1728 Cost of Time

"The Heart of Kanakht... the Heart of Kanakht..!

Suffering unbearable pain, Jet continued to fight the Great Devil calmly. Her mind was cold and focused, methodically calculating every move and motion of the enemy. She was unable to destroy hìm, but the abomination could not bring her down, either - as the two of them fought, the harrowing fury of their battle boiling in eerie silence, time continued to flow.

She was drawing the clash as much as she could, callously luring the ancient fiend to his eventual end.

Once Effie and Kai arrived...

'How do we kill him then?'

Kai would be able to weaken the Great Devil with the power of his voice. Effie would be able to deal some damage to the abominable creature with the help of the Starlight Shard... but not enough damage, considering that it was merely an Ascended Memory of the Fifth Tier.

The white cloth could shine beautifully in the darkness, as well as imbue her weapons with a rare type of elemental damage - one that wasn't that useful, apart from being able to cut intangible things.

It was a bit ironic that the only way to fight the terrible wraith had been given to her for slaying the Lord of the Dead... if Jet remembered correctly, that was the name of the Fallen Tyrant Effie had killed on the Forgotten Shore.

Something moved in her mind.

'Still, none of it is enough to kill the Heart of Kanakht'

The most useful thing Effie would be able to do in this battle was augmenting Jet with her Ascended Ability. However, Jet... was powerless against the Great Devil. Unless she could deliver him ten thousand cuts, the fiend would not go down.

However...

As Jet moved between the raging storm of screaming souls, slashing the whirling hurricane of sand with a blade made of mist, she felt a seed of an idea... or a revelation, maybe... bloom in her mind.

'What was I thinking about?'

The Heart of Kanakht...

The name was quite peculiar.

Jet did not know what Kanakht was, but she had a strange suspicion. That suspicion came from the name of another abomination, a Corrupted Monster Effie had killed soon after entering the city, and something she had read in a history book.

...It was a strange thing, really, Jet had never been that interested in history, only learning enough to understand the modern world, However, at some point, and for a reason that she remembered only vaguely, she developed a liking for it.

Perhaps it was because of meeting someone who was very enthusiastic about ancient cultures, and being secretly displeased at not having enough knowledge to sustain a conversation. She couldn't remember who it had been exactly, though...

Maybe one of the Army Command officers back in Antarctica? Or someone at the Academy, which she often visited to enjoy the food in the instructors' cafeteria?

In any case, Jet had read about a strange custom that ancient humans had here, in the Western Quadrant, once upon a time. They prepared their dead for burial in quite a peculiar way, removing all the organs from the bodies before placing them in opulent tombs. There was even a legend about a god whose body had been cut apart, and then assembled back together, bringing him back to life.

The Heart of Kanakht, the Maw of Kanakht.

She wondered if there were also the Hand of Kahakht, the Lungs of Kanakht, the Horns of Kanakht...

Cassie had said that the Great Devil was the remnant of a cursed king.

Maybe that king had been cut into parts, just like that ancient god. And maybe those parts were kept apart, to prevent him from coming back to life like the ancient god had,

Why was Jet suddenly thinking about that?

She wasn't quite sure, yet.

The hateful giant of sand was pursuing her relentlessly. The whirlwind of souls surrounding him was just as plentiful as it had been before, as if she had not depleted it even a little. The Great Devil had slowed down, somewhat, because of the accumulated weight of unnatural lethargy, but that was all.

The Corrupted Terror whose soul was bound to the black khopesh had infected an entire city in the Eastern Quadrant with lethal sloth. The loss of life was tragic, and if Jet had not hunted the creature down in time, it would have become calamitous. But all it could do to the Heart of Kanakht was reduce his speed a bit.

‘Tough bastard.’

Jet retreated, phasing through a blackened wall. The sand followed her, spilling through the cracks and broken windows before coalescing back into the shape of a gaunt glant. Another flurry of attacks descended upon her.

But wasn't it strange?

Due to her Transformation Ability, Jet could become an intangible wraith. Her body was like mist, but that mist was not mundane - it could not be scattered by the wind or dispelled by flames, for example, It could pass through solid objects or move underwater, That was because what looked like mist was not mist at all, but simply a manifestation of her power.

Of course, Jet could return to her corporeal form at any moment.

The Heart of Kanakht, though, was tangible and intangible at the same time. The sand comprising his body never phased through the walls like she did, simply penetrating the cracks and gaps in a quite mundane way.

Why did the ancient wraith need the shell of sand, to begin with?

She barely dodged another storm of souls, each of the myriad of them like a screaming blade, and grimaced.

Her reserves of essence were running dangerously low.

Feeling a bit regretful, Jet consumed one of the souls bound to her mist blade.

That soul... belonged to a Corrupted Tyrant she had killed in Verge, in front of the gruesome wall of flesh that marked the point where the harrowing, mindless mass of the First Seeker's sprawling body began.

The silent battle continued, and she endured more excruciating pain.

Soon, she was forced to consume another soul.

That one belonged to a Corrupted Titan that had fallen to her blade under the walls of a government Citadel in the Dream Realm. The battle against the dreadful creature had cost a lot of lives, but the Citadel withstood the calamity, in the end.

Jet continued to retreat, buying time.

Some time later, she absorbed the third soul.

It belonged to a Great Beast she had slain in South America. Jet had had to cash in a favor that Saint Naeve of the House of Night owed her to make it across the ocean in time with his help.

She was starting to falter...

The fourth soul dissolved into a torrent of essence that watered her desolate soul.

The fourth soul had belonged to one of the Saints who had completed his Third Nightmare in the wake of Antarctica. The public did not know about him, because the man had gone mad soon after Transcending. The scars dealt to his psyche by the Chain of Nightmares were too deep, and his life ended in tragedy. Of course, a much greater tragedy had been prevented by stopping him in time.

Jet let out a stifled hiss and staggered back, clutching at her chest. This time, the blow she had failed to evade was too vicious.

She consumed the fifth and final soul.

This one belonged to the Great Monster she had slain in Antarctica. She had gone there to find and kill that abominable thing, Winter Beast... but, to her dismay, it was already dead. In the absence of the powerful Titan, several dreadful Nightmare Creatures crossed the strait from East Antarctica to claim its land. Jet had recklessly fought one of them to satiate her smoldering anger.

‘...Not good.’

There were no more souls to consume.

Well, there was one...

Her own.

Smiling, Jet regained her balance and raised her sword.

Her cold gaze fell on the approaching devil.

"Hey, Heart of Kanakht..."

Her voice was calm and full of dark amusement.

"I know your secret. Also... you took too long. It's too late now, bastard."

A great dragon landed on the burning building to her left, and a giant foot encased in polished steel landed on the rubble to her right.

There would be no need to consume her own soul today.

...Her reinforcements had arrived.