2141 The good, the Bad and the Centaur  
  
Lost in the depths of a Death Zone and facing one of the most prolific killers of the Legacy regime, Cassie remained calm.  
  
Why would she feel agitated?  
  
Yes, Saint Jest was powerful. And she had indeed been lured here to be slaughtered — the old man was a deadly predator, while Cassie was his hapless prey.  
  
Or so it seemed.  
  
In truth, she was a predator herself. It wasn't just Jest who had wanted to lure Cassie away from her allies — she had wanted to get him alone and away from the King of Swords for the longest time, too.  
  
After all, the old man was her target. He knew a great deal of secrets, and Cassie wanted… needed… to learn what he knew.  
  
So, she had followed him into the jungle willingly.  
  
Saint Jest was here to deal with her, while she was here to deal with him. The only unfortunate person among them was Helie, who had gotten entangled in their secretive clash against her will.  
  
But Cassie could not do anything about that, at the moment. The best she could do was try to keep Helie alive until Jest was defeated.  
  
Of course… it wasn't entirely clear if they could defeat him.  
  
As Jest took a step forward, Cassie experienced the strangest sensation.  
  
She was currently perceiving the world from three points of view — her own, the old man's, and Helie's. Additionally, each of these perspectives was split into two, one corresponding to the present, the other to a point several moments in the future.  
  
The connections to the rest of her marks were temporarily deactivated in order to conseгve soul essence.  
  
In the present, Cassie was preparing to deflect Jest's first attack. But in the future…  
  
Her body was behaving strangely. There was a odd and sickening sensation settled somewhere in the pit of her stomach, and her limbs were trembling. Her pupils were dilated, and cold sweat was rоlling down her back. She was slow and sluggish, failing to гeact to the enemy's movements in time.  
  
'How curious.'  
  
Cassie could perceive what her body would feel in the near future as far as its four remaining senses were concerned: touch, smell, taste, and hearing. The same went for more mystical senses, like the ability to feel the flow of soul essence. However, she could not perceive her future thoughts and emotions.  
  
That was why she often felt lost when sensing the physical effects of future powerful emotions. It was like learning the answer withоut knowing the question… in the case of her strange state in the near future, though, the cause was easy to deduce.  
  
Cassie would be imminently weakened by an overwhelming fear.  
  
She was not too afraid, though. Of course, she felt tense and apprehensive about facing the infamous butcher of Valor, Saint Jest, in combat… but even if there was a slither of fear hiding deep in her heart, it was small and miniscule. Not at all powerful enough to be debilitating.  
  
But that was the nature of the enemy.  
  
As Cassie started to take a step back, she felt it…  
  
Her small fear suddenly surged like flame, uncontrollable, enveloping her entire being and turning into primal terror.  
  
"Ah…"  
  
Her legs trembled. Her eyes opened wide. Her heart shuddered like a wounded animal, and a terrified scream died somewhere in her throat, with only a weak squeal escaping from between her lips.  
  
Even knowing that it was merely the effect of the old man's Dormant Ability, which allowed him to intensify emotions, Cassie could not suppress the fear that grasped her limbs like a heavy chain.  
  
Therefore, she was a moment too late to deflect Jest's blow.  
  
His cane fell from above, whistling as it tore the air, aiming to crack her skull open — only to collide with Quiet Dancer, who put herself between Cassie's head and the enemy's weapon on her own.  
  
Echoes, after all, knew neither thoughts nor emotions. Therefore, her loyal rapier was utterly fearless.  
  
It was too weak to resist the power of a Transcendent killer, though. The wooden cane easily batted the Quiet Dancer aside, sending her flying far away… the collision slowed the cane down a little, though, just enough to let Cassie dash back.   
  
Creating some distance between her and Jest, she froze for a moment.   
  
The old man looked at her with a smile.   
  
"How interesting. Few people have ever managed to dodge my attack, you know?"  
  
He was indeed fast enough to startle even a Saint, striking without a hint of doubt or hesitation. If Cassie had not perceived the attack in advance, she would not have had time to react and give the Quiet Dancer a command.   
  
Taking a deep breath, Cassie considered Jest somberly.   
  
With her left hand, she unsheathed a long parrying dagger and put it between herself and the old man. The dagger was a Transcendent Memory of the Third Tier, and usually served as a partner to Quiet Dancer.   
  
At the same time, she deactivated the charm that hung on a silver chain around her neck. This one was a Memory forged by one of the Spellsmiths of Valor, and its function was to bestow a powerful augmentation on an Echo. The charm had been a potent tool when she was a Master… but after becoming a Saint, Cassie quickly started to feel that it was lacking.  
  
So, she had endeavored to make it stronger. In the end, the King of Swords himself had reforged it as a reward for her service, turning the charm into a Transcendent Memory — and a very powerful one, at that. It was the reason why the Quiet Dancer had been able to keep up with the demands of the battlefield so far.  
  
But no matter how Cassie loved the Quiet Dancer, she knew that her rapier would not be able to contend against Saint Jest. And as one of her two most powerful Memories, the forged charm consumed a lot of essence. There was no justification to waste any, right now.  
  
After all, Cassie only possessed one soul core — unlike Nephis and Sunny. She had to be conservative when managing her essence in a dire battle.  
  
So she activated the enchantment of her most powerful Memory, instead.  
  
It was another charm, which she had received in the Third Nightmare from Nephis… a Supreme Memory of unknown origin that could improve the material properties of other objects, making weapons sharper and armor more durable.  
  
Only, this time, she did not use it on the Quiet Dancer. Instead, she augmented her dagger, making it even sharper and more durable than it had been already.  
  
At the same time, Cassie activated the enchantment of a simple ring that adorned one of her fingers. With that, her mental resistance was boosted, and the terror strangling her heart grew a little less suffocating.  
  
Glancing at Helie, Cassie forced out a smile.  
  
"Be wary."  
  
In the next moment, she lunged forward and tried to sink her dagger into Helie's heart.