2277 This Ain't No Hymn  
  
In the end, Effie gave Sunny an angry look and grumbled:  
  
"I liked you better when you were Master Sunless..."  
  
He chuckled.  
  
"But I'm still the same person."  
  
She sighed and leaned back, picking up a pastry from the tray.  
  
But you're also a powerful Supreme who walks around and beheads Sovereigns..."  
  
Sunny raised an eyеbrow, then shrugged his shoulders expressionlessly.  
  
"You're the sweetest mom in the world, but you're also a Transcendent who tears Great Nightmarish Creatures apaгt with your bare hands. There can be more than one person."  
  
Effie swallowed the pastry and gave him a pleased look.  
  
  
Then her eyes flashed dangerously.  
"Not just one, you say? That reminds me...  
  
Thankfully, everything she wanted to say was interrupted by the sound of the door opening. Cassie came into the living room, carrying a stack of documents with her.  
  
"Oh, you're all here already. Let's get started—Nefis has to move on to the next item on her schedule in thirty-four minutes."  
  
That's how their short meeting began. As the Supreme Ruler of mankind, Nefis was endlessly busy—if she wasn't on the battlefield, she was usually immersed in an endless parade of strategic meetings and discussions. Every day she had to make many decisions, many of which could affect the future of humanity.  
  
Of course, the advantage of being at the top of power was that she had enormous resources at her disposal, primarily human resources. The best and brightest representatives of humanity were ready to respond to her call, advise her on the best course of action and take on various tasks. With Cassie's help, Nefis built an effective delegation pyramid.  
  
The great apparatus of Humanity's Domain worked like a well-oiled machine.  
  
The most valuable resource in the world was talent, and countless talented people worked together to achieve her goals. And yet... even that wasn't enough. Therefore, one of the most important priorities of the new regime has become the search and nurturing of talents.  
  
Administrative talents, scientific talents, engineering talents... All kinds of peоple were hired and given ample opportunities to realize their diverse talents, as well as to grow.  
  
But most of all, of course, Nefis wanted to cultivate strength.  
  
After all, humanity needed warriors more than anyone else.  
  
Therefore, everyone was encouraged to become stronger. The Awakened ones were encouraged to become Masters, Masters — Saints. The saints were encouraged to reach the very peak of their potential and even challenge the Fourth Nightmare if they so desired—so far, no one has done so. As a result, the number of champions of all ranks has grown rapidly over the past year.  
  
This was greatly facilitated by the fact that countless inexperienced Awakened Ones returned from God's Grave as experienced veterans.  
  
..And, of course, ordinary people were encouraged to become Awakened.  
  
Now that people have migrated en masse to the Realm of Dreams, the nature of Awakening has changed. Previously, only those chosen by the Spell could challenge the First Nightmare, but now anyone who passed through the Gates of Sleep could do it. All they had to do was ask for it.  
  
They didn't even need to return to the waking world with the Saint's help or leave the Nef Domain. It was enough to sincerely wish for it in my heart.  
  
By sensing their strong desire to challenge the Nightmare, Nefis could free them from the protection of her Domain.  
  
Oddly enough, people tended to do it together. The places where they gathered to prove their desire were solemn and quiet, and people meditated in silence for hours, and sometimes for days... For Sunny, they looked like believers kneeling in a temple for prayer.  
  
In fact, it was creepy to see how easily pеople forgot that Nefis was also human and treated her like a goddess. He knew for a fact that this strange development had nothing to do with what Nefis and Cassie wanted.  
  
If anything, they wanted just the opposite, because faith in a benevolent deity eventually inspired people with subconscious confidence that they would be saved, instead of inspiring them to seek enough power to save themselves.  
  
Nefis wanted to become what people thought they could become themselves, rather than an eternally unattainable supreme being.  
  
...Anyway, there were more and more Awakened Ones every month. They no longer had to wait for the winter solstice — it was enough to go through the Gate of Sleep and bind themselves to the Citadel to become Awakened, even if some still decided to pass the second test of the Spell without help.  
  
This new reality had unforeseen consequences. For example, for the first time since its foundation, the Awakened Academy was forced to change and open its doors to ordinary people. Since anyone could become a Sleeper if they wanted to, it made no sense to deny aspiring young people the best education.  
  
The other side effect was much darker.  
  
People were encouraged to become stronger, but not forced. However, more and moгe ordinary people were challenging the First Nightmare, more and more Awakened Ones were challenging the Second, and more and more Masters were challenging the Third. The number of human warriors of the Awakened, Ascended, and Transcendent ranks grew...  
  
but not all the challengers survived. For every one who succeeded, there were several who failed.  
  
The grim harvest of lives gathered by the Nightmare Spell was as abundant as it had never been before, with the possible exception of the first days of its descent.  
  
At the same time, more and more Nightmare Gates were opening in the waking world, and every day more and more young people were infected by the Nightmare Spell.  
  
Unfortunately, there wasn't much Nefis could do about the latter, even if she wanted to. The Sword Domain and the Song Domain stood on the foundations erected by the Nightmare Spell, the Citadels. However, her Domain had no boundaries, existing in the hearts of those who were inspired by her.  
  
It encompassed both worlds... but Nefis and Sunny quickly found out that the overwhelming effect of the Domains on the tiny seeds of Corruption hiding in the hearts of the Challengers was not actually a manifestation of the Sovereign's power.  
  
In fact, it was a function of the Enchantment in the Citadel, just as the Nightmares themselves were a function of the Enchantment, giving people a chance to destroy the Seeds before they bloomed.  
  
Thus, only those followers of Nefis who lived in the area of influence of her Citadels could escape from the First Nightmare.  
  
That is why the inhabitants of the Night Garden could cross over to Earth and be spared the deadly ordeal, but the infected youth of the waking world could not count on their goddess to save them from meeting him.  
  
All they could do was pass through the Gate of Sleep to delay the onset of the Nightmare if they so desired... and they had plenty of time to escape.  
  
In the end...  
  
humanity took heart and began to strive for greater heights.  
  
However, in the shadow of his rebellion, there was still a mountain of broken dreams hiding from the ruins of a ruined world.