

VILLAIN 89

Chapter 89: Unexpected Enemy

- Frey Starlight's Pov -

"Huff."

I exhaled a deep breath, the heat swirling around me as the sharp scent of sweat filled my nose.

"One, two, three..."

With the temple finally empty, I could now wield Balerion freely.

My training had become far more effective since I raised my talent to S-rank. My sword made a huge difference as well.

"One, two, three..."

It cut through the air itself. Unlike ordinary swords, I could unleash dozens of strikes in mere seconds with Balerion in my hands.

I had intensified my training ever since my battle with Feyrith. That fight had taught me a lot.

I couldn't rely solely on my sword. If I wasn't strong myself, it wouldn't make much of a difference.

I needed to strengthen my foundation and fully understand my abilities.

The power was already inside me—I just had to bring it out.

I sank into deep focus as I activated my new ability—

Ascension.

My expression sharpened, my eyes glowing with a dark violet light.

My entire perspective shifted. It felt as if I were looking at my body from a distance, with every unnecessary thought vanishing from my mind.

Now, all I saw was my sword. My mind focused on executing the most efficient and effective movements possible.

That alone elevated my aura control to new heights.

I could now draw upon far greater amounts of the aura slumbering within me.

Dark aura surged from my blade in powerful waves, carving deep scars into the ground around me.

If I had been fighting at 100% before, I was now pushing beyond those limits.

Breaking through one's limits—a rare phenomenon that occurred when warriors reached moments of enlightenment in battle or extreme training.

But Ascension allowed me to enter that state at will.

It was a reminder of just how terrifying this ability was.

But... nothing came without a price.

After just ten minutes of continuous use, a sharp migraine struck my mind, and droplets of blood splattered onto the ground.

I wiped my nose, feeling the warm trickle of blood, and pinched it shut while enduring the pounding pain in my head.

"Heh... Looks like ten minutes is my limit for now."

Any longer, and I might pass out.

Once again, this proved that my foundation was still too weak.

I glanced at the ground beneath me.

The scars my strikes had left were deep and crisscrossed chaotically. But...

"This isn't enough."

One of the things I realized after my fight with Feyrith—

My attacks couldn't kill him. They couldn't even leave a lasting wound.

I had to resort to an elaborate plan to outmaneuver him with Phantom Steps and take him down. If it had been a direct one-on-one, I would've lost.

In that case...

"I need a finisher. A move that lets me unleash everything. A strike capable of ending monsters like Feyrith in a single blow."

Fortunately, I already had an idea. But I would need an enormous amount of Achievement Points to make it a reality.

The fourth and final Skill—the key to securing my victory in the Victoriad.

"Be patient... Frey. Be patient."

I decided to stop overthinking it for now.

There was no point in dwelling on something I couldn't achieve yet.

Shaking off those thoughts, my mind wandered elsewhere—toward that old man.

Since Shaheen left the temple, I found myself training harder than usual... and getting lost in my thoughts much more often.

It had already been a week since the invasion.

I headed to my room for a quick shower, then stepped out for a nighttime stroll, hoping to ease the throbbing pain in my head caused by Ascension.

As I walked through the ruined temple grounds, I reflected on everything that had happened so far.

The Empire had already begun to move.

After drowning in public backlash and facing the fury of grieving families, they had to act.

So, they shifted the blame onto Headmaster Bloodmader, spreading the truth about his crimes far and wide.

And as expected...

They were handling public sentiment far better than I'd anticipated.

It was easy to control an angry crowd—just give them a tangible target to direct their rage at.

Now, Bloodmader was crucified in front of the Imperial Palace, exposed for the entire city to see.

Every day, hundreds of people gathered to hurl filth at him. Some even tried to kill him outright.

But Maekar wouldn't let him die just yet.

They planned to throw him into the coming war. And that was exactly what he wanted as well.

At least... that part of the story remained unchanged.

The real problem was me.

I sighed in frustration, thinking about what was coming next.

Since Frey Starlight was supposed to be dead at this point in the original timeline...

I had no idea what would happen next.

I had a general idea, but I didn't know the details. And that uncertainty had left me restless these past few days, anxiously waiting for the temple's next move.

The stress that I used to shake off at Shaheen's restaurant was now piling up without him around.

"Damn you, old man... Why the hell did you have to leave?"

I stood near a small lake, staring at the rippling water as old memories surfaced. But then—

I froze.

A strange sensation washed over me.

A feeling of... calmness.

As if all my fatigue was melting away.

I wasn't stupid. I knew this wasn't natural.

I immediately turned toward the source of that presence.

"Reveal yourself."

I deliberately hardened my voice.

In response, a woman stepped out of the darkness.

With flowing golden hair, ethereal blue eyes, and a voluptuous figure, she approached me with both hands raised in a disarming manner.

"Ah~ Sorry~ I didn't mean to intrude."

I let out a small sigh.

"No need to apologize... Ms Uriel. I should be thanking you for whatever you just did."

"Oh, don't mention it. You looked exhausted. Were you training?"

Matching her direct and casual tone, I nodded.

She responded with a teasing, seductive smile.

"Well done! I'm proud of you! Junior~"

"...Junior?"

Uriel nodded vigorously before explaining.

"Since I'm several years older than you, I should call you Junior! And you... should call me Senior!"

"...Seriously?"

My expression went blank.

Uriel caught on immediately.

"Go on~ Try calling me that."

