2125 Paving the Road to Grace  
  
Sunny could not help but tense up after hearing a hint of coldness in the skeleton's usually carefree and friendly tone.  
  
At that moment, he realized the precariousness of his position with painful clarity.  
  
Here he was, in the darkness of the Shadow Realm, beaten and battered… talking to one of the Nine while holding the shadow of another down. Sure, the archer was barely conscious and seemingly in no state to continue the battle, but on the other hand, the only safe enemy was a dead one.  
  
He had no idea what kind of powers Eurys of the Nine possessed, but they had to be quite mystical for the wandering skeleton to traverse the Underworld and reach the Shadow Realm more or less in one piece.  
  
It was alarming, to learn that the mysterious Nine had some kind of grudge against the Goddess of Life and her followers.  
  
Sunny chose his next words carefully.  
  
"Oh, really? That is surprising. How come Auro of the Nine was an imperial soldier, then? Wasn't the Empire ruled by the cult of War?"  
  
To be honest, he wasn't quite clear on what the Empire was and who ruled it. However, in his First Nightmare, it had seemed as if both its soldiers and citizens worshiped War God — to the point that they went around burning down temples of Shadow.  
  
He had learned bits and pieces of ancient history later on, too, some pointing to the fact that the militant Empire had gone on an unstoppable conquest spree during the dusk of the Golden Age, just before the final war.  
  
So, it was a bit surprising to learn that Hero — Auro of the Nine — had secretly harbored a deep hatred of War God.  
  
Hearing his words, Eurys just chuckled, seemingly full of mirth.  
  
"Auro, an imperial soldier? So what? I was an imperial slave, myself! Why, is there a better way to destroy an empire than from the inside?"  
  
Sunny coughed.  
  
He, of all people, could not argue with that.  
  
After all, that was exactly what they were doing — Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie.They were working to undermine the kingdom of an heir of War by fighting under his banner.  
  
"Well… alright. Fair. I'll give you that."  
  
'So the Nine were determined to destroy the Empire…'  
  
And Auro had been only posing as a loyal imperial soldier. No wonder he had seemed so different from the rest of the slavers...  
  
It was a tantalizing piece of information.  
  
Still. In Sunny's First Nightmare, Auro had been merely an Awakened swordsman, and one who did not seem to have unsealed his Aspect yet, at that. So, the Nine must not have been that powerful back then. How had nine people hoped to destroy an empire that enjoyed the favor of a god?  
  
He wanted to know more.  
  
"So, it was just the nine of you against the entire Empire?"  
  
Eurys scoffed.  
  
"Questions, questions, questions… you are so full of questions, boy. Why are you so interested in the ancient past, anyway?"  
  
Sunny smiled darkly, reminding himself to be polite and ingratiate himself with the mysterious skeleton.  
  
"Oh. Two reasons, mainly…"  
  
'Be nice, be polite. You need to get into his good graces!'  
  
His mouth moved on its own:  
  
"Because we are still paying for the sins committed by you vile bastards in that ancient past! If you impossible, abhorrent fools did not go and break the damn world back then, I wouldn't have been so desperate to learn how to fix it, would I?!"  
  
Eurys just stared at him silently with empty eye sockets.  
  
He did not seem too offended, but...  
  
Sunny took a deep breath and held it, struggling to suppress his scathing fury.  
  
The seventh incarnation, meanwhile, spoke in a more neutral tone:  
  
"Well, and also — you might not know it, but the Nightmare Spell has been running rampant for thousands of years. These days, it is more or less the only god that exists. The Dream Realm, meanwhile, is blooming with what we call Nightmare Seeds, and if you enter one, the Spell gives you a special trial. That trial takes the form of an event from the ancient past,so knowing more about the past makes it easier to survive there."  
  
He paused, then added:  
  
"Obviously, the Nightmares are quite deadly. So one would naturally have no reason to enter one, except for the fact that if a blooming Seed is left intact, it will continue to infect the world with Corruption. Something like that, at least."  
  
For the first time, Eurys seemed a little surprised.  
  
"Weaver's little spell? So it has gotten that powerful? Huh… how surprising. No wonder that abominable girl reeked of daemon, then."  
  
Sunny's eye twitched.  
  
'...Little spell?'  
  
He took another deep breath and forced his original body to speak:  
  
"So, what? Are you going to persecute me needlessly just because of where I come from? Let me tell you something, Eurys…"  
  
He looked at the skeleton somberly.  
  
"...being petty is unbecoming of a gentleman! Spitefulness is a hideous thing, a blemish on one's character, and an obstacle on the path to virtue. An enlightened man must know how to let go of grudges and embrace forgiveness! Tolerance and compassion pave the road to grace!"  
  
Of course, Sunny was no gentleman, had no interest whatsoever in being virtuous, considered enlightened values to be synonymous with foolishness, and preferred to stay as far away from grace as possible, lest he catch it.  
  
But the ancient skeleton did not need to know that.  
  
Eurys remained silent for a while, then sighed.  
  
"My, oh my… how eloquent! Don't you worry, boy. I wasn't going to act on my distaste for your kind — it's all in the ancient past, anyway. Let bygones be bygones. I was just contemplating how deeply ironic it is, that after thousands of years, the only ones who remain are the children of War. You can't even imagine."  
  
Sunny grinned.  
  
"Well… I'll be able to imagine if you explain things properly."  
  
The skeleton stared at him silently for a while.  
  
Then, Eurys chuckled.  
  
"Ah, but you expressed how desperate your need for knowledge is. So why should I share mine for free?"