1672 All That Remains

Sunny assumed his human form, standing on a twisting stalk of a giant vine side by side with Nephis. Sunlight was streaming from above, illuminating her slender figure... his, however, was hidden in the deep shadows, almost imperceptible. If someone gazed upon them right now, it would have seemed as though she was observing the overgrown ruin alone.

The ruin was vast and sprawling, but most of it was swallowed by the jungle. Only a few crumbling stone edifices rose above the canopy, covered in red moss. It was hard to recognize them as man—made structures, but the Awakened were experts on all things having to do with ruins — the Dream Realm was littered with them, after all.

Nephis tilted her head a little.

"Ruins? I didn't know that humans once lived here, in Godgrave."

Sunny remained silent for a few moments.

"...Godgrave was densely populated once, in fact. There was a fairly advanced civilization thriving here. The surface was just as deadly, and I can't say anything about the sea of ash below. But there are many ruined cities in the Hollows, some of them as large as the lesser population centers in the waking world."

She glanced in his direction, seeing only the darkness.

"I didn't know that you have such a keen interest in ancient civilizations, Lord Shadow." He smiled.

"Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it in the future."

His words vaguely hinted at a double meaning, but he didn't say anything else.

In any case, Nephis was right. Sunny did indeed have a keen interest in ancient civilizations — he always had, even back in the Dark City. Solving the mysteries of the past appealed to some hidden part of his heart. The thrill and charm of exploring forgotten ruins was the closest thing Sunny had to a hobby... maybe, in a perfect world, it would have been one of his life's passions.

However, his interest in the ruins of Godgrave was special.

The dead civilizations of the Dream Realm had always been one and the same for him — the people were different, the histories were different, but they all belonged in the pages of the same book. After meeting Wind Flower in the Tomb of Ariel, though, Sunny learned that there were two entirely different kinds of ruins in the Dream Realm.

One kind belonged to the people who had lived in the mortal realms, and were destroyed by the war between the gods and the daemons, as well as its immediate outcome.

The other kind belonged to those who had lived in the five divine realms, and fell under the tide of Corruption later.

The difference between the two was very important...

The latter civilizations had been infected by the Nightmare Spell before their eventual fall. Just like the people of the Waking World — the sixth divine realm — were.

The ruins in Godgrave belonged to the second kind.

Because Godgrave had once been a divine realm.

If Sunny was correct, then this harrowing place was what remained of the Sun God's world after it had been swallowed by the Dream Realm. The immolating white void hidden behind the veil of clouds, the sea of ash below... it had to be the broken realm of the Lord of Light.

If so, then the people of this realm must have survived the conclusion of the Doom War. The gods were dead, the nightmares of the Forgotten God were slowly devouring the scattered lands, the Dream Realm was being born. But here, a thriving civilization survived and persisted, building populous cities in the bones of the colossal skeleton.

He could only imagine how strange and vibrant this civilization had been, with vast cities rising in the glowing jungle, great waterfalls pouring from above to create swift rivers that would disappear without a trace a few days later.

The vast sternum must have been the heartland of that civilization, with satellite kingdoms rising inside the ribs, and most remote cities being built in the arm and leg bones of the dead deity.

But then... the Nightmare Spell had descended. And just like the people of the Twilight Sea, the inhabitants of Godgrave failed to meet its dire challenge, being swallowed by the flood of Nightmare Gates.

Now, they were gone. Even the memory of them was gone. The world they had called home was now part of the Dream Realm.

All that remained were these overgrown ruins.

Both Sunny and Nephis looked at them with the same emotion, even if they both hid it. ...Would their world be swallowed like this one, too? Would their people disappear like these people had, one day soon?

Sunny sighed and sent his shadow sense into the ruin.

After a while, his expression turned grim.

Sensing that the shadows around her grew darker, Nephis shifted and asked, her tone a little somber:

"Are they dead?"

He shook his head slowly.

"I have a piece of good news and a piece of bad news, Lady Nephis."

He paused for a moment, then added with cold indifference:

"The good news is that the two Sleepers are still there, in the ruins."

She looked at him with a frown:

"What is the bad news, then?"

Sunny took a step out of the shadows, bright sunlight reflecting from the surface of his onyx armor. The crack of his visor, though, still brimmed with impenetrable darkness. "...They aren't the only ones there."

'How the hell did that boy survive?‘

Out there, hidden in the canopy of the jungle below them, numerous shadows were moving slowly, each belonging to a powerful Nightmare Creature. He had never seen or sensed abominations like these before, but simply from the depths of their shadows, he knew that they were powerful.

And there was..- a lot of them.

"These Sleepers must have found the deadliest nest of Nightmare Creatures in the area to use as a hiding spot. Their luck... well, I don't even know if it's amazing or utterly terrible. They won't survive for much longer, but having survived for that long is already a miracle."

She nodded calmly.

"So we light, then."

Sunny stared at her for a few moments.

"Or... we grab them and run."

Nephis shook her head.

"I don't think that will be possible."

He frowned, not knowing what she meant.

A few moments later, though, he understood.

The bright light falling on them from high above suddenly grew many times brighter, becoming almost blinding.

'The clouds...‘

And a split second later, the great pillar of vines they were standing on shuddered, the upper part of it turning to ash.

As the tendrils that the subterranean jungle had extended toward the surface all moved and started to fall, torrents of flames spreading swiftly toward their roots, Nephis jumped off the stalk and dashed forward, toward the ruins...

And away from sunlight.

"Don't dally!"

Cursing silently, Sunny jumped after her, this time neglecting to turn into a small crow. Instead, he turned himself as light as he could and glided on the wind, descending in a somewhat controlled fall.

He sighed heavily, and then grinned, his eyes glinting with excitement.

'I guess that means that we are going to fight...‘