1612 An Audience with the Lord

The interior of the dark temple was drowning in deep shadows, and the enchanted lanterns of the Fire Keepers seemed even weaker in their cold embrace. The light emanating from the luminous Memories flickered, barely able to illuminate a narrow circle around them.

In fact, it was not even the shadows themselves... Neph's eyes narrowed when she felt the subtle presence of the being who was hiding in the depths of the hall wash over her like a tidal wave. Suddenly, the darkness around them seemed infinitely more dark, in turn making the light starker.

'...Strong.'

While Nephis was peering into the darkness, their silent guide walked to the side and turned around, resting the tip of her sword on the stone floor of the temple. It was as though the onyx devil assumed the position of an entrance guard.

...There was another strange sculpture on the other side of them. This one was at least five meters tall and resembled a four-armed fiend that had escaped from the depths of a fiery hell, his mighty body forged from polished black silver. The infernal troll had long, sharp spikes protruding from his steel carapace, as if he was made from countless shattered swords.

No, not a sculpture.

As the towering fiend moved slightly, the infernal flames burning in his eyes ignited with hungry malice.

The Fire Keepers grew tense under the gaze of the menacing giant. Nephis remained unperturbed.

A moment later, Cassie whispered into her ear:

[It is... it is a Supreme Devil. His body is incredibly durable and almost immune to fire.]

'...Bothersome.'

Killing a Supreme Devil was not impossible, but this one seemed especially tough. Melting him down would be a chore...

Of course, there were ways to deal with such turtle-like enemies. It was just that fighting the towering fiend and the onyx devil at the same time would not be convenient. In fact, Nether's daughter felt more dangerous despite being of a lower Rank.

In any case, neither of them showed signs of wanting to attack the guests. They just stood motionlessly, as if inviting them to walk deeper into the temple.

Nephis passed between the two powerful monsters and did just that. The Fire Keepers followed, looking oppressed by the inhospitable darkness.

When they reached the middle of the great hall, she stopped. In front of them... the shadows grew even deeper, and the light of the lanterns simply drowned in them, disappearing without any effect.

It seemed that the Lord of Shadows did not wish to be seen. Nephis sighed and looked up.

She could feel something enormous moving in the darkness beyond, staring at her from incredible height. At the same time, a chilling sound resounded in the silence of the ancient temple, surrounding her and her warriors from all sides. Like the rustle of countless scales as they scratched against the ancient marble.

It was as though a colossal serpent was slithering in the darkness, uncoiling its gargantuan body to raise its long neck and gaze upon them from the darkness.

Not being able to see the giant creature was a little uncomfortable. Luckily, Cassie was there to help Nephis know what she faced:

[A... a Transcendent Terror.]

Nephis frowned.

'How many powerful servants does the master of this temple have?'

She was... amused. Was the Lord of Shadows really independent? How come he had more powerful summons than she had, then? Wasn't it a bit ridiculous?

Granted, the Great Clan Valor did not treat its adopted daughter with nearly as much sincerity as it did Morgan. But still...

It was not the quantity of these monsters that mattered. It was just that Nephis could sense that each of them was far more ferocious and dangerous than any Echo she had seen.

Suddenly, she felt something very unexpected... A hint of sympathy for the Prince of Nothing.

[What about the Lord of Shadows himself?]

Cassie remained silent for a few moments.

[I don't sense anyone else. There is nobody there...]

But just as she said that, a cold voice suddenly resounded from the darkness, enveloping the Fire Keepers like a death knell:

"Nephis of Valor... welcome. I did not expect to be visited by someone as exalted as the last daughter of the Immortal Flame."

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Sitting on a tall throne cut from black marble, Sunny looked down on Nephis and her warriors. His face, hidden behind the polished black wood of Weaver's mask, was impassive.

However, a storm of emotions was raging in his heart.

Here in his territory, where the Nameless Temple now stood, he was almost omniscient. That was because the Shadow Realm Fragment enveloped a vast area around the Citadel, allowing Sunny to perceive everything, everywhere, all at once.

So, he had been watching Saint guide Nephis and the Fire Keepers to the doors of the temple all along. Sunny had thought that he would be ready to face her.

But he had been wrong.

Seeing her face, her lustrous silver hair, her beautiful grey eyes, the familiar stubborn resolve shining in their calm depths...

It felt as if he had been struck by lightning.

His heart was beating faster than when he had been facing that Great Demon.

Looking at Nephis from the darkness, Sunny remembered all the reasons he had come up with to spare himself the pain of being close to the members of his former cohort.

At that moment, he understood one simple thing.

'...I'm doomed.'

Because the moment he saw Nephis, all reason was obliterated.

What was good about being reasonable, anyway? Hadn't he personally preached the benefits of being unreasonable before?

Sunny took a deep breath, and then leaned back, glancing at the huge head of the Soul Serpent hovering high above his throne.

Then, he lingered for a moment and said, keeping his voice calm and devoid of emotions:

"Nephis of Valor, welcome. I did not expect to be visited by someone as exalted as the last daughter of the Immortal Flame."

She stared into the darkness, then bowed slowly.

"Greetings, Lord of Shadows. I hope you don't mind being addressed this way... or would you prefer I call you something else?"

Sunny remained silent for a few moments. Eventually, he answered evenly:

"I would not. But you can call me Shadow."