to stop the fighting, but with over sixty thousand troops, there was no way to control them completely.

The Empire's forces were tearing themselves apart. If the Ultras attacked now...

It would be a disaster of the highest order.

"No choice but to deal with the Church as quickly as possible," Iris Sunlight said grimly, cutting down more of those causing unrest as he moved alongside his brother, Gal Varion, trying to suppress the chaos.

Around them, the other leaders and strong fighters roamed the camp around the clock, trying to maintain order—men like the Lord of House Moonlight, Oliver Khan, and Valerion powerhouses like Ivar.

Their combined efforts were barely enough to keep the army from collapsing entirely.

“This is like self-destruction. If this keeps up, we’ll lose the war in the worst way imaginable,” Gal muttered, scowling, unable to contain the situation. Iris, for his part, stared with his one remaining eye at soldiers turning on each other, sorrow etched on his face.

“We’ll have to place our hopes on those three.”

“Hmph. You’re putting your hopes on three kids with no real experience? Has the Empire fallen this low?” Gal Varion made no effort to hide his disbelief in the current strategy.

If those three failed, it would spell the end for them all.

“Don’t forget—the youths you’re talking about are monsters who could crush old men like you and me .”

Iris was certain of this; his fight against V still haunted his mind to this day.

If one copy of Frey Starlight could unleash that level of destruction upon them, then... how terrifying would it be to face the real one?

And he wouldn’t be fighting alone—beside him would be the chosen hero, Snow Lionheart, whose talents were said to surpass even Kazis Valerion himself. And then there was Aegon...

The prince no one had ever been able to see through.

Gal would have preferred sending people like Sir Allon or Maekar Valerion instead, but Iris...

He saw the greatest chance in the new generation, and was willing to bet on them.

Still, somewhere deep in the old man's heart, a different feeling took root—especially toward Frey Starlight.

A dark power with an unknown origin. Limitless potential that couldn't be measured. Unfathomable motives. A beast born for war.

Was leaving such a monster among us truly the right choice?

This question plagued Iris's mind. His reasoning told him that as long as the Empire benefited from keeping that monster, he wouldn't object.

But with how fast he was growing... sooner or later, he would become something the Empire could never hope to control.

"Fighting this kind of beast... frightens me."

A fear had taken hold in his heart. And who could banish it?

What Frey had done so far wasn't a secret—many had witnessed it from different perspectives.

Those in command had likely thought the same thing.

If the Empire won and the war ended, they all knew they'd have to do something about him.

In the worst case... they might have to eliminate him.

A power beyond control could just as easily become the cause of their destruction.

These were the thoughts that haunted the elders and leaders whenever the topic of Frey arose.

Far from the camp, Frey himself stood with a select few, gathered in an open area, ready to move out.

It was dawn, the sun just about to rise.

“Looks like everyone’s here,” Aegon said with a faint smile.

The prince wore a striking black armor set adorned with gold patterns. It was clear this was no ordinary gear—Aegon had armed himself with the finest equipment this time.

Beside him stood Frey and Snow, wearing their usual battle armor—nothing flashy.

Around them, only Oliver Khan, Ghost Umbra, and Sansa Valerion were present.

There was little left to say; everything that needed to be discussed had already been said.

“We’ll teleport directly to the Holy Island. I have no idea about Uriel Platiné’s current condition, so we don’t know what’s waiting for us there,” Frey said. He had tried multiple times to use his Third-Person View on Uriel, but all he saw was darkness.

That meant she was either unconscious... or something was blocking his vision.

“In the best case, we find Blattier, kick his ass, and come right back. In the worst case, it’s a trap. No one knows how this will play out, so be ready to fight the moment our feet touch the Holy Island.” Frey’s warning was clear—the battle could begin the instant they arrived.

Aegon and Snow both nodded at the same time. At the very least, they understood this much—everyone would be responsible for themselves, and if one of them died, the others would not bear that weight.

“The War Angel Frey fought before is still somewhere above the Demonic Sea. In other words, you might not necessarily run into him,” Ghost said, sharing the latest intelligence they had.

That colossal War Angel was the greatest threat, which was why the Empire had kept a constant watch on him.

