1894 Mutually Assured Salvation

Sunny had been a silent companion for Saint, losing himself in the sensations of the furious battle. Revel was strong — too strong, even... in hindsight, he might have become somewhat arrogant after attaining Transcendence, which caused him to underestimate the champions of Song.

Why wouldn't the first Saint among the Queen's daughters be exceptionally strong? Sure, Revel had always been unassuming, avoiding the spotlight and public attention. There were no tales about her deeds or news about her achievements in recent years. In fact, Sunny did not think that he had ever seen a recording of her appearing in broad daylight...

And yet, he should have been more wary of the seven Transcendent sisters, who had been raised by a Sovereign and inherited the lineage of Beast God.

Sunny was still confident that he could defeat each of them in battle — just like he was confident that he could defeat Morgan.

...If not for the fact that Revel wielded power over elemental darkness as a weapon and was aided by Mordret. That devious bastard.

How was he still causing problems for Sunny all the way from the shores of the Stormsea?

Luckily, Saint countered I.ightslayer's Aspect just like it countered Sunny's own. So, he wasn't too worried...

Until she discarded her shield and shifted her stance.

At that moment, Sunny finally sensed a hint of alarm.

He remembered that stance... It was a sign that she was abandoning her usual conservative technique in favor of a savage and chillingly lethal one, which was utterly ruthless — both to her enemies and to herself.

The darkness was permeated by the smell of smoke.

The roar of the explosion they had heard earlier must have been caused by Nephis. She had not detonated her soul cores, it seemed — otherwise, the entire Citadel would have been reduced to a pile of rubble. So, the explosion must have been caused by her Aspect, the Sorcery of Names, or both.

It was a sign that she was still alive and fighting, at least. However, Sunny was struggling to understand what could have stalled her for so long... he had expected her to deal with the enemy sooner rather than later.

It was all up to Saint.

'Stay safe...'

His Shadow took a step forward, then unexpectedly kicked her round shield with terrible force. The battered shield shot from the cracked floor like a discus, colliding with the Reflection and sending it reeling back.

The graceful stone knight was already lunging at Revel.

Saint ignored the obsidian talons and allowed them to pierce her armor freely — one dislodged her pauldron and tore open her shoulder, the other brushed against the side of her helmet, shattering it into pieces.

Her hair fluttered in the wind, and her inhumanly beautiful face was revealed, expressionless and smeared in ruby dust.

In the next moment, her dark greatsword collided with Revel's blade, threw it aside, and cleaved into her wing.

Lightslayer's body was protected by leather armor, but her wings were not. Augmented by the elemental darkness, the black sword practically severed one of them, forcing Lightslayer to let out a pained groan.

Pure darkness flowed from the severed wing instead of blood.

But Saint was not done... no, she was only beginning.

Not encumbered by the need to defend herself anymore, she had become a harbinger of death. Even if it was mutually assured destruction, her enemies were the ones being destroyed first...

Which put them in a difficult situation.

Sunny stirred, starting to understand what Saint was doing.

She slammed the crossguard of her sword into Revel's chest, pushing her back, then spun to deflect the attack of the Reflection. Their weapons clashed, producing a shockwave, and Saint traded another wound with the enemy — she tilted her head to avoid being dealt a fatal blow, and the obsidian talon sank into her shoulder instead.

Her ruby eyes flashed with cold contempt.

Removing one hand from the hilt of the sword, she grabbed the talon, trapping it in her stonelike flesh to prevent the wing from retreating, and drove the tip of the sword through the Reflections's abdomen.

At that moment, Revel attacked from behind.

For a few moments, the three of them were entangled in a bloody struggle, then disengaged, all bearing terrible wounds.

Saint had been mangled more gruesomely than her enemies, but they had not escaped unscathed, either.

Sunny felt a sense of bitter rage at how hurt his taciturn Shadow was, but at the same time...

He wanted to laugh.

Because he had finally understood Saint's intention.

In truth, she wasn't trying to sacrifice herself to kill the enemy — he would not have allowed her to, anyway. Instead, she was betting her life on the fact that the enemy would not allow her to do so, either.

Saint was fighting Revel and her Reflection... but Revel was only fighting a mere servant of the Lord of Shadows. If she let herself be heavily wounded, or worse yet, killed, the Lord of Shadows would win.

In other words, Saint could pursue the strategy of mutually assured destruction to defeat the enemy, but Revel could not, because all she would be destroying was a minion of the enemy, not the enemy himself.

'I-Iow devious! '

Had his noble, prideful Saint picked up a few treacherous tricks after following him for all these years?

In any case, the battle reached a forced stalemate.

The beautiful demon of darkness, Revel, stared at the battered Shadow with a grim expression.

After a few moments, she uttered through gritted teeth:

"...Dammit."

Her mesmerizing voice sounded like the song of the lightless abyss, but Sunny was more interested in the emotion hidden in that one short word.

It was anger.

'What are you going to do now?‘

Sunny wasn't sure what Revel would do...

But he already knew what his next action would be, and had to act fast.

So, he allowed himself to be separated from Saint and quietly flowed down her arm...

Onto the blade of the Soul Serpent.