2093 Fragments of War (30)

The warehouse where the harvested materials were stored was built from wooden boards, which in turn had been made from lumber harvested in the scarlet jungle. It was an enormous building — it had to be — filled to the brim with the carcasses of Nightmare Creature, some of them relatively small, some of them towering like abominable hills of hide, chitin, and scales.

Godgrave was largely subjugated by now, so the two great armies did not clash with Nightmare Creature that much. The surface of the arm bones, collarbones, the breastbone, and a few ribs of the dead deity was already in human hands. The rest of the ribs, as well as the spine, the pelvis, and the femurs of the titanic skeleton were still untamed, but the soldiers had little reason to venture there.

Neither did they have many reasons to descend into the Hollows… and, of course, they stayed as far away from the harrowing skull of the dead god as possible.

In any case, that which had been unthinkable was now reality — the once-impregnable Death Zone was largely controlled by humans, while the abominable jungle that had covered its dreadful expanse was burnished into the Hollows.

Humans mostly fought humans here now, not the Nightmare Creatures.

Nevertheless, the Sword Army still battled abominations from time to time. Apart from the thralls of Beastmaster, there were also the eerie creatures that dwelled in the ash on the bottom of the chasms of the Two Crossings and occasionally crawled to the surface, attracted by the smell of human blood. So, the material storage was never empty.

The warehouse was roughly separated into three areas — the ground floor where the unprocessed carcasses were stored, the vast storage for the processed materials, and the butchery, where the meat of the slain abominations was being harvested to be delivered to the army brigades later.

Sunny inhaled deeply, thinking that there was a plus side to being a part of the Sword Army. There was a similar warehouse in the camp of the Song Army, no doubt… but the smell there had to be terrible. Clan Valor had become known for its mastery of runic sorcery, though, and there were runic enchantments in place here to keep the air fresh.

Whistling quietly, he headed for the ground floor to check if any useful carcasses had been dragged to the warehouse since the last time he visited. There was a particular creature he was interested in, an ash dweller whom he had seen being slain from afar while taking a walk along the edges of the Ivory Tower with Nephis.

The material storage was usually full of people, and today was no different. However, the atmosphere inside seemed unusual.

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

'What is this…'

It was as though the light was a little brighter, and the air was a little fresher, with a faint scent of rain and lightning permeating it. The workers processing the remains of the Nightmare Creatures were moving a little stiffly, a hint of reverence in the eyes.

In the next moment, he saw a familiar figure and realized the reason for this strangeness.

Saint Tyris of the White Feather clan was standing just a few meters away from him, studying the carcasses.

The soft light of luminous Memories was reflecting from her golden hair, and a beautiful white cloak shrouded her graceful figure. A few Awakened warriors of her clan, as well as two Knights of Valor, were just a couple steps behind her — considering how important for the war effort Sky Tide was, she was not allowed to go anywhere without a retinue of bodyguards these days.

Sunny hesitated for a moment, then bowed respectfully.

"Saint Tyris."

She glanced at him with an aloof expression, then nodded curtly.

"Master Sunless."

He smiled politely.

"Are you here for something particular, or simply exploring the latest harvest? If it is the former, perhaps I might be of some help. I know my way around the material storage quite well."

Sky Tyde remained silent for a second or two, then sighed.

"A bit of both, I guess. We've been facing a vexing problem recently. The aerial battles are growing more intense with each assault, and defending the Ivory Island is becoming more difficult due to attrition…"

The White Feather clan possessed many Awakened warriors who specialized in aerial combat, so it was often leading the charge in the battle for the sky above the Greater Crossing. Its main task was to prevent the enemy from reaching the Ivory Island and the ranged specialists stationed there during the assaults.

Saint Tyris shook her head.

"We have slain countless winged thralls of Beastmaster. But… it is hard to destroy them completely in the air, and once they fall to the ground, the Queen simply raises them again. Thus, they return to the battle as pilgrims. Our aerial Echoes are destroyed irreversibly, though, so we are slowly losing ground. The forgemasters of Valor are trying to counteract that by crafting artificial Echoes, yet the speed with which they can create them is woefully insufficient for the task."

Her impassive face turned grim.

"So, we are losing more and more soldiers instead. I've been coming here in hopes of finding something to armor the Echoes, but it is hard. Aerial combat is demanding… the material has to be sturdy enough to withstand its intensity, but also light enough as to not burden the flyers too much. Nothing here suits our needs."

She lingered for a moment, and then added:

"We have already exhausted all other means of enhancing our forces, including requisitioning every suitable Memory from other units of the Sword Army… well, you must already be aware. Your assistant, Aiko, was very helpful in arranging the Memory exchange with the Fire Keepers. But it is not enough, and at this point, I am forced to grasp at straws."

There was a hint of cold resentment in her beautiful amber eyes.

Sunny studied the massive carcasses of slain Nightmare Creatures that surrounded them from all sides, considering her words in silence.

As he did, his expression changed subtly.

Saint Tyris was right. There was no material here suitable for crafting armor for flying Echoes…

That was not the problem, though.

His smile grew a little forced.

"If you allow me to be so presumptuous, Lady Tyris, we have an extensive material warehouse on the Ivory Island, as well. I've collected many exotic materials over the years — all over the Dream Realm, not only here in Godgrave. You might find something that suits your needs… if you wish, I can escort you there right now."

Saint Tyris turned to study him calmly.

'Say yes, say yes…'

It was an unusual offer, but not that outlandish. There was no rule preventing various forces within the Sword Army from sharing resources, after all — in fact, they all did just that, even if most kept the best spoils for themselves.

Simple courtesy was not what had motivated Sunny to invite Sky Tide to the Ivory Island, though, and neither was it his favor toward the White Feather clan.

He had a far more urgent reason to want to get Saint Tyris out of the material storage.

It was that while Sunny was studying the carcasses of the dead Nightmare Creaturees, he had discovered…

That most of them were actually not that dead.