He had recently been spotted aimlessly roaming over the waters of the Demonic Sea, near the Ultras Continent. For that reason, it was unlikely he would appear on the Holy Island, which was far removed from that place.

“It seems the Church is keeping him close, waiting for the right moment to strike again.”

Oliver Khan nodded, agreeing with the conclusion.

“The Church holds the absolute advantage over us right now. They won’t attack unless another conflict breaks out between us and the Ultras... or if our army collapses entirely.”

In terms of losses and damage, the Empire’s condition was undeniably worse.

The Ultras had endured the onslaught far better than they had.

“If the Angel moves against us, we’ll fight him with what we have here. So focus on the mission in front of you—and don’t overextend,” Oliver said, his gaze locking onto a certain person.

“This is especially for you, Frey. If you see you can’t win, pull back immediately.”

Those last words weren’t those of a military commander—they were those of a friend who let a fragment of his feelings show, unwilling to see Frey dead.

And truthfully, a large part of that came from Sansa, for Oliver knew exactly what Frey meant to her.

Frey simply nodded with a smile.

“No need to worry. As you can see, I’m the strongest among you.”

“We’ll win, without a doubt. So hold out until then—I have no desire to return victorious only to find nothing but ash.”

The battle on the Holy Island was too important to understate. It was no exaggeration to say that the fate of the entire war rested on its outcome.

With full awareness of this responsibility... Frey and his companions readied themselves to depart.

But before the teleportation began, Frey and Sansa shared a brief look—no words, only a long silence.

After recent events, a fragment of the old Sansa had resurfaced... the human Sansa.

And this was thanks to Oliver Khan, with whom she had finally mended her relationship.

Perhaps she had never expected it to happen, and somewhere deep inside, she had thought a filthy demon could never find their way into another human heart—except for Frey, the madman who loved playing with monsters.

But reality proved otherwise.

In other words, Frey Starlight was no longer the only one Sansa lived for.

If he died, she still had somewhere else to return to.

That fact hadn’t escaped Frey—not for a moment. With a single glance, he understood. There was no longer a reason to drag her with him toward death.

There was no need for them to die together.

And so, he began to push her away.

Not bringing her along now was proof enough. Sansa was an SS+ rank— even if the Church possessed a counter to her, she could still fight and survive there, just like them.

But he deliberately chose to keep her away, because he wanted her to find a reason to live beyond him.

‘There’s no one in this world worth walking this dark path with me. This is my punishment alone... my fate alone. So, Sansa... find your own road—far from my shadow ‘

Smiling at her one last time, Frey’s body lit up as he placed his hands on the shoulders of Snow and Aegon, preparing to initiate the teleportation.

‘I’ll see you later, my sweet poison.’

Though the words never left his lips, Sansa understood them all just by looking at his face.

She reached out for him without thinking, her mouth opening as if to speak—but no words came in the end.

Yes, she had loved him, and that was no mistake.

But the bond they had built—a bond where each leaned on the other—had crumbled far too easily.

Unlike her, Frey had known this would happen sooner or later. He had simply been there for her when she had no one, and now that she had found another reason to keep going... he quietly, gently stepped aside.

No noise. No fuss. Just paving the way... and walking away.

Sansa understood this, but she realized it too late. Frey was gone before her, and she couldn't speak a word to him—because everything that had led to this was true.

Conflicting emotions churned within her chest, unable to define her fragile connection to Frey Starlight.

He had never been fair to her—not once.

He left her with no choice but to watch from afar.

And so, Frey Starlight vanished with his companions, leaving the rest behind on this side of the world.

At that moment, none of them could have known the scale of the disaster about to unfold on the Holy Island of Sicily... a disaster that would change everything.

#### Chapter 558: Paradise at the Edge of War (2)

The teleportation was swift ..only a matter of seconds before Frey and his companions erased the distance, reaching the other side of the world, where the Holy Island of Sicily lay.

The trio materialized on that thriving land, swords drawn, ready to fight at once—they had come prepared for dozens of possible scenarios.

Yet, against all expectations... the place where Frey and the others landed was completely empty.

They scanned the area around them, silence stretching between them for a time.

Lush, fertile grassland. Towering, flourishing trees.

