

VILLAIN 561

Chapter 561: The Name

– Frey Starlight's POV –

Aegon Valerion...

The prince had surpassed my expectations by miles. Though I thought I knew him, what he revealed just now proved the extent of my ignorance.

Dragoth, the human-demon... a monster of SS+ rank, nothing but a mere plaything in his hands.

He had forged his own demonic contract, twisted Dragoth's power into his own, exploiting the Empire, and even exploiting me to finish the job of killing him.

What happened didn't just grant Aegon the strength he sought—it also gave him the means to spy on the Ultras in a way no one would ever suspect.

The prince before me, though lacking in raw might, had proven himself a master of long-reaching manipulation... capable of weaving schemes whose effects spanned years. Even now, cornered here with only me and Snow, he stood there utterly calm, as though the situation meant nothing to him.

"Aegon Valerion is an unpredictable variable... a schemer on the same tier as the Engineer himself..."

From that perspective, he was no lesser than such monsters. Nineteen years old, yet wielding the cunning of beings who had lived for centuries.

Keeping him alive any longer... will lead only to catastrophe.

He hid his cards with terrifying precision. I only uncovered the matter of Dragoth because he chose to reveal it to me. If he had decided otherwise, perhaps I would never have realized.

And who's to say this was the only secret he had buried? There might be countless others... infernal plans waiting for the right moment to unfold.

I couldn't afford to let him roam freely any longer. The enemies were many, their power ever-growing.

I could not fight with such a serpent slithering behind my back, waiting for the perfect moment to sink its fangs into my throat.

Here and now... I must kill him.

The very moment I resolved myself, the pressure in the air shifted like magic. Both Snow and Aegon's eyes rolled instinctively toward me.

"Hold your hand, Frey. This isn't the time nor the place for this," Aegon said with a strained laugh, his smile carrying a nervous edge as he stepped back.

"Do you truly believe that? I'd say... there's no better chance than now." I replied, already prepared to move.

Snow wavered, uncertain. But he would not stand in my way.

Which meant I could strike Aegon directly, and end him here.

"Know this: if you try, you'll spell the Empire's end in this war. Believe it or not, but my mere presence alone keeps at bay horrors you cannot even imagine."

"Like domino pieces toppling one after another, I may be a small stone... but my fall will collapse far greater things. Think carefully before you take your next step, Frey," Aegon said, wagering everything on my hesitation.

"So what will it be? Do we fight here, or move on as if nothing happened?"

"I'll take the gamble. I don't think killing you will make my situation any worse than it already is, Aegon," I said with a gentle smile, as my foot slammed the ground.

I lunged. My blade tore through the air, aiming straight for his neck.

At the last instant before his head could fly, Aegon unleashed a massive surge of that stolen black lightning, meeting my sword with his own. Valerion's edge cut deep, slicing into a portion of his neck, barely sparing him from death.

He stumbled back, clutching the bloody wound with his free hand. That smile of his returned—but it wasn't his usual mask of confidence.

No, this one was different. An anxious smile. A smile that hinted at some kind of anticipation.

Perhaps Aegon simply didn't know how to show fear. Even if he was terrified, trembling within... all his face would ever display was that filthy grin.

"Frey! Are you seriously doing this now?!" Snow barked.

"Yes. Leaving him alive will bring nothing but disaster."

Snow looked torn. He too had seen the prince as someone who needed to be kept in check. But killing him here... didn't feel right to him.

That didn't matter. I had to finish it before Snow could interfere.

True, Aegon's strength grew significantly with the lightning he stole from Dragoth. But such power meant nothing to me. My next strike would end him.

A strike where I'd pour my full might into one blow—enough to sever his neck and kill him once and for all.

Through my eyes, I could see dozens of paths to his death in the battle ahead. He wasn't my equal.

And yet I knew ..that wasn't the truth.

Aegon Valerion... schemers like him never cast themselves into danger unless they had at least one way out.

That was certain. Which was why I pressed him to the edge—forced him to show whatever secret card he had hidden in his sleeve.

"Show me, Aegon. What are you really?"

What are you hiding? What power stands behind you?

I knew his fall would trigger calamities. But I was already a cursed man, doomed to fight beings beyond comprehension since long ago.

What difference would more curses make?

My blade's aura of darkness surged, overwhelming his black lightning with ease.

Face to face with Aegon, I was seconds away from tearing him apart.

And all the while, I waited... waited for whatever trick the prince would unleash to survive.

Would it be some alien power? A forbidden weapon? Something far worse?

"What are you hiding, Aegon?"

Show me your truth. Show me your true color.

I had imagined many possibilities. Countless scenarios.

But in the end... Aegon revealed none of them.

No great weapon. No new power.

And yet—even without any of that—my sword froze before his neck at the last possible instant.

And for the first time in a while , a shock I couldn't quite name carved itself across my face.

Snow stood off to the side, bewildered at how things had just ended.

Only a second ago, he was certain he'd see Aegon's head separated from his body—but that scene never came.

"Did he... stop?" Snow asked, confused.

It wasn't Aegon who halted me. It was I who froze before him—of my own will. Not forced, but choosing.

Cold sweat rolled heavily down Aegon's back as he stumbled away, clutching his half-slashed throat and sighing in relief.

"That was close..."

Holding the wound to staunch the bleeding, he collapsed onto the ground. I, meanwhile, stood unmoving, staring at him.

My mind was in chaos, barely able to process what had just happened.

The reason I stopped wasn't due to some power restraining me. It was because of something far simpler... words.

Words that Aegon had shaped with his lips at the last instant. He knew I could perceive even the slightest things, so he mouthed them silently, leaving me the only one who could notice.

And those words—just one word—were enough to paralyze me, to keep me from cutting him down.

A single word. Just one.

"Aegon... how the hell do you know that name?" I demanded, staring at him with new light in my eyes.

The prince chuckled softly, spitting blood from his mouth.

"Kill me, Frey. Who knows? Maybe then you'll learn the answer to your question."

Our cold gazes clashed. I found myself torn, unable to move forward.

With a single word, that damned prince had flipped the board. He had spoken a name I never expected to hear again.

At the very last moment, he mouthed it. No sound. And yet, I heard it as clearly as if he'd whispered into my ear.

It was my name. The true name I had abandoned long ago... the name I left behind when I became Frey Starlight.

A name lost for centuries. A name only the Demon King himself had ever spoken.

And now—by some impossible means—the prince had spoken it.

Just uttering it was enough to freeze me, my thoughts assaulted by a storm of questions.

Does he know I'm a reincarnator?

If so, how could he possibly know?

Is the one before me truly just a human prince not yet twenty years of age—or something else entirely?

Taking advantage of my hesitation, Aegon pressed on, still gripping his bleeding throat.

"We're on the same side, Frey. You have your secrets... and I have mine. But in the end, we're fighting on the same front in this war. Perhaps we're destined to clash—but isn't that the game you and I have always played?"

"You can try to kill me, or you can keep me alive and draw the answers from me. The choice is yours."

His words were spoken lightly, as if they mattered little.

But I alone heard the true weight behind them.

Revealing my true name was no accident—it was proof that someone stood behind him.

Someone who knew what I truly was.

How much do they know? And who, exactly, is that entity?

I could kill Aegon now and maybe find out. But Aegon knew I couldn't.

Because even I have my limits. If something powerful enough to uncover my secret truly stands behind him... then I cannot confront it with my current strength.

It could be an overwhelming monster... or something far simpler.

But I had no answer. Which meant I could not risk killing him here.

With a single word, he secured his survival.

"I see now... I underestimated you greatly."

Whether he gained this leverage through his own skill or mere luck, it didn't matter.

What mattered was that the prince had already stepped far outside the box I had placed him in. His boundaries were no longer clear to me.

"This world is vast, Frey. We are but tiny fragments drifting in the sea of existence. Each of us tries to play, to survive, to carve our fate with our own hands," Aegon said, staring up at the sky.

"You're tampering with forces you cannot withstand. Nor even comprehend," I shot back coldly.

He shook his head.

"That doesn't matter. As long as they serve their purpose, it's enough. So long as I'm the one who wins in the end, nothing else matters."

"We fight on the same side in this war. If it can be helped, I've no desire to be your enemy, Frey. Let me prove my good faith." With a wide smile, Aegon chose his next words with surgical care.

"When this war ends, I promise you—I'll tell you where I learned that name. What do you say?"

Out of nowhere, Aegon offered me a promise I never expected.

And truth be told... I had already been considering ways to force the truth out of him. But he preempted me, handing me the means himself.

"I know words alone won't be enough. If you demand it, I'll bind myself to an Aura Contract. I'll give you what you want—in return, let's fight this war side by side."

Aegon Valerion seemed desperate to keep me on his flank—at least for the duration of this war.

Perhaps that was what he had been aiming for all along.

From the moment he came with me to this island...

Perhaps it had all been part of his plan.

I thought I had cornered him by dragging him here, isolated and alone. But the truth was the reverse.

From the very start, he had played me. Flawlessly.

I couldn't kill him. I couldn't force him to speak. Even torture would yield nothing.

He left me no choice but to do exactly what he wanted.

I had lost—utterly—against him.

For this time, the battle wasn't fought on the field. It had already been decided long before.

Some battles aren't won by the sword. And this was one of them.

The preferred battlefield of Prince Aegon Valerion.

That night, before Snow's bewildered eyes—he who stood as a witness unable to understand what he was seeing—

I struck a pact with the prince.

Resolving that from this moment forward, we would fight the war together.

Chapter 562: Resonance of War

On the other side of the world...

