1886 Dark Dancer

'Damn it.'

Lightslayer had already taken the Citadel...

And, therefore, Ki Song's Domain had already descended on Godgrave.

There were a couple more conclusions Sunny made in the split moment before Revel's words resounded in the darkness of the ancient castle and the corpses came alive, but there was not much time to contemplate.

Since Revel was here, then the first arrow must have been shot by Moonveil. The two from behind... had to be Silent Stalker.

Who else was here?

Three Saints, no matter whether they were the Queen's daughters, were not enough to take on the conquest force of the Sword Army... even with the element of surprise on their side. Unless Ki Song was here personally, he struggled to understand what their plan was.

And she couldn't be here in person — for the simple reason that only two of the fourteen Saints had died, not all of them.

The corpses of the two slain champions came alive, lunging at their former comrades. They did not accomplish much, though — as soon as they had stirred, Neph's sword beheaded one, while the other was gruesomely dismembered by Saint Jest's cane sword. It happened in a heartbeat, so swift that Sunny did not even notice the thin blade move.

The corpse of the Great Terror was blasted back by a blinding bolt of lightning that Roan seemed to have sent flying from his sword. The creature was delayed, but not destroyed.

The rest of the Sword Saints all exploded with motion, dispersing as they summoned the power of their Aspects or assumed their Transcendent forms. Suddenly, the area in front of the castle gates felt very overcrowded.

Sunny noticed Saint Rivalen, in his heavily armored rhino form, ramming into the wooden gates of the ancient stronghold and barreling straight through them, on his way to challenge Silent Stalker.

Saint Helie's Transcendent form was that of a towering, graceful centaur — pushing herself into a leap with four hooves, she simultaneously let an arrow loose.

He did not waste much time watching, though.

His target was Revel.

Before IIelie's arrow could strike, Sunny already stepped through the shadows while lashing out with his odachi. There was a heavy feeling in his chest — if his last conclusion was correct, than this would be his only chance to end the battle easily.

Sadly, Lightslayer was too swift, and too skilled. Dancing away with an easy step, he deflected his blow with her sharp do despite the sudden and unpredictable nature of his attack. He also dodged Helie's arrow with the same motion.

"The Lord of Shadows, I presume..."

Her husky voice remained calm.

Sunny cursed inwardly.

In the next moment, a deafening howl seemed to shatter the world, and a bestial silhouette leaped from somewhere above, landing between the Saints of the Sword Domain.

A light smile twisted Revel's lips.

"...You're mine."

With that...

A tide of pure darkness suddenly drowned everything around them — true, elemental darkness. It suffocated Sunny's shadow sense, turned him blind, and at the same time cut him off from his source element.

A split second later, he felt space itself become twisted around him, and suddenly, the clangor of battle grew distant. It was as if he was transported somewhere else in the castle, separating him from the rest of the conquest force.

He didn't know whether that was some Memory Revel used, a power of another Song Saint, or a Component of the lake Citadel. However, he knew that wherever he was, there was someone else there with him.

'True darkness...'

True darkness was the natural enemy of shadows. With how unique and varied Aspects were, Sunny knew that he would run into an Awakened with affinity to it sooner or later. He also guessed what was happening after failing to sense the ambush and see Revel until she stepped in front of the Saints of the Sword Domain.

Why did it have to be one of Ki Song's daughters, of all people? What did darkness even have to do with the lineage of Beast God, which the princesses of Song all seemed to share despite not being related to the Queen by blood? Luckily... he wasn't defenseless against elemental darkness, either.

Sunny released his odachi and let it fall to the ground. Before it did, Serpent abandoned the Soul Weapon form and turned into a Nightmare Creature that resembled an enormous firefly — one of the Corrupted abominations Sunny had killed a long time ago, in the Burned Forest.

Darkness might have been the natural enemy of shadows, but it feared light. Serpent's body ignited with brilliant radiance, chasing the darkness away — instantly, Sunny could see that he was standing in the middle of a vast, overgrown hall. Roots and scarlet vines grew through the cracked walls, the bulging floor, and the broken ceiling, making it seem like the thick of the jungle. Lightslayer was standing a few meters away, looking at him with the same aloof expression.

Her darkness had retreated, but it was not vanquished — instead, it flowed around them like a dark cloud, suffocating the light produced by Serpent. For now, there seemed to be a fragile balance between the two elements, with neither being able to destroy the other.

Sunny smiled behind his mask as Saint and Fiend rose from his shadows.

"You didn't really think that would work, did you?"

Revel studied Saint for a few moments, then nodded.

"No. I didn't."

With that, two figures suddenly stepped out from behind her.

Sunny's heart grew cold.

Standing on both sides of Revel, the Lightslayer — the first of Ki Song's daughters to reach Transcendence — were...

Two perfect copies of her.

They were both beautiful, clad in dark leather armor, with raven-black hair and obsidian eyes... dark, cold, and breathtaking.

Suddenly, there were three of Revel in front of him... or one Revel and her two incarnations.

It was as if Sunny was looking at his own reflection.

His eyes widened slightly.

'Reflection...‘

In the next moment, the Reflections unleashed two tides of darkness of their own, and suddenly, the light was overpowered...

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On the stone steps outside the ancient Citadel, several Saints were battling the elusive Silent Stalker.

Beyond the gates, the rest of them were entangled in a ferocious fight against three bestial monsters. One of them was Lonesome Howl, another of Ki Song's daughters. The other two were Mordret's Reflections. The corpse of the dead Great Terror was also there — damaged, but unrelenting.

Deeper in the hall, Saint Jest of Dagonet was facing a towering gargoyle. The creature's noble face, which seemed to be carved from grey stone, bore a distant and somber expression.

The old man grinned.

"The Saint of Sorrow, huh?"

The gargoyle lowered its head slightly.

Saint Jest shook his head dejectedly.

"Goodness... that girl Ravensong just had to send the dullest man in the world to fight against me. How mean..."

And somewhere else, on the highest floor of the majestic castle...

Nephis was surrounded by three delicate young women. Each of them had enchanting features, white hair, and beautiful eyes that seemed to glimmer with the afterglow of pale moonlight.

Neph's check was still cut, the left side of her face painted with blood.

She touched the cut briefly and looked at her fingers, frowning at the sight of blood.

"...Are you Princess Moonveil?"

All three of the young women smiled.

However, only one spoke:

"Indeed. However..."

The pale radiance of her eyes slowly dimmed, turning them into two gaping windows into an abyssal, lightless void.

Suddenly, the hall seemed colder, darker, and full of echoing emptiness.

"I am also called the Black Moon. That name, I think, suits me better."

Nephis looked at her fingers again. There was no radiance beneath her skin. The blade of her sword remained dull, devoid of incandescent light.

...Her wound wasn't healing.