

League of Discord
Chapter 10: Fury of the Sands

“Okay gentlecolts, everything is going swimmingly, but I have to take my leave of you for a short while.” Discord paced in front of Swain and Singed. “I have to gather some allies for us. I trust you can hold down the fort in my absence? My use for Twilight Sparkle is almost done, but until it is time to dispose of her she must be kept from the other Elements of Harmony, else everything we've worked for will be jeopardized.”

Swain nodded, and his raven cawed in accord. “I'll kill any intruders myself. I'm curious to see what sort of 'allies' a world like this can offer to ones such as us.”

“Remember that this is the same world that birthed the likes of Discord.” Singed slid a blue crystal into its slot on the barding he had been crafting. One audible click later, and Singed began adorning himself in his new armor, which included a sturdier harness for his bottle, and spiked plating on his forelegs and shoulders. The entire ensemble was colored in the same shade of crimson his coat had once been. “You shouldn't underestimate what this world can offer.”

Discord allowed himself a smirk at the indirect compliment. “Well, everypony, I must be off. Something tells me today is going to be a good day. I can just feel it.”

Nasus stood alone, gazing at the setting sun. Luna was entirely occupied by the strain of moving two celestial bodies at once, and the other ponies were preparing themselves for the journey tomorrow, leaving the behemoth alone with his thoughts. At least, that's what he thought, until the presence of a cream-colored pegasus proved him wrong.

Fluttershy looked up at the earth pony. “Why aren't you with your friends? Don't you have anything to get ready?”

Nasus shook his head slowly. “I require no supplies. As for my companions...I am more...acquainted with solitude of late than of companionship. I was meditating. I must be sure that I have a clear mind, that I might do what must be done tomorrow.”

“Your mind hasn't seemed clear the entire time you've been here.” Fluttershy squeaked at her outburst, and looked at the ground. “Uh, I mean, maybe being alone isn't what you need to clear your mind? I'm not nearly as old or experienced as you, but when my heart is heavy, I always talk to Rarity and I usually feel better afterward. Don't you have anyone to talk to?”

“I had one, once. My brother and I used to spend many hours contemplating the meaning of existence together.” Nasus' expression was unreadable, his gaze fixed upon the dying inferno that the setting sun had set the sky ablaze with.

“If you don't mind me asking, what happened to him? You talk about him with regret whenever you mention him.” Fluttershy sat down, trying to fathom the other pony's emotions.

A pointed silence passed, and for a few seconds the timid pegasus was afraid that she had overstepped her bounds before an answer finally came. “A long time ago, my brother and I were the two chief figures in the operation of the pinnacle of our kind's achievements, the Great Library. I was the foremost scholar in charge of teaching those who came into the Library. However, not all who came had pure intentions, and my brother, who had a more sensitive perception of others than I, was designated the gatekeeper. It was his duty to read the intentions of those who would enter, and cast away those with evil in their hearts and minds.”

Fluttershy nodded. “That sounds like a heavy responsibility.”

Nasus continued, his deep voice taking on a distant and somewhat melancholy tone. “We were separated for long periods of time attending to our duties. I was so engrossed in the truths of the universe that I neglected the truth right in front of me. Sunset and sunrise, Renekton was exposed to the evil in the hearts of both my kind and the humans our kind lived to protect. He was a noble soul of noble intent. He only wished that he could find some way to rid the world of the evil he saw day after day, but we both knew that there was no way to do that, and thus we settled into our roles. Each fool seeking arcane secrets for the harm of others, each corrupt soul trying to force its way into a place of purity...Renekton became tainted by the very monsters he guarded against. The sheer amount of darkness he saw warped his mind and polluted his thoughts, sending him into an uncontrollable rage. The 'Butcher's Rage' they called it later. The agony of being a lonely source of light against the encroaching evil drove him to cut the evil from those who possessed it. The more beings he cut down, though, the less each one alleviated the blinding fury that he was becoming enslaved by. He was aware that his unstable mind was making him into a mockery of all he once stood for, and that only served to intensify his pain. In the height of his madness, he caused a war. A purification, the madness in his head termed it. The duty of my kind is to protect though, and I had no choice but to stand against him.”

His audience's response was barely above a strained whisper. “...Continue, please.” Fluttershy looked as though she knew where this story was heading, and the knowledge was crushing her, making her smaller and smaller each second.

