2078 Fragments of War (15)

Standing in the rubble, Kai took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly.

A powerful gust of wind rose from that one breath, sending a cloud of dust billowing into the air.

When he looked up, the usual soft placidity of his welcoming green eyes was replaced by a cold, sharp gleam.

The night suddenly seemed darker, the winds singing a haunting song as they blew across the ruins.

"Are you ready?"

He looked at Morgan and Valor and nodded curtly.

A pale smile appeared on her scarlet lips.

"No time to waste, then."

Kai looked away. His gaze pierced the piles of stone rubble, the vast expanse of the empty lake, and the palisade of scorched trees standing on its distant shore. No obstacle could obscure his sight, and no distance was too great…

Well, in theory.

In truth, Kai could not see too far despite having the ability to discern the individual grains of sand on a beach many kilometers away. That was for a simple reason… the curvature of the world. The world was not flat, so in normal circumstances, its curve obscured things at around five kilometers away.

At least that was how things worked on Earth. Here in the Dream Realm, though, the horizon was not quite as predictable. What else could one expect from a world where the sky was a patchwork of different heavens? Sometimes, the horizon was five kilometers away. In other places, it was much further or noticeably closer. In some places, there was no curve to the world at all.

Those places were few and far between, though, so there was still a limit to how far Kai could usually see.

He could try to pierce the very depths of earth with his gaze, of course, thus ignoring the horizon. But his Awakened Ability was not omnipotent. Doing something like that was not impossible, but would cost too much essence.

Especially when there was a much simpler way to see beyond the horizon — so simple, in fact, that it was accessible to all people… but especially so to Kai.

It was looking at the horizon from elevation.

The higher one was, the less important the curvature of the world became. Similarly, the taller the target was, the easier it was to see from a distance. It was such an obvious truth, but one that found new meaning in the battles of Transcendent beings.

Which was why what Kai was about to do was dangerous.

After a month of furious battles, there were not a lot of elevated points left in the ancient ruins. Everything had been toppled and obliterated, turning into piles of rubble… but Kai did not need to climb a high tower.

Instead, he simply soared into the air, ascending naturally into the night sky.

Higher, and higher, and higher still…

Until the whole world was in front of him like a moonlit canvas.

For a few moments, his graceful silhouette was outlined against the radiant fragments of the shattered moon.

Then, Kai took a deep breath and raised his bow.

That bow of his was a Transcendent Memory of the Fifth Tier, which he had earned for slaying the Corrupted Tyrant, Malignant Grave Root, in Antarctica. It was a sublime and deadly weapon, more than powerful enough to accomplish his goals.

What mattered just as much were the arrows he would use. Kai had plenty of Transcendent arrows, each suited for a different task… most were meant to deliver untold death and destruction, of course.

He even possessed one that was Supreme. However, now was not the right time to use it yet.

Hovering high above the ruins of true Bastion, bathed in moonlight and embraced by the winds, Kai turned his gaze to the dark expanse of the ancient forest. There, dozens of kilometers away, the enemy was moving under the cover of twisted branches. A vast swath of the forest was veiled by a thick shroud of flowing mist that Mordret had summoned to obscure his movements…

But he could not hide from Kai, especially now that Morgan had pointed him in the right direction.

'There.'

The princess told them that the final assault would begin with a wave of Nightmare Creatures — these ones much more powerful than those Mordret had used as vessels before, and whom he had been collecting slowly and in secret throughout the month of dreadful battles.

Kai had to make sure that the Nightmare Creatures were destroyed, or at least severely weakened, by the time they reached the ruins of the ancient castle.

Nocking an arrow on the string of his enchanted bow, Kai strained his muscles and drew it to his ear. With his auburn hair dancing wildly in the wind and his green eyes shining in the pale moonlight, he looked upon the dark expanse of the abominable forest coldly.

Then, he spoke:

"Strike true."

His words were a command that brimmed with mystical authority… one aimed at himself, but also at the world itself.

Feeling a sudden surge of dire power, Kai released the string.

There was a deafening thunderclap when he did.

The arrow surged forward with astonishing speed, tearing up the dark sky. It flew further and further away, easily crossing the empty lake and streaking above the ancient forest.

Until, finally…

Dozens of kilometers away, it silently and unerringly pierced the eye of a swiftly moving Nightmare Creature.

A moment later, a tremendous explosion shook the very foundations of the world.

An enormous conflagration spread from the point of impact in a straight line, swallowing several square kilometers of the abominable forest. Countless trees were incinerated, and even more were shattered and toppled by a devastating shockwave. A towering plume of raging flame rose high into the sky, and then subsided, spreading in every direction.

The darkness of the night was torn apart by the fierce glow of that hungry fire.

…Dozens of kilometers away, in the silent sky above the ruined castle, Kai observed the devastation calmly.

He had already found several other vessels of the Prince of Nothing, and a second arrow was already manifesting in his hand.

Of course, Mordret had to have noticed him too.

After all, this high above ground, Kai was not hidden from sight by the horizon.

In fact, he was easily noticeable and utterly in the open — a perfect target.

And he was not the only one who could send a projectile flying across the vastness of the empty lake.

'I wonder... how many times I died this way.'

He felt like it would be a shame, to die during the first wave of the attack. These Nightmare Creatures were merely an appetizer, after all… the main course was yet to show itself. According to Morgan, today, Mordret would use both these scavenged vessels and the bodies of the Saints of Night in turns.

Actually, Kai wasn't that keen on dying in the second wave, either. He would very much prefer to survive. There were too many things to enjoy in life, and there were also things that he still needed to do.

Life was precious.

Nevertheless, he did not dive to the ground in order to seek cover.

Instead, he simply nocked the second arrow on the string, and drew his bow again.

His voice resounded from the dark sky like a beautiful, dreadful melody.

"...Destroy."

The final battle for Bastion — the latest one in the long procession of prior final battles — had commenced once more.