Specifically, in the Blood Cities under Ultras control, the demon worshippers were busy reorganizing and putting the final touches in place to plunge once again into the depths of war.

The situation for the Ultras was far better than that of the Empire. They had successfully repelled the Church's offensive and limited the damage from that attack.

And with the Imperial Army suffering such heavy losses, now was the most opportune time to strike.

In the capital, Kaeld, within the fortress of Lord Gavid Lindemann...

The lord sat in the company of Mergo, who remained by his side most of the time. Both had sustained severe injuries from their last battles—first against the War Angel, and before that against Frey and the others. Thus, they had withdrawn from the chaos of war to recover.

Sitting bare-chested, his upper body wrapped in bandages, Gavid stared blankly into space, drowning in his own thoughts.

“You’ve been spacing out a lot lately, my friend. Is old age finally catching up to you?” Mergo’s voice cut in, mocking him as usual.

With a weary sigh, Lindemann answered.

“I was thinking about what we lost in the last battle... and what we gained.”

“You mean Dragoth?” Mergo asked, to which Gavid nodded.

“After all the effort we put into freeing him, he died so easily to a mere youth from the new generation...”

“You mean Frey Starlight. He’s no mere youth. He’s a fully-grown monster,” Mergo replied, closing his eyes, remembering his clash with that young man.

“I know... But I can’t help feeling regret. Dragoth was the people’s hero. I grew up my whole life walking in his shadow. And now, to see him end in such a pitiful way, only to be replaced immediately by the 18th Seat Demon...”

“You mean Beleth.”

Gavid nodded again.

“More and more high-ranking demons are flowing into our ranks, yet our heroes are gone. You and I are the last SS+ warriors left on this side.”

Mergo shook his head. “There’s still the new generation... and that prodigy you raised yourself.”

“Ah... V.”

At the mention of his name, both men turned their eyes toward the same direction.

In a separate chamber, visible through a thin glass barrier, that youth could be seen slumped against a filthy wall, the ground around him littered in disarray. His body was exhausted, and two swords lay buried in the floor at his sides.

“V is strong... but his power is unstable.”

“We don’t fully understand how his copying ability works. I’ve been pushing him hard lately, forcing him to try replicating Frey Starlight. It gave him overwhelming strength... but the results are lying there in front of you.” Gavid rose from his seat and approached the glass.

“His ability lets him mimic the techniques and combat styles of those he copies. Even their skills. But he cannot replicate unique abilities or elemental powers. In other words, he makes do with what he already has to compensate.”

Frey Starlight possessed an SSS-tier aura reserve—something V did not. To make up for it, V substituted with the dark flames drawn from his demonic contract.

That substitution allowed him to endure.

“He can mimic Frey Starlight’s strongest techniques, but in V’s hands they are far weaker. I saw the difference clearly in our last battle against him. The gap between them is like night and day,” said Gavid, and Mergo nodded in agreement.

“So you’re saying he’ll never defeat the original, is that it?”

“Not through copying alone, no. That much is certain. But that’s not the way I intend for him to fight,” Lindemann replied, his thoughts spilling out.

V had always been his student, his creation—his masterpiece to shape as he wished.

“I don’t know the exact conditions or limits of his ability, but my plan is to have him copy as many combat styles and techniques as possible, building an arsenal of endless weapons at his disposal. That way, he may never beat Frey Starlight through imitation alone, but he could compensate with sheer versatility.”

This was the vision Gavid placed his hopes on—his most talented disciple, forged into the ultimate weapon.

“You want to turn him into a killing machine that masters countless styles? Is that even possible...?” Mergo asked, his eyes flicking toward the discarded swords on the floor.

Firstly, V could only wield two legendary swords when in Frey Starlight’s form. Once he dropped the imitation, his body collapsed the moment he tried using both. Mergo never understood why—that mystery lay with Frey himself.

Secondly, there was no proof V could copy more than one person at a time, nor any clear understanding of his limits or conditions.

Thirdly, even when the copying succeeded, V was still weaker than the likes of Frey.

The ability was powerful, yes—but riddled with shortcomings.

From Mergo’s perspective, Gavid was blinded, perhaps even obsessed.

But in the eyes of Ultras’ lord, V was their last hope. And he had staked everything on him.

“That’s not the right way to fight, Gavid. One man alone will never change anything,” Mergo said, frowning, before turning to leave.

“Raw, overwhelming power is all that matters in this world. A single man with enough strength can achieve what thousands cannot. I thought you, of all people, understood that... Mergo.”

The words were true enough, yet Mergo simply did not see that potential in V.

“Let’s just hope your precious prodigy doesn’t shatter before becoming what you want him to be.”

With that, Mergo turned and walked away.

“Where do you think you’re going?!” Gavid shouted after him.

Mergo waved him off with a hand.

“You have your way of fighting, Gavid... and I have mine. Let’s both do our best to save our kind before it’s too late.”

With those words, Mergo vanished before him, leaving Gavid alone with V.

The Lord of the Ultras had placed much on the young man’s shoulders, trying to forge him into a monster that could be relied upon against the countless other monsters threatening their existence.

—

—

Meanwhile, as the Ultras were preparing for war...

A single man had already crossed the entire Demon Sea by himself, returning to the Empire he had once left behind for the sake of battle.

Maekar Valerion.

He descended out of nothingness into the skies above Belgrad, shaking the heavens with relentless thunder. Within minutes, he annihilated wave after wave of war-angels. None who stood in his way were spared as he cut straight toward his imperial fortress.

But upon reaching the place where he had spent most of his life, Maekar found only ruin. The flames of purification had reduced the once-mighty castle to ash, slaughtering everyone within.

He didn't care.

With his nerves taut and his face darkened by deep anxiety, Maekar rushed toward a specific part of the fortress, blasting aside rubble as he carved a tunnel through the earth with his explosive might.

"No... it's fine. There's no way they could have found this place," the Emperor muttered under his breath, though worry still tightened his expression.

The chamber he sought lay deep underground, where no fire could reach. That was the reason Maekar had hidden his greatest treasure there.

And sure enough—within seconds—he broke through to the secret tunnels beneath the fortress.

The Valerion estate was laced with underground passages, used in times of emergency as shelters. Maekar sensed many people within them now—likely members of his family who had fled and by sheer luck survived.

At first, he grew tense, fearing they might have stumbled upon his hidden chamber. But the passage they had taken was entirely separate, and the magical traps he had placed remained dormant.

Relief washed over him when he saw the outer chamber untouched.

Still, he refused to take chances. Pressing forward, Maekar reached the door and forced it open.

The frozen chamber.

The quiet, icy room he had retreated to whenever life became too much. The place where he had hidden his weapons, his tools, and—most importantly—

the body of the one he had been obsessed with for so long.

As the door swung open, Maekar's eyes met a sight that shattered his expression entirely.

Everything was as it had always been—cold, silent, untouched—except for one thing.

One thing that broke him.

With heavy steps, he walked inside, staring directly at the object at the heart of the chamber.

The coffin.

The frozen coffin was destroyed—smashed open by foreign hands.

Its contents were gone.

“...It's not here.”

“It's gone...” Maekar whispered, his face twisting into something monstrous.

His greatest fear had come to pass.

Someone had broken into this place, ignored the weapons, ignored the treasures... and taken only the corpse.

Rage boiling in his chest, Maekar's golden eyes burned as he turned toward the faint presence of survivors hiding behind distant walls.

"Was it them?"

Had one of them discovered his secret?

Clenching his fists, the Emperor surged forward, his heart trembling with fury.

"Whoever it was... they won't live to see tomorrow."

He swore it, unleashing explosions in his wake as he hunted for the thief—

the thief who had stolen what he valued above all else.

Chapter 563: Behind the Holy Veil

The Holy Island – Sicily

The stronghold of the followers of the Lord of Light—supposedly their blessed paradise. And yet, somehow, it lay empty.

Upon that land, cut off from the rest of the world, three men wandered alone among the corpses of both angels and humans alike.

Hours had passed since their arrival, yet Frey and his companions found no trace of Joseph Blattier, the one they had come searching for, nor of Uriel Platini, who was supposed to be nearby.

As they scoured shrines and churches scattered across the island, silence hung heavy between them. The reason was simple: what had transpired earlier between Frey and the prince.

Snow Lionheart, using his sword, searched for clues that might lead them to unravel the mystery at hand. But even the Vermithor offered him no direction.

Meanwhile, Frey released his full aura, expanding it to envelop the entire island in search of answers of his own.

The sheer magnitude of energy radiating from his body sent chills down Snow's spine, even after all he had been through.

"Even though my strength has grown tremendously thanks to the demonic path, I still can't perceive him..." Snow sighed as he approached Frey.

The latter opened his eyes the moment his friend neared.

"Ah—sorry. Did I interrupt you?" Snow asked apologetically, but Frey shook his head.

"Not at all. I was simply growing tired of searching for clues in this wretched place."

He exhaled, scanning the ruined sanctuaries before them.

"It's like looking for a needle in a haystack... except in our case, it's a whole island of hay."

Despite pushing his senses to the very limit, despite casting his aura over every inch of this land, Frey could not detect a single trace of the church's followers.

It was as though they had vanished from the world entirely.

“We had planned to strike swiftly and retreat, using the element of surprise. But that chance is gone,” Snow said, seating himself beside Frey on the roof of one of the island’s grander shrines.

“After the angelic assault earlier, it’s all but certain they know we’re here. Meaning that even if we do find them, they’ll be ready for us.”

Frey nodded grimly. It was the obvious conclusion.

“There’s something ominous about this island... something foreboding,” Frey muttered, recalling the sacrificed saint he had witnessed.

