1671 Fear the Sun

According to what the Sleeper had told them, his two friends were not very far from Sunny's territory — however, they were well beyond the reach of his Shadow Sense.

It had taken the youth two days of wandering to stumble upon the Fragment of the Shadow Realm, where he was picked up by Saint. The only reason he had survived such a journey across Godgrave was because Nephis and her people had burned away most of the Nightmare Creatures on the surface, clearing a path to the vicinity of the Nightmare Temple.

Sunny could traverse the distance a Sleeper could walk in two days in a couple steps, but using Shadow Step in such a manner was bound to consume a vast amount of essence, especially if he had to bring Nephis with him. Transporting her and two more humans all the way back was out of the question — unless he wanted to find himself severely weakened in the middle of a Death Zone, not to mention sabotaging his other two avatars.

In short, he would rather move in a less wasteful manner.

Flying suited him fine.

As Nephis was summoning her beautiful wings, Sunny extended his shadow sense outward. He was cautious about exploring the abominable jungle — there were many Nightmare Creatures here who could feel his gaze, and were not shy about gazing back. Soon, his expression darkened.

"We will proceed slowly."

The white wings appeared in a gust of wind. Illuminated by a soft radiance, Nephis raised her hands to tie her silver hair up. Stopping what she was doing, she raised an eyebrow and glanced at him, slightly confused.

"Haven't we decided to fly in order to save time?"

Sunny stared at her for a couple of moments, then slowly looked away.

"...Yes. but if something truly powerful notices us, we'll be stalled. Maybe even forced to escape. So, we will traverse a dozen kilometers or so at a time. I'll scout for danger when we stop."

He pointed to one of the vine bridges stretching toward the dome of the Hollows.

"Head there first."

Nephis remained motionless for a few moments, then nodded and bent her knees slightly. Then, she jumped powerfully, raising a gust of hurricane wind with one flap of her wings. Sunny dissolved into the shadows and followed her as a black crow.

The two of them soared above the dense canopy of red leaves and flew swiftly to the distant pillar of vines. As they did, countless gazes followed their flight.

'Not good...‘

A vast swarm of appalling creatures suddenly rose from the jungle, moving to intercept them like a buzzing cloud. Each abomination resembled a mosquito, if mosquitoes were the size of dogs and had glistening bellies full of rotten blood.

Sunny let out a resentful caw. W 'm I going to have to summon Serpent?‘

Before he made a decision, however, Neph‘s black sword suddenly ignited with blinding white radiance. She swung it in the direction of the approaching swarm, causing a single radiant spark to glide above the jungle, seemingly carried by the wind.

A moment later, the white spark suddenly blazed, and a hurricane of flame was born from it, enveloping the swarm. Burning abomination fell down like a rain of white fire, disappearing into the damp vermilion canopy. Those that had not been immolated slowed down, trembling.

Nephis was shining with a pure white radiance. Flying above the jungle, she was like a small sun... and if there was one thing that the Nightmare Creatures of Godgrave feared universally, it was the sun.

A moment later, those abominations that had avoided the initial conflagration were swallowed by the flame, as well. Just like that, the swarm was eradicated.

Sunny observed the scene incredulously.

'-..Damn.'

How convenient!

Sunny had a lot of ways to deal with abominable giants and ferocious beasts. But these misbegotten pests had caused him so much grief in the past year... now, he didn't even have to move a talon when they appeared. Hugging Changing Star's thigh was so great! Those Fire Keepers were living the life...

A minute or two later, they reached the vine bridge. Neph's sword lashed out once again, this time without being augmented by her flames. Nevertheless, the decapitated body of a hideous primate monster plummeted down, crashing into the jungle with a thunderous noise a dozen seconds later.

Nephis landed on a thick stalk of a red vine, using the vambrace of her armor to clear the wall of the living pillar of poisonous thorns. Then, she thrust her gauntlet into the moss to find a handheld. Half-standing and half-banging above the abyssal drop, she observed the jungle, her eyes calm and focused.

Sunny, in his crow form, landed on her shoulder. Nephis glanced at him briefly, but did not say anything.

He extended his shadow sense forward once more, sensing several truly powerful adversaries hiding under the thick canopy not too far away from their position.

One was already ascending the sky bridge, hidden from sight by the mess of red leaves. The best way to proceed would be...

He jumped off Neph's shoulder and glided forward, taking a smooth turn to the right after a couple of seconds. She followed.

Just like that, they hopped between pillars of vegetation, not spending more than a few minutes in the air each time. There were other abominations that attacked them in the process — swarms of weaker ones, and truly harrowing creatures as well.

The strongest of them was a Great Monster shaped like a crimson python, who had been pretending to be a part of the vine bridge. The creature's disguise was so thorough that Sunny did not notice it at all... Nephis, however, did. Not only that, but he also knew its exact Rank, Class, and Attributes, making the battle much easier.

Cassie must have been helping her from all the way in Bastion.

In the end, Sunny used Shadow Manifestation to immobilize the gargantuan python, while she severed its head with several merciless strikes of her sword. The battle was short, but fierce — it was so intense, in fact, that the commotion attracted the attention of other, much more dangerous beings.

Luckily, Sunny and Nephis escaped before other abominations reached the corpse of the great python and clashed for the right to devour its massive body, making the jungle quake.

Despite the fact that the two of them had not met in four years, and that she did not even remember him...

Their cooperation was as seamless and comfortable as it had been before. They moved like two parts of a single whole without having to say or signal anything to each other, raining death upon their enemies.

Sunny had missed that feeling.

All in all... had never had such an easy time traveling across the Hollows.

Before too long, they reached the approximate area that the Sleeper had described. The pillar of vines he had used to climb to the surface, at least, was the correct one. Now, they had to find the dead tree under which the other two youths were hiding.

If they were still alive, of course.

'Curse it.‘

Sunny's mood turned somber when he saw what lay beyond the towering pillar.

Out there, below them, swallowed by the jungle almost entirely...

Was a vast ruin.