2444 Dream of the Forgotten God  
  
Sunny stared at her, stunned.  
  
"It… doesn't change much? How so?"  
  
Nephis lingered for a long time, then shrugged.  
  
"My goal has always been to destroy the Nightmare Spell. But… back when I chose that goal, I was young and knew little of the world. As I grew and learned more, my understanding of the world expanded… and therefore, my goals expanded as well. The Nightmare Spell, the Nightmares — to me, they are one and the same. I want to destroy them all. And even if the root evil is the Nightmare itself, the Spell is not free of guilt either."  
  
Her voice grew a little lower.  
  
"You two seem to accept that the Nightmare Spell is a benevolent force, but I disagree. Yes, with what we know now, it is impossible to deny that its purpose, at least, was a noble one. It was created to save the world, no less. However, you forget that it was created by a daemon, a divine being as old as time itself… and their concept of benevolence and nobility would have been quite alien to ours."  
  
Turning аround, she looked at Sunny and Cassie coldly.  
  
"Sure, the Nightmare Spell pushes humans to walk the Path of Ascension as fast as possible — in order to give us strength to resist the spreading Nightmare. But have you considered that it might not be going about it in the best possible way? As far as I see it, the Spell's solution to the problem is to simply throw as many bodies at it as possible. Most will die gruesomely, and then, even more people will die. Countless lives will be ruined, and entire generations will be wiped out. But as long as a few survive and achieve a higher Rank… then everything is okay, isn't it?"  
  
Sunny remained silent for a few moments, considering her words. Then, he said tentatively:  
  
"But you can't deny that it's… effective, can you? And that we are in a pretty desperate situation, so it's not like we are spoiled for choices."  
  
Nephis shook her head.  
  
"Is it that effective, though? Or is it crude and wasteful? Think back to everything you have experienced. Was there really no better way? We are the strongest champions of humanity, you and I. But is it because we were the best, or is it because we were lucky? Would things have been different if the Spell had been different? All those lost lives… all that wasted potential. How would the world have turned out if the First Lord of the Bright Castle had not been sent into a death trap by the Spell, for example? How far could he and his cohort have gone? What about Daeron the Serpent King? If the Spell had not sent him into a Nightmare that only someone immune to Corruption could have conquered, what would have happened to the people of the Twilight Sea?"  
  
She shook her head and gritted her teeth.  
  
"You can only see the Spell in a positive light because you are its beneficiary, not its victim. No matter its purpose, the Spell is ruthless, inhuman, and vile. All this great power, all that startling potential… and you tell me that the great Demon of Fate could not come up with anything better than forcing children into the jaws of the Nightmare? Do you know how many Aspirants die every year without ever becoming Sleepers? I know, because I can feel their flames being snuffed out day and night. Was there really no better way?"  
  
White flames ignited in Neph's eyes, and she grimaced.  
  
"You can convince me that the Nightmare Spell is a necessary evil that we are stuck with, but you can't convince me that it is benign. You can't convince me not to hate it."  
  
Then, suddenly, her expression eased, turning cold and impassive once again. Nephis remained silent for a few moments, then sighed and turned back to the window.  
  
"Well… it doesn't matter, anyway. I meant it when I said that this new knowledge doesn't change much — in any case of how I feel about the Spell. A long time ago, I told someone that I intended to conquer all the Nightmares, and destroy the Spell. And I still do. It is just that now, I know that there will be a seventh Nightmare after the sixth, and that I will have to end the Forgotten God first before dismantling the Spell."  
  
She chuckled bitterly.  
  
"There would be no need for it by then anymore, anyway. So this entire argument is moot."  
  
Sunny frowned, then leaned forward a little.  
  
"But that is just the thing, Neph. It is not moot. Have you forgotten what our goal is? It is to prevent the destruction of humanity. Killing the Forgotten God is what Weaver's wanted to achieve, not us. Who cares what that treacherous daemon wanted? Weaver is dead, so we are free to do what we want. And to achieve that… we don't need to risk ourselves in a battle against a being that neither the gods nor the daemons were able to stop."  
  
He clenched his fists.  
  
"We don't need to conquer the Seven Nightmares and destroy the Forgotten God. We don't need to destroy the Spell, either — the Spell can continue keeping that thing asleep. It has contained him for eons, and it can contain him for a few eons more. We just need to become strong enough to contend against the creatures that are threatening humanity here and now… we just need to become Divine."  
  
Others would have called him a fool or a coward for thinking like that, but Sunny did not care. In fact, he considered people who could not see past what was intended for them foolish, instead.  
  
Sure, the Forgotten God was the source of Corruption that plagued the world, and destroying him would theoretically stop the spread of the Nightmare… but so what?  
  
None of them had even considered the possibility of a world without Nightmare Seeds and Nightmare Creatures before. These were merely inalienable facts of life until just a few days ago, and rather than fantasizing about some kind of heavenly paradise, they had been busy planning how to ensure the survival and prosperity of mankind in reality.  
  
As long as its safe resettlement into the Dream Realm could be ensured, and as long as there were champions powerful enough to keep the Cursed and Unholy Nightmare Creatures at bay, humanity could not only survive, but thrive in this world they lived in.  
  
