2085 Fragments of War (22)

It was never easy to fight Great Nightmare Creatures.

They were faster, stronger, and more durable than even Transcendent humans were, not to mention possessing abominable constitution. Worse than that, the world bent to their will… and the humans did, as well. Facing an abomination of the Great Rank was a treacherous ordeal at best, and a deadly mistake most of the time.

The wounds dealt to the enemy would be more shallow than they were meant to be. A sharp blade would turn dull; a sturdy armor would succumb to blows easier than it had ever succumbed before. Similarly, one's own body and mind would betray them, making the difference in power feel even greater than it was.

But it did not mean that human Saints had no chance in a battle against Great abominations. In fact, Sunny judged that even the most inexperienced Saint was far more deadly than most of those… at least as far as Nightmare Creatures of lesser Classes were concerned.

It was for a simple reason. Great Nightmare Creatures possessed dreadful power and dire will by their very nature. The Saints, however, were innately unnatural beings — they were, in fact, the product of a bitter fight against one's nature. From a mundane person to a Transcendent warrior, each step on the Path of Ascension was paid for in blood.

And only the very best of humanity had walked that far on the path. They were the strongest and deadliest members of the human tribe, trained for war by the Nightmare Spell — unlike most Nightmare Creatures, who were granted their power without having to strive to gain it.

That was why six Saints of the Sword Army were not instantly overwhelmed by the Great Nightmare Creatures of the ancient ruins.

Sunny had used shadow sense to predict where the enemy would appear from and moved in advance to make up for his lacking speed, slamming his mace into the breastplate of the appalling golem. Of course, he had wrapped himself in shadows and used [Feather of Truth] to make his blow as heavy as possible.

Most importantly, Serpent's [Slaying Blade] Ability was meant to ignore the will of greater enemies, to a degree.

As a result, the stone breastplate of the golem exploded into a rain of debris, and before the thunderous boom of the heavy impact could even die down, the Handy Bracelet announced the kill.

[You have slain a Great Beast, Asura of Condemnation.]

[Your shadow grows stronger.]

Sunny wasted a split second to wonder at the fact that beings of such dire power could die so swiftly by his hand. Since when had it become the norm? It was truly bizarre…

But he did not have a lot of time to celebrate the kill. Already, another Asura was moving in his direction, mere moment away from obliterating him with a devastating strike.

Before it could, however, a different kind of horror intercepted the shambling golem from the darkness. Glowing red claws shot forward, and Fiend threw the creature to the ground, having already sliced off its arm with terrifying ease.

Infernal flames burned in his eyes with hungry glee.

Sunny's Supreme Devil towered above the Asuras, his glistening black frame bristling with countless jagged spikes.

Unlike the six Saints, Fiend did not look inferior to the Asuras in terms of sheer menace. If anything, he looked much more terrifying, like a demon of blackened steel that had crawled from the depths of a fiery hell. His hungry expression only made him seem more sinister.

Without wasting any time, Fiend threw himself into battle.

The other Saints were holding their ground, as well, albeit just barely. Cassie, Roan, Rivalen, and Helie coordinated their movements, facing the lumbering stone golems with a united front. Jest, meanwhile… seemed to have disappeared somewhere. Sunny felt a strange hint of concern about the old man, but he was also sure that the elder of Clan Dagonet could take care of himself.

Sunny dashed forward and brought his mace down on the moss-covered mass of the Asura whom Fiend had thrown down moments earlier. There was a shockwave, and the ground beneath the creature split open. Around them, a few ancient buildings collapsed…

The Great Beast grew still, not trying to rise anymore.

A split second later, Sunny was gone, having used Shadow Step to jump a few dozen meters away. A diamond blade whistled through the space he had been occupying a heartbeat before, seemingly cutting the fabric of reality itself apart.

He belatedly felt a cold chill running down his spine.

'That was close…'

The battle raged on, with the six Saints attracting more and more Asuras from the depths of the ruins.

But it was merely a distraction.

The true confrontation was about to happen somewhere ahead of them, where the King of Swords was walking calmly with an aloof expression on his cold face.

Out there, in the heart of the nameless city…

Condemnation was rising slowly.

Sunny felt the Tyrant before he saw its towering figure.

He felt its harrowing presence first, then shuddered as he sensed its shadow. It was vast and unfathomably deep, indescribably ancient… inescapable.

Suddenly, he felt like a Sleeper once again, shivering from fear in the shadow of the Crimson Spire.

The rest of the Saints had sensed the Cursed Tyrant, as well. They paled and stumbled, almost losing their lives in the middle of the battle. Condemnation's mere presence seemed to have changed the world, making the Asuras stronger while humans were suddenly weak and frightened.

The only one who showed no sign of fear was Anvil of Valor.

The King continued to walk forward with measured steps, his black armor making no sound, his vermilion cloak fluttering in the powerful wind that had been raised by the Condemnation.

The Cursed Tyrant was slowly rising at the heart of the ruins, making the world quake…

That was where Anvil was headed, a sharp and ominous gleam igniting in the depths of his cold, grey eyes.