1248 Entombed

The two of them climbed from the fissure and were staring at the seven suns moving across the vast sky. They remained silent for a while.

Eventually, Sunny spoke:

"I know that it doesn't make sense... but it also makes so much sense, you know?"

Nephis frowned, but did not retort. She had read both descriptions, as well... although Sunny's theory sounded outlandish, it was also compelling, in a bizarre and irrational kind of way.

He took a deep breath.

"I mean, listen... we were in the Nightmare Desert, and entered the Third Nightmare through a Seed that had been a part of Ariel's Tomb once. Logically, the Spell should have sent us into the past of the desert, or at least into the past of the black pyramid. However, it sent us into the Great River instead. That is an obvious contradiction."

Sunny swept his hair back and rubbed his eyes.

"But it all makes sense if the Great River is actually situated inside the pyramid. Sure, no matter how large the pyramid is, it can't be large enough to contain an entire region of the Dream Realm... an entire world, even. That is if we think about it from the perspective of human logic. However, Ariel was not a human. He was a daemon —an actual deity. Beings like that are not bound by mundane logic. If he could create a pyramid that does not draw nearer no matter how long you walk toward it, who says that he couldn't create a pyramid that contains a whole world inside it?"

Nephis studied the seven radiant suns, then glanced at the vast expanse of the Great River.

The azure serpent raised its head from the water, staring at them with madness and hunger.

Struggling to ignore it, she sighed.

"Did he create that world too, then? Well... now that I think about it, he might have. Both of us thought that this place looked like a Soul Sea, right? Maybe it is not a Soul Sea, but instead was made from one. Ariel built the black pyramid out of the flesh of an Unholy Titan. He created the Great River out of its blood. Then, he created a world out of its soul? If so... then those seven suns were made out of seven divine soul shards that the Titan had left behind."

Nephis lingered for a bit, and then added:

"If the humans of the Forgotten Shore could create an artificial sun, there's really no reason why Ariel couldn't create seven better ones."

Sunny nodded.

"It would also explain why there are no stars in the night sky, and why it's entirely black. Because it is not a real sky... instead, the black pyramid is hollow, and what we're looking at is actually the inner side of its walls."

The two of them looked at each other, both growing more and more convinced that this startling theory was right.

Troubled, Nephis looked at the seven suns again.

"So, Ariel created this place... this tomb... to bury the truths he couldn't endure. And there is said to be a dreadful secret hidden in its estuary. It is easy to conclude that the truth he buried and the dreadful secret are one and the same. However... isn't it a little bit too elaborate of a feat, to create a whole world, hide it within an indestructible pyramid, and remove it from the natural flow of time — all just to hide a secret? Why would he want to go to all that trouble?"

Sunny listened to her with a somber expression on his face. He remained silent for a bit, then said:

"Maybe it's not that he wanted to, but instead that he had no other choice. The truth is hidden in the estuary of the Great River, and the Great River flows from the future into the past. But... what is its estuary, actually? What can be the end of a river that flows through time, into the past?"

He shifted slightly.

"The only end such a river can have is the point... when time didn't exist yet. Isn't it? Where the past terminates. The estuary of the Great River has to be the point where the past disappears into the primordial void, which was everlasting and everchanging, and existed before the concepts like death and time were even created. By the gods. In fact, the estuary has to exist before the gods were born. And, therefore... outside their control. If Ariel wanted to hide something from even the gods, wouldn't he have had to go to such lengths?"

Nephis sighed, then rubbed her face.

"This is... a little bit too strange to think about. A time before time existed? That is a paradox in and of itself, don't you think? Also, the Great River does not only flow from the future into the past, it also does so endlessly. How can an endless river reach a point of termination?"

Sunny felt a headache coming. He grimaced and looked away.

"...Well, anyway. Regardless of all that. At least we know now that the sybils did not literally hide inside a huge pyramid with their people. They actually came to the Great River, which existed outside the natural flow of time, and was thus far removed from the doom that they were escaping. That doom... it had to be the war between the daemons and the gods, right? That was why they eventually couldn't hear the voices of the gods anymore. Because the gods died."

Nephis slowly nodded, prompting Sunny to smile. "You do understand what it means, don't you?"

She looked at him with a hint of confusion. "What exactly are you talking about?"

He grinned.

"It means that there are tons of locals here on the Great River. We just haven't found them yet... but when we do, we'll be able to learn all kinds of information from them, including what the central conflict of this Nightmare is, and how to conquer it."

She tilted her head a little.

"Right... there have to be plenty of humans here, according to the descriptions of the Memories. It's just that they had entered the Great River much, much earlier than we did. So, they are probably somewhere further downstream... further into the past."

Without having to say anything, both of them turned to look north, in the direction where the waters of the Great River were flowing.

The view was rather beautiful, except for the terrifying silhouette of the ancient serpent, which had raised its neck from the water and was devouring them with its eyes.

Nephis lingered for a while, and then said in a low voice:

"But, Sunny... what if the goal of this Nightmare is to reach the Estuary? What are we going to do then?"

He shivered, startled by her question.

Reach the end of the Great River... surely, a Third Nightmare would not have an insane goal like that. That was not a task mere Ascended were qualified to complete.

There had to be something esle... something palpable and attainable, something that they could accomplish.

He just didn't know what it was.

Sunny let out a stifled laugh.

"Let's hope that it's not. And if it is... well. I guess we'll have to do our best." The Sin of Solace smirked as he looked at the water.