“They’re sacrificing their own to grasp at greater power... they went so far as to slaughter an awakened of rank SS+. I can no longer make sense of what the church is trying to achieve.”

He was sincere. Even the novel he had once written offered him no clues now. In his original story, the church had been little more than a nuisance—a force Snow was meant to dispatch without much difficulty.

But this church—the real one—was nothing like that. Frey had abandoned all thought of relying on the novel he once authored. He no longer saw himself as the creator of this world at all.

“Aegon said there’s some riddle we must solve if we hope to find Platier...” Snow said, his gaze drifting toward the prince, who wandered some distance away, conducting his own search in his own peculiar way.

Snow’s expression grew complicated, clouded with suspicion. Frey noticed it immediately.

“Sorry... I suppose what happened earlier left you unsettled.”

“Well... I’d be lying if I said it didn’t.”

Leaning back, Snow replayed the scene in his mind.

“First you tried to kill him—and I could clearly tell you were serious. The killing intent radiating from you wasn’t something anyone could mistake. But then, at the very last moment, you stopped. It was as if something held you back... something that made you strike a deal with Aegon instead.”

From Snow’s perspective, watching from the sidelines, he hadn’t been able to catch what Aegon had whispered. He had no way of knowing the true reason Frey stayed his hand.

To him, it looked like some strange power had frozen Frey in place. And then, bafflingly, Frey had entered into some kind of agreement with the prince immediately afterward.

Snow couldn’t make sense of it. So, for now, he chose to focus on the matter at hand, setting the enigma of Aegon aside.

“Tell me, Snow—what do you think is the best way to deal with Aegon?” Frey asked, his voice calm but edged with weight.

Snow remained silent for a few seconds, pondering before answering.

“Honestly? I think following a man like that will only lead to disaster. I don’t believe in the shallow notions of good and evil, so I won’t say Aegon is simply ‘evil’ and must be killed. But without question, he’s someone who deserves punishment—and someone we must be wary of.”

He recalled everything Aegon had revealed... most of all, his use of Dragoth in his schemes. That revelation had shaken him.

And yet, he didn’t believe Aegon deserved death. For all his disdain for the prince, Snow acknowledged his cunning. Aegon Valerion was capable of much—and if he was on their side, he could be a devastating weapon in this war, tilting the scales against any foe.

That was why Snow hadn’t supported Frey when he attempted to kill him—but he hadn’t intervened to stop him either.

In other words, he chose neutrality in the matter. As long as Aegon fought on their side, Snow would let him live—though he must face consequences. Whatever form that punishment took, it wouldn't extend to execution.

Frey, listening, nodded slowly.

"Your reasoning isn't wrong... but it isn't right either." His eyes hardened as he stared toward where Aegon wandered.

"Aegon Valerion could be a tremendous asset in this war. But there's no guarantee he'll always be on our side. He only ever acts for his own gain. He's an unpredictable variable... one better off dead before he can keep playing the game."

Frey chuckled bitterly, spreading his arms.

"But as you can see, killing him has become... difficult. That bastard utterly defeated me."

He laughed again, standing up from where he sat.

The truth was simple: the thought of Aegon consumed him. It hadn't left his mind once in the hours since their clash.

For now, he had accepted Aegon's offer. He had agreed to fight alongside him. But it was compulsion, not choice.

Killing Aegon now could lead to disasters beyond reckoning.

At worst, it might draw out the being who had gifted Aegon his true name. At best, perhaps Aegon had obtained it by some other means.

For example, just like the Mist Stalker did in the past... when it used his memories against him.

Perhaps the prince possessed a method or an artifact that allowed him to read minds... but that possibility was slim.

Either way... the risk was too great.

Between the risk of killing Aegon and provoking whatever he was hiding, or going with the flow and waiting... Frey chose the latter.

It was vexing—his enemies had begun to multiply far too much lately: the Ultras, the High Demons that had recently appeared...

The Church, shrouded in mystery, and now Aegon, with whatever secrets he concealed.

It felt as if Frey was now cornered from all sides... even the Empire's side could no longer be trusted because of the prince.

"Let's move," Frey said before leaping down from the top of the mausoleum, with Snow following right after him.

"To where?!"

"Where do you think? To the place where the Church's bastards are hiding," Frey replied, his gaze fixed on that waterfall which split the heavens and descended to nourish this land with blessings.

"When I once covered this island with my aura, I could sense every little thing happening here... nothing could escape my eyes."

"But that waterfall was the exception. No matter how I tried to pierce it with my aura, it was as if some force repelled me. You know what that means, don't you?" Frey asked, while Snow grasped the implication.

"That waterfall is the key..."

“Most likely.”

With Frey’s SSS-class aura and heightened senses, finding the path wasn’t difficult.

“Chances are, the Church never expected to face someone like me.”

After all, no human alive was known to possess an SSS-class aura. The Church would never have imagined that Frey was the exception.

“Let’s drag that damned prince and head to the waterfall... it’s time to solve this mystery.”

And so, the three of them found the first clue leading to the place they had been seeking.

—

It took only a few minutes for Frey and Snow to regroup with Aegon, and together they made their way toward the waterfall.

As they approached, the three were awestruck by the bizarre sight... a waterfall descending straight from the heavens.

“This is definitely not something man-made...” Snow said, and Frey agreed.

“You’re probably right.”

Aegon was the first to advance, placing his hand upon the waterfall, attempting to push through... yet his hand halted before crossing to the other side.

“These are no ordinary waters—they are brimming with divine power.”

They appeared like ordinary water, but the truth was vastly different from what the eye perceived.

The moment Frey and Snow approached, they both realized the prince had spoken the truth.

The amount of holy energy those waters emitted was immense—so immense that it surpassed even what Snow's sacred blade, Vermithor, had unleashed.

"This is incredible. It looks like a normal waterfall at first glance... but in truth, it's a current of divine energy so dense that it has taken the form of water," the prince said, delighted with his discovery.

"That would explain why this island overflows with such pure aura..."

The holy island of Sicilia was described as a paradise on earth, blessed with endless riches and abundance. No place was more sanctified than this.

And the reason was none other than the waterfall itself, which nourished and healed the land endlessly with its divine energy.

This realization made them all ponder the same question...

"Where in the hell is all this holy power coming from?"

A waterfall that poured out aura ceaselessly for years... what was its true source? And what kind of aura was this, never once depleted over all these years?

The answer was a riddle that baffled them, but solving it wasn't their priority.

At the same time, all three tried to cross the waterfall—but the waters were like a wall, denying passage.

“Looks like we’re in the right place...” Aegon said with a smile, while Frey drew the Dark Sister.

“This waterfall is more like a barrier... or to be precise, a gate. It conceals whatever lies on the other side.”

They could have simply gone around it, but the waterfall wasn’t hiding what lay behind—it concealed something entirely different.

“There must be some mechanism to pass through,” Aegon said, pointing out the obvious.

“That’s true, but we don’t have time to figure out that mechanism.”

Gathering dark aura around his blade and amplifying it with the Dark Sister, Frey readied himself to strike.

“It’ll be easier to carve open the path by force.”

Channeling his sword, Frey intended to tear the way open himself, letting the aura of darkness invade the waterfall.

Chapter 564: Let Him Play

Aiming at the waterfall of holy power, darkness welled from Frey Starlight’s blade.

With a sweep of his sword, he unleashed a colossal cleave that soared hundreds of meters, banking on shaking the waterfall apart.

Frey’s full-force strike scattered the holy-aura waters in all directions, and the ground quaked violently.

The attack was overwhelming—neither Snow nor Aegon could have done any better.

An attack like that should've been enough not just to split the waterfall, but to obliterate it entirely...

Yet none of that came to pass. True, Dark Sister's blow sent turbulent ripples coursing across the surface of the waterfall of holy power, but it soon resumed its flow as if nothing had happened—swallowing Frey's starlight whole.

Stunned, Frey stared at his sword, then back at the falls in turn.

"I wasn't playing around here... did that thing actually block my strike?"

The waterfall hadn't seemed man-made, but Frey had never once expected that a blow carrying his full might wouldn't even make it tremble...

'What now? Am I supposed to hit it with Nameless Judgement or something?'

Frey scowled, seriously considering erasing the waterfall with the strongest weapon in his arsenal—but Aegon stepped in to stop him.

"This isn't the right way to handle it, Frey. This is supposed to be a door—a magical pass-through. To pass, we need a key. Otherwise, even if you destroy it, that won't open the way."

In other words, Frey might manage to destroy the falls with his strongest strike, but all that would accomplish was destroying the path—not opening it.

"So you're saying we're forced to hunt for the key now, after finally finding the door?"

"That's how it is."

Having found the passage, they were back to square one—until Aegon pointed out something else that changed the equation.

"If our assumption is right, the Church's entire force is on the other side... which likely means the method of entry is simpler than it looks. Maybe you only need to belong to the Church." Aegon spoke, and Frey answered at once:

"Or carry something that ties you to it."

At that moment, both of them turned toward Snow Lionheart. Snow traded looks with them for a few seconds, raising a brow.

"What?" he asked—then realized what they meant.

"Ah... I see."

Snow extended his hand, revealing the sacred blade, Vermithor.

"If what it takes is proof of one's bond to the Church to enter, I doubt there's anything better than Vermithor—the holy sword granted by the Lord of Light Himself."

What lent even more weight to the theory was the strange glow that rippled across the waterfall's surface in response to Vermithor—proving it was the key.

"So? Do I just stick my sword into the falls like a key, or what?"

There wasn't any keyhole to begin with, so that didn't seem like the answer.

