

## VILLAIN 621

### Chapter 621: The End of Shadow and Light (2)

Aegon's praise sounded sincere. He clearly hadn't known about Liora's intervention .. she'd appeared after his escape from Nocthera.

Still, he'd sensed something had happened, so he'd sent Calistes on ahead and lingered to watch. He had tried to return to the heights, but Liora's barriers had turned him back .. and Frey had marked his presence the moment they descended; his aura had returned in full.

"Aegon... you knew everything from the beginning, didn't you?" Snow asked, cold.

"I did. Calistes has been mine for a long time. I apologize for the deception .. but it was the optimal way to bring the Church down," Aegon replied.

"The optimal way to bring the Church down... and the best way to make you the biggest winner, right?" Snow sighed, annoyed.

Snow was beginning to understand the prince better and better .. now able to glimpse a piece of the real power that made Aegon so consequential on the board.

"Where are the War Angels?" Frey asked this time.

The Church had possessed two War Angels at SS+ .. both of which now belonged to Aegon.

"They're under Bishop Calistes's control. He is, of course, wholly loyal to me," Aegon answered without hiding a thing.

"In other words, they're under your control," Frey said, a dry laugh slipping free.

At day's end, Aegon had acquired three SS+ .. class weapons: two War Angels .. and the turncoat bishop.

The finale hadn't gone exactly to plan thanks to Blattier, but overall...

He was the greatest beneficiary.

"Those angels are the crystallization of thousands of lives sacrificed," Uriel said, remembering how Blattier had seized them. "Weapons that should never have existed."

The Path of Sacrifice.

It had nothing to do with the Lord of Light. How the Church had laid hands on it remained a mystery.

"From now on, these weapons will be harnessed for the Empire. I'd say that's the most fitting use," Aegon smiled, eyes closed.

Silence held for a few seconds.

"A crushing victory for our side, then—yes?" Frey asked with a smile. Aegon nodded.

"Correct. We've won, and all that remains is to crush the Ultras and end the war."

Aegon's gaze slid over the three before him, his mind working as always to ferret out the truth behind them. He wanted to know what had happened the moment he'd left .. but he knew these three would never tell him.

No hurry. There were many ways to reach the truth. That was his specialty.

Once the four were together, Snow gave Frey a nod to teleport them back to Imperial forces; he had no desire to deal with the prince any longer.

But Frey didn't move. He stood there, head bowed, looking at his clenched fist.

"Crushing the Ultras and ending the war... that would be a lovely ending," he murmured.  
"Unfortunately, the Ultras aren't our only enemies."

Slowly, the air around Frey seemed to change.

Slower. Heavier.

"Our enemies are everywhere .. lurking in the shadows, watching from every side, waiting to strip us of everything we hold dear.

"The Church was only the beginning. What's coming is far worse."

He lifted his face to the sun blazing over their world, eyes narrowing by degrees.

"The Ultras. The demons. And many more."

"They're all our enemies."

Aegon nodded. ""You're right .. the game will only get harder, which means we'll have to play better, won't we?" the prince said, playing along with Frey.

"That's right," Frey answered. "Because we won't win..."

He paused. A baleful gleam flared in his eyes, a chill racing the spines of everyone present.

"...until every last one of our enemies is dead."

SLASH!!!

None of them understood what had happened until it was too late.

They grasped the truth only when the blood fountained .. and that dreadful black blade flashed into view:

Balerion—the Black Terror.

With a single stroke carrying all of Frey Starlight's might, he severed Aegon's neck at a speed beyond comprehension. The prince's head spun away through the air as his body toppled, slowly, into its own spreading blood.

"...Huh?" was all that slipped from Aegon's lips before his head rolled across the ground, painting a thin red line.

It felt unreal. Impossible.

Frey stood there, staring down at Aegon's corpse ... undisguised contempt dark in his eyes.

As for Snow Lionheart and Uriel, both froze, unable to process what had just happened.

Stunned, Snow opened his mouth and asked,

"Frey... what did you do?"

"Something I should've done a long time ago." Frey answered at once.

Turning away, leaving the prince's corpse behind him, Frey came back to the other two. "Let's leave this place."

Ignoring their looks, Frey sank inward, preparing to trigger his teleportation. In those brief seconds, his eyes fell on a line on his system interface:

Current Achievement Points: 0

'I'm tired'...

Remembering everything from the start of the war, Frey felt exhausted—not in body, but in spirit.

In that fleeting moment, memories flashed .. things he had buried deep, and the reason he had refused to use the system's powers during the war.

-Glimpse of the Future-

As his enemies multiplied and the war grew more vicious than ever, outcomes became uncertain. The chance of defeat rose.

Unable to shake the dread of what lay ahead, he had used that power again and again, trying to see where the war would end.

The Glimpse had shown him dozens of scenarios already. He'd used it so often his Achievement Points had run dry.

But no matter how he tried, no matter what he changed, the Glimpse showed only one ending.

At the end of the war, far ahead in the future...

He saw a sea of corpses. A place where death had spread and life had been stripped away.

Bodies of the Empire's warriors .. every last one of them. All dead.

Every time, standing there, he understood:

"We lost."

Every time... they lost. And what made it worse was that he could never discern exactly how they lost.

So Frey had tried to change the future again and again, but whatever the scenario, the result never shifted.

"I'm tired..."

He was tired of the visions he'd seen .. unaware that using that ability so often had side effects on those around him as well, making them catch fleeting glimpses of their distant futures.

Pushed to his limit by all he had seen, Frey chose to play rough this time, to face everything head-on...

And the first step was that damned prince.

"The end is close. There's no room left to retreat."

Either they won and escaped the fate set for them...

Or they lost, and were dragged along by the dark current of destiny toward ruin.

Taking hold of both Snow and Uriel, Frey prepared to return and plunge into the final act of the War of Darkness .. the Chapter that would end the conflict between the Empire and the Ultras once and for all.

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Far from Frey and the others—high in the sky—

Sitting quietly in the center of a vast crater of devastation, Geppetto exhaled.

"That saint surpassed my expectations. Who would've thought she'd go so far .. burning her body, destroying it completely .. just to keep me from taking her?"

He sounded annoyed, and that was all. As expected, he had won. The saint was dead.

But the end hadn't been what he wanted.

The island had become a mass of ruin, their battle a natural disaster.

"She would've made a splendid addition to my collection... but it doesn't matter now."

Floating slowly away from the island .. which had already begun to fall .. Geppetto left once his task was done.

"I wonder how Zibar is doing..."

The battle raging in the shadows had reached its own peak . It wouldn't be long before everything was dragged into the light.

Between humans and demons, a bitter struggle awaited .. and only the future would answer who would stand victorious in the end.

Chapter 622: The Soul of Reincarnation (1)

The first half of the War of Darkness had ended, and the Church was the first to fall .. resetting the war to where it began: Empire versus Ultras.

The Church had been an entirely unforeseen variable, wielding colossal weapons that could have tipped the conflict decisively in its favor.

But its fall was swift and brutal.

It took only three imperial fighters to bring it down. What the world at large didn't know, however, was that the battle on Noctera had far surpassed imagination.

The dead were counted in the millions .. the highest toll yet.

Powers that had lurked in the shadows began to step forward, one after another, and the rate at which the balance of power climbed was becoming alarmingly dangerous.

Liora, the Saint of Dawn, was the first to fall after Geppetto's sudden appearance. He had been actively hunting those like her ... figures who had hidden themselves in the dark .. and this was only the beginning of the tragedy.

