1375 Spoiled for Choices

The dark surface of the water exploded, and a gargantuan shape rose from beneath it. Sunny struggled to contain his revulsion as he saw its grotesque form... the creature looked so appalling and alien that he did not even know how to describe it. It was as if a mass of slithering eels was wearing a messy cloak of tangled seaweed, its countless limbs ten times longer than its vague, slender body.

'How... how did it even manage to stay hidden?'

The great hall of the lost temple was flooded, but the water was not that deep. As the revolting depth dweller continued to reveal its twisted shape, the dark water boiled, and countless Drowned revealed their presence.

These ones were similar to the abominations that had attacked the Chain Breaker in the past, but also different.

Their bodies were humanoid, with powerful black tentacles instead of a pair of legs — however, instead of gaunt outcasts who were overgrown by barnacles, the true Drowned looked much more strong and fearsome. Their weapons were of much higher quality, and some even wore strange but durable armor made out of shell and bone.

The black eyes of the sentient Nightmare Creatures burned with bloodlust and malice.

'Damnation!'

Most of them were Corrupted Demons, while the few most powerful ones seemed to be Devils.

And then there was the sybil herself, of course. Sunny still couldn't see her clearly.

By the standards of the waking world, the three of them were a truly formidable battle force. Sunny was pretty sure that he and Nephis were among the most powerful Ascended humans to have ever lived, with Cassie trailing not far behind them. They were accompanied by two Transcendent Devils, a Transcendent Beast, an Ascended Terror, and an Ascended Monster.

Their Memories were also empowered by a Supreme Memory, the Crown of Dawn.

Still, this battle was not going to be easy. It promised to be extremely perilous, in fact.

As Sunny's pupils narrowed, the time seemed to slow down. His mind entered the state of battle clarity, banishing all unnecessary thoughts. He lingered only for a moment, waiting for Nephis to make a decision...

Every battle force needed a commander, and for their cohort, the burden of command lay squarely on Changing Star's shoulders.

"I'll handle the depth dweller. Sunny, if you will... slaughter these Drowned. Cassie, you will have to occupy the sybil."

Sunny was already moving, the blade of the Sin of Solace slashing through the air. As he did, though, a transient thought entered his mind...

This was it. This was what he knew best. After the endless onslaught of bloody warfare Antarctica, he had thought that he was sick of and nauseated by battles, bloodshed, and violence. But after experiencing these strangely peaceful months in the Third Nightmare...

Had he secretly missed the dark splendor of combat?

'I'm really losing it, huh?'

Then, there was no more time to think.

The silence that had reigned in the flooded hall was torn apart and obliterated. To his right, the darkness was suddenly vanquished by a furious explosion of radiant light. Sunny saw a glimpse of a silvery sword, and felt the entire temple tremble as the gargantuan depth dweller moved to meet it.

Nephis had wasted no time attacking the ancient abomination.

He had no doubt that she would keep the appalling creature busy. His role, however, was no less important — Sunny had to eliminate the Drowned and clear the path for Cassie to face the sybil.

'...Will she be alright?'

Suppressing his worry, he lunged forward.

Sunny was really spoiled in this battle. With the Crown of Twilight supplying him with an almost endless amount of essence in this place of eternal dusk, he did not have to be frugal with how to use it at all. The limits that had oppressed him during the entire Southern Campaign were gone... the only one that remained was mental capacity.

There was a lot he could do. Shadow Manifestation would allow him to, if not outright kill, then at least wound and stall many of the abominations. He could achieve something similar by controlling water with the help of the Serpent King's crown. While the hall was not spacious enough to

warrant turning into the onyx serpent, he could still use Shadow Shell to assume the form of the shadowspawn. He could also use Shadow Step to reign terror on the battlefield.

The problem was that his mind was not potent enough to handle all of these tasks at the same time... the enemies were also more powerful than any group he had faced in Antarctica. Corrupted Demons and Devils were not new enemies for him, but Sunny had never faced so many of them at the same time.

What made sentient abominations so dangerous was their intelligence, and the Drowned seemed more than smart enough to fight as a single force instead of a group of powerful, but uncoordinated creatures. Many of the strategies he had used to slaughter weaker enemies were not going to work as effectively against them.

So, he chose to concentrate on two of the multitudes of tools available to him.

The first was the Crown of Twilight and the rudimentary control over water it gifted him. Although the great hall was not entirely flooded, it still gave an advantage to the Drowned, who could move with equal ease on land and in water. Terrain advantage was of utmost importance in any battle, so Sunny was going to try and turn the tables on his enemies.

The second was the Sin of Solace. Currently, all Memories Sunny had summoned were augmented by the Crown of Dawn — including his already fearsome jian. Its long jade blade was more than powerful enough to cut through both the Corrupted abominations and their armor, and therefore, augmenting his strength even further with Shadow Shell was simply unnecessary.

The best decision Sunny could make was to fully concentrate on his swordsmanship, cutting out all things except for those that were in service of it.

'Let's show them...'

Landing on a toppled column, he moved fluidly and delivered a lethal slash to the neck of an attacking abomination.

However...

From just that first strike, Sunny realized that this battle was going to be much more deadly than he had ever thought.