2296 Teaching and Learning  
  
Rain knew that she had a talent for the Sorcery of Names. In fact, she was more or less born to be a Shaper.  
  
Humans all spoke the same language these days, but before the Dark Times, people of Earth had spoken all kinds of them. Pieces of these languages still remained, passed down among family members for generations, and academics had to learn the basics of a few if they wished to study the past. Naturally, there were powerful machines capable of translating ancient texts for them, as well.  
  
Then there was the Dream Realm and the Nightmare Spell, which translated the dead languages of the fallen civilizations for the Awakened. There was the language that the Nightmare Spell itself used, too.  
  
Rain had not understood why her brother insisted on teaching her these dead languages, but in hindsight, it was a very useful skill to have.  
  
She had noticed that numerous of the Dream Realm languages were similar to each other a long time ago… almost as if they shared a common source. The runic language of the Nightmare Spell was the closest to that source, but it was still merely an adaptation of it.  
  
Having studied Shaping for a while now, Rain had come to believe that there was one true language out there, woven into the very fabric of existence… a language where every word was a True Name. The language of the gods.  
  
Unlike the human languages, which had been invented, this one was inherent to reality, both shaped by the world and shaping the world. Therefore, speaking the words of that language was no different from reshaping the world.  
  
That was what Shapers did. By channeling True Names and assembling them into Verses, they could change the world in accordance with their will.  
  
…However, not just anyone could become a Shaper. The knowledge of True Names was esoteric and lost. Anyone could learn the True Names as long as they found one, though… and yet, very few could actually speak them.  
  
After all, these Names were never meant to be spoken by a human. They were meant to be spoken by the gods.  
  
Most people simply did not have the talent to master the True Names, but rare individuals like Rain and Lady Nephis could, to a degree. Still, it wasn't easy.  
  
The True Names were… elusive. Even learning one did not mean that you could know it. The knowledge of a True Name was effervescent, straining to erase itself, as if something that was not supposed to be retained by a human mind - like an object placed into an ill-fitting vessel.  
  
Speaking the True Names was difficult, too. Even if one had the talent, they had to practice relentlessly in order to realize it.  
  
Then, there was the act of invoking the True Names itself - channeling them required a deep well of endurance, soul power, and a firm will. Faltering during an invocation could not only ruin the sorcery, but also harm the sorcerer.  
  
And finally, there was the process of assembling the Verses. That aspect of Shaping was not particularly hard or punishing, but demanded a lot of creativity from the Shaper. That was the part Rain enjoyed the most.  
  
Lady Nephis was the only other Shaper she knew, and it was interesting to see how different their talents were. Overall, Rain judged herself to be a more talented Shaper… which did not mean that she was a more powerful one, though.  
  
Due to her innate Attribute, [Poet], Rain could learn and speak True Names easily. Building Verses came naturally to her, as well. However, Lady Nephis was… indomitable. Once she learned a True Name, that Name could never escape her - therefore, she carried an astonishingly broad library of them in her mind.  
  
And while Rain had an easier time speaking the Names, her teacher could channel them much more effectively due to how uncompromising her will was.  
  
Rain not really sure, but she strongly suspected that neither of them was an ordinary Shaper. True Shapers of the ancient past could neither have invoked the Sorcery of Names as easily as Rain could nor have known as countless Names as Lady Nephis knew, most likely.  
  
Therefore, they would have probably been astonished by the speed with which both of them were absorbing Shaping.  
  
Today's lesson was, honestly, a bit alarming. The True Names Lady Nephis spoke were so violent and destructive that Rain wasn't sure she could channel them without destroying her own soul. Her teacher, naturally, had no such problem - there did not exist a Name that Lady Nephis would not dare invoke, and no Name she would fail to tame.  
  
After a while, Rain was covered in sweat and trembling from exhaustion. Her essence was on the verge of running out.  
  
'Let us finish here.'  
  
Nodding, Rain collapsed on the floor. There was no furniture in the spacious chamber, but she was happy to feel the cool touch of the stone plates. After a while, she sat up and smiled.  
  