Just as the world turned upside down on the Sacred Island of Nocterra, another event shook the world elsewhere at that very moment...

There, in the Eastern Nightmare Lands .. in the cleared zone Frey Starlight had scoured after annihilating most of the nightmare creatures that dwelled there ..

the place was quiet and desolate, especially that ancient sect whose size had swelled into a great city, its walls built of jet-black stone of tremendous hardness.

The Shadow Sect was calm as ever, its ramparts standing proud against anything that dared approach...

But the enemy did not come from the earth. He came from the sky.



Under the wing of night, he descended slowly .. a cursed creature whose mere appearance would breed nightmares in anyone who saw him.

His skin was black and blistered, his eyes a deep, drowned violet.

A pair of long horns crowned his head, and a long black cloak billowed behind his back.

In parallel with the events on the Sacred Island, the Shadow Sect received a heavy guest who intended to knock upon its door—and unveil what its walls concealed.

Rank Ten, the One-Man Army: Zibar.

His eyes swept over the entire sect with idle curiosity before settling on the tall walls rising before him.

There, a old man in black sat ..his eyes closed, scored by deep scars.

A blind elder, calm even beneath the insane pressure pouring from Zibar.

Zibar narrowed his eyes, recognizing the elder before him.

"I came here expecting many variables, but I never accounted for you being one of them," Zibar said, a mocking smile tugging at his lips.

"Aren't you the fool who once dared call himself the Sword god? Only to end up as nothing but a toy in Wesker's hands." The more he looked at the withered elder, the wider Zibar's smile grew.

"What's the matter, Avalon? Haven't you been hiding all these years, afraid of the likes of me? Or did you finally muster the courage to stand before me and die?" With a pressure that made earth and sky quake, Zibar's voice rose beside the ears of the blind Avalon.

"Answer me, Avalon!" Zibar roared, threatening, as Avalon lifted his head toward him, staring with the empty hollows where his eyes had been.

Then, without warning, the old man unleashed all his strength, shaping a pure white sword from the Aura of Light ..

his greatest blade of all: Colinal.

"I've lived my whole life eaten away by fear... and I'm still afraid, even now. I know I'm not your equal, demon."

Between light and darkness, there was a clear divide.

Avalon had reached Stage Two of SSS .. Pulse of Chaos .

This stage brought a violent surge of power that slipped free of control and turned utterly chaotic. It granted many and varied abilities to those who reached it, but in exchange it was a brutally difficult level .. surpassing it required mastering that chaos completely.

Avalon had been stuck there for many years, and he knew it was his limit.

Zibar, however, had surpassed it long ago.

"The peak of Stage Three .. Origin Revelation "

"Correct," Zibar said with a smile. "That's the level this incarnation reflects."

His words, and the pressure radiating from him, removed all doubt.

This copy present on Earth represented at least 80% percent of the original's power .. that much was now obvious.

Avalon understood that the one before him was no ordinary foe, but the bearer of one of Agaroth's Six Souls.

That alone placed Zibar at the summit of power.

"Tell me," Zibar asked, advancing slowly, "how would you like to die, Avalon?"

He spoke with scorn. Zibar fully intended to kill Avalon, even if the latter was one of Wesker's playthings.

The old man weathered the demon's pressure without moving an inch.

"You can answer that yourself," he said. "You're the one who dies today, damned demon!"

Letting out a feral howl, Avalon erased the distance in a single step and loosed a thunderous slash aimed at the demon's neck.

Colinal was swift and terrifying; in mere heartbeats it struck, detonating with a blast that shook the void.

But the blade never reached Zibar's throat; he caught it with one hand.

"Pathetic," Zibar sneered, thrusting his free hand toward Avalon.

But Avalon instantly warped the Aura of Light, forming thousands of colossal swords around them .. swords that hurtled forth to engulf them both.

Zibar unfurled a dark halo around his body at once, and the blades shattered one after another like glass the instant they touched him.

"Is that all you've got?" Zibar sounded irritated this time; Avalon's colossal strike had done nothing but blind him with light...

But that was exactly what the old man had banked on.

"Now!!"

Avalon's shout rang wide, and from behind that vast curtain of light... Zibar felt it coming.

Guarding with his free hand, he received the colossal scythe that struck him out of nowhere.

The momentum of the blow sent the demon hurtling, smashing him toward the ground before he rebounded across it, carving a trail of devastation behind him.

"..."

Staring up, Zibar's eyes fixed on the wrath-faced statue that had appeared from nothing to attack him.

"A black statue... this drags up unpleasant memories I thought I buried long ago," Zibar said with a smile, then slammed the ground beneath him and lunged toward Angri.

"Let's see how sturdy your craftsmanship is!"

Gathering a terrifying quantity of Aura around his fist, Zibar threw a ruinous punch at Angry .. too fast for his opponent to react.

But at the last instant, Zibar halted and moved his hands with deft precision to parry what came from right and left.

On his right stood a strange man wielding a spear; on his left, a cursed, hunched old man with a sword.

Their weapons ground violently against Zibar's fists. He held them off with skill—only to be slammed a heartbeat later by a coordinated assault from Angri and Avalon, forcing him to give ground.

"Four against one... funny that I, of all people, should be outnumbered," Zibar laughed, unfazed by the arrival of more enemies.

He didn't finish laughing before a roaring black arrow plunged from the sky, exploding against him and everything beneath.

Zibar recoiled instantly, catching the arrow in his left hand after deflecting it—only to be met by dozens more, screaming toward him from every direction.

"Hah!!"

Mouth opening, Zibar unleashed a torrent of Aura that swallowed the arrows and ground them to dust.

And the moment he did, the ground vanished beneath him as the maw of a colossal beast .. hundreds of meters across at least .. erupted upward.

It threatened to swallow him whole, a thing wrought entirely of pure Aura.

#### Chapter 623: The Soul of Reincarnation (2)

Flinging the arrow from his hand, Zibar wrapped his fist in Dark Aura and obliterated the beast below him, the detonation slamming against the Shadow Sect's walls as a curtain of mist billowed out, veiling everything around them.

Seconds later, a hoarse, menacing laugh spread through the smoke as Zibar stepped out slowly from behind the drifting shroud.

"Ha! Six against one? Have mercy on me!"

Dusting his cloak, Zibar smiled as he looked over his new hosts.

'Wave Controller .. looks like a mere child who hasn't even come of age... which only proves absolute control. Impressive.'

The one behind that sweeping, crushing attack was just a blond boy in a hood.

He had taken position behind the others, ready to strike at any moment.

Farther back still stood a dark-skinned woman bearing a great bow—the source of those terrifying arrows.

Two duelists, a tank, a spearman, a Wave Controller, and an archer...

All of them were SSS-tier.

It was a terrifying formation, but Zibar kept probing for whatever lay hidden beyond them.

"Where is your leader? I don't see him among you," Zibar asked, as the spearman advanced with Angri at his side.

"There's no need for him. You're not leaving this place alive."

"I see," Zibar said—then opened his mouth again in their faces.

"Show me what you've got!"

BOOOOOOM!!!

Spewing a roaring beam that tore the void ahead of him, Zibar blasted both the spearman and Angri back at once, then surged toward the rest.

In mere seconds he crashed into Avalon and the other duelist, trading blows at the speed of light.

All the while, his body absorbed hundreds of arrows that shattered one after another against him.

They came from everywhere, skimming past Avalon and the other duelist by a hair's breadth...

And that wasn't all—every shot was placed with perfect precision on vital points.