"Just release some of the blade's holy power into the waterfall. I think that'll do it," Aegon said, and Snow nodded, stepping forward.

"Let's try it, then."

Holding his sword before the falls, Snow poured a considerable amount of holy power into it—and the instant he did, the ground trembled beneath their feet, and the waterfall's surface shuddered.

"Immediate effect..."

The response was instantaneous, and a passage opened within the waterfall—a strange gateway formed entirely of holy power.

Oddly, the passage pierced the very void, carving a path that broke space and time; it didn't lead to the other side of the waterfall at all...

But to somewhere else entirely.

"The Church really was hiding a lot," Aegon murmured, as Snow turned to him, Frey at his side.

"Stay close to me when we go in. This place seems to reject anyone who doesn't carry the key."

Following him, Frey and Aegon kept near Snow as the three of them stepped onto the road shaped by holy power.

The path trembled as they went, holy tendrils creeping across the ground and through the walls toward Frey and Aegon—only to calm the moment they neared Snow.

They seemed especially agitated toward Aegon; he drew the fiercest resistance.

"This tunnel can pinpoint impurity with precision. No wonder it's drawn to you," Frey said to the prince, who chuckled lightly.

"Don't forget you're getting your fair share of attention too."

Aegon wasn't wrong; Frey drew some resistance as well—but it was paltry compared to what Aegon faced.

Whatever the prince was hiding, it clearly wasn't in harmony with holy power.

Demonic aura, maybe? Frey wondered, keeping his eye on the prince the entire time.

Holy power springs from the Bearers of Light, the antithesis of demons.

In other words, demonic aura is exactly what would send holy power into such agitation.

That gave Frey a few hints, though for now they were only wild inferences.

The entity backing Aegon... might be a demon.

The possibility was there, and Frey connected the dots.

The prince had never left his thoughts—not even now, when the three of them were about to clash with the Church. Frey kept prioritizing him above everything else.

As they walked upon the luminous ground of holy power, time itself seemed to slow around Frey while he pondered the prince's truth:

If the entity behind Aegon is a demon, it would be one of immense power—one whose abilities could reveal my secret.

Aegon had spoken his name—his true name from his previous life.

And the only demon who had ever uttered that name was the Demon King... Agaroth himself.

The latter possesses an eye that can behold fate itself... He can discern the past, the present, and the future of those he gazes upon. This is the King's Eye—a world-breaking power that toys with fate itself.

Beside Agaroth, there is another demon who wields the very same ability.

The demon whose name had been circling around Frey of late—the one the Engineer warned him about.

Perhaps it was the very entity that whispered into Aegon's ear and told him his name—the malign being that whispers to all humankind and manipulates them from behind the curtain.

Connecting the dots, Frey drew close to a conclusion.

He had no proof, nothing to guarantee his thoughts were right—but this was the most logical inference he could reach.

The demon backing Aegon... the one who gave him my name—and perhaps other weapons hidden up his sleeve...

'The Fourth Seat... Wesker.'

The moment this possibility surfaced in his mind, Frey's eyes gradually darkened, as he smothered the killing intent gnawing at his heart.

'I'll watch a little longer.'

Staring at Aegon's back, Frey wore a thoroughly frightening expression.

'I'll let him play it his way... then finish it my way.'

From the beginning, Frey had made Aegon swear to tell him the truth once the war ended—an Aura Contract the prince entered.

Likewise, Frey had entered an Aura Contract stating he would fight in this war at Aegon's side and would do him no harm.

But what Aegon didn't know was that Aura Contracts no longer worked on Frey at all.

'The first time I entered an Aura Contract was three years ago—right after my reincarnation...'

Back then, he made it with Ada. Since that time, Shadow Attunement had already grasped the inner workings of that contract.

And now, after Frey opened the third stage of Shadow Attunement—the stage that let him manipulate aura with absolute freedom—he had become capable of nullifying the inevitability bound to Aura Contracts.

In other words—

'I can kill him.'

Frey played obedient, presenting himself as utterly beaten from the moment Aegon spoke his true name.

He let the prince believe he had won completely—that Frey would pose no threat.

No human in recorded history had ever been able to annul an Aura Contract.

In other words, Aegon Valerion truly believed he was safe now.

'I've been dancing to others' tunes for far too long. Countless entities have toyed with me, trying to make me do their bidding.'

It was the curse of Frey's life.

Aegon Valerion was attempting the same—manipulating him and leading him into a trap.

But things were no longer the same.

'I'm not the naïve fool you can push around so easily anymore.'

As the three of them walked within the tunnel of holy power, Frey quietly wove his counterplan, deliberately keeping his head lowered.

'Enjoy your victory, Aegon—and the false safety you crafted for yourself. Keep walking just like that... and ready your neck.'

'Because you won't know when you'll lose it.'

Mastering himself—and the killing intent within him—Frey steadied his breath and schooled his body and features with meticulous control, hiding his true intent.

Thus, Frey and his companions finally reached the tunnel's end, setting foot for the first time in the land where their enemies had hidden—

the land erased from the history books, the safe haven of the Lord of Light's followers:

Nocterra, the lost city swallowed by eternal night.

Chapter 565: Second Seraph

It took Frey and his companions only a handful of minutes to finally reach the other side...

Following Snow, who led the way bearing Vermithor, they crossed without trouble, and within moments the three of them were left breathless by the sight before them.

Nocthera—the Land of Eternal Night. A vast, boundless expanse where darkness reigned without end.

Gazing up, they couldn't tear their eyes from the glittering stars studding the sky—so many they seemed like jewels and lamps lighting the world out of shadow.

Among them, a colossal moon looked down, adorning the heavens with its brilliant glow.

The moon was so near it covered a vast swath of the sky by itself; the atmosphere felt utterly otherworldly...

"Who would've thought the Church was hiding something like this..." Aegon said, taking in the lay of the land.

Before them stretched a sprawling forest, its trees carrying leaves that glowed with a faint green light, gently revealing the path.

The place was pure enchantment—so much so that all three felt as though they were no longer on Earth, but had set foot into an entirely different world.

"Where are we exactly?" Snow asked the obvious question—for this was no longer the holy island of Sicilia.

"It's as if we were transported to another world altogether."

That was how it seemed to Snow as he scanned their surroundings—but Frey, who had closed his eyes for a heartbeat, disagreed.

"No... this isn't another world. We're still on Earth."

He opened his eyes, violet light kindling within them, and spread his aura outward; he had already uncovered the land's secret.

"To be precise, we're still on the holy island of Sicilia—we never left it." At those words, Aegon and Snow both turned toward him; it didn't sound logical.

"Explain, Frey. How can this be the same island?"

They had teleported through the passage the waterfall had formed, and nothing around them felt familiar.

But Frey had found the key. In the first place, his teleportation ability that brought them to the island had been configured to take them straight to Uriel Platini.

In other words, even if some force interfered with the transfer, they should have ended up near him.

And since Uriel Platini was, in all likelihood, here in Nocthera, Frey reached a strange conclusion after attempting to sweep the area with his aura.

"We're still on the holy island of Sicilia, but..."

Pointing upward, he told them the truth.

"We're above it—specifically above the island. This place sits in its sky, and if I'm not mistaken... the waterfall rich with holy power originates from here."

Frey's words finally allowed Snow and Aegon to grasp one of the Church's secrets.

"So we're standing on land built in the sky?" Aegon laughed, staring into the darkness overhead.

"This doesn't look like a sky to me—we're literally in space."

A strange island, floating alone in the void, an immense distance above the ground below.

It was a phenomenon beyond anything they knew—how could this land stay aloft in space without falling? And how were they even breathing here?

However they looked at it, this place was not the work of human hands...

But it certainly brimmed with a terrifying saturation of aura—more even than the holy island lying beneath them.

Frey and the others were still lost in the wonder of it when a voice, from no discernible source, snapped them from their trance and dragged them back to reality.

"My children, my brothers... and my companions in this dark world—the shadows of our enemies have deepened, and now they strive to defile our land."

The man's voice was so loud it was heard everywhere; Frey and his companions could not pinpoint its origin.

But they recognized the speaker with ease.

"Blattier..."

The High Bishop of the Church—the very man they had come to find.

He continued, addressing others unseen.

"The night is long, and filled with darkness... but rejoice, beloved ones, for the Lord has spoken to me at last and illuminated my path—and I now bear His light to you."

Joseph Blattier went on, his tone strange, like a self-styled messenger delivering a heavenly decree.

"The Lord of Light is still with us! He has granted us the power to conquer all our enemies!"

"The unclean who dared deny the Lord of Light's authority and reject His existence now stand among us—and they have grown so bold as to set their filthy feet upon our sacred ground, seeking to defile us with their evil and their shadows."

At that final part of Blattier's address, the faces of Frey and Snow darkened.

"Frey..." Snow said, tightening his grip on Vermithor. Frey nodded.

"Yeah... they already know where we are."

In the same breath, Blattier began to shout without warning.

"Those demons clad in human skins crawl toward us—shall we allow them to defile us?!"

"Rise, my children, my brothers—rise and answer their aggression with iron and fire!"

At his call—and as if by sorcery—

Hundreds—no, thousands—of torches flared to life throughout the forest encircling Frey and his companions.

The Church's followers appeared everywhere out of nowhere, surging forward with weapons drawn toward their enemies.

"What in the hell is happening?!" Frey said, violet light sparking in his eyes.

He had been spreading his dark aura from the very beginning, and he hadn't sensed anything.

Yet in a single instant, thousands of people were within his domain—as if they had been there the whole time.

"You're telling me they have a way to slip past my senses this easily?"

Either they had teleported directly into place, or they had been here from the start and hid their presence...