A clean, refreshing aura.



The air was fresh, carrying a strange atmosphere for those who had spent the entire past month fighting in the dead lands of the Ultras.

Compared to that cursed wasteland they came from, the Holy Island felt like paradise—especially with that colossal waterfall cascading down from the heavens, feeding it endlessly.

Scanning his surroundings, Frey's expression hardened.

"I don't see Uriel anywhere."

Unleashing his aura to its absolute limits, Frey formed an immense celestial dome around himself, stretching for miles.

Yet, his enhanced senses caught nothing.

"What the hell is going on here?"

They had arrived ready for battle, only to find nothing but emptiness.

"It's as if the entire island has been abandoned," Aegon muttered, glancing around.

"Relocating their base might be a smart move on their part, though I doubt that's the case here."

His gaze lingered on the grand waterfall in the distance, and the monumental remnants of a faith that had endured on this land for centuries.

Aegon shook his head.

"No... they're here. I'm certain of it." Frey's voice was firm.

“The teleportation brought me to this exact spot. That means Uriel is here, but some kind of force is preventing me from reaching her directly.”

The logic was simple—whatever applied to Uriel applied to the Church’s forces as well.

“They’re hiding themselves somehow.”

“Then we move forward and uncover their purpose,” Snow said, drawing Vermithor’s blade, which shone even more brilliantly than before.

“I’ve been here several times in the past, but I’ve never liked this place. Always felt there was more here than meets the eye.”

With their auras cloaking their bodies, the three of them surged forward at high speed.

“If we’re certain they’re here, then this island must be hiding a secret,” Aegon remarked, surveying the terrain.

“And that secret is what we’re going to find,” Frey replied.

Step after step, they arrived at one of the Church’s main shrines—a sacred place where people had once come to pray.

There were many ancient marble structures, built with meticulous care. The place could almost be called heavenly.

Almost.

The moment they set foot inside, the three froze .. shocked by a sight that seized their attention entirely.

At the top of a marble staircase leading upward stood a platform overlooking the entire island. Crimson blood had trickled down its steps, clotted and rotting after days had passed, leaving it to dry slowly under the sun.

And at the source of that blood—

“Ha! Would you look at that?” Aegon’s laugh was sharp and mocking.

“In the end, the Church’s so-called pure and holy followers are no different from the Ultras’ lunatics.”

The prince seemed amused, but Frey and Snow’s faces remained grim.

At the peak of that high platform, nine towering spears stood upright like crosses.

Upon each one, an unfortunate girl was crucified, their bodies mutilated so that their blood had endlessly poured down.

Aegon recognized all but one.

“Eight of them are the Saintess candidates—the ones said to have a chance at ascending to the position.”

As a prince, he had met them before. The ninth girl, however, was a mystery.

Her cross was the largest of them all. Her skin was shriveled and withered, like that of an old woman who had long passed her prime.

Her hair was blonde, her lifeless eyes—wide open—were a deep crimson.

Different as she appeared, her features were still recognizable.

“Saintess Yurasha...” Snow’s voice slipped out unconsciously. He had spent more time with her than the others, and her presence had been carved into his memory.

And now here she was—crucified and dead, left to rot.

“What the hell happened here?! Why does she look like this?!” Snow roared, unleashing a wave of aura that shattered the crosses and sent the girls’ bodies tumbling down one by one.

Manipulating the winds, Snow caught them all before they hit the ground—yet it was pointless. Every one of them was already dead.

Especially Yurasha.

She had been a young woman, not even thirty.

“She’s not like Carmen, who hides her age. Yurasha was truly in the prime of her youth,” Frey said, examining her body.

A warrior of SS+ rank—her life force should have been virtually inexhaustible. She should have been able to live for a very long time before her body gave out.

Yet here she was ..dead, her body looking like that of an old woman at the end of her days.

“Looks like some cursed ritual was performed here,” Aegon said, unable to hide his twisted smile as his eyes scanned the surroundings.

Strange, blood-drawn symbols had been etched into various spots across the shrine.

It was as if a demonic summoning ritual had taken place here.

“So this is the so-called paradise on earth they talked about? How laughable,” Aegon sneered.

Snow’s anger only deepened.