"What a terrifying archer..."

Zibar muttered as he snapped into a rapid retreat .. the sky had lit with a strange, deep blue, and rains of Aura were cascading down on him.

The Wave Controller was relentless, targeting every opening the demon showed.

BOOOOM!!!

Assaulted from all sides, Zibar evaded everything as four fighters hounded him at once while two more attacked from afar.

"They're beneath me in raw power, but they're closing the gap through coordination."

Forced into a high-tempo fight across multiple fronts, Zibar cranked his Aura output to the maximum .. unleashing thousands of strikes in seconds as he tried to break the encirclement.

But the attempt failed: Angri blocked him in tandem with the spearman, while the two duelists pressed him head-on.

Their coordination was terrifyingly flawless; they left no openings at all.

Bearing that insane pressure, Zibar's smile only widened with every blow he took.

"Entertaining enemies."

The flow of battle was entirely against Zibar, yet the demon didn't seem bothered in the least .. as if his current situation meant nothing to him.

What stood there was only a copy. A tremendously powerful copy... but a copy all the same.

When he found himself surrounded, Zibar's body flared with a strange radiance and his eyes lit up.

"Shall we tip the scales a little?"

Spreading both arms wide, Zibar unleashed a baleful pressure that froze everyone around him in place.

"This is—"

"The Soul of Reincarnation!"

Before their eyes, one of the world-breaking abilities appeared in full.

There are only Six Souls in existence—and the cursed Agaroth happens to possess them all.

The Demon King was a true enigma, for he also wielded an extra, world-breaking gift that let him share his powers with whomever he wished—as if it were the simplest thing in the world.



Zibar was one of the hosts of that immense might.

In a single instant, where there had been one, there were three, and the tide flipped completely.

"Three copies, each carrying fifty percent of the original's power..."

Though his individual strength had dropped, turning the fight into six-on-three let Zibar break the encirclement. Instead of facing six at once, each copy only needed to handle two.

"Even if my power falls to fifty percent, that applies only to my Aura output ... which means the force I can wield still sits within Origin Revelation!"

BOOOOOOM!!!

"I am one of the Top Ten Ranks! What made you think you could pen me, of all people in!?" Zibar laughed loud, turning the battlefield into hell.

But despite the unprecedented blast, his enemies withstood him savagely, barely shaken by what he'd done ..

as if they'd expected it.

Zibar was a true monster: physicality and hardness beyond imagination, with power and strikes that could butcher the likes of Blatir with ease.

Yet those six endured everything he hurled at them, fighting in silence without a single wasted word.

Their coordination, the way they moved...

It was as if one mind was fighting, piloting all their bodies.

"The battle's six-on-three... and I still can't seize the advantage."

Zibar's thoughts raced as he sought to break them.

At first he targeted the archer and the Wave Controller, but they turned him back—especially the bow-bearer. She was just as lethal up close as she was from afar.

"Just who exactly are those four?"

He scanned their faces. He recognized Avalon and Angri... but the other four were a mystery.

"I can't deploy more copies above fifty percent .. my original body, along with another at eighty percent, is already roaming the world..."

From the start, this demon had been only a copy. True, he hadn't overturned the tide against his foes... but they, in turn, had failed to crack his defense.

The fight was perfectly even; the outcome opaque; every possibility still on the table.

Relishing the battle, Zibar cut his thoughts short.

"No point overthinking .. let's smash each other with everything we've got and see who's left standing!!"

Meeting them head-to-head, Zibar made the six feel the terror of the Top Ten Demons, who hadn't budged from their thrones in thousands of years.

If a mere copy could hold off six SSS-tier fighters... what would happen if the real one came?

The thought alone was a nightmare .. let alone its realization.

Before the Shadow Sect, a battle shook the entire continent and drew a new ceiling for power upon the Earth.

Whether for the human side ..or for Zibar .

the victor would undoubtedly reshape the War of Darkness from this moment on.

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Far from the Eastern Nightmare Lands, back on the Ultras Continent ..

there raged the war everyone knew, far from what had transpired in the shadows.

There, specifically where the Empire's forces were positioned,

the field flashed violet as three figures appeared from nowhere, returning to the main battlefield.

On that day, Frey and Snow finally returned to rejoin their comrades .. having toppled the Church and completed their mission successfully.

Chapter 624: Surrounded by the Empire

On the Ultras Continent .. the stage that held the war's front line and the fiercest clash between the Empire and their eternal enemy .

three figures appeared out of nowhere near the encampments the Empire had made their base.

Frey Starlight set foot upon that dead land after an absence of several days, though it had felt far longer for him .. and for the others who'd been forced to face the Church and everything it hid behind its faith.

"We've been gone a while... I wonder what things look like here," Snow asked, face bleak, as he took his first step toward the allied camp.

"We'll face a harsh backlash, most likely... since the prince is no longer with us," Uriel said, eyes on Frey's back as he walked ahead with an expressionless face.

He had killed Aegon out of nowhere, catching them completely off guard .. they had never expected him to do such a thing.

Aegon had always been a filthy schemer, weaving his tricks in the dark and swaying those around him for ill or for good... but at the very least, he had fought on their side in this war.

Snow had thought that would be reason enough for Frey to spare him .. and the prince had seemed to have something up his sleeve that had stayed Frey's hand.

"We no longer have time to waste. The war is entering its final phase, and there's no point keeping the likes of Aegon around. From here on, you and I will end this war, Snow—and we'll crush anyone who stands in the way," Frey said, turning to Uriel.

"The fighting will be harsher than ever, and the death toll will far exceed the previous battles. With these hands, I'll kill the Ultras—slaughter them to the very last."

At the mere mention of what he was about to do, certain memories flashed through Uriel's mind .. back to the days she marched with Frey at the vanguard of the war; how the corpses piled into mountains and the blood ran in rivers.

It was a sight she would never forget for as long as she lived—and here was Frey telling her he was ready to go even further.

“We’re not heroes. We’re soldiers now. Our job is to win this war. Our hands will be stained one way or another, and that may be too much for you... but if you’re still willing to walk with us regardless, your help would be a great gain for us, Uriel.”

Frey pressed Uriel to decide .. and she did not hesitate long.

“My hands are far dirtier than yours, Frey. I’m the one who, one way or another, caused the deaths of millions. So don’t worry—I set my feet on the Blood Path a long time ago.”

Uriel spoke, and Frey nodded.

“Good.”

With their resolve settled, the three made for the camp.

As they drew near, the sentries spotted them, and word of their arrival spread quickly through the ranks.

Frey and his companions found a large number of soldiers waiting, eyes upon them with every kind of look .. faces reflecting a storm of feeling.

Some were grateful .. these were the heroes who had put an end to the Church and its designs .. but they could not properly celebrate, not with the number of lives the confrontation had cost.

Most of those present had lost at least one person dear to them. Yet overall...

awe was plain upon their faces, as if they were looking at some kind of legends walking on two feet.

Even so, that didn’t stop many from stepping forward to thank Frey and the others .. foremost among them Phoenix Sunlight, who had recovered much of his luster and vigor after the battle against the demons and the Angel of War.

Approaching them, he greeted them with a gentle smile.

“Welcome back.”

“Phoenix...” Frey muttered, scanning the camp around him.

He realized at once that the soldiers were far fewer than the last time he’d seen them .. and he couldn’t sense the presence of those close to him, like Sansa and Ghost...

“What happened here?” he asked, and Phoenix shook his head.