Neither possibility felt plausible to Frey.

"If we wish to survive the darkness of this world, we must stop acting like humans."

"The Lord of Light has spoken to me—His words washed this body clean of weakness and frailty. A great power awaits us, and we must open our hands to receive it. We must not act like humans, but take the Lord of Light Himself as our model and follow in His steps."

"The Lord of Light would not forgive His enemies, nor grant them freedom—He would punish them for what they do."

"And so, my beloved ones, we must fight—and purge this world of evil."

Joseph Blattier's heresy droned on for a long while, and battle was on the verge of erupting.

Frey had grown sick of listening, yet he couldn't pinpoint Blattier's location, and the source of the voice remained unknown.

It came from everywhere at once—like Blattier was whispering right beside their ears, ensuring they heard him.

Then, at the moment the Church's followers drew near and the three prepared to fight—

the sky around them blazed, and a colossal being swept overhead on white wings.

"Let the purification begin."

Blattier's words rang out—and in the same instant, that War Angel appeared from nothing, opening her mouth toward Frey and his companions.

Their faces darkened at once, especially as they took a harder look at the angel.

Unlike the one that had appeared in the past, this time it was a different one.

The previous had seemed male; this one was female—her features unmistakably womanly.

But the pressure she exerted was the same—equal to the other.

In that moment, their fears became reality.

The Church...

"They have another War Angel," all three said at once—just before the angel unleashed that immense beam of light capable of killing those at SS+.

The torrent of light descended like a waterfall, swallowing Frey and his companions whole.

The aura kept pouring for several minutes before the angel finally ceased, closing both mouth and eyes to recharge.

At the same time, a ring of holy power formed a barrier around her for protection.

Meanwhile, the Church's followers rushed in, surrounding the crater of devastation the angel had left behind.

The pit was incredibly deep—but contrary to expectation, they found it completely empty, without a trace of their enemies.

Scanning their surroundings, they immediately began searching, shouts echoing everywhere like madmen hunting a prey bold enough to flee.

The War Angel, too, began circling above the forest in search of them—but found no sign.

At the last instant, before the beam of aura could strike their heads, Frey had used his teleportation ability to whisk them far, far away at random.

Noctera was vast, its forest stretching for terrifying distances, so putting space between them wasn't hard.

And the moment they were clear, Aegon immediately produced a strange device that looked like a totem, which raised a crimson barrier around them.

Hidden among the trees, they watched from afar as the torches of the Church's followers fanned out in all directions, searching.

"Looks like... they've lost our trail," Snow said, as Aegon gestured toward the device in his hands.

"This Shadow Totem can perfectly conceal the presence of anyone within its field, so they won't sense us no matter what."

"It's a handy tool. Its only flaw is it breaks after a single use," Aegon added blandly, setting the totem down at their feet.

"So? What's our plan? Do we fight them? That doesn't seem optimal to me—that War Angel can suppress those at SS+."

Not to mention, the battle wouldn't necessarily end even if they defeated the angel; Blattier and his cohort were lying in wait somewhere...

Hidden among the trees while the Church's followers prowled around them,

Frey and his companions began working out a plan—how to deal with their enemies.

Chapter 566: Shadow Unbound

"Keep searching! There's no way they've gotten far!" one of the Church's followers shouted, torch in hand as he prowled for those who had dared trespass upon his sacred ground.

"They're strong—but remember, you don't have to defeat them. All you need to do is reveal their location, and our dear Bishop will handle the rest!"

"Dying to fulfill the Lord of Light's will is a great honor few truly grasp. There is no end more glorious than this! Our enemies will writhe in hell, while we are reborn—stronger, purer! That is the destiny we seek!"

"Do not fear death! Death is the beginning, not the end!"

Among the swarms of the Church's faithful flooding the forest were many who kept spewing such speeches—people of high rank within the Church.

Their words inflamed their followers, stoking them to a fever pitch, indifferent to death.

Their enemies were no ordinary foes: Frey Starlight, Snow Lionheart... and the enigmatic prince, Aegon.

It was obvious this trio could slaughter them with ease—yet the Church’s followers didn’t care. So long as they could contribute even a little to bringing them down, they didn’t mind dying for such a cause.

Hidden among the trees as rain began to fall from nowhere ..

a strange rain, not made of water, but of holy power ..

Frey and the others watched in silence.

“They’ve been brainwashed,” Aegon said, recognizing the signs of manipulation.

“These Church followers are the product of ceaseless indoctrination and deceit by the High Bishop and his circle. They planted extremist ideas in their minds and made them believe their cause is the truest—so much so that they don’t mind dying.”

Manipulating people in the name of religion ..

it was a terrifying way to breed fanatics.

“They mean to kill us .. even with their hero standing here,” Aegon said, glancing at Snow, bearer of Vermithor ..

in other words, the one chosen by the Lord of Light.

But his word no longer held any weight.

“Since they claim to receive revelation from the Lord of Light, they have no need of me. I don’t think they’ll go so far as to kill me, but they likely won’t listen to me anymore—not when I oppose direct orders they believe came straight from the Lord they worship and love.”

In short, there was no way to turn the Church's followers into allies—especially those in Nocthera, the secret stronghold of the Lord of Light's faithful.

"Our priorities now: find Blattier... confirm he's the one controlling those angels... and look for Saint Uriel. If Aegon's assumption is right, they may sacrifice her to summon something far more sinister."

Sitting on the ground as the sacred rain soaked him, Frey set the Nameless mask on his face, hiding his skin.

"The best way to operate now is to split up and search. The two of you are strong enough to handle yourselves. The moment either of you finds any lead to our targets, send a signal and we regroup immediately."

That was the plan Frey laid out.

"Not a bad idea," Aegon said in agreement. He preferred working alone anyway; it was the best way to set the traps he liked to prepare in advance.

Snow didn't comment; instead he studied Frey, who sat before him—something about him suggested he was hiding something up his sleeves.

Aegon agreed at once and moved to depart.

"I'll push deeper north. The rest is yours," he said with a smile before cloaking himself in the glow of lightning and darting away.

"The totem will lose effect soon, so move now and mask your presence as much as possible—or you'll draw the angel," Aegon warned one last time, then vanished among the grasses and trees.

Snow and Frey remained.

Frey sat fitting the Nameless mask, and Snow stood behind him.

Snow wanted to ask, but he didn't press since Frey hadn't spoken of it.

"I'll head west... Frey, don't overdo it or try to shoulder this alone. Remember—I'm on your side," he said, his eyes gleaming gold.

Frey gave a curt nod. "I know. And I truly appreciate it. Be careful out there."

Snow nodded back, wrapped himself in aura, and sped off.

Frey was finally alone.

The moment Snow and Aegon were far enough, he pulled back his sleeves and bared his skin—revealing what he'd been hiding.

From beneath his pale flesh, lines of black crept forth—like filthy worms of shadow.

Frey felt his body changing by the moment; his power had grown anything but stable.

"I need to hurry and purge this damned shadow." Rising to his feet again, he kept his face hidden behind the Nameless mask.

That mask always helped him keep his power in check—and his nerves under control.

"It's been a while since I last explored that Library... I suppose I'll have to visit it soon."

Within the depths of the Nameless mask lay thousands of strange books, waiting for him to leaf through them all.

And the Blood Path forced him to kill without pause if he wished to grow stronger faster...

“I can’t enter the Library right now. Dealing with the Church and the shadow takes priority. But at the very least... I can increase my power without restraint—by killing as many of the Lord of Light’s devotees as possible.”

He had sent Snow and Aegon in different directions, urging them to conserve strength and hunt for clues leading to Blattier.

It was the best plan, truly—but Frey had never intended to follow it.

“I can’t let Wesker’s shadow shackle me. If I want to rise to a level where I can defeat my enemies, I need to kill far more... many more.”

And the Church would be the new prey.

Most of the Church’s followers were merely ordinary people—misled and manipulated until their faith blinded them.

You could say the vast majority hadn’t done anything that merited death. They were victims.

And Frey knew all of this already—yet he intended to kill them anyway.

“Everyone in this life has the freedom to choose. Yes, you were manipulated—deceived by others—but in the end, you chose this path all the same.”

“You chose to worship the Lord of Light and obey His orders—no matter how extreme or senseless—so far that you’re ready to die for Him.”

From the brush, Frey stepped out before a group of Church followers, who screamed the instant they saw him.

But Frey walked toward them calmly, unfazed by the weapons leveled at him.

“You’ve chosen—now face the consequences of your choice.”

Slash!!

With a single sweep of his sword, Frey sent a colossal arc of aura that swept through the dozens before him, severing every head before they even realized what had happened.

“He’s here! The intruder is—arghhh!” one of the Church’s followers screamed—only for Frey to take his head as well.

“You believed what you chose to believe—and here you are, losing your lives to my blade, one after another.”

Slash!!

Upon Nocthera’s sacred ground, blood spilled and the dead fell one after the other.

“This life is anything but fair... Had you crossed paths with a virtuous hero, perhaps you might have been saved.”

The plan had been to find Blattier, defeat him, strip the Church of its angels—then withdraw.

A plan meant to spare the Church’s followers who had nothing to do with this... mere weaklings whose existence was as good as nothing.

“Unfortunately... I’m no hero.”

Hand stained with their blood, Frey cut them down one after another.

And little by little, that familiar feeling returned—

the feel of blood slick across his body, his muscles boiling with the heat of war and death...

That feeling was what made Frey kill more—and proof that he was growing stronger.

The Blood Path drove him forward, pushing him to higher tiers he needed to reach as fast as possible.

