1652 Terrible Challenger

Two weeks after Sunny had returned to Antarctica, he stood on a cliff overseeing a vast scene of devastation. In front of him, a great valley was formed from collapsed mountains and stone debris, the ruinous landscape now covered in ice and snow.

This was the place where Sky Tide, Wake of Ruín, and Dire Fang had battled the three emerged Titans - Whispering Legion, Goliath, and Winter Beast. The Whispering Legion had been slain, while the other two calamitous abominations drove the Saints away. An entire span of the mountain range had been demolished in the process.

There were Nightmare Gates hidden under the crushed stone, without a doubt, or maybe above it.

Sunny could not see, because most of the valley was hidden by a raging blizzard. This blizzard was the very same that had once enveloped Falcon Scott, sapping the lives of all its remaining inhabitants.

It was the manifestation of the Winter Beast's authority,

The air was so cold that each breath Sunny took felt like he was swallowing a scattering of sharp knives,

Not paying it any attention, he was gazing down with an expressionless face, his eyes drowning in deep darkness. His gaunt body was encased in fearsome onyx armor, and that armor was shrouded in darkness.

Out there in the valley, far below, a long line of Nightmare Creatures was advancing into the blizzard. Their movements were still and unnatural, as if they were corpses animated by some unknown force. But, at the same time, none of them showed any fear or hesitation. Neither did they show the demented frenzy inherent to most abominations.

They just slowly marched into the snow, stretching into a wide line that seemed to encompass the front of the blizzard.

A few moments later, the first of the Nightmare Creatures collapsed, its corpse swiftly becoming encased in ice.

Standing on the tall cliff, Sunny pursed his lips in disdain.

‘Weak.'

Not that he needed these useless things to be strong. No, their purpose was different... it was to show him which type of Nightmare Creature was the most resistant to the Winter Beast's cold.

From what he could tell, the cursed thing was not that powerful physically... at least as far as Titans went. It did not rule a legion of powerful minions, either, What made the Winter Beast so lethal was its uncanny ability to freeze everything around it to death - corporeal or incorporeal, weak or strong, pure or corrupted.

Close to the heart of the blizzard, even time itself seemed slower, as if the chilling cold could freeze the very laws of existence.

Sunny might have been burning with murderous hatred, but he had not lost his reason. if he wanted to kill this Corrupted Titan, he needed to understand It first. Only after dismantling the secrets of the Winter Beast's power would he be able to slay it.

And these thralls were the sacrifice he had prepared to throw into the deathly cold to comprehend it.

Soon, they disappeared from sight. Sunny could not see his sacrificial pawns anymore, but Soul Serpent still shared a connection with them. Therefore, he could know if the Larvae were still moving or had fallen still.

There were all kinds of Nightmare Creatures under his command, and by studying which ones lasted longer, he would be able to determine a few things about the lethal cold.

'Come on. Die for me.’

And yet, in the end, Sunny was disappointed.

Because none of them lasted long.

The small army of thralls he had so laboriously created in the past few weeks was obliterated in mere minutes, none of them making it that far into the snowstorm. The cold did not differentiate between large monsters or small, those with affinity to ice or those without. All of them were drained of warmth or frozen solid, dying a meaningless death in the embrace of the Winter Beast's unholy power.

Sunny cursed, then sighed with regret.

'No matter

The absence of a result was a result in and of itself. The fact that there did not seem to be a kind of resistance effective against the authority of the Winter Beast's profane domain told Sunny a lot, as well.

He had contemplated several strategies for just that kind of outcome. These strategies were risky, yes... but, actually, he did not feel regretful. Because they were also much more direct and brutal.

Killing the wretched Titan in such a fashion was bound to be much more satisfying.

Down in the crumbled valley, the blizzard suddenly expanded, as if coming to life. A terrible wind blew, crushing into Sunny with a chilling force. The wall of swirling snow and ice particles slowly advanced, moving in his direction.

A dark smile split his face in half.

"Look at that, Serpent. We seem to have been spotted."

He had hoped that hiding in the shadows on top of a distant mountain would be enough to throw the Titan off his scent, but he had been wrong. Perhaps the creature had been aware of his presence all along, but did not bother to react until he dared to challenge it directly.

In any case, the Corrupted Titan, Winter Best, was finally rising to deal with the Transcendent Terror, Sunless.

Sunny let out a sigh, then moved his shoulders to stretch his stiff muscles.

"I guess I'll have to finish the preparations faster.”

With that, he glanced at the towering figure of the Mountain King that stood in the darkness behind him.

Under his gaze, the tyrant suddenly turned into a torrent of black liquid, which then reformed itself into a different, equally ghastly abomination.

A Spire Messenger now stood on the edge of the cliff, its terrifying black beak cutting the wind like a dark blade. The creature's pale body was utterly black, and its many powerful limbs pierced the ice with long, sharp talons.

Throwing one last look at the approaching snowstorm, Sunny jumped onto its back. In the next moment, the mighty wings of the creature raised a hurricane, and it shot into the air, carrying him back in the direction of Erebus Field.

The snowstorm followed.