“Let’s join the others first—we’ve been waiting for you to arrive.”

“We’ve been... waiting for us?” Snow Lionheart echoed, puzzled.

It seemed Phoenix had expected them, and the soldiers’ reactions didn’t look surprised at all.

But Snow didn’t dwell on it .. he simply followed Phoenix and his group as the two led the way.

“That was a hard battle you were forced to endure,” Phoenix said. “I’m glad you all made it back alive.” Frey nodded.

“We won .. and that’s all that matters. But the war isn’t over.”

“You’re not wrong,” Phoenix agreed. “The Ultras began launching assault after assault the moment you left. As a result, we’ve been fighting without pause ever since.”

With an irritated sigh, Phoenix sketched the present situation in brief as they walked.

“The fighting is still ongoing. We just received word that Oliver Khan’s squad clashed with one of the Hollows.”

“Oliver Khan’s squad...” Frey whispered.

That was likely the unit Sansa was with.

Slowly, Frey’s eyes darkened as he opened the Third-Person Player Perspective to check on her.

Should I go to them... Frey thought, ready to head out and join the battle in earnest.

His intent was plain to those around him, and Phoenix hurried to dissuade him.

“Do you really mean to plunge back into the war the instant you return, Frey? Take a rest .. even you need it.”

Frey shook his head.

“I don’t need rest. I’m in my best condition.”

He was stubborn enough to make Phoenix chuckle despite himself.

“You claim you’re fine even after fighting an SSS-tier warrior... Just how much power do you have, Frey?” Phoenix said with a dry, weighty laugh.

But at those words, Frey’s .. and the others’ .. faces darkened.

“An SSS-tier warrior... Phoenix, how do you know we fought an opponent like that?” Frey asked, the question that had been gnawing at him finally taking shape as he began to realize just how strange the situation had become.

Likewise, Snow and Uriel did the same.

“The way they were waiting for us... as if they’d expected our arrival from the start. And now Phoenix is talking about Blattier...” Snow said, standing beside Uriel.

It was strange indeed. Phoenix .. or anyone in the Empire’s camp ..shouldn’t have known what had happened; there’d been no way to contact them. For him to know about Blatir’s breakthrough into SSS-tier was certainly suspicious.

Phoenix, for his part, tilted his head, equally puzzled by their reaction.

“What are you talking about? We’re fully aware of what happened to you on the Sacred Island .. you told us yourselves.”

Phoenix’s words only deepened Frey’s confusion and distrust.

“You’re telling me you know everything...?” In those scant moments, dozens of possibilities raced through Frey’s mind.

Had Aegon informed the Empire when he fled? Or was it Calistis, who left the island before them?

All were possible .. but Frey didn’t believe any of them, for some reason.

By the time they reached the command tent the Empire had taken as headquarters...

a certain line Phoenix had spoken began to ring in both Frey’s and Snow’s minds at once.

“Phoenix... you said earlier you were glad to see all of us make it back alive,” Frey said, his tone heavy.



## Chapter 625: Not Alone

Snow understood what he meant.

All of them alive?

That wasn't true at all.

One person was missing—someone who hadn't returned with them, whose corpse had been left to rot on the Sacred Island even as they spoke.

In that weighty instant, they both arrived at the same question:

Why hadn't anyone asked them about Aegon Valerion?

Coming back without the prince should have raised every alarm. It should have been the first thing Phoenix asked.

But he hadn't. He'd been calm .. genuinely pleased to see them .. and he seemed to know far too much about their clash with the Church.

"Who exactly told you what happened?" The moment Frey asked the question...

time itself seemed to stop.

Drawing back the flap and revealing the inside of the Empire's command tent,

Phoenix pointed to the truth, frowning at how astonished Frey and the others were.

"What are you getting at, Frey? The one who informed us was..."

The moment the door opened, faces Frey had already sensed came into view.

Seated in scattered places were all the Empire's great names.

Sir Alon Valerion, and even Maekar Valerion had returned.

Ivar and his brother Luc, and Iris Sunlight as well.

They were all there. But one more person sat among them ..

and it was the man whose presence shocked Frey, Snow, and Uriel as if they'd seen a ghost.

Sitting with one leg crossed over the other, leaning calmly on an arm braced on the chair,

he smiled in greeting.

"Of course .. the prince is the one who told us what happened to you," Phoenix said, gesturing to Aegon.

The prince sat there, quiet, wearing his usual smile ..

as if he were savoring their reaction.

"We were genuinely surprised when the prince returned alone a few days ago," Phoenix said with a smile.

"But he informed us of your victory and what transpired, and thanks to that we understood the situation and could act accordingly." His smile faded quickly as murderous intent flooded the tent.

Most present tensed; the eyes of Sir Alon and Maekar flared with a dangerous light.

All of it in answer to the suffocating killing intent pouring from Frey Starlight.

"You...Why the hell are you here?!" Frey asked, face black with fury, cold sweat breaking across those S-rank and below.

The prince didn't so much as flinch.

"Why am I here? Where else would I be?" he replied with confidence, reclining in his chair.

"I judged I no longer had a place among you there, so I returned ahead of you. I hope you don't mind... Frey~"

At those words, a terrifying violet light flashed in Frey's eyes as his thoughts raced.

How? When? Why is the damned prince still alive?

Was the one he killed before just a copy?

No—impossible.

Frey rejected the notion at once. The prince he'd slain with his own hands had been the real one who'd accompanied them the entire time.

Aegon couldn't create such a perfect copy .. unless he possessed something like Zibar's Soul of Reincarnation, which in Aegon's case was impossible.

So how had the prince survived?

And was the man before him truly Aegon Valerion? Frey couldn't sense him at all, even though he could feel the likes of Sir Alon and Maekar Valerion...

"Who are you?" Frey asked, voice leaden, tension flooding the room as everyone edged away from one another.

"You chose to play rough, Frey .. so don't blame me when my hand slips and reveals horrors you're not ready to endure."

"I see," Frey answered coolly, silence hanging for a heartbeat.

In the very next, a devastating Aura exploded from his body as he drew both his swords.

A colossal pressure shook the ground beneath him, and the prince sprang back at once.

Frey moved to pounce ..but halted when he was completely boxed in from both sides.

A terrifying fiery spear thrust in from his right, while a pure white blade flashed up from his left.

In the same instant, Sir Alon Valerion and Maekar Valerion hemmed him in, their weapons poised at his throat.

"Do not take another step, Frey Starlight," Sir Alon warned, his voice iron.

"What you're attempting now is direct rebellion against the ruling house and its next emperor. In other words... you are raising your weapon against the entire Empire." His words rang through the tent, and Maekar affirmed his father's decree.

"Stand down, Frey Starlight ..and sheathe your blades."

Steel at his neck, both men ready to strike, the pressure they exerted was no small thing.

Frey was unmoved.

"Do you truly believe you can stop me? I'm not the weak youth you could toy with anymore."

BOOOOM!!

With a single stroke, Frey knocked aside both Maekar's and Sir Alon's weapons, forcing them back.

In response, Ivar Valerion and Iris Sunlight closed in to flank him.

They didn't want to kill him .. but they were certainly not on his side.

One glance told Frey that Aegon had done something during their absence.

"When are you going to stop hiding behind other people's backs, Aegon? If these fools are the ones you're relying on, you should know better than anyone that I can cut through them with ease."

At Frey's threat, Aegon simply nodded.

"I'm perfectly aware. You're the monster who stood against SSS-tier fighters, after all."