No sooner had the battle begun than Frey had killed many of them, and chaos followed in his wake—

chaos that drew the celestial creature that had been circling the region from the start.

Above his head, the War Angel appeared once more, shaking the land with the pressure of her aura.

The instant she caught sight of Frey, she opened her mouth—and the roaring beam of aura poured forth, annihilating everything in its path.

But that overwhelming strike touched nothing but earth and the corpses Frey had left behind.

Using his teleportation ability, he vanished and slipped the attack with ease—then reappeared elsewhere among the Church's ranks, tearing through them as if nothing had happened.

Screams rose everywhere, and the dead dropped one by one.

The angel pursued Frey at once, attacking him again—but each time she targeted him, he disappeared, only to reappear farther away to reap more followers.

It repeated several times. In a short span, hundreds died, and the Church stood powerless to halt a single man.

“The angel is strong. That blast of hers can kill even those at SS+.”

Slash!!

Ripping through more and more bodies, Frey kept one eye on the angel wheeling overhead.

“She may be strong—but she’s simple. One attack in her entire arsenal, and she’s forced to recharge after every shot... like a machine.”

Fighting her was annoying all the same; her holy barrier was hard to pierce.

But avoiding her was child’s play for someone like Frey, who could teleport instantaneously.

“Keep spewing your filth at me as much as you like—you’ll touch nothing but a mirage.”

“By day’s end, nothing around you will remain but the dead. Then the one who sent you will learn who he’s dealing with.”

Frey could more than handle the angel—even defeat her—but he saw no need. It would only drain him pointlessly.

Killing the Church’s followers, on the other hand, fed his strength ..and that was exactly what he welcomed more than anything.

As the fight dragged on, the Church’s followers began to understand ..

to understand what the Ultras had suffered since the war began.

They began to grasp who the Black Death was, and why he’d been given that name.

Frey Starlight—the man who had borne most of the war against the Ultras alone and made them taste endless ruin—

now turned his blade on the very ones who had chosen to follow the Lord of Light.

Minutes earlier, they had been ready to face death itself to fulfill their god's command.

But now ... face-to-face with the man drowning them in his viscous killing intent ..

one after another, many of them broke into screams and fled, turning their backs on the figure whose face a black mask rendered all the more terrifying.

Their blessed angel, in whom they had placed such faith, was of no use against this monster; he toyed with her with ease, as if she were nothing but a child's plaything.

One after another, the Church's followers ran.

"Stop! How dare you flee before the enemy?!" one of the bishops bellowed, furious.

He was supposed to command them and keep them on the field ..

but he had lost control completely.

He tried to halt them—but only seconds passed before his head toppled from his shoulders as well.

"What—?" he managed, staring at Frey who had appeared before him. It was the last word he spoke—and Frey's visage was the last sight he saw in life.

The Church's followers scattered in panic, and Frey walked after them.

“That’s right... run. Run back the way you came.”

Step by measured step, he followed, teleporting whenever the angel tried to strike him down.

Amid the followers’ screams and the thunder of the angel’s bombardments,

Frey walked calmly through the chaos, violet light blazing in his eyes—fixed upon his victims,

the ones whose blood he meant to spill.

“Run—and show me the path to the place where your leaders are hiding,” Frey said, a terrifying smile forming beneath the mask...

a sadistic, blood-soaked smile of a man who relished the kill.

“In this way, I’ll be able to kill you all.”

The hunt had only just begun—and a massacre was about to unfold.

Chapter 567: Heaven’s Veil

Far from where Frey was... deep within Nocterra, the City of Eternal Night .

in a strange, wondrous place built amid the heavens ..

stood a majestic edifice overlooking the skies, from which poured the waterfall of holy power that nourished the land with blessings.

At its summit stood three men—two in pure white vestments, the third cloaked in black.

They were none other than the Church's three bishops: Blattier, Platini, and Calistes.

"It seems the battle has already begun," Calistes remarked, hands clasped behind his back as he stared toward the distant horizon—commenting on the fight raging on the far side of Nocthera.

"Frey Starlight... he lives up to the rumors. A true monster." Smiling, Calistes turned to Blattier. "Is that why you put the name Starlight on the Revelation Tablet, High Bishop Blattier?" he asked lightly.

Silence fell.

The other bishops showed no reaction, but had anyone else been present, the words out of Calistes's mouth would have sparked a catastrophe.

"No... that wasn't the reason," Blattier said as he turned to face what stood behind him.

At the very crest of the waterfall—at the highest point in Nocthera—there rose a wondrous golden tree, its branches and boughs spreading so wide they covered a vast portion of the sky.

This was the phenomenon that had fed the Church its power—the cornerstone of the name it had built for itself.

Those who knew of the tree's existence could be counted on one hand, and Blattier had allowed only a select few to set foot in this sacred place.

"This tree appeared out of nowhere centuries ago, and it's said the sword Vermithor was drawn from within it."

"Thanks to its power, we were able to forge this institution—one strong enough now to fight in this war," Blattier said, eyes fixed on the far horizon.

“We must be cautious from here on. If this place is ever discovered... that would be our end,” warned Mikhael Platini in a grave tone.

“For this religion is nothing but a lie we made the whole world believe.”

There were many secrets hidden within the Church’s walls ..

secrets that must never leak into the world.

“The Lord of Light abandoned us long ago. We have heard not a single word from Him since the first war, when Kazis Valerion sacrificed himself,” Blattier said, his expression deepening.

The Lord of Light had forsaken them, had said nothing to them—yet he had appeared again recently, choosing a new champion:

Snow Lionheart.

At that moment, Joseph Blattier did not miss his chance and played his cards shrewdly.

“That so-called Revelation Tablet is nothing more than a device we made ourselves, deceiving our followers into believing it a heavenly shrine capable of receiving the Lord’s words.”

That light which had descended from the heavens was simply power Blattier borrowed from the towering tree behind him.

Its power was so pure and immense that any who beheld it would assume it came from something not of man.

And thus Blattier, with cunning, set forth his decrees—as if they had been revealed upon the Tablet.

“At the time, I named the Ultras—our natural enemies—as foes, along with the Valerion family; once they fell, we could seize control of the Empire with ease,” Blattier said with a scowl, recalling those days.

“As for the third force worth fearing—the combined strength of the other three great houses—I chose Starlight to weaken them, for they were the weakest of the three and the easiest to eliminate.”

He was right: at that time, House Starlight had but a single fighter who had barely reached SS- ..Carmen Starlight.

In other words, they were an easy target.

Scowling, Blattier stared out toward the horizon where the battle raged.

“Who would have thought that weak house would bring forth a monster capable of crushing the other families single-handedly...”

“Frey Starlight must die here—and we must reclaim Vermithor and its bearer.”

Blattier issued his orders and bared his forearms.

Across them, blood-red sigils were carved deep into his skin—hideous to the eye, yet the sight of them made Ramiel Calistes’s eyes kindle at once.

“Are we going to use both War Angels in this battle?”

Blattier answered with a nod.

“We will use everything at our disposal to win—even if it means sacrificing our followers.”

Redoubling his resolve, Blattier turned to Platini.

“Tell me—how fares the new Saint?” Blattier brought up the subject out of nowhere.

Platini’s answer was brief. “She resisted at first... but in the end, she surrendered to her fate.”

The three bishops moved together .. following Platini ..

toward the place beneath that mighty tree.

There, a place of sorcery spread out like a paradise upon the earth:

a vast spring of pristine waters, saturated with holy power.

From that spring, the waterfall flowed.

But the bishops’ eyes ignored the spectacle and fixed upon a single point.

“As you can see, the legacy transfer is proceeding smoothly. Soon she will awaken—a complete Saint loyal to us, bearing the powers of her foremothers,” Platini said, while Blattier nodded in satisfaction.

Before them... a naked girl lay within the spring.

It was the only place where any color but blue could be seen—red was there as well, in abundance.

Her eyes were closed; she had been unconscious for a long time, unable to endure the torment.

All over her bare body, dozens of tubes had been driven in—pierced into her flesh—pumping strange blood into her veins.

There were so many tubes, and she bled without cease ..

yet her wounds constantly mended under the spring's holy power, keeping her alive throughout.

And so Platini kept vigil over her all the while ...

cutting her, inscribing strange runic letters across her naked skin.

Then, as soon as the spring healed her, he would begin again ..

over and over, until those things were carved into her very being.

The pain was immense... the torment, greater still.

She was forced to endure the Church's mad rites, eyes shut against the world.

She was none other than Uriel Platini—the Saint chosen to live... and to meet the fate of her foremothers.

Chapter 568: World Tree

— Snow Leonhart's Pov —

"So, it has begun..."

Even from this far away, I can still feel that explosive aura... Frey's power.

Just as I expected, the moment he pushed us aside, he threw himself into battle. And most likely, he will slaughter every last one of the Church's followers standing before him—no matter their motives or their pasts.

Without exception, he will kill them all.

To feed the demands of that Blood Path he has chosen for himself.

Ever since the day Frey somehow fused with my body, I've felt as though I started to understand him—my mysterious friend who carried more secrets than anyone else.

That day, he must have glimpsed the world through my eyes... but at the same time, I saw through his.

I felt what he felt. I lived, if only for an instant, what it meant to exist as Frey Starlight.

The Blood Path is a road of darkness, forcing its bearer into endless killing, drowning in blood until the red floods form rivers and seas...

A truly demonic path. One that even Frey himself could not predict where it would ultimately lead.

"The Paths..."

All my life, I believed there was only one way to become stronger ..unceasing training, polishing the body, absorbing aura, meditating until the next breakthrough.