'I am not sure I will ever need to speak such horrible Names, teacher. After all, I want to be a builder, not a natural disaster.'  
  
Lady Nephis smiled faintly.  
  
'Creation and destruction are two sides of the same coin, Rain. You can't neglect one if you want to master the other.'  
  
Rain frowned a little, contemplating her words.  
  
Well… it made sense. If she wanted to build a bridge, she had to know all the ways in which the bridge could collapse - otherwise, she wouldn't be able to design it solidly enough to weather the burden of its own weight.  
  
Still, she didn't want to focus on learning True Names that could be of use in a battle too much.  
  
Rain lingered for a while, then summoned the Bag of Withholding and pulled out a stack of paper, each page filled with neat, pretty handwriting.  
  
'Here is the new revision.'  
  
She touched her hair in embarrassment.  
  
'I… I did my best to expand on the points you asked for. It is a bit hard to put into words, though. I am sorry.'  
  
Lady Nephis took the papers from her, studied them briefly, and nodded.  
  
'Thank you, Rain.'  
  
Her expression grew a little wistful.  
  
After a few seconds of silence, Lady Nephis sighed.  
  
'You must be curious about how things are going, right?'  
  
Rain would lie if she said that she wasn't. In truth, she had come to Bastion not only to learn.  
  
She had also come here to teach.  
  
The knowledge of how to Awaken naturally was too precious to keep for herself. Rain was the only person - for now - who had managed to not only Awaken, but also unseal her Aspect and Flaw without the help of the Nightmare Spell. If she could teach other people how to achieve the same, far fewer of them would have to face the First Nightmare… and far fewer of them would die.  
  
Like the first child of her parents had. Lady Nephis and Cassie wished to see more Awakened in the world, as well, so they promised to support Rain fully. Due to the inherent danger of reshaping the very foundation of the world, her identity was kept secret for now, and the Immortal Flame clan served as her proxy in this endeavor.  
  
They were proceeding carefully. At this stage, only a select number of volunteers had been chosen to attempt natural Awakening in secret - people of various ages, backgrounds, and professions, all united by thе shared desire to help humanity grow stronger.  
  
But things were progressing slowly. It had taken Rain four years to Awaken, but she was a pioneer. Those who would follow in her footsteps were supposed to enjoy a faster journey, and yet none of the volunteers were showing great results.  
  
Lady Nephis shook her head slightly.  
  
'None of them have learned to control their soul essence yet, let alone attempted to form a soul core. However, there is good news as well. Two volunteers are now showing initial signs of being able to sense their essence - a promising result, to say the least. I am sure we will have our first success eventually.'  
  
She looked into the window.  
  
'Naturally, by now, we have no choice but to admit that natural Awakening will never be as speedy as the path offered by the Nightmare Spell. And the Awakened who do emerge that way in the future would most likely never be as fearsome as those forged and tempered by the Spell. Still, their power will supplement the power of humanity just as well… we just have to be mindful of the cost.'  
  
The easiest way to help a mundane person Awaken naturally was to let them absorb soul shards of Awakened Nightmare Creatures. However, there were more and more carriers of the Nightmare Spell in the world these days, and all of them needed to saturate their cores in order to reach the pinnacle of their power.  
  
So, natural Awakening did promise to produce a tectonic shift in the fate of humanity - however, it was not a panacea to the problems that plagued it.  
  
Lady Nephis glanced at the papers in her hand and smiled softly.  
  
'Still - thank you, Rain. One day in the future, when the world becomes kind enough, children will not have to become fearsome warriors anymore. When that day comes, this effort of yours will save myriad lives. No words can express my gratitude.'  
  
Rain glanced away and blushed.  
  
'That… that is alright! All I did was hunt a few Nightmare Creatures with big brother's help, fall into a canyon, and trek across a muddy plain. It was not a big deal…'  
  
Lady Nephis chuckled quietly and patted Rain on the shoulder.  
  
'I hope you didn't include this observation in your notes. We wouldn't want our volunteers to start jumping into random canyons, would we?'