Whatever he said, Aegon didn't seem rattled by being singled out.

"You're strong, Frey ..but are you ready to make the entire Empire your enemy just to kill me?"

As he spoke, the command tent tore open, revealing a staggering number of troops encircling the place.

It could be said that every imperial soldier present had converged to pen them in, ready for battle.

Casting a look over their faces and letting his Aura spread, Frey finally understood.

Among those gathered, not a single person stood on Frey Starlight's side.

All his allies and friends .. along with the soldiers who admired him and had sworn to fight for his sake ..had been driven off to join the ongoing battle outside while this meeting took place.

Surrounded on all sides, it felt like a carefully laid trap, prepared by Aegon Valerion from the very start, awaiting their return.

And it only cemented Frey's certainty that the prince before him was not the human he knew .. but something far beyond.

"What now, Frey? Will you raise your sword and butcher the very people you've been fighting for?"

Aegon walked slowly, drawing close to his grandfather and father.

"You're very strong. It's possible you could kill everyone here... but what would be left to you afterward?"

"The demons are your enemies. The Ultras are your enemies. The Church and its followers are your enemies... Will you make the Empire itself your enemy now?"

Aegon worked Frey's nerves, laying out the board.

"You can kill those present—but you will never kill me, Frey. I'm like an idea living in every citizen of this Empire. Wherever you go, you'll find people loyal to me, ready to fight for me. That is the result of what I've built for years while you floundered in your miserable life."

The message beneath his words was clear:

You cannot kill me.

## Chapter 626: Prelude to the Final Act

As if he were telling him that even if Frey killed him again now, Aegon would reappear sooner or later ..

and in the meantime, the entire Empire would become his enemy.

For Frey Starlight, who had fought multiple fronts at once and borne insane pressures no sane man could endure ..

was making the Empire his enemy as well truly the right choice?

That was the nerve Aegon pressed, the wedge he tried to drive into Frey.

Frey stood alone against the whole Empire.

He had the power to face them by himself .. but choosing to do so was another matter.

If he did, he would have no place left in this world to return to ..and whether he could kill Aegon at all was in doubt to begin with.

And then ..amid that crushing tension .

a second young man stepped up beside Frey.

Exerting a terrifying pressure to rival Frey's own, Snow Lionheart took his place at his friend's side, his body blazing with a fierce golden runic glow.

“You’re mistaken, Aegon. He isn’t alone.”

Raising Vermithor, Snow showed he was ready to fight.

“Between you and the Empire you’re trying to build, and Frey Starlight .. I’ll take his side without a shred of hesitation.”

Likewise, Uriel stepped forward to stand behind them both.

Aegon nodded, as if he’d expected exactly that.

“The Church’s hero... Shame your presence doesn’t carry the same weight anymore. The Lord of Light who chose you is cursed by mankind now as much as the demons.”

To the world, it appeared that the Lord of Light had caused the catastrophe of thirty-five million sacrifices—the orders seemed to have come from him.

Aegon had made no effort to correct that. He exploited it to the fullest.

Clearly, he had no intention of winning a straight fight against Frey Starlight ..

his aim was to strip Frey of the place he called home.

If Frey fought here, the Empire would turn on him. And if he didn’t...

The prince would simply carry on, exploiting Frey’s presence in the war.

He seemed confident that Frey wouldn’t be able to kill him, so either outcome amounted to a win for him ..at different costs.



What he truly wanted was to see which choice Frey would make...

to fight and start a massacre ..or to retreat, grinding his teeth.

“That’s enough. All of you ..we’re on the same side. There’s no point in fighting each other. Even if Frey is dangerous, I want to believe in him ..and in the necessity of his presence.”

Standing between them, Phoenix Sunlight stepped in, making clear his wish to defuse things as peacefully as possible.

On the other side, Snow stood before Frey, shielding him.

“Frey... let’s fall back for now,” he said, turning to his friend.

He’d shown he was ready to fight for Frey, but he didn’t want to kill imperial soldiers if it could be helped ..and he believed Frey felt the same. After all, both of them were fighting for the Empire first and foremost...

But Snow froze when a single look at Frey’s face told him a terrifying truth about the man standing before him.

“Frey... you—”

Shocked by what Frey was about to do, Snow lunged, gripping his shoulder.

“Frey! Come to your senses!”

Frey said nothing.

He turned his head to the right ..dozens of soldiers stared back at him with all kinds of eyes. He turned left ..more of them, with the same expressions.

Some of them feared him.

Some of them saw him as a monster to be used.

A killing machine. A weapon of war. A tool to slay their enemies.

A tool, drenched in blood, whose purpose was to win the war for them—and then be tossed aside once they had what they wanted.

This was the mindset of those Aegon had deliberately kept here for this very purpose.

In that moment, Frey wondered:

“Would I feel anything... if I killed them all?”

He wondered it honestly.

The soldiers. Sir Alon. Maekar. Ivar. Iris.

Whatever their strength, whatever their necessity to the war ..

Frey asked himself whether he needed any of them.

From the start, I’ve had nothing to rely on but my own strength. Power decides everything...

His emotions were the only thing making him hesitate ..but in this decisive instant,

Frey found his feelings toward them completely numb, realizing he wouldn't be affected at all even if he butchered every last one.

If I slaughter every soldier of the Empire—and then the Ultras after them ..the Blood Path will grant me immense power. Power enough to set my feet on a wholly different plane ..enough to stand against the mightiest demons.

What's the point of fighting for the Empire?

What's the point of sparing their lives?

In any case, the number of people who mattered to him was small ..and none of them were among this crowd.

Maybe they'd hate him if he did it.

Maybe they'd turn on him...

Frey saw no problem with that.

So long as I can gain the power I seek, casting aside these feelings is a paltry price to pay.

He said this, gripping his swords and taking his first step toward Aegon and the imperial soldiers.

Staring at him, Snow understood that his friend truly intended to make the entire world his enemy, without a shred of hesitation.

Realizing the scale of the danger, Snow pleaded for Frey to stop...

If a monster of Frey's caliber went off the leash now, the dead would number beyond counting ..and that only deepened Aegon's laughter across the way.

Frey didn't care. In those brief heartbeats, he remembered a certain presence he had seen in his visions ..

Nameless.

That strange being who had weighed so heavily upon his life.

That great warrior had always stood alone, steeped in solitude.

He forged no bonds, relied on no one.

He built his strength himself and achieved what none before him had ..and nearly defeated Agarothe, the Demon King.

That was the kind of power Frey Starlight sought. And if butchering imperial soldiers was the key,

he found himself unexpectedly ..ready to pay the price.

Like that, Frey prepared to fight ..

but at the last instant, he halted as a slender hand cracked across his face, snapping his head aside.

The slap rang out through the tent, and Snow blinked to see someone else standing in Frey's way.

Stunned, Frey slowly turned toward her .. Uriel stood before him, a complicated expression on her face, her hand still gleaming with halo-light after the blow.

"That's enough, Frey."

She pulled him into a fierce embrace; her body blazed with intense golden light, and the golden aura formed around her, taking the shape of six wings that burst from her back.

Gathering her power, she shaped countless golden chains that coiled around them both, binding Frey to her .. then stretched out to snare Snow as well.

Without warning, she blasted the ground beneath her and took to the sky.

She was fast, but Sir Alon and Maekar moved at once to stop her ..

and in moments they were upon her, only to recoil as Snow repelled them with a fearsome wave of light, hurling them back.

Snow backed Uriel immediately, and together they bore Frey away ..before he could cause a disaster.

