2084 Fragments of War (21)

Sunny had once again entered the ruins of the nameless city.

Last time, he had come here with Nephis, both of them on guard and wary of the ancient ruins.

This time, he was in a more illustrious — or maybe more deplorable — company. Led by a Sovereign, the Sword Saints strolled into the ruins with daring confidence. The source of that confidence was the King of Swords himself, whose bearing and expression remained calm and aloof despite the looming battle with a corrupted god. His brazen nonchalance was eerily infectious.

Of course, the Saints were still nervous.

Sunny was nervous, too.

Not only at the prospect of battling Great Nightmare Creatures and witnessing a clash between a Sovereign and a Cursed Tyrant, but also for a different reason.

He threw a furtive glance south.

The Nameless Temple was not that far from here — no more than two hundred kilometers. Subsequently, the swath of the abominable jungle where his menagerie of Great Nightmare Creatures were slumbering under the influence of the Dream Curse was not that far, either.

Their hideous bodies were shrouded in a veil of shadows, true, but even hiding them inside the darkness of the Shadow Realm Fragment did not put Sunny at ease when a Sovereign was so close.

In fact, the Fragment itself could attract unnecessary attention. Sunny did not know what senses Anvil possessed and how far they reached… so, he was a bit on edge.

'I… should probably focus.'

All Great Nightmare Creatures were dire enemies, but the Asuras were especially fearsome due to their special nature. He had to throw distracting thoughts out of his mind and concentrate on the upcoming battle.

The role of the Saints was to pull the attention of the Asuras away from the King and carve him a path to Condemnation. Then, they were supposed to keep the minions of the Cursed Tyrant at bay until it was destroyed.

Of course, Sunny was meant to serve as the sledgehammer of the group, doing the lion's share of the work — the other five Saints were here to support him.

That was the price he had to pay for being too outstanding.

As they entered the city, his companions grew apprehensive… except for the King, who looked indifferent to the deadly danger of the overgrown ruins.

Sunny commanded Serpent to assume the Soul Weapon form. This time, however, he did not go with the familiar odachi — considering the nature of the enemy, a blunt weapon would work much better. So, the serpentine Shadow took the shape of a great mace that seemed to be carved from black obsidian. It looked almost like the exact opposite of the diamond weapons the Asuras used.

Hoisting the heavy mace on his shoulder, Sunny took the lead and headed toward the center of the ruined city. The others followed, spreading a little to form a loose battle formation.

Each of the Saints looked formidable and battle-ready… well, except for Jest, who was wearing mundane clothes and leaning on his walking stick. The old man was looking around with curiosity.

"This place… reminds me of Europe."

Sunny glanced at him with interest.

"You've been to Europe, old man?"

That continent was lost to humanity, but unlike the Americas and Antarctica, it had not been lost to the Nightmare Spell. Instead, it had been rendered uninhabitable before it even descended.

Jest grinned.

"Sure. Where have I not been? Anyway, there are many such cities in Europe. Ancient, beautiful, swallowed by nature… quite a sight, really, albeit one that will put you in a melancholic mood. Well, and those beautiful forests are no less deadly and vile as this damned jungle. Of course, that is because of the weapons used during the Dark Times, not just the Nightmare Spell."

Sunny stared at him for a few moments, then looked away.

"Still, I don't think there's a city quite like this one in Europe."

Jest raised an eyebrow with a smile.

"How so?"

Taking a deep breath, Sunny grasped the handle of his great mace with both hands.

"There's no friendly locals…"

At that moment, the mounds of vermilion moss around them exploded, revealing damp interiors of overgrown buildings, and the lumbering figures of the Asuras lunged at them with a dreadful speed.

The appalling creatures looked just like Sunny remembered them.

They were twice as tall as humans, but shriveled and hunched. Their vaguely humanoid bodies were made from stone, with deep cracks covering its rough surface. Red moss covered the stone like tattered garments, with scarlet blossoms growing from it on black stalks.

Below the moss, desiccated flesh could be seen through the cracks in the dark stone. That flesh belonged to the Awakened warriors who had once worn the powerful suits of enchanted armor… and were now entombed within them.

The featureless faces of the Asuras gaped with round holes cut on their surface, all of them full of appalling darkness.

The terrifying abominations descended upon them in an instant, their diamond weapons already falling to shatter the world into pieces.

Sunny grimaced.

His black mace slammed into the chest of the nearest Asura with enough force to collapse a mountain, producing a devastating shockwave and causing several of the overgrown buildings to crumble.

At the same time, Rivalen staggered back on his four stubby legs, his barrier of shields collapsing under the terrible force of a Great Nightmare Creature's blow. Luckily, the invisible barrier had stalled the abomination just long enough to allow Helie to send several arrows in quick succession, each striking the Asura's chest and exploding with thunderous roars.

Roan simply used his mass to topple one of the golems, then bit down on the stone carapace. A moment later, powerful currents of electricity seemed to flow through the ancient suit of mystical armor, frying it from the inside.

Cassie simply dodged the attack, gliding back with the help of the Quiet Dancer.

The King of Swords, meanwhile…

Simply ignored the sudden attack, continuing to walk toward the center of the city with a cold and terrifying expression on his chiseled face.