"Call you what?"

"Senior~"

...Was I really about to call a Saint Candidate—a character I created—Senior?

Are we in a football club or something? Yeah, not happening.

I stuck out my tongue in disgust at the mere thought.

Besides, if we're talking about actual age, I'm already older than her.

"You won't?"

She asked again, prompting me to cut this pointless conversation short and get straight to the real issue.

"I'd rather call you as I did before... By the way, Ms Uriel, isn't it about time you told me why you've been following me?"

A subtle shift crossed her expression at my unexpected question.

She had tried to make this encounter seem coincidental, but I knew her far too well—she was one of the heroines in my story, after all.

"Hmm... I thought I hid myself well. You have sharp senses, Junior Frey~"

To be honest, I hadn't sensed a thing. It was almost laughable.

I had simply deduced it based on my knowledge of her true character—and it turned out I was right.

Now then, what do you want from me, dear Uriel Platini?

Her answer came swiftly, paired with that same playful smile.

"Would you believe me if I said I had no ulterior motives?"

Her feigned nonchalance only made her seem more suspicious.

With that alluring demeanor and an undeniable presence, it was hard to believe she was the Church's leading Saint Candidate.

I shrugged.

"I believe you. If you truly meant me harm, you wouldn't have gone through the trouble of hiding yourself."

She hadn't expected that response, but she quickly adapted, stepping closer.

"Those words... do you really mean them? That I'm stronger than you?"

"Of course. You're a Saint Candidate, while I'm just—"

"Actually, Frey Starlight, I followed you here because you caught my interest."

I didn't mind her cutting me off—she clearly saw herself as the senior one here.

"I caught your interest?"

Uriel nodded.

Her words reminded me of the time she had attempted to probe me, trying to confirm whether I was the Contractor.

Back then, Balerion had repelled her holy power.

I knew she had sensed that something was off... but I hadn't expected her to dig this deep.

"I heard you defeated the Main Contractor alongside the princess."

"That's right... Somehow, we managed to win by working together."

By now, the story of how Sansa, Ghost, and I had taken down Feyrith was already spreading, so there was no point in hiding it.

"I wonder if that's really how it happened."

"It's the truth."

Uriel smiled faintly at my swift response.

"I'll take your word for it."

A brief silence settled between us as we both gazed at the tranquil lake before us.

It was the only thing left untouched amidst the ruins and destruction.

The night atmosphere only made the scene more surreal.

Then, breaking the silence, Uriel turned to me with a soft smile, her hands resting behind her back.

"As the Church's leading Saint Candidate, I failed miserably when I couldn't identify the Contractor. But you corrected my mistake. So... how about a little gift from me?"

I smirked, deliberately twisting her words.

"What kind of gift?"

She didn't play along. Instead, she simply revealed what she had in mind.

"You're curious, aren't you? About what will happen to the Temple from now on."

My expression shifted instantly.

Now she had my full attention.

"Hehe~ Your curiosity is written all over your face."

"Unfortunately, I'm terrible at hiding my expressions... As for your gift, I'll gladly accept it."

If I could get an early insight into what was coming, I'd have time to prepare.

And that was invaluable to me.

"The official announcement will be made soon, but I managed to get this information a little earlier. No harm in sharing it with you."

Then, with a composed tone, she continued—

"It's simple, really, Junior Frey. The Temple is undergoing a major transformation. It's no longer an independent institution. External forces will now be involved."

I nodded—I already knew this much.

"The Great Houses... and the Church."

"That's correct."

Uriel smiled, pleased with how quickly I grasped the situation. It made her explanation much easier.

"Since the Temple will need time to rebuild, all students will be sent on training expeditions to major guilds. As for us Elite Students, we'll be sent to the Three Great Houses."

She glanced at me with an amused smile.

"So, Junior Frey... Which family do you think they assigned you to?"

I paused for a moment.

What she said aligned perfectly with the original events of the story.

As planned, everyone would undergo closed training within the Great Houses.

I already knew that much.

What I didn't know was which family I'd be sent to.

The logical choice would be the family that suited me best.

Which meant...

"House Starlight."

It was the only answer that made sense.

But Uriel shook her head.

"It's House Moonlight."

"...Hah?"

House Moonlight—the guardians of the Empire's Western Borders.

Seris' family.

That... didn't make sense.

"You look surprised, Junior Frey."

Uriel Platini seemed to enjoy reading my expression.

But I didn't let it bother me—I simply confirmed her words.

"Honestly... I am."

"And rightfully so."

She paused for a second before continuing.

"I came to see you today because I wanted to know you better. Frey Starlight, you're someone I may fight alongside in the future... a force that may prove essential to this Empire."

Then, with a slight change in tone, she added—

"That's why I need to warn you."

I listened carefully.

Everything she said gave me clues about what was happening now—and what was about to happen.

"External hands have interfered with your placement.

So never let your guard down... and don't die."

With those final words, Uriel Platini turned away, her usual gentle smile never fading.

In return, I gave her a small nod.

"Thank you... Senior Uriel."

She stopped briefly upon hearing my words—then walked off, stifling a small chuckle.

Even though she had spoken to me while wearing that mask to conceal her emotions...

I knew just how kind she truly was.

She went out of her way to warn me—despite having nothing to gain from it.

And for that, I was grateful.

As I turned around and left, a new thought emerged in my mind—

"Now... what does House Moonlight want from me?"