1374 Drowned Temple

'Damned sword...'

Making his way into the ruined interior of the temple, Sunny was seething with dark emotions.

What did the Sin of Solace even want? One moment, he was fanning the flames of guilt Sunny might have felt about how he treated Cassie in the past. The next moment, the wraith was reminding him of what had happened, and of how cruelly she had betrayed his trust...

Well, it was perfectly clear what the apparition wanted. The bastard wanted to drive him mad.

And he was... Sunny was mad.

No matter how much he understood why Cassie had done what she did, and no matter how many times he told himself that her actions had ended up saving Rain from being killed by Nightmare Creatures, and him from dying in the Nightmare Desert or becoming Mordret's slave... no matter how many things they had gone through together after the Forgotten Shore and how much their relationship had improved and deepened...

At the bottom of it all, Sunny was still hurt, resentful, and angry at Cassie. While at the same time caring deeply about her.

It was a proper mess...

'What else is new?'

It had been for a while.

"This place... is not creepy at all."

Jumping down from a pile of rubble, Sunny landed in shallow water.

The interior of the lost temple was drowned both by stale water and darkness. Since the island-ship was tilted and partially submerged beneath the waves, the long corridors with high ceilings were tilted as well. The three of them had to walk awkwardly, stepping on the walls with one foot and the cracked floor with the other.

Not to mention that there was rubble everywhere, forcing them to jump or climb over the natural barricades obstructing their path.

If there was one good thing about the situation, it was that none of them was oppressed by the darkness. Sunny could see in it perfectly fine, Cassie did not need sight at all, while Nephis was capable of lighting her own path.

"I think he is trying to say that this place is really creepy."

Nephis looked at him and smiled with satisfaction, proud to have understood his meaning.

Sunny stared at her incredulously.

'...What? Why does she look so smug? It's really not that hard to understand!'

Neph was such a weirdo sometimes...

Shaking his head, he turned away and continued to make his way deeper into the temple. Cassie was walking at the front, protected by her Echoes. Nephis and Sunny were in the middle, with his Shadows following them from behind.

The layout of the temple seemed different from the one the blind girl had lived in, but she seemed to know the way.

They were moving deeper and deeper into the labyrinth of half-collapsed corridors. Sunny felt that they had descended far enough to be underwater by now... nevertheless, the ancient temple must have retained some structural integrity, considering that it was not fully flooded.

Their surroundings, however, were rather ominous.

It was not even because of the darkness, the stale water sloshing at their knees, and the eerie feeling of something influencing the future. It was because this place had served as a prison for the Defiled sybil for a long, long time before being cut from the rest of the city and ending up half-drowned.

From time to time, Sunny noticed strange marks on the cracked walls, as if someone had clawed at them in fury. Other times, there was dried blood smeared across the old stone. The whole temple seemed strange and sinister, like a ruin haunted by an unspeakable evil.

Of course, Sunny was not afraid of ghosts. He had slain enough ghosts to treat them with indifference.

What he was afraid of, however...

Were the sybils.

Even though Sunny did not want to admit it to himself, he still shuddered when remembering the cold despair of L049, and the horror of facing its butcher in the depths of the ocean.

He had been with Naeve and Bloodwave back then. Today, he was with Nephis and Cassie.

...Even though the two of them were weaker than the champions of the House of Night on paper, Sunny somehow felt more reassured in the company of these two young women.

The three of them had survived far worse odds together.

'It's alright to be afraid.'

He was sure that he'll feel better after putting down another one of these Defiled oracles with his own two hands.

"We are getting closer."

Cassie's words were sobering.

Soon, they arrived in front of a huge, intricately engraved door. Its wood was wet and rotten, with illegible runes covering the dark surface. Sunny suspected that these runes were a part of a sorcerous seal once... now, however, they were damaged beyond recognition and lifeless, devoid of any kind of power.

For a moment, he considered turning around and leaving the sinister temple the way he had come.

But of course, he wouldn't. The Defiled sybil had to die... both for the future of Fallen Grace and for the sake of Effie and Jet.

Sunny took a deep breath and wondered if his resolve to slay the abomination was the result of the creature manipulating the future, as well. Had she pulled forward only those of the possible futures where the three humans were adamant on arriving in front of the ancient door, with not a slither of hesitation in their minds?

The thought made him shiver.

'To hell with this!'

Gritting his teeth, Sunny glared at the door, and then delivered a devastating kick to it.

Turning into a rain of rotten debris, the massive gate flew off its hinges and cluttered down, into the dark expanse of a partially flooded hall.

It was then that he felt it... a massive shadow stirring underwater, its slumber broken by the sound of the breaking door.

There were countless smaller shadows hiding in the darkness of the drowned hall, too. And at the far end of it, an especially elusive one. A harrowing specter that made his hair stood on end.

Sunny's entire attention was drawn to the enormous creature that had been sleeping in the heart of the lost temple, though.

Belatedly, he remembered Cassie's words:

"They hunt in groups... and herd true horrors of the depths to use as war beasts."

One such horror, it seemed, had somehow found its way into the inner sanctum of the Defiled sybil's tainted stronghold.