1622 Many Mysteries of Shadow

The Lord of Shadows did not seem in the mood to talk after the conclusion of the duel. Maybe he was dissatisfied with its result, or maybe he had simply strained himself too much in order to withstand the torrent of steel unleashed by Nephis, and needed rest. With how mysterious the reclusive Saint was, it was impossible to tell what was on his mind.

In any case, shortly after he had disappeared into the darkness, the beautiful onyx devil moved once again, inviting them to leave and make a camp outside the temple.

The territory around the ancient Citadel seemed safe enough, with all the Nightmare Creatures having been eradicated by Shadow and his servants. So, the Fire Keepers did not mind resting outside... there was no trust between them and the master of the temple yet, anyway. They would have felt uncomfortable resting under his roof, surrounded by powerful creatures.

A Transcendent Devil, a Transcendent Terror, a Supreme Devil... and gods knew who else. That power was enough to give a stronger force pause.

So, they made camp a dozen or so meters away from the great dark edifice of the Citadel, among the bones of slain Nightmare Creatures.

The lanterns chased away the darkness, and a fire had been ignited in the middle of the camp. Various storage Memories were summoned, containing food and beverages. They even raised several tents, hoping to enjoy a bit of peaceful sleep.

After experiencing two weeks of pure hell, the Fire Keepers could finally rest and relax a little. Of course, they did not lower their guard completely, still wearing their armor and keeping watch in shifts.

Nephis sat in front of the fire, watching it dance with a thoughtful expression.

The Lord of Shadows...

There were too many mysteries about him.

That mask, for example...

By now, Nephis remembered where she had seen it. Ananke had worn a mask almost identical to the one worn by Shadow. It was a symbol of the priests of the Nightmare Spell.

So... was Shadow one such priest, as well, or at least considered himself to be one? Or had he simply slain a follower of Weaver in one of his Nightmares and received the mask as a reward?

In fact, Nephis had seen the depiction of Weaver's Mask long before meeting Ananke. It was drawn on the wall of the Ebony Tower, where the Demon of Destiny had left a map of strongholds built by his siblings in various realms,

The mask, representing Weaver, was placed north of the Hollow Mountains, above all six strongholds... almost as if looking at them from afar. But it did not mean that Weaver's stronghold was hidden somewhere on the Forgotten Shore, or even further north. It simply meant that no one had any idea where Weaver's stronghold was, or if the transient daemon even had one.

So, Nether had drawn it outside the map.

Was the Lord of Shadows connected to the priesthood of the Nightmare Spell, or to the Demon of Fate directly?

And what business did the heir of Shadow God have being tied to a daemon?

'Curious.'

The mask was curious. The Citadel that somehow existed in the middle of Godgrave was also curious. So was the lineage of Shadow God that the master of the Citadel seemed to possess, and his Aspect.

But most curious of all...

Was his swordsmanship.

Staring into the fire, Nephis sighed.

These days, she rarely met anyone who could wield the sword well enough to give her a challenge. There were dreadful Nightmare Creatures and Transcendent warriors with potent Aspects, sure... but that was a competition of power and will, not skill and technique,

As such, the only person Nephis could truly spar with was Morgan,

The Lord of Shadows... was at least on par with the Princess of Valor. No, not quite. It felt like he was much more dangerous

The first battle style he had used was more or less a perfect replica of the refined and domineering style that the Knights of Valor practiced. Mastering it was already no easy feat.

But it was merely one of the styles the Lord of Shadows seemed to have mastered. He was a true sword saint, one of the few that had been born since the descent of the Nightmare Spell.

Suddenly, Nephis wanted to duel him again, this time using the full might of their Aspects. What abilities would he show her? How ingenious was his transcendent battle art?

She had no doubt that he had built one.

Which was... impressive.

Most Saints had mastered a battle art of their own, but few had created it without aid. After all, Saints were supported by their clans, as well as the Great Clans they owed allegiance to. Most had inherited the skill and wisdom of their predecessors, as well as received extensive help from exalted counselors and mentors.

Lord Shadow seemed like a solitary man. There was no clan behind him, let alone a Domain, Which meant that whatever technique he possessed had been designed by him, and him alone.

And then...

There was the second battle style he had shown, obviously as a message to her. Or a provocation.

Her father's style.

Nephis hugged her knees, calmly looking into the fire. Feeling the shift in her mood, the fire surged and swirled.

How was it possible?

As far as she knew, there were only two people in the world who had been taught that style. She had been taught by her family, and Cassie was taught by her. There were no others...

Or were there?

Had her father had a pupil that she didn't know about? Was Lord Shadow that pupil, or a disciple of that pupil?

She wanted to know. She wanted to ask.

Her father had perished when Nephis was four, so she did not have a lot of memories of him. Most of what she knew about Broken Sword was from listening to her grandmother, who talked about her son-in-law often. The rest was from the legends that he had left in the world before dying an untimely death.

But...

She sighed,

There was little sincerity in the world. Knowledge was power, and people guarded their power fervently, Usually, one had to be prepared to pay a price if they wanted to receive an answer, Secrets were not revealed easily,

She was already indebted to Lord Shadow, Heseemed like an unfriendly sort, and would definitely not part with information lightly. In fact... he had probably chosen to use that style for the exact purpose of enticing her into deepening her debt.

‘Devious.’

Who was that man? So strong, so devious, and having enough resources to disregard the riches of Clan Valor...

As she considered that, the ground suddenly trembled.