1518 Ruin

Standing on the crumbling wall of the floating fortress, Sunny saw the light grow dim above Twilight. For a moment, everything was still.

And then, the entire world was suddenly drowned in white radiance, blinding him.

Stunned, he raised a hand to cover his eyes and saw a pristine star ignite in the heart of the distant city. It swelled, growing into a massive sphere of furious flame.

Everything happened in an instant.

The buildings nearest to the white star simply dissolved in its pure light, evaporating. Those further away exploded into dust and were erased from existence by an obliterating shockwave. Those behind them were flattened and melted, turning to ash from the immolating heat.

A wave of incinerating fire, taller than the towering walls of the city, spread outward at lightning speed, consuming everything in its path —buildings, trees, cobblestones, even air itself... and all the tiny human figures flooding the crumbling streets.

Behind it, the furious star rose and deformed, slowly turning into a mushroom cloud of incandescent white flame. The pillar of fire supporting it dwarfed everything, reaching toward the sky.

'W—what...'

Even driven into madness by fury, he was momentarily paralyzed by the harrowing splendor of that inconceivable sight. Twilight... Twilight was being destroyed in front of his eyes.

...That was when the invisible shockwave reached the fortress, shattering its walls and throwing him down.

The deafening roar of the explosion came next, shaking the world.

Sunny plummeted from the broken wall and hit the cold stones with a sickening sound. Bouncing off the hard surface, he rolled and then instinctively covered his head with his hands. In the next moment, a rain of stone debris fell down, pummeling him like crushing hail.

'Who... who dares...'

Deaf from the cataclysmic roar of the blast, he screamed furiously and

tried to stand up. Something hit him on the head, but Sunny did not care. Hunched, he rose from the ground and peered into the dust that had enveloped everything around, searching for the massive figure of the dragon.

So what if all of Twilight was devoured by flame? So what if it seemed like the sky had been shattered and fell down?

He was still going to kill the hateful worm... '...Why is it so dark?'

The colossal pillar of flame had reached the heavens and collapsed on itself, torn apart by the wind. The furious light of the pure white star had dimmed and disappeared, plunging the world into darkness.

A vast cloud of ash rose into the air and obscured the seven suns, turning the twilight of dawn into a lightless gloom of dark devastation.

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Far away, in the scorched desert that had been Twilight, ash fell from the sky like snow. In the heart of the ruined city, nothing but darkness remained. Even the air itself had been burned away by the inconceivable heat of the obliterating explosion, and so there were no flames burning on the blackened stones.

The only source of illumination in that dark abyss was a radiant figure that stood amidst the destruction, surrounded by ash and ruins. It was slowly coalescing back into the shape of a beautiful young woman from pure light.

Her brilliant skin did not have a single blemish on it, and her shining hair flowed like incandescent silver, emanating a blinding white radiance.

Her pristine light reflected in the boiling water, creating a small island of light in the sea of searing darkness. Twilight was still and silent, with nothing but water moving on its vast, smoldering expanse.

The numerous human bodies of Soul Stealer were all gone, devoured by the merciless flames and turned to ash.

The Nightmare Creatures who had battled against them were gone, too. Only Nephis remained, illuminating the darkness with her light.

...And because she was the only one left, the indestructible reflection of the sinister mirror fiend had nowhere to go but into the depths of her radiant, harrowing eyes.

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Nephis was standing on the surface of a calm ocean. The world around her was suffused with sunlight, and the perfectly still water below her bare feet glowed beautifully, reflecting the brilliance of heaven.

It was as if she was standing on a sea of golden clouds, awash in breathtaking light.

Seven suns shone brightly above her head. She looked at them impassively.

She had felt the terrible agony of one of her soul cores — the Terror Core — destroying itself before. But so many Defiled abominations had been consumed by the unleashed flames of her soul that it was reformed anew.

With it, the seventh core was born.

The last core.

The pain of its creation had already passed, and Nephis was a Titan now.

She looked away from the seven suns and gazed silently at the only spot of dirt and darkness in her perfectly radiant world. Out there, some distance away, a repulsive creature stood, staring at her with mirror-like eyes.

It did not look like a human, nor did it look like a Nightmare Creature. Instead, it was like a revolting amalgamation of countless people, countless abominations, all joined together into a monstrous patchwork being that shifted and changed form with every move, every breath, every moment that passes.

The shifting monster towered above her, staining the pure waters of her soul with darkness and corruption.

Soul Stealer grinned, reaching forward with countless hands.

He called her name with countless voices.

His countless eyes festered with hatred and greed.

But also fear.

Nephis looked at him with contempt.

Her even voice echoed across the radiant expanse, uttering a single word: "...Burn."

And then, the beautiful landscape of her soul changed.

The water Soul Stealer stood upon was no water at all. Instead, it was liquid flame, as if he was standing on the surface of a furious white star. The golden clouds floating above him were not vapor, but incandescent gas, as if he was drowning in burning stardust.

Most harrowing of all, though, was the light of the seven suns

Because here in the sea of Changing Star's soul, there was no escape from their incinerating rays.

The radiance of the seven suns swelled, turning the calm ocean into an incandescent white void.

And, trapped in that merciless void... Soul Stealer burned.