1244 Damn Great Steak

'It's actually her...'

Sunny did not want to admit it, but he was incredibly excited. A small smile appeared on his face, and he let out a long sigh.

Far below, his shadow waved back at Nephis.

He was happy, and not only because it was Neph whom he had found. Sunny was also happy to find anyone at all... after days spent in solitude, he was starting to fear that the strangeness of the Great River was much more dire than he had thought, and that he was actually sent into an entirely different Nightmare — or perhaps epoch — than the other members of the cohort.

In fact, he had been suppressing the gnawing fear of being the only human in this flowing world.

'Thank the gods.'

Under the watchful gaze of the azure serpent, Sunny retrieved the Heavenly Burden and glided down in a wide spiral. He was still wary of the great abomination, but had no choice except to land. It was a good thing, too... after spending two days drifting through the empty sky, he longed to stand on something solid again.

The small puncture wound left behind by the black needle was completely healed by the time Sunny reached the stone shell of the dead behemoth.

To his relief, the ancient serpent did not follow him onto the island. It stayed in the water, staring at the tiny human with hungry madness — luckily, looks could not kill.

Well, at least this Great Beast's gaze could not kill. There were all kinds of Nightmare Creatures and Aspects out there, though...

As soon as the soles of his shoes touched the weathered rock, Sunny let out a satisfied sigh. Then, he dismissed the Dark Wing, bent down to grab the edge of the fissure in front of him, and jumped down.

A few moments later, Sunny landed in front of Nephis. The gloomy shadow slid off the wall and attached itself to his feet.

The two of them stared at each other for a bit. Then, Sunny grinned.

"That smells delicious. Where did you get fresh meat?"

Nephis tilted her head and blinked. \*\*\*

A few minutes later, Sunny and Nephis were sitting opposite each other inside the narrow fissure, finishing the last of the meat she had roasted. The Covetous Coffer was standing nearby in the form of an alloy chest, its lid open — there was not much food inside by now, but there was still some salt and spices left. With the help of seasoning, the meat tasted sublime.

Not that it was easy to chew. Sunny's teeth were incredibly tenacious due to Bone Weave, and yet, he had to augment himself with a few shadows just to take a bite... and yet, he was thankful for that meat. Without Neph making a fire to roast it, he might not have found her so soon, or even ever at all.

'It really tastes amazing...'

Finished with his portion, Sunny glanced at his greasy hands with a bit of regret, and then carefully licked his fingers. Then, he looked at Nephis and smiled.

"Hey... did we really just eat the meat of a Great Monster?"

How had his life turned out this way? It was a bit too ridiculous.

She nodded and brought the Endless Spring to her lips, drinking greedily. "Yeah... I carved it myself. After the sea serpent left."

Hearing this, Sunny shifted awkwardly.

As it turned out, Nephis had been on the shell of the black turtle the whole time. At first, she had appeared within the mist, just like Sunny — but after the mist dissipated, she found herself standing on the surface of the dark island, with no one else in sight.

Neph had felt that something was very wrong almost instantly, but it took her a few hours to realize that the rocky island beneath her feet was actually the carapace of a titanic abomination. Then, she slowly explored the shell of the black turtle while trying her best not to awaken the Great Monster from its slumber.

On the second day, the sea serpent had suddenly attacked, waking the turtle up and initiating a harrowing battle. Nephis had no choice but to hide in one of the fissures and hold on for dear life while being battered, doused with water, and tossed around.

The pressure and the shockwaves of the furious battle between two great abominations almost killed her — that was why her clothes were insuch a sorry state. Eventually, though, the serpent managed to burrow into the turtle's flesh and kill it from the inside. After killing the monster, it left.

At that point, Nephis recovered a little, then dove down into the water to carve out some meat to satiate her hunger, as well as quench her thirst.

Sunny coughed awkwardly.

"About that... I'm sorry."

She raised an eyebrow, looking at him in confusion. "Sorry? Why?"

He scratched the back of his head.

"Well... I also entered the Nightmare within the mist. Only I was still in the water once it dissipated, on a piece of flotsam. And there was this serpent trying to eat me. So, I escaped into the sky and flew downstream for a while, with the serpent following. Eventually, I stumbled on this turtle... and therefore, so did the sea snake. You, uh... you know the rest..."

A strange expression appeared on Neph's face. She stared at him silently, making Sunny let out a nervous laugh.

"Actually, I was right above you, high in the sky, when they started fighting. We almost missed each other! Luckily, I noticed your flames from afar the next night, and came back."

He lingered for a moment, and then smiled.

"So, it all ended well. Now we are both stuck here."

Then, the smile froze on his face.

Sunny remained motionless for a bit, then looked away and cleared his throat.

"Oh, by the way... that sea serpent? Yeah... I might have accidentally led it back here, again. It's currently circling the turtle. Did I say that I was sorry?"

Nephis stared at him for a while, then lowered her head and covered her face with a palm.Sunny could have sworn that he heard her mumble something under her breath.

But he must have heard wrong, right? There was no way Nephis would say... "Damnation..."