1730 Heartbreaker

The battle continued, with the three of them slowly losing ground. The Great Devil was pushing them further and further back, toward the fireline established by the Wolf Army.

Now that they were closer to the heart of the city, there were many Nightmare Creatures around. Jet would have loved to go on a rampage and cut some of them down to replenish her essence, but sadly, the ancient fiend was too powerful and overbearing. She could not allow herself even a momentary distraction if she wanted to survive.

The abominations, too, seemed to abandon their demented frenzy and scattered to avoid the rolling whirlwind of destruction that was the battle against the Heart of Kanakht.

Jet, Effie, and Kai were already battered and beaten. Both their souls and bodies had received plenty of wounds - well, in her case, not the body. Nevertheless, they were still holding up well. Pain and injuries were nothing new to them. Each possessed a rich experience of crawling out of the most harrowing of hells.

All Saints did... but these three, in particular, had experienced too many horrors to be deterred by a few scrapes, no matter how frightening the adversary was,

It was also because of their experience that they cooperated seamlessly, not only resisting the unholy powers of the Great Devil, but also slowly luring him into a trap.

The Heart of Kanakht was like a tide of devastation. He was Insidious, lethal, and seemingly immortal. No matter how many times they forced the giant limbs of moving sand to collapse, the sand simply reformed into its previous shape again. No matter how many of the souls the fiend had consumed they destroyed, his wailing legion seemed endless.

And yet...

The moment of his death was swiftly approaching. There were a few things Jet needed to achieve to make sure that her plan worked - she had to learn the limits of both the giant sand projection conjured by the Great Devil and his actual body, create an opportunity, and make use of that opportunity with flawless timing.

Finally, everything was ready. Raising her scythe, Jet yelled:

"Now!"

In the next moment, the three Saints moved like three parts of the same body.

The dragon dove down, opening his maw to release a haunting song. That song crashed into the great mass of sand and produced an earth-shattering blast, dissipating the vague form of the towering man for a moment.

Almost at the same Time, Effie tossed her shield into the breach created by the blast. The shield tore through the air like a cannonball, colliding with the gaunt figure hidden in the hurricane of sand. That figure was the actual body of the Great Devil - of course, just like the giant projection he had used to fight them, it was also made of sand.

Effie's shield could not truly destroy or even damage it. But the dreadful power contained in her throw was so vast that it shattered the torso of the fiend, turning it into a cloud of sand for a split second.

Soon, the sand would be pulled back to rebuild the body of the abomination.

But not just yet.

Jet's icy eyes glinted with dark satisfaction.

'It seems I was right…’

There, in the chest of the Great Devil, revealed when his body broke apart...

A black human heart was revealed, hovering in the air like an amalgamation of countless curses.

The Heart of Kanakht.

If Kanakht was indeed a cursed king whose body had been cut apart and scattered to prevent him from coming back to life, then wouldn't the true core of his remnant, the Great Devil, be one of those body parts?

The wraith was just a manifestation of the sinister will that still dwelled in the vile heart, and the body of sand was just a shell to protect it.

Just like the mountain of bones had protected the corpse worm.

But now...

The Heart of Kanakht was stripped of its protection.

Before the Indestructible sand had a chance to coalesce back into the form of the gaunt man, Jet lunged forward with astonishing speed.

Her scythe flashed...

And cut the black heart apart.

The strike was swift and precise, almost surgical. However, a devastating shockwave thundered from the point where the mist blade pierced the heart, spreading in a wide cone and toppling a few buildings.

Jet staggered and pulled her scythe back, suddenly feeling utterly exhausted.

'Did it do it? It'd better have... otherwise, we'll be in deep trouble...'

The whirlwind slowly came to a halt.

The invisible hurricane died down.

Rivers of sand spilled to the ground, forming tall dunes.

The wails of tortured souls grew quiet, and then disappeared entirely.

Jet looked up, at the broken figure of the Great Devil's shell.

Its contours gradually blurred, and then, it crumbled like a sand castle.

The Spell whispered into her ear:

[You have slain a Great Devil, the Heart of Kanakht.]

[...You have received a Memory.]

Jet smiled and looked at the bleeding pieces of the black heart with contempt.

After a few moments, she shook her head and looked away.

"...You should have stayed in the safety of hell, fool. Why come to this dire and dangerous world?"

The battle wasn't over, still. There were still plenty of Nightmare Creatures in the city, and it would take some time for the government forces to slaughter them all. But with the most powerful Gate Guardians gone, the three Saints should be able to oversee the cleansing without too much problem.

Then, they would have to gather the survivors, treat the wounded, and transport all civilians away from the ruined city.

Work, work, work. There was no end to it. Jet could not remember the last time she had not been overworked... well, the Third Nightmare was a bit relaxing, in that regard,

Perhaps she would take such a vacation again, sometime in the future,

But first…

Jet absorbed the shattered soul of the Heart of Kanakht into her mist blade. At the same time, she took a deep breath, feeling a few soul fragments being pulled into her core. Making it a little bigger, and capable of containing a little more essence.

Her expression changed slightly.

"Walt, what is...'

There wasn't just one fragment, or even a few. A whole flood of them was suddenly pulled into her soul, too many to count.

Countless.

‘...What the hell is this?!'

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A long time later... The battle was over.

The Nightmare Creatures had been eradicated, and although the seven Gates still remained, barriers were built around them, with soldiers keeping watch in case more abominations arrived.

The city... was beyond saving. It was damaged too much, and too many people had died. The survivors were slowly emerging from the shelters, while the soldiers were searching the ruins for those who had not been lucky enough to find a way to safety.

Jet had no heart to look at the lost faces of the civilians, so she retreated to the top of an artificial hill, observing everything from a distance.

She had replenished her essence greatly after participating in the final cleansing. So, she was feeling alright.

Kal and Effie were sitting nearby, staring at the ruins with exhausted expressions.

After a while, Effie suddenly said:

"That was a bit scary, wasn't it?"

Kai stared at her silently for a while, and then shook his head.

"Scary... you know what was scary? Watching a titan fly across the sky like a baloon. Now that... that gave me a fright!"

Despite her fatigue, Jet smiled.

"Damn. I missed that... what a pity."

Effie grinned.

"What's the problem? Next time, I'll throw a titan in your direction. You'll get the front row view!"

But then, the smile disappeared from her face. She sighed, lingered for a bit, and added wistfully:

"But, anyway. Battles like this one will only become more frequent in the future, won't they?"

Jet hesitated, then nodded simply,

"I guess."

The huntress lowered her gaze.

All three of them remained silent for a while, not knowing what to say.

Despite the fact that today's battle had ended in triumph- and a historic one at that - none of the three seemed particularly joyous.

Instead, their faces were somber, and their eyes were harsh.

Eventually, Effie broke the silence.

"Well, whatever. Now, about that Memory you received... please, tell me it's a weapon!"

Jet gave her an odd look.

"Sorry. It's not a weapon. Actually, that Memory... it's a bit strange."

Effie cursed, then leaned back in irritation and glared at the sky.

"What is it, then?"

Instead of answering, Jet simply extended a hand and summoned the Memory. Soon, a peculiar object appeared on her palm.

She raised an eyebrow, looking at it with a vexed expression, and said slowly:

"...It's an hourglass.”