1890 Dark Tide

Now that Sunny could see through Saint's eyes, the ravaged hall of the ancient Citadel was revealed to him once again. It had changed drastically in a short span of time…

The outer wall was partially missing, torn open by Fiend's charge. Splinters and debris littered the cracked floor. The scarlet vines and the roots of the trees that had protruded from the ceiling were decimated, filling the air with a sweet fragrance while they bled viscous — and undoubtedly toxic — sap.

Everything was drowning in darkness.

Before, Sunny had always seen darkness like a billowing cloud of nothingness — an impenetrable black barrier that was uniform and featureless, obscuring the world from his senses. However, now, he saw it in a new light… or rather, the opposite of light.

To Saint's eyes, darkness was rich and full of nuance. It flowed all around them, its fluid torrents creating beautiful patterns in the air. Moving, ebbing, changing… almost like a living creature. The dark splendor of that scene was subtle and breathtaking.

Sadly, Sunny had no time to enjoy the beauty of darkness, because Lightslayer was not wasting even a moment.

To his surprise, Revel herself was like a part of the elemental darkness she had unleashed. When she moved, her body seemed to become one with the flow of it, dissolving into ethereal dark liquid before coalescing back into a tangible form — because of that, she could travel to any point in the hall with such tremendous speed that it almost seemed instantaneous.

The Reflection, which mirrored her appearance perfectly, was the same.

'A movement Aspect Ability? Or a partial Transformation?'

Sunny did not know.

A split second later, Saint was attacked from both sides.

Revel was far too strong and powerful for a Transcendent Beast, which meant that at least one of the Abilities granted her a physical augmentation — quite similar to Saint's own [Mantle of Darkness]. Although it was hard to judge, Sunny suspected that the extent of that augmentation was greater than even Effie's own potent physical enhancement.

Effie's Dormant Ability was universal, though, while Revel's seemed to only work within the bounds of true darkness. So, there was some kind of balance to her unreasonably powerful Aspect, at least.

Of course, another of her Abilities allowed her to summon a flood of elemental darkness to anywhere she was. That was quite a problem.

Revel attacked from the left, while the Reflection attacked from the right.Both strikes were insidious, devastating, and potent… however, Saint was undeterred.

Blocking one blow with her shield and deflecting another with her sword, she easily avoided the sharp blades and took a small step while shifting her weight. Simultaneously, she bent the elbow of her sword arm and rotated her wrist, binding Revel's sword and pulling her closer.

Although Saint faced two powerful enemies alone, her own augmented power was no less fearsome than theirs. On top of that, she was much taller than both of them, and possessed much greater mass.

As for her skill… she wasn't called a Battle Master without reason.

[Battle Master] Attribute Description: "Born on the battlefield, the Onyx Saint is proficient in all forms of combat."

Her actions, while small and frugal, allowed her to create a little distance between herself and the Reflection while simultaneously drawing closer to Revel. With their swords still entangled in a bind, she ruthlessly struck with the rim of her shield, aiming to crack open Revel's skull.

Lightslayer was forced to disengage — dissolving into a torrent of fluid darkness, she instantly moved several meters back. At the same time, the Reflection used the opportunity to deliver a blow to Saint's momentarily unprotected side.

But the graceful knight was already bringing her shield back, pushing the enemy's blade down with its rim. The sharp do scraped fruitlessly against the side of her greave.

The whole clash took less than a heartbeat.

And in the next dozen seconds, countless clashes like that happened in an unceasing succession, turning the dark hall of the ancient castle into a scene of chilling destruction.

The thunderous sounds of clashing steel fused into a deafening litany. Powerful shockwaves spread in all directions, decimating what little tendrils of the scarlet infestation there were left. The ceiling crumbled, and the floor collapsed.

The Citadel had obviously been built from mystical materials, considering that it withstood the passage of time and countless disasters that must have befallen it in the Hollows — and yet, it could not withstand the violent forces unleashed by the battle.

Sunny was in awe.

He had never had a chance to experience someone else's battle skill so clearly, so vividly, and so intimately. And it wasn't just anyone's skill, at that — it was the sublime technique of Saint herself, who was one of the most fearsome warriors he had ever met.

Measured, calculated, and insidiously lethal.Solid, grounded, and explosively destructive.

It was both a joy and a privilege, to be exposed to such excellence without any barriers. To not only observe how Saint fought, but also feel and experience it as if her body was his own, as was her will.

Granted… the actual situation was quite dire.

Saint plummeted through the broken floor and landed heavily on the wooden surface of the level below, which cracked slightly under her prodigious weight. Splinters and debris rained down, and darkness flowed from above, swiftly drowning everything around.

Her intricate onyx armor was battered, its surface covered my cracks in a few places. There was some ruby dust scattered across the polished surface, as well — she had received several wounds. Luckily, her wounds were able to heal faster when surrounded by true darkness, and since Revel and her Reflections had generously provided copious amounts of the rare element, those shallow cuts were already healed.

Her two enemies followed, coalescing from the torrents of darkness and immediately resuming their assault.

Neither side had a decisive advantage — while Saint was being pressed by Revel and the Reflection, she was like an indomitable wall of stonelike metal. Their attacks shattered against her shield and armor, while her own blade was a lethal threat.

Sadly, Saint wasn't able to harm either of her adversaries in turn. For the moment, the furious battle had reached a fragile stalemate.

A few moments later, both Lightslayer and the Reflection disengaged, their raven-black hair flying in the wind. Revel paused for a moment and looked at Saint, a harsh expression settling on her beautiful face.

The Princess of Song remained silent for a second, then said in a low tone:

"A creature of darkness… just where did that man find you?"

Sunny did not have to answer, and Saint wasn't going to, either.

She stared down at Revel with her usual indifference, then raised her sword slightly, preparing to attack.

However, at that moment, it seemed as if Lightslayer had come to a decision.

She smiled coldly, and in the next moment, the surrounding darkness enveloped her like a mantle…

At the same time, the entire Citadel suddenly shook, and a deafening sound of splintering wood reached them from somewhere high above.