There were already vast cities like Bastion and Ravenheart here, in the Dream Realm… there were electric street lights and fertile fields, roads were being built across the wilderness, trade caravans were traveling between human strongholds, and new settlers were arriving every day. Sure, there were also Nightmare Creatures and horrors beyond description… but that was just life.  
  
He had never known anything different, and most of humanity had not either. And yet, that did not stop people from living their lives… from struggling, striving, and thriving in this dangerous, but generous and stunning world.  
  
That was what Sunny wanted to protect. That was why he had returned from his journey to the edge of the world, resolving to change it.  
  
Slaying some ancient God of Corruption had nothing to do with it. Sunny could sleep peacefully even knowing that the Forgotten God was dreaming about him somewhere out there, imprisoned in a Nightmare by the Spell.  
  
Sure, there was a possibility that the Spell would fail one day and that its prisoner would awaken… but that was not an unfamiliar reality, either. After all, even before the Nightmare Spell descended, people knew that the sun would die one day, and that the entire universe was moving toward eventual demise.  
  
But nobody threw themselves into the sun because of it. The world had always been meant to end one day… probably long after humanity had already destroyed itself ten times over. The awakening of the Forgotten God was no different from the heat death of the universe, in that regard.  
  
Only destroying the Forgotten God would probably be far more difficult and deadly than destroying the universe. After all, he was older than the universe, having participated in its creation.  
  
…And that was whom Weaver wanted them to kill?  
  
Sunny shook his head.  
  
"Becoming Divine is already impossible enough. Sure, I understand that we are indoctrinated to count and do everything in sevens, and that it feels wrong to ignore the logical conclusion of the path laid out for us by Weaver… but our goal has been to become gods in order to protect humanity. Not to challenge the final Nightmare and correct an error made by the true gods when designing the world. Not to eliminate the Flaw of existence. A perfect world is a dead world, anyway, so why would we want to throw ourselves into something entirely fatal, and meaningless on top of that?"  
  
Nephis looked at him with a deep scowl.  
  
"To prevent numerous people from having their choice robbed from them by the Nightmare Spell. To save countless lives from dying in the Nightmares. To ensure that the end of the world never comes. To destroy the Spell once and for all! Why… why can't you see it?"  
  
Sunny did not respond for a while, looking at her silently.  
  
He knew… he knew that deep down, Nephis was a selfish person. That she did what she wanted, and it was merely a happy coincidence that what she wanted was to be a righteous and decent person — according to her own harsh understanding of righteousness and decency, of course.  
  
But what she really wanted was to destroy the Spell, which she hated — and do so in a way she would not be ashamed of.  
  
To avenge herself upon the world.  
  
The Nightmare Gates, the Nightmare Spell, it was indeed all the same to her. She would not be able to let go of her most ardent desire easily.  
  
But…  
  
Sunny was a selfish person, too.  
  
"I see it. But I… I simply don't want you to throw your life away, Neph. Not in an attempt to create some kind of flawless Garden of Eden, of all things. I need you alive… please, try to see that as well."  
  
They both remained silent for a while, looking at each other.  
  
In the end, Nephis sighed and turned away.  
  
"...Why are we arguing, anyway? It's not even guaranteed that we will survive the Fifth Nightmare, let alone the Sixth. We can't even think about challenging the Seventh right now, and won't be for many years. So… let's cross that bridge when we get there."  
  
Sunny lingered for a while, then nodded reluctantly.  
  
"Sure. Let's focus on what we need to do right now, indeed."  
  
He knew that she had not been convinced, and that her determination to destroy the Nightmare Spell was as firm as ever.  
  
But… Sunny also knew that many things could change with time. So, he tacitly agreed not to continue this conversation later, for now.  
  
Nephis sighed.  
  
"So, what are your plans?"  
  
He leaned back and smiled.  
  
"Well, since you so kindly disposed of that Cursed Demon and cleared the path to the Mirror Maze, I thought I'd get Effie and explore True Bastion a little. Oh… but I want to make a short stop in the frozen wastelands west of here first. There's something there I want to try finding. I'll depart for Bastion after that."  
  
Nephis hesitated for a moment, then nodded.  
  
"Good. Actually, I found something after the battle with Abjuration. A fragment of one of Mordret's Reflections. It could have been there from when we unleashed that Cursed Demon in True Bastion a year ago, but something tells me that it got there later. So, he might be hiding somewhere in that Mirror Maze… it's good that you'll be heading there."  
  
Sunny's smile dimmed a little.  
  
"That guy? How wonderful."  
  
With that, he turned to Cassie.  
  
"He was not hiding in that piece of mirror by chance, was he?"  
  
She shook her head.  
  
"No… Abjuration would have gotten him, and I checked just to make sure on top of that."  
  
Sunny nodded with relief.  
  
"Good. Then… I guess we are done for today. I think we all need some time to digest all this new information."  
  
He looked at Nephis, knowing that the two of them had a lot to talk about... and talk through. But that was better done alone.  
  
Outside the window, the sun was already rising from beyond the horizon.  
  
A new day had come to Ravenheart.