Frey’s gaze swept the area again and again.. searching for someone. She wasn’t here, and that fact brought him a flicker of relief.

“This isn’t a joke, Aegon. We just confirmed the loss of another SS+ warrior,” Snow growled, unable to hide the heat in his voice.

He was right—warriors of SS+ rank were so few they could be counted on one hand.

“Well, there’s no guarantee she was on our side to begin with, so maybe it’s not a complete loss,” Aegon said with indifference. To him, Yurasha had always been an enemy—just another pawn of the Church.

Snow’s jaw tightened, ready to retort, but Frey cut in.

“No time to argue. Arm yourselves.” His tone was firm as he drew his blades.

“They’re here.”

The moment those ominous words left his lips, a crushing wave of aura descended upon them.

Above, the sky split open, revealing swarms of angels descending one after another until they surrounded the trio completely.

Their numbers were so great they looked like a plague of locusts blotting out the sky.

Leaving the Saintesses’ corpses behind, the three of them stepped forward.

“The battle starts now, Snow. If what you saw made you angry, this is your chance,” Frey said, a bloodthirsty smile curving his lips.

His body flared with radiant power.

“No mercy! Tear them all apart ..leave none alive!”

With a roar that shook the air, Frey launched himself into the heavens, Snow and Aegon right behind him.

The battle had begun.

Chapter 559: Defiance in the Abyss (1)

Dawn broke over the Sacred Island as usual—the land hailed as paradise itself.

Normally, it would have marked the beginning of yet another blessed day upon holy soil.

But today was different.

Frey Starlight.

Snow Lionheart.

And Aegon Valerion.

Three men had trespassed upon hallowed ground, planting their feet upon forbidden earth. After discovering the horrific fate of Saint Yorasha, they were met with flocks of angels, descending from the skies, intent on ending their lives.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Supreme art — Echo of the Abyss!"

"One Sword: Supreme art — Infernal Ascension"

In perfect unison, both Frey and Snow unleashed wide-scale destructive techniques, their pillars of aura blazing into the heavens, eradicating dozens of angels in one strike.

The two soared at impossible speeds, trailing afterimages of pure aura behind them as they tore through angel after angel.

The spectacle was dazzling, overwhelming, and though they were outnumbered beyond reason, the battlefield belonged wholly to them.

Aegon, meanwhile, concerned himself only with those that dared to approach him.

Wielding a golden sword of at least grade A, he conjured streams of black lightning with effortless precision, dispatching the few that drew near—leaving the vast majority to Frey and Snow.

While they fought above, the prince arranged the bodies of Saint Yorasha and the eight candidates neatly side by side, dragging the slain angels he had cut down and setting them beside the corpses. His eyes studied every detail.

Upon closer inspection—after tearing most of the garments from the saintesses—Aegon found dozens of bloody carvings and glyphs etched into their very flesh, bringing a blissful smile to his lips.

"Exactly as I suspected... Cursed rituals were performed here."

The deafening roars of explosions shook the shrine as Frey and Snow unleashed chaos above, but Aegon ignored the carnage, fascinated by the corpses before him.

Examining the angels' remains, he discovered the very same bloody markings carved into their flesh and throughout the shrine's foundations.

"It seems to be a mechanism of sorts... This language, these runes—they are not of human origin. There is no such tongue in this world."

In other words ..

"This power stems from an entirely different race. Just as demonic power and contracts flow from demons, these symbols bind humanity to something else entirely."

And it was not difficult for Aegon to guess the source.

After all, the Church had never hidden the name of the being they worshiped.

"The Lord of Light, isn't it?" Aegon muttered, seated among the desecrated corpses of girls and shattered angels littering the marble floor like fallen insects.

"But tell me... are such pitiful creations truly the handiwork of a being revered as a god?"

The Lord of Light was a force beyond comprehension—yet the Church's methods? They were pathetic in comparison.

Blood-carved symbols, sacrifices of the living ..all to spawn weapons like these angels, the majority of whom were nothing but weaklings.

"Did they truly sacrifice Saint Yorasha—an SS+—for something so trivial?"

It would have made sense if only the candidates had been offered up.

But the saint herself?