That method served me well for a time, and I thought it would carry me to my peak.

But reality was different. Eventually, I struck the wall. No matter how hard I trained, no matter how much I tried, I could never break past Rank A.

And yet, in a cruel twist, I shattered the shackle and broke through the wall the moment I devoured the corpse of a single human being.

Raising my fist before my eyes, I let my aura flow freely—golden energy gathering thickly around it.

“I am not human...”

Or rather, only part of me is human. That was why the human method worked for me for a while ..but it revealed only a fraction of the power I sought.

The other part of me is demonic... the blood injected into my body again and again since childhood.

That makes me, too, a demonic contractor, giving me the right to walk a demonic path.

The method of Yosefka...

“To grow stronger with every corpse of my own kind I consume.”

A path fouler than even the one Frey follows.

Perched on the branch of one of the tallest trees in the area, I watched the chaos around me while my thoughts drifted far.

“The human path... the demon path... the blood path... How many Paths exist in this world?”

The demon’s method—devouring his own kind—was but one training path of a High Seat Demon, Yosefka.

Which meant that even among demons, there might be countless Paths, each different from the next.

And what of the other races, far above in the heavens ..beings I know nothing of?

The more knowledge I gained, the smaller I felt... like a mere ink drop lost in the vast canvas of existence.

But then—what is the right Path for me?

What is the true way I must walk if I wish to reach the same kind of strength Frey holds?

What must I sacrifice? What exactly must I do?

I didn't yet know the answer—but I resolved to find it here, no matter the cost.

Leaping from the tree, I drew my blade Vermithor, letting its holy power pour through me.

From the moment we set foot in this strange land, my sword had behaved differently ..almost as if it had returned home, to the place it was born.

And because of that, I too felt a deep bond to this land, strengthening my conviction that the answer I sought lay here.

Every time I synced my consciousness with Vermithor, I caught glimpses of strange aura trails in the air... golden currents weaving through earth and sky, flooding even the void itself.

No one else could see them. Only by synchronizing with Vermithor—and awakening the War King Form—was I able to perceive them.

Golden aura currents swirling around me, often passing directly through my body...

I couldn't tell what force could emit such energy, or whether it was even a living being at all.

But I was almost certain: if I continued following these trails, they would lead me at last to Blattier and his followers—and perhaps, to the very answer I sought.

Thus, with my mind synchronized to Vermithor, I pressed deeper into the City of Eternal Night.

Minutes passed. Then hours. Time fled swiftly as my senses focused on nothing but the golden aura trails.

From time to time, I collided with stray Church followers, but I cut them down with ease and pressed forward, using Void Step to shift constantly.

Constant movement kept me from unnecessary fights, but it slowed my progress.

Every distraction around me made me lose track of the golden trails, forcing me to stop and find them again—a process that wasted far too much time.

That was why, even after hours, I had barely advanced at all.

“I must keep trying.”

I alone could perceive these trails. Frey was likely still fighting the Church’s hordes, while the prince... who knew what schemes lingered in his mind, or what he would do next.

I wouldn’t let him steer us the way he wanted ..so I had to find the path myself.

And that was what I focused on.

In this way, I kept moving forward, while time sped past too quickly for my senses to grasp.

From time to time, waves of destructive aura reached me from afar—proof that the war Frey had waged against the Church was still raging.

But I ignored it completely and kept following those trails.

That immersion severed my connection to the world around me; I could see nothing but black.

A darkness in which no light existed—save for those golden trails.

That golden light grew stronger and stronger the farther I went, until it swelled from the size of a fist to envelop my entire body.

And the more intense it became, the more I felt a bond with it—a longing for it—

as if it were a part of my very being.

The overwhelming experience stirred tangled feelings in my heart, sharpening my desire to explore that dormant side of myself.

At some point, progress became smoother, and I stopped running into enemies. My link to the golden trails grew so strong that I stopped walking and began to sprint, surging forward in pursuit.

After delving for a long time, I finally reached the end of the trail—the place from which that all-encompassing golden power sprang.

What I saw left me speechless.

At the end of the path stood a towering structure that pierced the dark sky. I couldn't make out its features—the world to me was still wrapped in shadow—but I could see what crowned it, clearly.

“This... a tree...”

It was a tree—a colossal golden tree, its branches and leaves unfurled, radiating such power that I flinched and stood stunned.

The golden aura path I had followed until now was only one among thousands of other trails—all of them leading to that tree.

In that moment I realized: these were its roots, creeping everywhere across this land, feeding it with a mighty power that made it look like a paradise upon the earth.

I couldn't see its true form ..it was far above, in the sky ..yet before me it manifested in that shape of aura alone.

Magnificent and awe-inspiring—a thing from another world.

A phenomenon not wrought by human hands.

“So this is the Church's secret...”

The secret behind that great waterfall, behind the prosperity the Church enjoyed—the source of their intense holy power.

There was no doubt.

“Blattier and the other bishops are there.”

I had found them—and to be honest, I burned to climb that place and end it myself. But I knew the true measure of the enemy's strength—and the unknowns they still hid.

So, reluctantly... I chose to withdraw.

“Time to find Frey.”

Rather than charge in alone, it would be better to unite our strength and destroy them with a single strike.

Separating my consciousness from Vermithor and letting the War King Form fade, I finally regained my sense of the world around me, able at last to see colors other than black and gold.

And then I found myself standing, at a loss, unable to place where I was.

I now stood in what seemed to be a labyrinth—a strange forest constructed in such twisting fashion that getting lost was child’s play.

“Where am I now? And how much time has passed, exactly?”

Tracking that golden trail had severed my sense of time and place.

I had focused so hard I’d failed to realize several days had gone by since I split from Frey and Aegon.

“I can’t feel Frey’s aura... Has the fight already ended? Or am I simply too far away to sense him?”

Knowing I had no time to waste, I plunged back into the forest at once, using Void Step.

I hadn’t been attacked by Church followers for a while now... did that mean they couldn’t reach this place?

It was strange. True, this forest felt like a maze, saturated with a peculiar aura.

Even so, I found my way through with ease, and going in and out was no challenge for me.

I didn’t understand the secret behind this place ..but so long as I could move freely within it, that was all that mattered.

Delving into the recesses of the sacred land, I cut my way forward in search of Frey ... intent on ending the battle with the Church once and for all.

Chapter 569: The Curse of Choice (1)

Three days had passed since Frey and his companions had parted ways.

Each of them had spent those days fighting in their own way, seeking to bring the Church—whose malice had scarred them—under submission.

Snow Lionheart, thanks to his direct bond with Vermithor, had uncovered one of the Church's deepest secrets: the place where the High Bishop and his retinue were hiding.

He had been so utterly immersed in tracing the trails of that great tree that he lost all sense of time. It had taken him three full days to reach the tree, and two entire days just to return and escape from the labyrinthine forest he had wandered into.

But Snow's first priority had been to find Frey Starlight. The last time they crossed paths—five days ago—Frey had been slaughtering the Church's followers. Back then, the resonance of his SSS-ranked aura had spread so far and wide that Snow could feel it even from a great distance.

Now, however... there was no trace of him.

Unable to discern what had truly happened, the Empire's Hero resolved to head to the last place where he had sensed Frey's presence. The battlefield itself.

Using Void Step, it did not take him long to arrive at the destined place. Yet the moment he set foot there, Snow froze in horror at the grotesque sight before him.

"What in the hell happened here?!"

Step after step, Snow walked among the countless corpses piled before him.

Bodies drained of every drop of blood.

It wasn't the number of corpses, nor the savagery of their deaths that unsettled him—he had grown accustomed to such scenes after fighting at Frey's side against the Ultras.

His strange friend had long since become an unstoppable killing machine.

What stunned Snow this time was the state in which the corpses had been left. All of them, without exception, shared the same fate.

Kneeling by one, he examined the signs of death up close.

The mark of the sword was plain and undeniable—proof that Frey had slain the man with a single strike. That was how Frey Starlight fought—ending his enemies in one blow, one corpse at a time.

But the moment Frey killed them, something strange befell their bodies. Their skin shriveled, their blood dried away, leaving twisted husks—skin stretched tight over bone.

As if life itself had been stripped away along with every last thing the body once held.

This had been the fate of all the corpses around Snow—without exception.

He couldn't understand what was happening... until, after scrutinizing more closely, he noticed something bizarre ..and familiar.

At once, he turned to another corpse. The same thing. And another. And another. All bore the same mark.

"Those damned scribbles again..." Snow cursed, as he recognized the same blood-carved language etched into the flesh of the dead.

An incomprehensible script, like lost runes from an ancient age.

Among the sea of thousands of corpses strewn around Snow, many belonged to angels as well—creations the Church had unleashed against Frey, it seemed. But he had felled them all.

And even across the bodies of those mechanical-like beings... the same bloody inscriptions sprawled.

Snow did not know their meaning, but from all they had witnessed thus far, he could only associate them with sacrifice.

"The Church... they have a way to sacrifice others, to summon something greater in return..."

It was a pattern that had repeated again and again—enough that they had even sacrificed the Saint, Eurasha.

"Don't tell me... they deliberately sacrificed all these people?!"

Rage boiled within him as Snow began to grasp the Church's true intent—and the nature of his enemies.

"They sent this many weaklings against people like me and Frey. There was never any chance they would survive. In other words, they sent them to die, under the pretense of serving the Lord of Light and His cause."

It was a twisted, filthy tactic—so vile that Snow saw no difference between the Church and the demons themselves.

"Sacrifice... blood... exploiting humans. Tell me—what difference is there between the so-called pure Church, and the foul demons they claim to oppose?"

