1381 Cleaning Up

As soon as the sybil fell, it was as though an invisible ripple spread through the darkness of the flooded temple. Sunny did not see anything, nor did he sense the change... but the gnawing feeling of something being subtly wrong with the world was suddenly gone, allowing him to breathe freely.

'Cassie... killed her?'

Stunned, he froze for a split second. The grotesque body of the Defile plunged into the water and disappeared beneath its dark surface. Sunny had no doubt that the creature would emerge from the restless depths to deliver its furious retribution the next moment... but the moment passed, and it had not.

The glossy black surface remained unbroken.

'She... did.'

Sunny was momentarily astounded. Yes, Nephis had chosen Cassie to face the sybil — but not to slay her. The blind girl had been meant to occupy the Defiled until one or both of them finished wiping out their share of enemies and reached the dais.

When had Cassie become so strong?

Although the sybil had been a Nightmare Creature who relied on her unholy powers more than on her physical might, a Corrupted Tyrant was still a Corrupted Tyrant. Killing an abomination like that was no small feat — quite the opposite, actually — let alone doing it in one strike. How many Masters were there who could boast the same? Were there any, even?

And yet, Cassie had not only killed her, but had also made it look effortless.

Sunny frowned, feeling a strange mix of unease and elation. Had she always been that lethal, or was it the result of the year she spent alone in the Third Nightmare?

He suddenly felt a hint of discomfort. It was as though... as though he did

not know one of his closest companions nearly as well as he had thought.

Sunny quickly recovered from his brief reverie, though. The battle was still not over, and albeit victory was within grasp, all that separated him from death was one mistake.

Well... maybe one mistake and a half, thanks to Weaver's forbidden lineage and the Marble Shell.

Generously burning his nearly inexhaustible essence, he used the Crown of Twilight to call upon the water once again, and lunged at the next enemy.

The moment Sunny faced the powerful demon, he knew that the tide had changed. The Drowned were still just as powerful, sinister, and deadly... but the oppressive burden of the shifting future was gone. It had disappeared as soon as Cassie's rapier pierced the sybil's neck, ending her tyranny.

'Now we're talking...'

He forced himself to remain focused, refusing to relax... right, what madness was this? What kind of fool would relax when facing a swarm of Corrupted Demons? Even without the Defiled oracle, they were enough to slaughter a score of Masters.

These creatures were different from the usual minions Tyrants controlled, too. It was as Cassie had said... the Drowned were sentient and chose whom to serve, as opposed to being forced into servitude. Usually, Tyrants could only control minions of a lesser Rank, but since the Drowned had followed the Defiled sybil voluntarily, that rule was broken in the flooded temple.

'Don't get arrogant.'

The haughty shadow already had enough arrogance to outshine ten vainglorious fools. Sunny really did not want to end up dead by following its example.

Stepping on water, he deflected a harpoon flying at him from the darkness with enough speed and force to put a projectile shot from a siege engine to shame. Then, Sunny shifted his weight and lashed out with the Sin of Solace, cleanly decapitating the nearest Drowned Warrior.

It felt different. Finally, he was once again in full control of both his actions and their outcomes. The confidence that Sunny had almost lost returned. Grinning behind the fearsome mask, he listened to the Spell whispering into his ear and disappeared into the shadows.

A moment later, a mass of black tentacles enveloped the empty space where he had been standing. Sunny, however, was already somewhere else, his jade sword reaping another life.

Not too far from him, Saint continued her silent slaughter. With nothing holding her back anymore, the graceful knight had turned even more lethal. Unlike Sunny and Fiend, she could not move through shadows, which put her at a dire risk of being surrounded — the Drowned were not much weaker than the taciturn Shadow, so being caught by their tentacles could very well mean the end of her.

However, Saint was too skilled and calculating to allow herself to be immobilized. She was a battle master, after all, which meant that any battlefield was her domain. Moving with deadly grace and murderous foresight, she controlled not just her sword, but also the very space around her. Everything that entered it was at her mercy.

Fiend, meanwhile, was wreaking havoc among the Drowned. The dull black silver of his metal body seemed to radiate heat, and surrounded by boiling vapor, the furious Shadow sliced through the abominations with his incinerating claws. The white radiance burning in his eyes and maw was tinted crimson by the flowing blood of his enemies.

The infernal ogre seemed to be enjoying himself quite a bit. This was his first battle after reaching maturity, and so, he was basking in his ferocious strength and his newly learned battle techniques. He also seemed very happy at the opportunity to show off in front of Saint.

...Not to mention that every abomination he killed was bound to become his dinner soon. Unlike everyone else in the flooded hall, Fiend was on cloud nine and living his best life.

The Echo of the sybil was gruesomely slaughtering the Drowned, followed by the damaged steel mannequin. The two of them were much less expressive than Sunny's Shadows, but also pulling their own weight.

Of course, all of them were having a much easier time of fighting the swarm of Corrupted Demons because their enemies were weakened by the dreadful powers of Nightmare.

The dark destrier was shrouded in darkness and terror, moving across the flooded hall as swiftly as a shadow. His adamantine fangs, horns, and hooves had broken and mutilated many abominations already, but judging by the menacing crimson glow of his eyes, the stallion's fury was nowhere near being satiated.

The battle was still perilous and dire...

But its outcome seemed more and more certain with every moment.