And stranger still, the way Yorasha's youthful beauty had been reduced to the shriveled husk of an old crone...



"This is a riddle indeed. One I could solve easily if I brought out my favorite tool... but—"

Aegon tilted his head upward, his eyes locking on Frey Starlight.

Even while battling countless angels, leaving a storm of violet trails in the sky, Frey's gaze never once strayed from him.

"...Too early to reveal it here. For now, I'll play by their rules."

Kicking aside the body of a broken angel, the prince rose and returned to the fray.

Whether by chance or design, the angels were converging on him.

It almost seemed as though Frey had let them slip past on purpose, for with his power, eliminating them would have been no challenge at all.

Ordinary angels, as far as Frey had gauged, barely reached rank A in strength.

Formidable as soldiers—capable of overwhelming much of the Empire or the Ultras armies ..

but against the true elite? Against SS and beyond?

They were nothing.

Which explained why Snow and Frey were cutting through them with ease.

But what of Aegon?

The last time his combat ability had been measured, he was only at rank A-.

By raw power alone, he was beneath them all.

Now, surrounded by dozens, this should have been his death.

Yet the prince's composure never wavered—not even once.

At that instant, when the angels encircled him ..for just one heartbeat ..

a strange pressure rippled outward.

A chilling bite of frost ran down both Frey's and Snow's spines.

They could not explain it, nor trace it ..

but it was Aegon. They were certain.

From his blade, countless serpents of crimson-black lightning slithered across the edge, and with peerless precision, he cut into the angels' bodies, rending them apart one after another.

His power was not flashy.

Not overwhelming.

But it was absolute.

Dark crimson lightning—quiet, deadly—yet strong enough to cleave apart beings of rank A with ease.

The angels retaliated, firing volleys that engulfed the sky in roaring explosions.

But from the smoke and ruin, the prince strode out unharmed. His armor glowed with golden inscriptions, casting an aura-barrier that turned aside every strike.

"Apologies," he said coolly, brushing dust from his shoulder.

"But this armor renders me untouchable to anything below rank S."

"In other words..."

"You have no way of hurting me."

Slash!!

With effortless precision, the black lightning carved through his enemies, ripping them apart. Within minutes, the battle was over—hundreds of angels lay dead at the feet of Frey and his companions.

Descending from the skies, Frey and Snow regrouped with Aegon, who had remained by the corpses.

Aegon glanced once more at the bodies, but it was Snow who spoke first.

"You held your ground well back there. I didn't know you had that kind of strength."

It was the first time Snow had seen a glimpse of the prince's true combat style.

He looked almost ordinary—wielding his dark lightning and shield with calm efficiency. Nothing about it seemed remarkable... and yet, Snow couldn't shake the strange sensation that had struck him for that single moment when Aegon revealed his power.

Their eyes met. Aegon seemed ready to share something, but Frey cut in sharply with the question that had been gnawing at him.

"Aegon... where did you get that power?"

The prince blinked in mild surprise, then smiled.

"Clarify—are you referring to the shield? Or something else?"

Feigning ignorance, but Frey pressed harder.

"I mean that lightning you wield." Frey's voice was firm, forcing Snow to frown.

"Isn't that just the highest form of lightning? Look, I can use it too."

Snow casually formed a black spark in his right hand, as if it were nothing.

But Frey shook his head.

"No. This is different. What you showed us wasn't the highest form of lightning. It was something else entirely."

A deep violet gleam flickered in Frey's eyes as he stared at Aegon.

"No human alive has sharper senses than I do. You might fool others, but not me, Aegon. That power you're using... it doesn't belong to you."

In an instant, Frey vanished and reappeared directly before the prince, seizing his arm in a crushing grip.

Aegon had no chance to resist. With ease, Frey tore away the gauntlet on his right arm, revealing what he had already suspected.

At first, Snow didn't understand. But when he saw the markings, his eyes widened.

"Those are...!" Snow gasped.

Aegon's arm was covered in jet-black tattoos, swirling across his skin like chains.

"These aren't tattoos," Frey muttered, his expression darkening.

"This is a contract. A demonic contract."

It was unmistakable. Every demonic contractor bore the same kind of mark—the same as those of the Ultras.

