2088 Fragments of War (25)

As the flames died down, a hurricane wind slammed into the Saints and the Asuras from behind. That was air rushing in to fill the vacuum — and bringing the overbearing smell of ash with it.

The ruins of the ancient city had turned into a fiery hellscape, and an unbearable heat singed their lungs as they breathed in. No mortal man could have survived in this incandescent purgatory, and yet, the Sword Saints did. After all, those of the Transcendent Rank were not quite mortal.

Ahead of them, the stone carapaces of the Asuras were glowing with angry red embers.

Helie dismissed her Transformation and wiped the sweat off her brow, breathing shallow breaths.

A pained grimace twisted her beautiful face.

"How are we supposed to fight them in these conditions?"

Her voice sounded weak and ghostly, since there was not enough air around them yet to carry the sound properly.

Sunny simply leaned forward, preparing to lunge at the enemies.

"What are you waiting for? Attack while their armor is still softened by the heat!"

She stared at him for a split second, then gritted her teeth and nocked an arrow on the string of her bow — which had shrunk in size greatly now that she assumed the human form once more.

The other Saints moved, as well.

…Far away, past the dark figures of the Asuras, Condemnation's hand was moments away from reaching Anvil. Rivers of swords twisted in the glowing red darkness of the incinerated wasteland, converging right in front of him like a colossal steel flower. Its epicenter was supposed to serve as a shield for the Sovereign and receive the Tyrant's blow.

Four incarnations of Sunny descended upon the Asuras, unleashing hell upon them. However, even embroiled in the deadly battle, he could not help but keep an eye on the titanic confrontation happening in the distance.

Condemnation's hand collided with the whirlwind of swords in an explosion of furious devastation. It seemed to move slowly from a distance, but there was a blinding flash when the collision happened, followed by a thunderous roar and a tremendous shockwave.

This time, the shockwave spread vertically. A few moments later, it slammed into the floor of the Hollows, as well as in their dome — the world quaked, and a net of shallow cracks appeared on the surface of the ancient bone above them.

The swirling mass of flying swords had failed to stop the cursed god's hand.

It barreled through them without ever slowing down, obliterating countless swords and sending many more flying into the distance. Shards of broken blades and streams of molten metal rained down.

Sunny could not see the blow clearly. He only saw a whirlwind of scarlet sparks surrounding the King of Swords, and then saw him plummeting down like a meteor.

He perceived what happened next with shadow sense.

Anvil failed to damage the body of the enemy, and was struck down instead. However, the Sovereign seemed to have protected himself from the blow, after all. He crashed into a river of lava, sending a great fountain of it rising into the air.

A few moments later, Anvil rose slowly to his feet, unscathed, and looked up with a dark expression. Drops of lava rolled down the black surface of his armor, not leaving even a trace on it, and he stood in the incandescent river of molten rock as if it was water.

His eyes were cold and full of dark, suffocating determination.

Outstretching a hand, he summoned another sword.

This one, however… felt different.

Its shadow was much more terrifying than the shadows of the countless blades moving above the Sovereign like a steel storm.

'What just happened?'

Sunny struggled to contend against the terrifying Asuras while trying to comprehend the awesome exchange between the King of Swords and Condemnation.

On the surface, it had seemed simple enough — a straightforward competition of their ability to exert force and unleash devastation. However, Sunny was sure that there was more going on than what met the eye.

Anvil had not just failed to cut Condemnation because the colossal body of the Cursed Tyrant was too tough, and he had not failed to block Condemnation's blow because its arm was too strong. Instead, the Sword Domain had failed to exert its dominance over the authority of the cursed god, and his will had failed to overpower the will of the enemy.

Everything else was merely a result.

Sunny's expression grew ugly behind the mask.

He was distracted from the profane battle after that, forced to concentrate on his own. As Sunny and the Sword Saints battled the shambling Asuras, they caught glimpses of the dreadful confrontation between the King of Swords and Condemnation from time to time.

Flashes of blinding light, deafening thunderclaps, and devastating shockwaves continued to torment the world, making the Hollows quake in horrid convulsions.

The gargantuan figure of the Cursed Tyrant was hard to miss, but Anvil was too small to be seen clearly from the distance — especially in the appalling mayhem of their awesome clash. However, his presence was just as overwhelming, since even when the Sovereign himself could not be seen, the storm of swords that he had summoned was always visible.

The torrents of rustling steel that besieged Condemnation were of the same scale as the Cursed Tyrant, even towering above it at times. Moving, flowing, soaring, falling… assaulting the eldritch deity unceasingly. The swirling hurricane of swords was strangely hypnotic, and most of all, it almost looked like a living being itself.

As if the currents of sharp swords were a substitute for the King's own body.

'...What is he doing?'

It was hard for Sunny to judge, since he did not really know a lot about Anvil's actual battle prowess, but it all seemed strange. Up until now, the King of Swords seemed to have only used his Dormant Ability… an inconceivably evolved version of it, true, but nothing else.

Sunny had seen that Ability in Orum's memories. As a Sleeper, Anvil shared a deep connection to metals and could even somewhat control them, using that weak form of control to push the blade of his sword in battle and thus enhance his swordsmanship in deadly and unpredictable ways.

As an Awakened, he could control a flying sword and use it to effectively slay Nightmare Creatures without ever touching his hand.

And as unlikely as it seemed, this vast storm of swords was just that — an extension of that same Ability. From one sword, to a dozen, to a myriad… the scope of implementation was entirely different, but the essence was precisely the same.

So, why wasn't Anvil using his other Aspect Abilities to fight Condemnation?

Sure, there was a chance that his Awakened and Ascended Abilities had nothing to do with combat, and were instead meant to be used for crafting. He was a Spellsmith, after all, so at least one of them had to be.

But there was the Transformation Ability, too. Sunny had never seen Anvil assume his Transcendent form… but if there had ever been a good time to do so, it was now.

What was the King of Swords waiting for?

Feeling confused and uneasy, Sunny frowned and studied the battlefield.