1893 Child of Darkness

The garden temple standing in the middle of the dark lake shuddered, and for a moment, the dim twilight of the Hollows was illuminated by a brilliant blaze of cold light.

Powerful torrents of ghostly blue flame shot from the overgrown Windows on the higher floor of the castle, extending dozens of meters in all directions like rays of a fiery star. The vines and branches covering the embrasures were instantly reduced to ash.

For a split second, the world seemed frozen. Then, a net of brilliant cracks revealed itself on the ancient walls, and the entire top of the castle disappeared in the annihilating radiance of a violent explosion.

A vast flower of blue flame blossomed above the dark lake. A cloud of burning splinters was shot outward like shrapnel, and a deafening thunder rolled across the surging water like a roar. The immense spire of the castle tilted slowly, collapsing into the flames, and then plummeted down from a great height.

As the billowing mass of flames rose into the air, the trees and vines permeating the devastated upper floors of the Citadel caught fire. The fire enveloped them hungrily, already spreading down.

Far below, Saint stood her ground as the entire structure of the castle quaked. In front of her, Lightslayer was enveloped by a whirlpool of darkness — her lithe body was obscured by the dark torrent, as if she had become one with it.

And then, something moved in the darkness.

The darkness took shape, and suddenly, Saint had to raise her head to look her enemy in the eye.

Revel had retained most of her human features... it was just that her beauty had become even more breathtaking. Her height had increased, as well, reaching almost four meters. Her raven hair seemed to have grown longer, and two obsidian horns were protruding from her head, curving slightly.

Two black, bat—like wings grew from her back, each crowned with a sharp obsidian spike.

With her flawless alabaster skin and tenebrous eyes, she was like a beautiful demon of darkness... or a fallen angel, perhaps.

A moment later, her hypnotic gaze flashed with sudden intensity, and she lunged forward. Her curved sword had increased in size, as well, turning into a semblance of an odachi — or whatever the equivalent of an odachi for a sword was.

Her Reflection was already enveloped in a whirlpool of darkness, as well.

Saint silently dashed forward to meet the attack.

Revel's sword collided with her shield, almost causing her arm to buckle. The taciturn knight stubbornly withstood the terrifying force of the impact, but it was still dreadful enough to send her staggering back a couple of steps. However, at the same moment, one of Revel's wings shot forward like a scorpion's tail, and the sharp obsidian spile — or a talon, perhaps — flashed above the rim of the round shield, piercing Saint's armor and her chest.

It wasn't easy to break the onyx armor of the Underworld, but Lightslayer's wing did so easily.

The wing retreated as fast as it had struck, preventing Saint from slashing it with her sword. But the other one was already descending to sting her from the other side...

A stream of ruby dust flowed from the gruesome wound on her chest, painting the onyx armor red.

Saint calmly moved her shield to deflect the obsidian talon. The blow pushed her back once again, and a split second later, Revel spread her first wing as it retreated, slashing at the Shadow with its edge.

The edge of her wing was sharper than a sword. Saint blocked it with her sword, but a deep scratch was left on her gauntlet.

Revel's sword was already flying to slide into the visor of her helmet. Her ability to use her weapon and her wings to create a seamless flood of dreadful attacks was both strange and mesmerizing, elegant like a dance and lethal like death's own embrace. Each movement flowed effortlessly into another, creating a dark and morbid spectacle.

Behind them, the Reflection had already finished its Transformation.

The demonic creatures attacked Saint simultaneously, unleashing an onslaught of attacks so terrifying that any other Transcendent Devil would have been annihilated in a moment.

But the graceful stone knight facing them was not just any devil. She was one of the Stone Saints, children of the Underworld. Empowered by the blessing of shadows, she was far too fearsome to be easily defeated.

More than that, while Revel's Aspect countered that of her master, Saint herself thrived in the elemental darkness called forth by the princess of Song.

The dark hall was soon ruined by a hurricane of onyx and steel. The three powerful creatures fighting a lethal battle under the collapsed ceiling of the ancient chamber moved with astonishing speed, the fury of their fight so tremendous that the mystical wood around them groaned and trembled, and the darkness itself seemed to cower in fright.

Saint remained as cold and indifferent as always, her ruby eyes shining with crimson flames. Her battered shield had resisted countless blows, and her dark blade had tasted the blood of the enemy on a few occasions.

Sadly, all the wounds she had managed to deliver Revel and her Reflection were shallow and insignificant.

Her own armor, meanwhile, was terribly shredded by now, breached in a dozen places, and smeared in ruby dust.

However, surrounded by true darkness, Saint simply would not succumb to the terrible wounds. Instead, they were healing at startling speed. The gash on her chest had already closed, and the rest of them were not far behind.

Still... she could not continue in this manner for much longer. Albeit slowly, her enemies were gaining the upper hand. The longer this battle continued, the weaker she would grow, and the greater their advantage would become.

The hall was slowly filling with the smell of smoke.

Making a decision, Saint strained her tattered body and momentarily pushed both creatures of darkness hack.

None of them moved for a short moment, gathering the strength for the next attack.

Saint stared at the beautiful demoness, Revel, silently...

And then dropped her battered shield to the ground.

Her weapon rippled and elongated, turning into a heavy greatsword.

It was as if she was abandoning all pretense of defense in favor of uncompromising offense.

In favor of an indomitable will to see her enemies dead no matter the cost. The crimson flames burning behind her cracked Visor shone with cold light.