2278 Field Reports  
  
Sunny had little to do with most affairs discussed this morning, so he only listened to the meeting half-heartedly. Cassie was delivering a concise report on various issues.  
  
"...I received the initial status update from the Night Garden. It is indeed being somewhat suppressed by the laws of the waking world, but not outside of our expectations. Jet managed to get under control with relatively little trouble, so she proceeded along the planned course. Their speed is greatly diminished, though. Clearing the Northeastern Corridor and reaching Australia will take them no less than a week. What is more, the vessel seems incapable of replenishing its fuel — whatever it might be — in the waking world. They will have to гeturn to the Dream Realm before the end of the month, at least for a few days."  
  
"Also, agricultural research in Ravenheart is proceeding smoothly. Saint Bliss has requested additional reinforcements stationed at the laboratory in case of an unexpected containment breach — Helie is there at the moment, so I asked her to stick around. It should be fine, but the seismic readings coming from the depths of the volcano are somewhat concerning. We know that a powerful Nightmare Creature emerged from it once in the past... Kai is monitoring the situation and will let us know if there is a real threat. Hopefully, we can deal with whatever comes before an earthquake or an eruption happens."  
  
"Oh, and I'm not sure if you noticed, but last night, the test run of the Rivergate Facility finally succeeded. People all over the city are celеbrating. Nephis, you'll need to congratulate Chief Bethany personally... I scheduled it for tomorrow."  
  
Sunny smiled faintly. So, Beth had finally fulfilled her bold promise. He was glad. "Wait, last night?"  
  
How did he miss the entire city glowing with electric lights?  
  
In any case, Rain would probably be sleep-deprived when she visited the Ivory Tower today...  
  
Sunny had reported on a few issues next. Most of them had to do with the development of the Citadels east of Godgrave, but there were a few interesting pieces of news, as well.  
  
"Both eastern subjugation campaigns are proceeding smoothly. We are cleansing the interior of the Domain at a good pace. The progress is especially great on the Chained Isles. Tyris and Roan have also come up with measures to prevent more islands from falling into the Sky Below — something about pulling the Ebony Tower up from the depths and using it as an anchor. And just so you know, it took all my willpower to hold back the joke about plugging a huge rift with a... ah, never mind! In any case, the exploration teams surveying the territories in the far east have not discovered any new Citadels after those first two... from what they report, we might reach the edge of the landmass in the next few months. We'll move north from there along the coast."  
  
"The situation in the Eastern Quadrant is still dire. Skinwalker, that damn thing... it's learning faster than we are coming up with countermeasures. There were three outbreaks in the last week — the casualties are not as countless as before the latest security protocols were put in place, but our Saints are growing tired. We need to deal with them more often now. The cohort that had conquered the Third Nightmare last month improved the situation somewhat, but just barely. In addition, Skinwalker seems to be growing stronger. I'm afraid he is nearing an evolution. If that was not bad enough, a Category Four Gate opened in the Western Quadrant last night. I'll be going personally, but before that, we'll need to redeploy the Wolves from Australia. Princess... I'll be counting on you for that."  
  
Due to the unique quality of Neph's Dream Gate, it could serve as a means of rapidly shifting troops across the waking world. All they had to do was enter the Dream Realm through the Gate, then leave through it once Nephis repositioned its entrance. Therefore, Bastion had become a transit point for countless soldiers. Of course, only Awakened could use that method, since mundane soldiers would be thrust into the First Nightmare as soon as they returned to the waking world from the Dream Realm, Nephis nodded. "As long as the Dream Gate schedule is adjusted properly, there should be no problem." They continued to discuss various matters having to do with logistics and countless fires that needed to be put down across the two worlds. Soon enough, Sunny grew a little bored...  
  
For rather, he grew a little lost. It was happening to him from time to time these days, in the moments when his concentration waned. The sensory input he was receiving from the numerous shadows serving him overwhelmed his sense of self like a sea, making it hard to remember that he was human. Of course... he wasn't really a human anymore. Even though Sunny drew a line between himself and the shadows, in truth, he was no more than a shadow himself.  
  
Even if that shadow was a divine one.  
  
Things were even worse for Nephis. Not only was she enduring the weight of three billion souls, but she was also acting as a guardian angel... no, Eurys told him not to use that word... a guardian deity for the warriors of humanity battling the Nightmare Creatures across two worlds. Even if her powers struggled to reach Earth, she still persisted. Which meant that she was almost constantly using her Aspect, and therefore almost constantly experiencing excruciating pain. That was the price people worshiping Nephis did not know she was paying to be the shining beacon of hope for them. If there was one silver lining to it all... it was that she was not prone to losing her own humanity in the process anymore. That was because of Sunny's help, Neph's own efforts to ground herself in all the human, and the odd connection she was sharing with numerous people and their human desires.  
  
"Still... I hate it."  
  
He did not like the self-sacrificial nature of Neph's effort, whether people saw her as a messiah or not... "And what about you? Don't you have anything to report?"  
  
Hearing Effie address him in a teasing tone, he belatedly turned to her and scratched the edge of his nose. "Oh... well, I'm still busy up north, in the Burned Forest. The information network of the Shadow Clan is spreading, but there is still no sign of Mordret. My people are monitoring the known Category Four Gates, though — oh, right, I'll need to send someone to Western Quadrant now. And things have settled down on the Forgotten Shore, so I won't need to pay it as much attention anymore. I'm thinking of heading to Ravenheart."  
  
Effie raised an eyebrow, surprised. "Ravenheart? What did you forget there?"  
  
Sunny lingered for a few moments, then smiled faintly. "Let's just say that it's a... piece of my inheritance."