1249 Titanic Ship

'So... this is it, then.'

The Tomb of Ariel had been built from the remains of the Stone Titan, while the Great River created from its blood was contained within it, illuminated by the seven suns made from its broken soul cores.

The secret hidden at the Estuary was the truth that Ariel had wished to forget. The Nightmare Desert was the result of the battle between him and the unholy creature.

Looking at the blue sky above them, Sunny couldn't help but wonder... 'So the daemons were capable of creating artificial worlds?'

Then, a sudden thought made him shiver.

'What is the difference between a real world and an artificial one, though?'

Was there even a difference? And if there was not... had the rest of the worlds been created by someone, as well? The daemons? The gods?

The unknown?

He sighed, then shook his head.

'Do I really have time to ponder the cosmic origins of the world?'

Right now, they had more practical questions to answer. Many of the mysteries of the Third Nightmare had been revealed to them, but many more remained. At least they now knew where they were, and what their next step had to be.

Travel downstream, find the syblis, and learn how to conquer this Seed. 'Well... that is easier said than done, though.'

Sunny stared at the waters of the Great River and saw the sharp blades of the azure serpent's dorsal fin break its surface as the great abomination hungrily circled the corpse of the titanic turtle.

A dark expression appeared on his face. After a bit of silence, he said:

"Neph... do you think we can kill this thing?"

She smiled faintly. Sunny had expected to hear some kind of a crazy answer, like always, but she unexpectedly gave him a sober one instead.

"It is... not impossible. This Beast is two whole Ranks above us, which would usually mean that there is no hope. But then again, we did eventually kill a few Fallen abominations as Sleepers, back on the Forgotten Shore."

Nephis grew silent for a moment, and then added somberly:

"However, the gap between Ranks grows much wider the higher those Ranks are. The difference between a Corrupted creature and a Fallen one is much greater than the difference between a Fallen creature and an Awakened one... while the gap between a Great abomination and a Corrupted one is even greater still. Worse yet, this Great Beast is in its natural element in the water, while we are not. My Aspect will also be weakened there, in the depths."

Glaring at the serpent intensely, Sunny slowly nodded. Everything she said was reasonable.

"...I bet I can still kill it, though."

Hearing his unexpected words, Nephis chuckled.

But Sunny was serious. He was not particularly confident, but he also did not think that their chances were close to zero. Both of them were strong, and they were even stronger together. There were his Shadows, and the powerful Memories they possessed. Most importantly, the azure serpent was a mere Beast... no matter how harrowing its power was, it lacked intelligence.

While Sunny was full of all kinds of devious schemes, with Nephis trailing not far behind.

The odds were perilous, but not impossible indeed. Neph sighed.

"Maybe... but maybe we won't need to gamble with our lives. There might not be a need to fight it at all."

He lingered for a while, then nodded.

She was right. Their current goal was to travel downstream, far into the past, and find those humans who had escaped the war between the gods and the daemons by entering the Tomb of Ariel.

The corpse of the Great Monster they were using as shelter, meanwhile, was being slowly dragged in that same direction by the current.

The titanic carcass of the Black Turtle was like a ship that could very well take them all the way to their destination. Since that was the case, there was no reason to battle the azure serpent, or anything at all.

Of course, things could change for the worse at any moment. The future was unclear, and there was no way to tell what would happen.

'No... wait... since we are moving downstream, wouldn't it be the past that is unclear? Ah... my head hurts...'

Sunny sighed and glanced at Nephis:

"What do we do, then? What is our next move?"

She looked up. The seven suns were already starting to drown in the radiant waters of the Great River, and the dawn of the eastern horizon was slowly fading into the pitch blackness of the night.

Nephis lowered her gaze.

"...It's late. We should probably rest and take another look at the situation in the morning, with fresh eyes. I don't know about you, but I am thoroughly exhausted. I haven't slept in a long while, and the battle between the turtle and the snake took a lot out of me."

Sunny smiled crookedly.

He was tired, too... he had not done anything in the last couple of days except drift through the sky, but as it turned out, doing nothing was very exhausting. Especially when one was suspended between the surface of a mystical river and the sky, having to keep an eye on both lest some terrible creature swallow them whole in one bite.

"Yeah. I'm tired too."

Some time later, the two of them were hidden from the wind and the piercing gaze of the ancient serpent in the familiar fissure on the shell of the dead behemoth. There was a small fire burning between them, casting shadows on the black rock.

The shadows were dancing,

There were not a lot of things on the dark island that could be used as fuel, but Sunny had a few bricks of compressed synthetic firewood stored in the Covetous Coffer. Once again, his loyal alloy chest had come in handy... sadly, it was already almost empty.

Nephis made a dish from some of Sunny's last provisions, and the two of them enjoyed a late supper as the world was slowly consumed by darkness. The soft glow of the water was not visible from inside the fissure, and it seemed as though nothing at all existed outside the small circle illuminated by the fire anymore.

There were no stars in the black sky, and so...

Sunny couldn't help but remember a similar night from many years ago, when Nephis and he had first met on the Forgotten Shore and shared a conversation in the dark.

Gods... almost four years had passed since then, hadn't they?

A small smile appeared on his face.

"Hey... do you remember how you told me about the adventures of Odysseus?"

Nephis looked up from her food and hesitated for a moment. A distant expression appeared on her beautiful face.

"Sure. Why?"

Sunny shook his head and shoved a spoonful of the fragrant, thick soup into his mouth.

"No, nothing. That Odysseus guy... I don't think he had gone through half the crap we had to go through, though..."