“I tried to reason with him. I tried to help him.” Nasus' face had a trace of defeat on it now, and more than a trace of regret. “My help came too late for him though. I was not there when he needed me the most, and the opportunity had passed for me to do anything other than to end his torment, something both of us desired at that point. On one fateful day, I stood against him in battle. Blinded by his rage, he could not stand against me or the knowledge of combat I had obtained. As I moved to strike him down for the final time, though, the Summoners of Runeterra intervened. A summoning ritual aimed at my brother caught both of us, and I was transported to Valoran while my brother was caught in between dimensions. It was only recently that he finally emerged into Valoran, and the League was forced to contain him until they could find out what to do with him.”

“I'm...so sorry.” Fluttershy struggled to find something to say to dispel regret of this ancient being. “It...it wasn't your fault though. Your brother could have come to you, or stepped down from his position. It's always a shame when you don't spend enough time with your family, but if anyone is to blame here, it is those evil souls that drove your brother mad...and, and I'm sure if your brother was as noble as you say, there is still hope, as long as you don't give up on him. Your world may be dark and scary compared to ours, but I'm sure the darkness will only serve to allow you to be a better light to

guide your brother back to you.”

Nasus broke his gaze away from the retiring sunlight to look the small being next to him in the eye. “...Thank you. I wished only for someone to remember my brother as he truly was...but perhaps I was the one who needed reminding.”

Fluttershy got up and began to walk away. “I have to go help the others now...but please be careful tomorrow...The last time we fought Discord, we almost lost. I know your friends always say that you’re very powerful, but just...remember that you can’t help your brother if anything...really bad happens to you.”

- - - -

Singed scribbled down some hasty notes on some parchment Discord had given him. “Okay now, Twilight, on a scale of one to ten, tell me how much discomfort and/or pain you feel when I administer this chem-” The chemist paused his experimentation as he heard a rumbling noise in the distance. “Don't you move, dear, I'll be back in a jiffy, and then we can continue the science.”

He and Swain arrived at the castle's courtyard and waited for the dust to clear. Swain noted that for dust, the cloud had a very rough texture, almost like sand...

- - - -

Ezreal nodded to Luna, who pointed at a collapsed tunnel. “This should lead us inside. Let's hope Nasus can keep them busy long enough for us to get in and out cleanly. We shall stay and start clearing out the rubble here in case we need to support Ezreal in a hurry, who will be scouting ahead.” Ezreal nodded, and in a flash of blinding light, vanished behind the obstruction.

- - - -

The cloud of sand began to abate. Swain instinctively took a defensive posture as he recognized a faint silhouette with blazing red eyes. “Coming here alone? I'd thought you smarter.”

Nasus stepped forward slowly, each step deliberate and measured. “You have insulted and damaged everything I have worked for, and brought pain to those who are innocent bystanders to your cold ambition. I have already waited long enough to pass judgment upon you.” Nasus' world was a maelstrom of color as he began picking out, twisting, and amplifying streams and currents of magic. Sensing each myriad life force as a pinprick against his soul's awareness, he silently begged forgiveness of each one as everything from microscopic organisms to plant life nearby began to wither and die as Nasus drew their energies into himself. “This castle will be your tomb, a weathered landmark among the sands of time to show the consequences of those like you. Your legacy will be that of a lesson the inhabitants of this world and your own will tell to their young about the price of ambition without compassion, and your death will serve as history's reparation for the suffering you have caused. Jericho Swain, prepare to die.”

The sky seemed ready to collapse on itself as clouds formed and dissolved in moments. The wind picked up, and in the distance, Swain thought he could spot the beginnings of several tornadoes.

A furious whirlwind of sand began to form around Nasus. Around the castle, the Everfree Forest began to wilt and collapse as the life of the land drained itself into Nasus. The sandstorm expanded, and the Castle of the Royal Pony Sisters already began to show signs of weathering against the assault. Nasus took a breath, and for a moment, the chaos seemed to abate, only to explode back to life at full force as Nasus let out an unearthly roar. For a moment, Nasus' form was completely obscured before the other two could see the Curator of the Sands grow to three times his normal size. The maelstrom expanded around them until it formed an eye with the courtyard of the castle as its center. Nasus' expression spoke of pure rage, and Swain began to see a silvery trail from himself and Singed join the multitude of sparks and shimmers that already surrounded Nasus.

Swain moved forward, already feeling his body morphing as he began to channel his own power. Singed had already uncorked an Insanity Potion and was in the process of drinking it, his magically imbued armor glowing briefly in response. Singed ran forward to strike at Nasus, the bottle on his back spewing a sickly purple gas. Nasus slammed a hoof on the ground, and a circle of ghostly blue flames caused Singed to stumble for a moment, only barely able to dodge in time as Nasus leaped at him, the latter leaving a small crater at his impact.