From a distance, Aegon watched them go, his smile deepening.

“So it wasn’t your feelings that stopped you this time ..but your friends’,” Aegon said lightly, closing his eyes as he stepped back.

“It’s time to set the stage for the final act.”

#### Chapter 627: The Fated Descent (1)

After returning from the Sacred Island, Frey was stunned to see his counterpart, Prince Aegon Valerion, alive and well.

He had thought he’d killed him ..finished it. Instead, Frey found that Aegon would remain a thorn in his side for longer yet. Their struggle had been written to continue, and no one knew where it would lead.

Cornered and forced to decide, Frey had been a breath away from doing the unthinkable ..killing all those people to bring the prince down .. showing his full readiness to sacrifice them and feed the Blood Path with their souls.

It would have been a point of no return. But Uriel's last-second intervention prevented it.

Clinging to him, binding him with her chains, Uriel carried him into the sky while Snow followed, keeping them away from where Aegon and the others stood.

The prince had managed to draw most of the Empire's main strength to his side .. and to turn them against Frey. In many eyes, Frey was nothing but a blood-thirsty monster.

More monster than hero.. and the way he fought only reinforced that belief.

In the end, Frey was saved.

Not from his enemies. Not from Aegon.

From himself.

He was spared from making that dark choice ..and he owed it to his friends.

Resting against Uriel's chest, Frey looked at her for a while before closing his eyes, a wry smile tracing his lips.

"No need to hold me so tight. I'm not going anywhere," he said calmly, trying to make Uriel release him. She refused.

"Impossible. I won't let go until we're far enough away."

"And just how far is 'far enough'?" Frey asked, laughing.

"As far as it takes!!" Uriel shot back, flustered.

She flew in front with Frey, while Snow trailed behind to ensure no one ambushed them.

He was terrifyingly strong now .. after opening his Path, fending off the likes of Maekar and Sir Alon had become possible for him. Thanks to that, Uriel and Frey could pull away cleanly.

Once they had put real distance behind them, the oppressive haze around Frey lightened .. some of the killing intent he had poured at Aegon finally ebbing.

Even so, the tension never left Uriel.

"We could just use my teleportation ability instead of all this aimless flying, you know," Frey said. Uriel shook her head.

"You might use it to go back there and start a fight. So—no."

"Your logic's strange. If I truly wanted to fight, you wouldn't have been able to stop me in the first place ..and you know it," Frey answered with a soft laugh. Uriel scowled.

"I don't know what I should do, Frey... I really don't."

As they flew in uneasy quiet, Uriel admitted what was on her mind.

"You really meant to kill all those people I'm sure of it. Your face then... it was the same one I saw when you butchered those terrifying numbers of Ultras."

"That version of you... it frightens me."

Listening, Frey narrowed his eyes, remembering the mountains of corpses he himself had made while following the Blood Path.

"You've always walked in darkness. From the start, it's been there in you .. by degrees. And even with that dark nature, you were still the Frey I knew .. the same fractured soul that fights again and again to survive, bearing every kind of pain."

"No matter what happened or what your hands did, you didn't change .. you remained that same person, that same striver. But this time... had you really done it there, Frey, I felt it for the first time..."

Bitterly, Uriel voiced what she had sensed in those scant moments when Frey nearly crossed the line.

"I felt I would lose you. If you'd done it, you wouldn't have been the same person anymore."

People's choices decide their fate ..and how the world sees them.

For Frey, who was ready to sacrifice so much to gain power, perhaps this sacrifice would have gone far beyond the bounds... turning him into another kind of monster.

The very monster Liora, the Saint of Dawn, had warned her about.

Hearing Uriel's words, Frey wasn't surprised by her line of thought; he had expected such a reaction from the start.

"To be honest, I've always found the idea of death... comforting. Even delightful."

"Thinking my life could end at any moment—it brought with it a sense of freedom I'd always lacked. Freedom from the horrors and terrors this life kept throwing at me... But since I didn't die, I'm forced to face those horrors ..and pass through them."

"To do that, I need to sacrifice a lot... and of the many things I've given up so far, few remain ..and I am one of those few."

As the two descended slowly from the sky and set down on the slope of a distant hill, Frey smiled at Uriel and opened his heart.



"As you can see, Uriel, I don't mind. I don't mind sacrificing myself ..or losing my humanity and the image you all hold of me. I don't mind, so long as I achieve my aim. So long as I win in the end ..nothing else matters."

Hearing that, Uriel remembered fragments of the visions that had haunted her in the past.

Visions of a future where Frey appeared in a form she had never imagined ..an image of a cold monster marching over a horrifying number of corpses, paving his way with fire and blood.

Perhaps the Frey before her now reflected the seeds that would lead to that dark image she feared.

If he kept walking the path he'd chosen, he would reach that future sooner or later.

And what kind of future would that be?

Frey did look truly powerful in that future self ..but at what price?

He had shown complete readiness to do whatever it took to gain power. If the price turned out to be the lives of those around him..

her life, or Snow's, or anyone dear to him..

would Frey pay it? Would he hesitate?

The Frey of now did not seem like someone who would make that choice... but if the slaughter continued and his enemies grew stronger, it would only be a matter of time before he lost the last thing holding him back.

To become a lone monster of overwhelming power... but alone, with no one.

"I don't want that kind of future for you," Uriel said. Frey shook his head.

"Then you shouldn't stay near me. I'm not the hero you should be supporting."

He stepped back to put distance between them..but Uriel caught his face at once, stopping him from slipping away.

Erasing the space between them, she stole a deep kiss he never expected .. throwing her weight into it.

It wasn't the first time Frey had kissed a girl, but Uriel's lips carried a different taste .. and with that act she made her stance clear without words.

#### Chapter 628: The Fated Descent (2)

In those brief moments, Uriel remembered Liora's warning .. when the Saint of Dawn had told her to stay away from Frey.

But Uriel had never intended to abide by that warning. She had already chosen the one she wanted to walk beside, settling a decision she had wavered on her whole life.

Pulling back slowly, she lowered her head, hiding her flushed face, while Frey stared at her, surprise still plain on his.

"Uriel..."

"Sorry, but this is all I can offer you in my state," Uriel blurted.

"I might not be able to stop you like I did today next time .. but at the very least, I'll be there. Maybe my presence will help you hold on to yourself, even a little. I still lack the strength to make a real impact on the battlefield... but I'll work many times harder to narrow the gap, even a little. So..."

"Please let me stay with you ..to the very end."

Hearing her out, Frey realized Uriel had made her choice ..intent on staying by his side, to be his saint.

He could only wonder whether it was the right choice for her to make...

Before he could say anything, a third figure dropped onto the hill, cloaked in a light of pure gold.

Approaching, Snow looked at them for a beat, sensing the odd air between them.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked, uneasy. Frey and Uriel both shook their heads.

"Good. We're safe here ..Sir Alon and Maekar didn't chase for long ..but we could be attacked at any moment," Snow said.

"Unlikely," Frey replied. "That isn't Aegon's way."

The prince never moved at random ..that was what made him dangerous.

After one last look at Uriel, Frey shelved their conversation and turned his attention to Snow. Given where he stood, he didn't have much more to say to her anyway.

Snow still wore the War King aspect he'd adopted most of the time, to acclimate himself to his new Path of Light.

Forced to withdraw and flee before the situation escalated, the three of them now found themselves alone again.

None of them had expected to face this the moment they finally returned.

And between the prince and Frey, the latter's allies were few.

