1872 Burning Bright

The Great Beast resembled an enormous, emaciated tiger with black fur and red stripes. No… the red markings on his gaunt body only looked like stripes. In truth, they were festering wounds that revealed vibrant red flesh and the sprouts of tall, blood-red grass growing from the rotting meat.

There were motes of crimson light drifting above the grass, made pale by the radiance of the Cloudveil. Those motes were living beings — tiny fireflies that fed on the Monster's blood and propagated in his infested flesh. Sunny felt a wave of revulsion wash over him when he recognized the vile nature of the beautiful shimmer.

The great tiger must have looked breathtaking once, in the dim twilight of the Hollows. But now, it had been reduced to this ghastly and hideous state.

At the same time, Sunny felt a pang of regret.

He wanted to learn the creature's name. But, sadly, the Nightmare Spell was silent — once he killed the enemy, its familiar voice would not whisper into his ear, revealing a hint of the Great Monster's story.

He had never seriously considered it, but it was really a shame, to kill enemies without learning anything about them.

At least their shadows remained in his Soul Sea as silent reminders that they masters had existed once.

He almost called upon Cassie to ask her to take a look at the Great Monster, but then abandoned that thought. She must have been busy with her own important tasks — now that Mordret was on the verge of ravaging the Sword Domain, Clan Valor would lean heavily on their Seneschal and best diviner.

Even though Cassie could not see the future anymore, her Aspect was still capable of revealing the secrets of the present and the past to her.

So, he did not want to bother Cassie unless the enemy he had to deal with was at least a Devil. With those, knowing about their unholy powers in advance could mean the difference between life and death.

A Great Monster, meanwhile, was nothing more than a dreadfully powerful, rabid animal. The world might bend to its will, but that will could not be too sophisticated.

This one in particular was severely weakened, on top of that.

'Fiend…'

Making sure that the Great Monster's bloodshot eyes caught the sight of him, Sunny raised the odachi and dashed forward. He was weaker and slower than the abomination — but that did not matter.

Because he could sense the movements of the Monster's shadow, and dive into its corrupted mind. Using Shadow Dance,

he could somewhat guess where the tiger would strike, and when.

A moment before the giant paw of the mighty tiger shattered his armor and broke his body, Sunny turned into a shadow and slid under the terrible claws. A moment later, he assumed his corporeal form again and delivered a swift strike to the chest of the enormous creature.

His odachi did not deal a lot of damage, but it did cut deep — he had aimed for one of the open wounds on the body of the abomination, bypassing the adamantine barrier of its tough hide.

His goal was not to deliver the black tiger a serious wound. Instead, he just wanted to bring it pain.

And bring it he did.

The Great Monster let out a tortured, demented roar. A split second later, Sunny was already dashing back — he had gotten too close to the emaciated creature, and especially to the beautiful motes of red light drifting in the air around it.

Sunny was wary of the tiger, but he was much more wary of the crimson fireflies. In fact, he wanted to avoid being near them as if they were a plague.

 He landed on the moss a few dozen meters away from the abomination and raised his odachi again, attracting its attention. Before, the Great Monster was looking at him as if Sunny was food… but now, there was pure hatred in its frenzied gaze.

'Good… come on, come get me…'

The giant tiger lunged forward. This time, instead of advancing to meet it, Sunny retreated instead.

He fled across the scarlet jungle, evading a barrage of lethal attacks. The tiger was like a hurricane of bloodred darkness, devastating everything in its path. The white surface of the ancient bones resisted its dire might and its sharp claws, but everything else was obliterated — the moss, the vines, the young trees, and even the weaker Nightmare Creatures.

Only Sunny remained unscathed, leading the Great Monster away from the war party. On the way, they passed Rivalen of Aegis Rose — the gallant Saint was engaged in a battle against a Corrupted Tyrant and its newborn minions, single-handedly holding the entire swarm back. He was not dealing the Tyrant any damage, but he was also preventing it from reaching the soldiers.

Noticing the rolling wave of destruction and the terrifying silhouette of the giant tiger at the heart of it, as well as the white hair of the Lord of Shadows dancing in the wind, Saint Rivalen froze for a short moment.

His eyes widened a little.

"A… A Great Nightmare Creature… he's fighting it alone?"

Then,

he had no time to be distracted anymore.

However, just then, a cold voice reached him from a distance...

The Lord of Shadows was eerily calm, considering his dire situation.

"Hold tight, Shield Wall! I'll come to assist you in a little while."

Then, the terrible monster and his slippery prey moved out of sight.

Sunny was sweating under the Onyx Mantle. Actually, it was quite incredible… that armor granted him an unreasonably high resistance to the elements, and he was a Saint on top of that. Despite that, the suffocating heat of Godgrave made him sweat more than he had in the last four years.

It was as if the incandescent abyss above and the heat emanated by its ruthless radiance did not care about the natural course of things.

'Ah… how annoying…'

Sunny dashed back to avoid another furious attack of the black tiger. The abomination shot past him, landed on the moss, and spun around like a deadly whirlwind. Its tail whipped in the air, toppling dozens of twisted trees.

At that moment, however… Sunny slipped.

He seemed to lose balance as his leg slid awkwardly, and at the same time, blades of scarlet grass crawled up the polished onyx of his greave, rooting him in place. He tried to free himself, but fruitlessly — it seemed that, for the moment, he was trapped.

The Great Monster lunged at the helpless prey…

'Just where I wanted you.'

And then, a towering figure of polished black silver exploded from the jungle, colliding with the creature's side.

Fiend tore into the flesh of the Great Monster with all his four hands, easily slicing through its adamantine hide with dagger-like, glowing red claws. The black tiger let out an agonized wail as he was ruthlessly butchered.

Sunny would have had to work harder to achieve the same result, but in theory, he was capable enough to cut down the Great Monster himself.

However…

Those crimson fireflies were giving him a very, very bad feeling. He was not only worried about himself, but also about the soldiers that would pass the carcass as the offensive continued.

Therefore, he had lured the abomination toward Fiend.

Sunny's personal Supreme Devil, meanwhile, opened his terrifying maw. More infernal glow spilled from it, and then, he breathed out a powerful stream of sinister red flame. The hellish fire enveloped the convulsing tiger, vaporizing its blood, incinerating its flesh, turning the sprouts of crimson grass to ash, and most importantly of all, annihilating the swarm of beautiful fireflies.

Sunny stopped pretending to be trapped and easily tore his leg free.

Sensing a trickle of shadow fragments enter pour into his soul, he smiled darkly.

'That's better…'