The fury that consumed Snow nearly drove him to storm back and attack Blattier and the others himself.

But at last he mastered his temper, forcing himself to focus on finding Frey.

Drawing Vermithor, Snow gathered a torrent of flame through the holy sword, then raised it toward the heavens.

"This will draw attention—but we don't have time to waste."

Through his blade, Snow launched a colossal fireball into the dark sky.

The flame soared upward, before exploding in a dazzling spectacle like a firework that lit the world around him.

The signal was clear. Even if they were miles away, his companions would surely see it.

Yet no matter how long Snow waited, there was no answer. Not from Frey, not from Aegon.

"Has something happened to them?" The thought invaded his mind.

But he quickly dismissed it.

"No... Frey would never fall so easily. Nor would Prince Aegon, who has survived far worse."

Charging onward, Snow resumed his search, desperate to find them soon.

His pursuit stretched on for a long while. Hours bled away, until Snow began to worry he might never find them at all.

And then—just as that dark thought took hold—he felt it. A strange, savage aura pressing in from afar.

A wild and dreadful pressure that sent shivers crawling down his spine.

He froze among the towering trees, staring in its direction, as silence fell over the land.

The oppressive aura was so ominous that his instincts screamed at him to turn back.

But instead, Snow felt a strange familiarity with that feral power—enough that he defied his instincts, and rushed headlong toward its source.

Yet Snow felt a strange familiarity with that feral aura—enough that he defied his instincts and rushed headlong toward its source.

Using Void Step, he crossed vast distances in the blink of an eye, drawing ever closer. With each step, cold sweat trickled down his back, for the pressure of that aura grew heavier, sharper, more suffocating.

"What cursed aura is this?!" Snow muttered unconsciously, until he reached the edge of a cliff overlooking another vast forest stretching beneath the dark sky.

At its center, nestled among the endless green, he finally saw it.

A colossal mass of violet aura blazed like a second sun—not of fire, but of pure, searing power.

It was immense, overwhelming, so heavy that Snow felt his own body grow heavier beneath its weight. Still, he pushed on, for now he was almost certain who this aura belonged to.

Drawing closer and closer, Snow reached the source at last.

Amid the trees lay a great lake, and at its center sat a lone man. His long white hair fluttered in the aura's violent currents, his black garments whipping in the air as if on fire, bathed in the burning light of that violet sun.

It was Frey.

Chapter 570: The Curse of Choice (2)

He looked utterly consumed, his face drawn tight with pain. But the moment Snow neared, Frey's eyes snapped open.

Their gazes met. Frey inhaled deeply, struggling to draw that raging violet aura into himself, the earth around him quaking violently in response. The strain of containing it boiled the energy so fiercely that the lake itself evaporated—vanishing entirely.

Minutes passed. Finally, Frey succeeded in containing it, stepping out of the dried lakebed with heavy, dragging steps.

“Snow... forgive me, I didn't notice your presence,” Frey said, apologetic. Snow remained silent for a moment, then finally asked the question that had consumed him since the beginning.

“What just happened, Frey? What was that aura?”

“Ah... you mean this?”

Frey lifted his palm. A small sphere of violet aura bloomed above it, like a tiny sun of condensed destruction.

It was small, yet it carried the exact same energy as before.

With a dismissive wave, Frey dissolved it into nothing.

“Nothing special. I've been trying to develop a new technique for my arsenal. But so far... every attempt has failed.”

“A new technique...” Snow whispered, though his body remembered all too well the crushing pressure.

What kind of cursed technique carries such terrifying power...? he thought, staring at Frey.

And then he noticed something he had failed to see earlier—distracted as he’d been by the overwhelming display.

“Frey, you...” Snow began, startled. Frey immediately understood, pulling on his mask once more to hide his face.

“Ah. I’ve spent so long alone that I forgot myself.”

But Snow had already seen.

“What happened to you?” he asked, his voice low.

Frey sighed. In just a few short days, he had changed dramatically.

Now that Snow was truly looking, the signs were clear.

His face was pale, marked with heavy black rings beneath his eyes—as though he had aged years overnight. His arms were thinner, harsher, their usual color leached away, as if some wasting sickness had taken hold.

“I’m cursed, my friend. That’s all there is to it,” Frey said, as if it were the most ordinary truth in the world.

“Cursed? What curse? Who placed it on you?” Snow pressed, questions tumbling from him. This time, Frey chose to answer honestly.

The two sat before the barren lakebed as Frey told the tale of the shadow within him—Wesker's Shadow.

It crept through his veins, draining his body, his mind, even his power.

So far, Frey had kept the symptoms in check, aided by the Nameless mask that suppressed the shadow's influence. But lately, the symptoms had worsened rapidly, the shadow's grip tightening. A warning, a reminder that time was running out. He would soon have to face it—or pay the price.

"Fortunately, the cure lies here, within the Church's domain," Frey said. "Though I don't yet know what it is. That's why I've tried breaking through their lines, aiming for their leaders. But I couldn't find their hiding place..." He recalled the days of bloodshed.

"I killed every soldier the Church threw at me. I even fought their War Angel. I tried to make them lead me to their masters. But the plan failed. In the end, I hit a labyrinth—impossible to cross unless certain conditions were met."

At the mention of the labyrinth, Snow immediately thought of the place he himself had encountered.

"That labyrinth... I think I can cross it. In fact, I already have," Snow admitted with a crooked smile.

Frey chuckled, unsurprised. "As expected of Vermithor's bearer. Their defenses mean nothing to you."

"To be honest, it didn't feel like a labyrinth at all," Snow said. "I simply followed a trail of aura I felt drawn to—and it led me straight to their sanctuary. A strange temple, shaped like a towering spire. At its peak... a tree."

"A tree?" Frey asked, narrowing his eyes. Snow nodded.

"Yes. A golden tree radiating the purest aura I've ever seen."

The moment Snow mentioned the tree, Frey fell into deep thought. Snow noticed his reaction at once.

“You... you know something about it, don’t you?” he asked, not expecting an answer.

But to his surprise, Frey nodded.

“In a way... yes. I believe I know what that tree is. Most likely... it’s the World Tree.”

“The World Tree?”

“Yes... though I’m not entirely certain. A tree of that kind shouldn’t even exist here, on Earth. Though honestly...” Frey smirked darkly, lifting his gaze toward the star-studded sky and the colossal moon above, “...I doubt we’re still on Earth at all.”

“I don’t know much about the World Tree. But what I do know is that its very appearance requires a power on the level of the one who forged the blade in your hands.”

“The same one who forged Vermithor... Are you talking about the Lord of Light?”

“That’s right.”

Frey’s reply sank into silence, a grim possibility flashing across Snow’s mind.

“Are you saying the Lord of Light truly stands with the Church?” If that were true, it would mean they had no chance of victory at all.

But Frey shook his head firmly.

“Impossible. The Lord of Light only cares for one human—the chosen wielder of the sacred blade he forged himself. In other words, you, Snow. If the Lord of Light sides with anyone... it’s you.”

Snow blinked in surprise, then lowered his gaze to Vermithor, the sword that had been resonating with him more and more each day.

“That doesn’t make sense. If the Lord of Light truly stands with me, then why issue such twisted decrees? To exterminate the Starlights, the Valerions... If he’s on my side, he’d know I’d stand with them. Why would he push me into fighting his own followers?” Snow demanded, his voice tight with confusion.

Frey was quiet for a while, as though he too had wrestled with the same thought for long. Finally, behind the mask of Nameless, he muttered:

“In that case... are we so sure the Lord of Light gave those commands in the first place?”

“...What?” Snow breathed, stunned.

“Think about it,” Frey pressed. “Isn’t the Tablet of Revelation supposed to be the means by which the Lord of Light communicates with mortals?”

“Yes,” Snow said cautiously.

“And do you really believe that? That a being of such immense power needs pawns of flesh to slay his enemies for him? That he’d scrawl his will into some worthless slab, instead of speaking directly to his chosen messenger on this earth—you?”

The thought struck like lightning. Had the Lord of Light truly given those orders? And if so, why address them to the Church rather than Snow—the very vessel of his will?

Questions, endless and grim, spread like cracks through their certainties.

Frey hadn’t known about the Three Decrees until recently, when the Church had turned against them. Yet suspicion had gnawed at him from the moment he’d heard of them.

“I have no proof. But keep this possibility in mind, Snow... There’s a strong chance it’s not the Lord of Light at all—but High Bishop Blattier and his ilk, pulling the strings in his name.”

“And by doing so, they can deceive every last soul who bows to their false god, making them obey without question.”

As long as the name of the Lord of Light was invoked, the faithful would do anything.

“If you’re right,” Snow said darkly, “then this entire religion was built on a lie...”

A faith that had ruled the earth for centuries. With vast legions of followers. Its history, its structure, its very existence—nothing but a fabrication spun by men.

“The Lord of Light exists,” Frey admitted. “But he isn’t a god. He’s a powerful being, yes. Perhaps even unimaginably so. But nothing more than that.”

The weight of the truth hung between them. Snow sat in silence, his thoughts reeling. The Lord of Light was real, but not divine—merely another entity of great power within the vast, merciless cosmos.

There were far greater beings still. The Demon King Agaroth. The First Seat, Crimson, whose presence was said to rival even the Demon King. The Pantheon’s King, Medir. The mysterious Great One’s.

So many monsters under the same heavens. And in comparison, they were but dust. Frey had lived with this awareness for a long time. Snow was only now beginning to walk that path.

It was a road that led easily to despair. And perhaps for that reason, Snow rose to his feet with a strained smile.

“Then let’s go, Frey. Let’s put an end to this.”