"I never imagined the prince would trick us like that," Snow said, unable to let it go. "Phoenix mentioned the prince returned several days ago ..that means the one we met on the Sacred Island was just a copy."

It was the only explanation ..but even that didn't make sense.

"My senses can track even those at SSS-tier... and I never once suspected the man before me was only a copy," Frey said, remembering the moment he took Aegon's head.

"At the time, I truly believed he was the real one."

But he wasn't.

The more Frey thought about it, the worse the pounding in his skull became.

"The only way to pull that off is one of two things: either a world-breaking ability that defies logic... or he's far stronger than I am."

And in either case...

those conditions shouldn't apply to Aegon.

He was clever and devious, full of surprises..but he had never been a strong warrior. Most of his strength came from outside means.

With that in mind, a frightening realization began to take hold in Frey—and Snow reached the same suspicion.

"Frey... could it be...?"

Frey nodded.

"I don't know what conspiracy we've stumbled into.. but that thing is filthy, not human... and perhaps not Aegon at all."

This suspicion had dogged Frey for a while .. especially since Aegon had managed to reach Frey's true name. At first he'd thought some entity stood behind him.

But after what had just happened, that possibility seemed smaller .. and another grew in its place:

This was not the human prince at all. It was something else entirely.

Faces darkening by degrees, Snow and Frey began to grasp the weight of what that implied.

"If that's true... then most of humanity is currently following an external entity that has nothing to do with them."

If so ..toward what end?

"Who the hell is Aegon Valerion?"

The answer was close. The more Frey learned about the prince, the more he understood the foul, bottomless abyss the man reflected.

It felt as if the fateful war they'd fought so far had become a play ..

a black play that toyed with the fate of millions, its strings all pulled from the shadows without anyone's knowledge.

Frey found himself stuck at the center of that theater ..and the amount he could still change was shrinking by the day.

Even after spending all his Achievement Points on the future-vision ability, he saw only defeat and death ahead.

To change that ill fate, he had to move at once.

"Let's go," Frey said, voice low.

"To where?" Snow asked.

"To our comrades..."

Gathering together, Frey chose to teleport to the main front where the war against the Ultras raged.

The Empire would now split .. though "split" was barely the word.

Most would stand with Aegon, while a few might fight beside Frey.

Surrounded by enemies once more, Frey decided to do only what he had intended from the very beginning:

Fight.

Hurl himself into the battlefield, follow the Blood Path, and seize as much power as possible to face whatever stood before him from this moment on.

The level was rising .. and deadlier clashes waited ahead.

...

...

...

Far from where Frey stood .. on the other side of the world ..

amid the forests of the Eastern Nightmare Lands, a certain figure stumbled from tree to tree, clutching at trunks as he pushed on.

He looked exhausted and wounded... yet his expression was the same as ever.

Pausing a moment, he glanced down at his battered body and let out a muffled laugh.

"They really got me this time..."

Zibar, Rank Ten .. had left the field in a crushing defeat after a grueling solo battle against the Shadow Sect's fighters.

In the end, only one copy survived .. carrying 50% of his power.

True, the copy that fought had not been the main body and possessed only 80% of the original's strength.

But that didn't change the fact that one of the Top Ten Demons had lost the battle.

"How pathetic," Zibar said with that same dry chuckle .. then froze as another voice sounded nearby.

"Yes... you are pathetic, Zibar."

A voice sweet ..and filthy as always.

From the shadows, another demon emerged.

### Chapter 629: The Fated Descent (3)

This time he came in his true form, and Zibar's eyes narrowed.

A cursed demon said to resemble Agaroth in his earliest days ..

a demon with three terrifying crimson eyes and a grin splitting his face from ear to ear.

"Wesker," Zibar said, naming his counterpart as the two stood face-to-face.

"I didn't expect you to come in person anytime soon," Zibar added, feeling the pressure of standing before him.

This present copy carried only half his power ..nowhere near enough to face Wesker.

And Wesker looked exactly as he had nineteen years ago, as if it had been only yesterday.

"You're not wrong. I don't intend to appear in public... not yet."

"What are you planning this time?" Zibar asked, genuine curiosity in his voice. Wesker shook his head.

"I would have told you .. but you're a failure who just suffered a resounding defeat. I see no point in informing you of anything." Wesker laughed loudly, circling Zibar.

"I told you plainly, didn't I? I told you to bring your main body, and you disobeyed .. sending a pathetic copy instead."



At Wesker's taunt, Zibar didn't seem affected at all ..which only proved he was used to Wesker's whims and tricks.

And since both were among the Top Ten, Zibar showed no submission before him, even with the gulf in their strength.

"Yes... I remember you said that. I assume it was based on what your King's Eye saw, wasn't it?"

Wesker nodded. "That's correct."

The King's Eye could see fate and the future; he had likely known Zibar would face the Shadow Sect's fighters and had been fully aware of their strength.

That was why he ordered Zibar to use his main body in the fight .. but Zibar ignored the order, and it cost him.

"Forgive me, but that eye of yours hasn't been very reliable lately. As far as I know, it's colliding with a world-breaking ability of the same kind, isn't it?"

Again, Wesker nodded. "Also correct. But I can still see beyond the scope of the likes of you, Zibar. You should have listened .. instead of returning with your tail between your legs..."

Wesker pressed, mocking. Zibar answered at once:

"You seem to enjoy ridiculing me .. even though you, too, suffered a humiliating loss to a human in the past. Wesker, do you think I don't know what really happened?"

Wesker laughed louder. "Well... you're not wrong."

"We don't have much time to waste," Zibar said. "The world is convulsing, and the King.. together with Crimson .. refuse to move."

With that, Zibar stepped forward until he was shoulder to shoulder with Wesker.

Both were towering .. figures fit only for nightmares.

Darkness wreathed them as Zibar's violet eyes met Wesker's blood-red ones.

"Since I possess the Soul of Reincarnation, I've sent thousands of copies of myself roaming the world .. to feel out any wave that might rise from nothing one day. And I can say with certainty: what's coming is a tidal wave."

"Wesker... your presence will be necessary. Whatever play you're staging this time, you'd best wrap it up quickly."

Wesker shook his head in reply.

"So long as the King does not summon me, I see no need to return. Marvas is more than enough there in Helmond."

"I knew you'd say something like that..." Zibar sighed, walking past him.

"That Frey Starlight .. what's his secret? Why are you so obsessed with him?"

"Why? Has he caught your interest, Zibar?"

"..."

Zibar paused and looked up at the sky.

"This world has begun to forget the terror of demons. The races gained their freedom after the King withdrew, and many warriors have appeared .. said to stand at the level of the Seven Great Powers."

"The Great Ones themselves have begun to move strangely, after leaving no trace in this world for so long."

As he spoke, both his and Wesker's eyes fell upon the vast birds sweeping across the heavens ..

the Chaos-Eaters, counted among the Great Ones.

"They say their stirrings are paving the way for an ancient calamity... a disaster the ancients feared . and even the King said little about."

"I think such a calamity deserves far more attention than chasing the remnants of Nameless, who've become mere ghosts of what they once were," Zibar said with a smile, turning back to Wesker.

"For that reason, I won't be following your instructions anymore. I'll join the war of men myself."

In that moment, Zibar stated it plainly ..he would step out of the shadows, threatening to upend Wesker's plan.

"Frey Starlight ..I want to see his true mettle for myself."

Zibar's personal involvement would hasten the end, without question ..or so the Rank Ten demon was counting on.

