1651 New Predator

The [Formless] Ability allowed Serpent to assume the form of any shadow resting in Sunny's soul, Inheriting its powers and abilities. The shadow had to be of the same or lower Rank and Class, which meant that the most powerful form Serpent could currently assume was that of the Sybil of the Fallen Grace... the Terror of LO49.

And, in fact, that form was suited for Sunny's goal much better than the Mountain King. However, Serpent had to maintain the transformation with its own essence, and could not sustain such a powerful shape for a long time, let alone constantly.

Once the Shadow's essence was exhausted, the effects of those powers it had assumed would be gone. In other words, if Sunny had ordered Serpent to turn into the harrowing Sybil and enthrall a swarm of Nightmare Creatures, those abominations would have been released from the mind hex before too long.

The Mountain King, meanwile, was merely an Awakened Tyrant. As a Transcendent Terror, Serpent could maintain that form almost indefinitely, especially after Sunny augmented it with the shadows. That was exactly what he needed in order to collect a small army of abominable thralls,

It was funny... the Larvae the Mountain King spawned were Dormant Beasts. Therefore, his first thrall was also a Dormant Beast - but one wearing a Fallen Monster's corpse. What exactly did it make him, Sunny did not know. Nor did he care that much.

Come to think of it...

Sunny glanced at the towering figure of the Soul Serpent, then at the hideous creature laying obediently on the snow. He sighed.

By now, Serpent had to possess at least two new Abilities since it had risen in Class twice while following Rain, and in Rank once. But without the Spell conveniently informing Sunny about what these Abilities did, he had no way of knowing what they were.

There had not been a lot of time for research and experimentation, either, while he was traversing the toxic wilderness of the Northern Quadrant and fighting his way through the depths of the ocean.

All he had was a suspicion that one of these Abilities had to do with Serpent's weapon form, while the other one had to do with souls and spirit essence. However, he wasn't sure.

‘Well. I'll find out later.’

Once the Winter Beast was dead, there would be no serious threats left in the Antarctic Center for a while... at least until the powerful abominations in East Antarctica sensed its absence and crossed the half-frozen strait.

One more reason to kill that cursed thing

Not that Sunny needed more reasons.

Looking at the Larva with contempt, he remained motionless for a few moments, and then turned away. The desolate landscape of the Antarctic Center stretched in front of him, tall mountains rising from the snowy plain in the distance,

The chilling darkness in Sunny's eyes stirred.

"Time to hunt..."

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There had been three most powerful Nightmare Creatures in the Antarctic Center during the Chain of Nightmares - the Fallen Titan Goliath, the Corrupted Terror Sybil of the Fallen Grace, and the Corrupted Titan Winter Beast. Sunny had killed the first two, while the last now ruled this land.

Which was to say that Sunny, now a Transcendent Terror, was the second most terrifying creature in the frigid mountains of the abandoned landmass.

He remembered vividly the dreadful gauntlet of the Southern Campaign. Back then, the Antarctic Center was like a merciless death trap, with harrowing abominations waiting to ambush him and his soldiers on every turn. He had crossed it once with the First Evacuation Army, and the second time with a convoy of refugees, each time struggling desperately just to survive.

But things were different now.

Now, Sunny was the harrowing predator, while the abominations dwelling in the mountains were his prey,

He slowly moved south, retracing the steps of the army. It was already winter in Antarctica, but the sun had not fallen beyond the horizon yet... there was twilight and darkness dwelling in the deep canyons between the snowy peaks, so he could remain unseen, moving from shadow to shadow like a stalking beast.

Wherever Sunny passed, the snow was painted crimson with blood. The corpses of the Nightmare Creatures were brutally torn apart, and their carcasses littered the slopes like morbid gardens of mangled flesh. He appeared out of nowhere, surrounded by a tide of shadows, and butchered the abominations with cold, ruthless determination.

He even started to enjoy the slaughter after a while.

...Not all of them died, of course.

From time to time, he chose a Nightmare Creature to be infected with a Mountain King's Larva. Slowly but surely, his swarm of thralls grew, which made it harder to hide them. Eventually, he had to abandon stealth and advance forward openly. Sunny hoped that a horde of Nightmare Creatures would attack him, but sadly, the number of abominations seemed to have dwindled under the Winter Beast's reign.

The great hordes of Nightmare Creatures were nowhere to be seen. Some must have migrated south, some had succumbed to cold, and some could have even crossed the strait to East Antarctica. Only the strongest and most resilient abominations remained... and these were the abominations Sunny hunted.

There were creatures of all kinds following him now. He did not choose the most powerful monstrosities or the most lethal to enthrall, so their combat power was not that impressive. What he pursued was variety... variety of types, shapes, forms, elemental affinities, and resistances.

These thralls were not meant to kill the Winter Beast, after all. They were only meant to help Sunny find a way to kill the creature himself.

The further inland he went, the colder it became. There were lesser Nightmare Creatures around, too, since fewer and fewer of them could withstand the dreadful cold. Even Sunny himself was starting to feel uncomfortable, hiding from the cutting wind and wearing Ananke's Mantle to warm himself.

By the time he reached the ruins of Erebus Field, the cold was almost lethal.

Here in the vicinity of Mount Erebus, though, Sunny could at least breathe easily. The siege capital that had once stood at the foot of the volcano was destroyed by Goliath. The ruins were mostly drowned in lava - the lava had long turned to stone, of course, which was now buried by snow.

Still, the heat coming from below the ground made this area a little bit warmer.

Standing on a cliff above the snowy plain, Sunny took a deep breath and studied it carefully.

‘...It will do.’

There was no better battlefield in the Antarctic Center if he wanted to kill the Winter Beast.