Swain began sending his ethereal flock to tear at Nasus as his raven flew overhead, spewing goutts of white-hot magic at their assailant. As each of the demonic swarm tore at Nasus' flesh and returned to Swain, the weakness that Nasus' sandstorm had begun to wreak on him abated, and he began flinging bolts of his own magical energy at the colossal figure. Nasus and Singed continued their martial dance, Singed landing pinprick hits on Nasus, who struggled to hit the unnaturally speedy chemist with steel-shattering blows.

Ezreal's pace increased as the castle shook with the force of the fight as he searched frantically for his objective. Avoiding as many falling rocks as crumbling pony skeletons, he desperately searched for any sign that would lead him to Twilight's prison.

After what seemed like an eternity, he came to a room with a sickly green glow coming from it. Entering the laboratory, he spotted his prize. "Oh, no...I knew Singed was twisted, but..." He paused, unable to voice his disgust. With a strained grunt, he managed to pull Twilight onto his back. "Come on girl, best we get you out of here quickly."

Nasus roared in frustration, and Singed felt an oppressive magic begin to slow his movements and make him feel as sluggish and helpless as an elderly man on the edge of the grave. With a swift kick, Singed was sent flying through a wall, and stirred no more. The cuts and bruises that adorned Nasus faded instantly, and he turned to Swain. "You are outmatched. Face your death with dignity."

Swain laughed, a twisted, hollow sound as he began to shift back into his original form. "You're forgetting something."

Discord returned Swain's laugh. "I leave to go party with some friends for a little bit, and already you're letting in uninvited guests. How irresponsible! Although, Nasus, I must say, I'm quite

impressed with the chaos you've caused here. All good things must come to an end that aren't me, however. Discord snapped his fingers, and Nasus turned to face the new opponent that the Spirit of Chaos had summoned.

It looked as if someone had adorned a bear with the visage of the night sky itself, and then expanded the bear into the size of a town. Discord looked like he was about to faint from sheer giddiness. "It's called an Ursa Major. Wonderful, isn't it? Well, you'll know soon enough anyway, as you're about to find out firsthand." Nasus closed his eyes for a moment, and took a deep breath before moving to strike.

- - - -

Ezreal burst through the recently cleared tunnel, only to find the others gazing at an enormous bear that seemed to blot out the sky with its own constellation-studded pelt. Luna looked conflicted for a few seconds, glancing up at the castle and then at Twilight. Riven placed a hoof on Luna's shoulder, and nodded sadly. "He's doing his job so we can do ours." Luna's head sank to near the ground, and the group vanished in a subdued pool of shadows.

- - - -

The group appeared at the lake, where the other Elements of Harmony were worriedly staring at the storms over the Everfree forest, only to be snapped out of their reverie by Ezreal's worried voice. "Quick! Twilight Sparkle needs medical attention. Who knows what Singed did to her..."

Luna and Fluttershy moved past the others to inspect Twilight. Her form had become unnaturally thin and emaciated, and various cuts lined her body, some of which looked to be turning a variety of unhealthy colors. With grim determination, Fluttershy began directing the others to retrieve various herbal ingredients while Luna began using her magic to help stabilize Twilight, who was staring blankly into space with a dull expression, her breathing shallow and rapid.

In the distance, the storms began to subside. Ezreal gave a respectful nod toward the forest, while Riven gave a traditional Noxian salute. The others, not knowing what to make of this, or perhaps not wanting to let themselves think about it, focused on caring for Twilight.

- - - -

Discord surveyed the carnage around him. The castle, already aged and weathered, was now crumbling. In a huge circle around the castle, the trees were entirely crushed or withered. Singed was imbibing a foul-smelling red liquid while holding his ribcage tenderly. The Spirit of Chaos turned to Swain, who was standing beside him, inspecting the latest addition to Discord's new statue garden. "Well, good news, two out of three of our opposing immortals have been dealt with. Bad news, we've been tricked. I felt Luna's magic right after I arrived. They must have been using Nasus as a cover to retrieve Twilight."

Swain nodded. "One threat falls, another rises. Still, from what you've explained, the Elements of Harmony require time to channel, so we at least know a reasonable counter to them."

“Yes, and this time I'm not going to be quite so reckless when dealing with them. Last time I tried to fight them by destroying the inner harmony that allows the six to make use of the Elements, but this time, I think I'll stick to a more...practical approach. Probably one that you're familiar with. I'm nearing my full abilities again, but before I make my move against Canterlot, I need to be sure the elements have been dealt with. Those two objectives might overlap if they seek sanctuary there though, and there's no telling what sort of countermeasure's they will have prepared. I will not be caught off guard again. Prepare yourselves. We have work to do.”