Even as a copy bearing half his power, he still had enough to crush any human.

By moving now, he was directly defying Wesker ..and so he expected a reaction.

But the fourth-ranked demon made no move.

"Seeing that this body of mine is still intact... it seems you truly intend to watch to the very end."

Wesker nodded.

"Do as you like, Zibar. You're free to interfere as you wish."

From the start, Wesker's smile hadn't shifted .. and that made Zibar laugh aloud.

"You... you predicted this from the beginning, didn't you?"

At that, Wesker's King's Eye flared .. and Zibar's certainty deepened.

"Perhaps I did, perhaps I didn't," Wesker said. "What matters now, Zibar, is that I need you to take care of a few tasks for me before you do what you intend."

He stepped closer.

"That's why I've appeared before you today."

"What kind of tasks?" Zibar asked, wary. Wesker's smile widened.

"The dirty kind .. the sort only demons would commit."

Far from the world's sight, Wesker spread his poison .. his courier none other than the Rank Ten demon, Zibar.

And Zibar, for his part, showed his readiness to join the War of Darkness .. a warning of a shattering catastrophe looming on the horizon.

The second half was destined to be more chaotic than ever before... and darker than any age that had ever passed.

## Chapter 630: The War of Three Fronts (1)

—Frey Starlight's POV—

A lot had happened, and life had started taking strange turns lately...

Bracing myself, I took hold of both Uriel and Snow, readying to use teleportation.

"Our destination is our comrades at the vanguard," I confirmed what we were about to do, triggered my ability, and we all shifted .. teleporting for the second time that day.

"What if Aegon set some kind of trap there?" Snow asked, considering the possibility. I simply shook my head.

"Unlikely. And even if he did... we have plenty of allies there."

My target was Sansa ..with Ghost and most of those who had followed me into the war at her side.

Even if Aegon tried some trick, our individual power was far beyond what he could handle. With Snow and me together, we're a force they can't manage.

So I was confident we'd arrive safely. Even so, because of the wild Aura fluctuations I sensed where Sansa and the others were, it had become difficult to land exactly on their position.

"We'll probably drop somewhere close to the battlefield, so be ready for anything."

At my warning, Snow and Uriel both nodded, and I began at once.

Teleportation was instantaneous; reality flipped on its head, and we found ourselves in a different spot on the Ultras Continent...

The dead earth and suffocating sky were the same, but things were tangled .. and within seconds the sound of screams and clashing weapons reached us from nearby.

Before us sprawled a wide, barren plain, the ground smeared with blood. A thunderous battle was raging there now.

A closer look told me the enemies weren't human at all... but something else entirely .. something I knew well.

"These are..." Snow began, trying to parse what he was seeing. I took over.

"Puppets."

Puppets animated by a strange blue fluid that served as their blood ..

the very same puppets I'd faced in the past when I clashed with Simon Manus.

I'd thought I destroyed most of them, but the number before me was horrifying ..so great that our imperial forces were being pushed to the brink.

I didn't know the full situation, but I moved at once with Snow.

"Questions later! For now .. help them!"

"I don't need you to tell me that!"

In a lightning flash, Snow and I surged forward, Uriel following behind.

It took only seconds to join the fight, and our arrival sent ripples of chaos through the ranks ..drawing every eye.

Slash!!!!

With Vermithor's light, and Balerion's darkness ..

we tore through the puppets at high speed, driving straight through their lines with the intent to wipe them all out.

Our faces were known; the imperial side recognized us both, and their morale spiked at once.

"It's Snow Lionheart and Frey Starlight!"

"They've finally returned!"

Seeing the soldiers cheer, I realized Aegon's ploys hadn't reached this front yet. If they were hostile to me, they wouldn't have reacted like this ..

so at the very least... they weren't enemies.

With that settled, I focused entirely on erasing the foes before me and stopped paying attention to what lay behind.

Slash!!

My blade sheared metal with ease; the puppets didn't stand a chance.

Now and then I spotted familiar faces among them..like the policeman puppet that used electricity...

Or the fat clown who once swallowed one of my lookalikes, Clana Starlight, long ago...

Thinking of those times dredged up bitter memories. Somewhere inside, her specter still haunted me to this day...

Shredding puppets that burst into flame each time they died, I found myself frustrated with the whole situation.

Destroying puppets didn't count toward the Blood Path at all ..meaning I couldn't increase my power by killing them ..and they stirred up hateful memories besides.

All of it pushed me to end the battle as fast as possible.

Their numbers were immense, even if each was weak ..and that was why the Empire was losing to them.

I counted at least several thousand, crawling forward like ants from the distance ..as if some factory were churning them out without end...

"Seeing you stirred up foul memories I thought I'd buried, so don't blame me for playing rough."

Gathering Dark Aura, focusing all my strength ..

I released a colossal vertical cut, unleashing the strongest strike in my arsenal.

"Ten Thousand Steps of Shadow: Frey Starlight Style:

Nameless judgement!"



The instant it fired, time itself seemed to stall, and a black flood roared forth, swallowing puppets one after another .. along with everything around them.

That wave of darkness was terrifying to behold; its destructive reach went beyond imagining, leaving not a trace of the puppets it touched.

The darkness tunneled on for miles before finally detonating far ahead, sending a violet spark spearing into the sky ..

and the blow was enough to end thousands of puppets at once, heralding the end of the battle.

"I'm not used to seeing you use moves like that on this kind of enemy..." Snow said, tracing the path of ruin my strike had carved. He sounded surprised that I'd used one of my strongest techniques on foes like these.

"If we cut them down one by one, we'll never be done. This is the best way to deal with them."

"No argument here," Snow grinned, and the two of us turned toward the imperial forces.

With the enemy finished, it was time to hear from our allies.

Within seconds, a certain man stepped toward us ..

someone I hadn't seen in a long time.

"I was wondering where those violent Aura fluctuations were coming from... and it turns out it was you two ..the Hero of the Victoriad and the Church's Hero."

He approached, his body wreathed in a surging Aura shaped like serpents of lightning.

He wore a stunning golden cuirass ..a strange armor that suited his form so perfectly it looked like a part of him.

Blond hair... golden eyes... and an overwhelming build.

"Daemon..."

It was Daemon Valerion, one of my former classmates in the Elite Class.

"It's been a while, Starlight. I thought your last strike would kill me, but I came out without a scratch, unexpectedly. Can you really control your power that precisely?"

Daemon said with a mocking smile that couldn't hide his genuine surprise ..so much so it struck him as absurd.

I nodded, confirming his guess.

Earlier, Daemon had been up front fighting the puppets alone, so he was inside the range of Nameless judgement. But I sensed his presence ahead of time and screened him from the damage.

That was one of the perks I gained from the third stage of Shadow Adaptation:

perfect Aura control.

"Amazing... You two have gotten so strong it actually makes me angry."

"You don't look ordinary either," Snow answered, eyeing Daemon. "That strange armor you're wearing... something about it.. is doing something to you."

Snow wasn't wrong.

You could say the armor wasn't just something Daemon wore anymore ..it looked like a part of him, carved deep into his flesh and skin.

I noticed it too. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say around forty percent of Daemon's body had vanished and been replaced by the armor.

It was a bizarre phenomenon ..nothing I'd seen or heard of before ..but Daemon waved it off, turning away as he gestured for us to follow.

"Since you're back, you can help ..along with the saint with you," Daemon said flatly, leading the way.

We went with him, passing companies of soldiers ..hundreds strong who burst into applause and cheers.