And now it was revealed: the crown prince of the Empire, its supreme commander, and future emperor... was bound by a demon's pact.

That alone was grounds for immediate execution ..stripped of his titles, his achievements, and branded a traitor.

But instead of panic, Aegon merely sighed in irritation, releasing a surge of lightning that forced Frey's hand off his arm.

Chapter 560: Defiance in the Abyss (2)

Snow, misinterpreting the gesture, thought Aegon meant to fight and raised his guard—

but the prince simply flexed his hand, which Frey had nearly crushed to bone.

"Easy there, Frey. Not all of us are monsters like you," Aegon laughed lightly, waving his injured arm. At last, he addressed their accusations.

"To be honest, your conclusion is correct... but also wrong. Let's say you've got fifty percent of it right."

Frey stayed silent, his eyes locked onto the prince, while Snow scowled.

"What are you saying, Aegon? Don't deny that filth on your arm is a demonic contract!"

"I'm not denying it. I'm saying you've only uncovered part of the truth. If I were truly a demonic contractor, Frey would have already struck me down."

Snow realized the point.

Frey hadn't attacked. Not yet.

The prince quickly pressed on, aware of how precarious his position had become.

"With your enhanced senses, Frey, I'd wager you've recognized this lightning before. Maybe you've even suspected the truth. Let me confirm it for you."

His smile widened.

"Your suspicions are correct."

Frey's voice cut the air.

"Dragoth—the Human Demon."

"That's right!" Aegon exclaimed, almost gleeful.

Snow's confusion deepened, but Frey explained grimly.

"I fought him once. Killed him with my own hands. Dragoth... a warrior who stood at the pinnacle of SS+, wielding a unique lightning. Black lightning, tinged with crimson."

As soon as he said it, Snow understood.

"Tell me, Aegon... how do you have the same power as Dragoth?" Frey's tone carried the weight of a threat. "Your answer will decide how I deal with you."

Aegon instinctively stepped back—but his composure never cracked.

He had expected this moment. Revealing that lightning hadn't been careless. It had been inevitable, once Frey's senses came into play.

"To put it simply... let's say I am contracted. But I am not bound to a demon. I've made no pact with any devil."

Dark sparks slithered across his arm, black lightning alive with a crimson edge.

Lightning pulsed with an aura as overwhelming and majestic as the one Dragoth himself had once wielded.

"I am not a demonic contractor... because the one I forged a contract with—was Dragoth himself."

At those words, Frey raised an eyebrow, while Snow immediately denied it.

"That's impossible! Contracts only work with demons!" Snow protested.

Aegon nodded calmly.

"That's true. But Dragoth was no ordinary human. He was the first to shatter his demonic contract, freeing himself from that bondage. But to reach such strength, he descended into madness—drinking demon blood in excess, even devouring their flesh.

"At some point, Dragoth ceased to resemble a man at all. He became something in between—a being that stood halfway between human and demon. That's why forging a contract with him was possible. That's what I call a Fourth-Generation Contract."

He spoke with feverish excitement.

The first generation of contracts was weak—merely transferring aura from demon to human.

The second generation, more infamous, injected demon blood directly into humans. This was the common type, and countless humans in Ultras perished from it. Men like Gavid Lindemann were prime examples.

The third generation was the most grotesque ..breeding between humans and demons, spawning half-breeds like Mergoth. Success was rare, as most humans simply couldn't withstand it.

"What sets humanity apart," Aegon continued, his tone darkly reverent, "is adaptability. That is our species' true strength. We started at the bottom, and through adaptation, climbed higher. That's why demons favor humans as test subjects. Even when most die, a few survive—evolving into something monstrous."

His lips curled into a sadistic grin.

"And Dragoth was the best of them. He broke free of a demon's leash, fashioned himself into a monster nearly equal to them. That's when the idea struck me.

"Fourth-Generation Contracts. A pact between human and human. You borrow the power of one infinitely stronger than yourself. Madness, isn't it?" He chuckled. "But it worked. And I am living proof."



For a moment, neither Frey nor Snow knew how to respond. Aegon's words were riddled with gaps and contradictions.

Snow pounced on one immediately.

"That doesn't make sense. You're saying you dealt with Dragoth in secret? Contracts enslave the recipient to the stronger party. Doesn't that mean you should be Dragoth's thrall? A pawn of the Ultras?"

Aegon simply nodded.

"That's correct. And yet... it never happened."

"What are you talking about?" Snow pressed, baffled.

Frey's voice cut in, cold as steel.

"Dragoth vanished after losing to my father. For years, everyone thought him dead. He only resurfaced right before this war began. Are you saying you had a hand in that, Aegon?"

The prince shook his head.

"Not at first. When Dragoth lost to Abraham, I was just an infant. Despite his defeat, the Human Demon didn't die. The Empire seized his body, held him captive in secret when they failed to kill him outright."

He revealed truths few in the world had ever heard.

"For years, some of the great names of House Valerion experimented on him, tried to twist him further. It was so secretive that even my father, Maekar, knew nothing. But once I gained influence in the Empire, finding him was only a matter of time."

His eyes gleamed with cruel pride.

"In the end, I found them. Killed them all. Then exposed the secret to my father and the other great houses, leading to the creation of four seals to bind him for eternity.

"But before I handed Dragoth over... I had already played with him."

What Aegon had done could hardly be put into words.

Upon discovering Dragoth, he tortured him day and night, breaking him in the vilest ways imaginable. When Dragoth was later freed, he was a shattered lunatic. Even after regaining his senses, the trauma was so deep he couldn't remember what had been done to him.

"Yes, I signed a demonic contract with Dragoth. But he cannot command me. The bond of master and slave no longer applies."

The truth was chilling.

Aegon had broken him—piece by piece—until the great Human Demon was nothing but a broken puppet in his hands.

In other words, Aegon had become a free contractor. No leash, no chains. He would never accept servitude—not to human nor to demon.

"I would have preferred a true demon," Aegon admitted with a cold laugh, "but Dragoth was all I had."

He clenched his hand, arcs of crimson-black lightning sparking violently.

"I drew power from Dragoth. But it was incomplete. To seize full control, someone had to kill him. End him so completely he could never regenerate. That's why—"

"You helped release him," Frey realized at last.

"Exactly," Aegon grinned.

"I couldn't kill him myself. I needed someone stronger. Someone who could obliterate him beyond return. I failed. Abraham failed. Even my grandfather failed.

"But you, Frey... you succeeded. You killed him."

"And thanks to you... my plan is finally complete."

The black lightning flared violently, growing thicker, wilder, power surging far beyond Aegon's supposed level.

The prince standing before them had deceived the Ultras, manipulated the Empire, and twisted Dragoth into his pawn. And when he was finished... he let him loose only to die, gaining both the power he craved and the favor of his enemies.

With such a deal, Aegon had lost nothing—in fact, he had gained everything.

A long-term plan, built over years... executed with meticulous care. No errors. No flaws. To the extent that even Frey himself had unknowingly become part of it.

"You're the one who freed Dragoth—the SS+ class monster," Snow said, unable to conceal his shock.

"That's right," Aegon replied lightly. "But as you can see, Dragoth cannot defy me. I've been his master from afar all this time. And thanks to him, I now know most of what the Ultras are planning. In other words... this war is nothing more than a giant chess game. Victory belongs to the one who plays his pieces better."

"Freeing Dragoth led to the death of thousands!" Snow roared.

"They would have died anyway—because they were weak," Aegon answered coldly. "Compared to what I've gained, their lives were nothing more than a cheap price."

At last, Aegon revealed one of his cards... one of the secrets he had hidden so carefully until now.

Both Frey and Snow looked at him in a new light.

The prince was a beast capable of devising schemes that spanned years, manipulating both sides, and twisting everything to serve his own ends.

There was only one conclusion they could reach.

Dangerous.

The prince was far too dangerous—a threat beyond prediction.

A monster of their caliber, perhaps even worse.

At that moment, Frey's expression darkened as killing intent poured from him in torrents.

The young man before him... Prince Aegon Valerion.

It was too dangerous to let him live. Against a beast like that, killing him on the spot was the only option.

Such thoughts consumed Frey's mind as he took the first step toward the prince standing before him.

The tense atmosphere surged higher, spiraling toward the unknown...