1317 Difficult Questions

Approaching the window, Sunny opened the heavy shutters and looked at the desolate landscape of Weave from the height of one of the Nightmare Spell Temple's bell towers.

The sky was veiled in impenetrable darkness. The waters flowing through the canals of the floating city glowed with iridescent radiance, bathing the empty streets in ethereal glow. Usually, the light of the Great River at night was dreamlike and beautiful, but contrasted against the forlorn desolation of Weave, it made for an eerie sight.

It was like a city of ghosts.

He sighed, thinking about the cruel fate that had befallen the followers of Weaver... and the creature that had driven them to extinction.

The Mad Prince.

A dark expression appeared on Sunny's face.

He was reluctant to think about his meeting with the Defiled Titan — or at least some vestige of the abhorrent creature that had found its way into his dreams. It almost felt as though thinking about the abomination would summon it here.

Nevertheless, Sunny had to consider what he had seen, and heard, in the harrowing dream. Because it was too ominous.

'I dreamt of being Weaver.'

The spider with a broken leg was, without a doubt, a representation of the Demon of Fate. It was not surprising that Sunny had dreamt of the nebulous daemon after witnessing the mural in the grand hall of the temple, and neither was it unexpected that he had assumed the daemon's role in his nightmare.

Weaver's blood was running through Sunny's veins, after all, and he too had an innate affinity to fate. The latter was the reason for the former, in the end — it was because of being Fated that he had stumbled on the egg of the loathsome Thieving Bird and received the forbidden lineage of the sinister daemon.

Sinister... Sunny had actually never thought about Weaver in such terms before. Mostly because he had benefited greatly from their tenuous connection, but also because there was no reason to. In all honesty, he had admired the mysterious daemon, with no particular reason except for the fact that the Demon of Fate was an intelligent, cunning, and fearsome deity.

But the more Sunny learned about the end of the Dream Realm and the Nightmare Spell, the more ominous of a figure Weaver seemed. And how could they not... who could be more dangerous than a creature that wielded knowledge of fate itself?

Sunny and Nephis had argued about the nature of the Spell, whether it was a fundamentally benevolent force or not.

He was inclined to believe that it had been created for a noble purpose... which was not to say that it was not a vile and terrible curse for the humans of the waking world... but he was also starting to suspect that neither of them really understood the true intention and scope of what Weaver had done at all.

The Nightmare Spell seemed like a tool to make living being stronger in the face of encroaching Corruption. But there were too many discrepancies between what was apparent and what was hidden beneath the surface. The Nightmares, the slow but inevitable escalation, the sheer convenience of it all...

What was Weaver's true goal? How had the rudimentary version of the Spell Ananke wielded grown to become the pervasive and nearly omnipotent power that seemed to be as absolute as the universal laws of reality that the gods established?

Come to think of it, how had the Doom War ended? What had actually happened to the daemons, the gods... and Weaver? Where did the Corruption that had devoured the Dream Realm come from, and why?

Just like always, Sunny had no answers. More than that, these were not even the questions he had to ponder.

The Defilement was a form of Corruption that had spread from the Estuary, and there were six champions of it... Dread Lord, Devouring Beast, Undying Slaughter, Torment, Soul Stealer. And Mad Prince.

The Mad Prince, who seemed strangely familiar when Sunny had dreamt of him. He shivered.

'...Why did he feel familiar?'

The Defiled horror seemed like a human... no, like a broken marionette of a human. He was like a flesh puppet worn by a boundless sea of madness, to the point where the madness seemed like the actual being, while the human body just seemed like its ragged shell.

Sunny still shuddered when he remembered the creature's eyes. The torment hiding in them... was like a chilling storm of insanity born from a thousand years of horror, agony, and knowledge.

Knowledge was the heaviest thing in the world, after all. As well as the origin of power.

And that was why he was very uncomfortable with the fact that the Mad Prince seemed so familiar.

Sunny had not noticed it at the start, because the abominable creature was too different from him. But when the Sin of Solace appeared... he had to admit to himself that the Defiled Titan and the sword wraith were eerily similar.

Which meant that Sunny and the Mad Prince were similar, too. He stared at the ghostly landscape of Weave for a while.

'Have I... assumed the role of that abomination?'

Sunny and Nephis had discussed how strange their entry into the Nightmare was. Whose roles did they assume? Who could have been present that far upstream at the moment of their arrival?

He had also theorized that the Mad Prince might have died there, as evident by the piece of flotsam with deranged runes carved into it.

It was strange to think that a Corrupted Titan could have become an Ascended Tyrant... but not impossible. The Spell could have decided that it was the best and only option, slightly changing the rules. The Third Nightmare was different from the previous two, to begin with, with challengers entering it with their own bodies.

...That was one possibility.

The other, more harrowing possibility, was that the abominable madmen could have been the Sin of Solace from the future, conjured into the present by some strange quirk of the Great River. Ananke had said it herself that the flow of time in the Tomb of Ariel was often strange and unpredictable.

The Mad Prince... could also have been the future version of Sunny, who had either been devoured by the Corruption, or the Sin of Solace itself.

'No... no way. No way!'

He suddenly felt incredibly cold.

But it was too compelling of a theory to be discarded because of the outrage he felt at the thought of being able to turn into that bastard. The letters of the modern alphabet being mixed with the deranged runes, the ability to spread madness, the physical resemblance...

It was not only the Mad Prince, either. The description of the rest of the Six Plagues was also extremely ominous.

The Soul Stealer, who could wear the skin of those he killed. The Undying Slaughter, who was overcome by insatiable bloodlust. The Devouring Beast, who consumed the bodies of her slain foes... the Dread Lord, and Torment...

Didn't they sound like corrupted, twisted versions of the members of the cohort? All except Nephis, who was incorruptible.

'It's too ridiculous of a thought.'

Sunny could reluctantly acknowledge that some form of time... distortion could have happened inside the Tomb of Ariel. He could even admit that it was quite possible for them to fail in conquering the Nightmare and succumb to Corruption.

However, what were the chances of all of them surviving that and becoming Saints in the process? The Six Plagues were vastly more powerful than the members of the cohort, to the point that an entire civilization of powerful Awakened had not managed to slay a single one of them.

Two civilizations, even, considering the King of Twilight and his people.

No, it was far more likely that Nephis and her cohort were pitted against Nightmare Creature resembling the perverse versions of themselves because of a little nudge from the Spell.

The Spell had shown itself to be fond of such ghastly, but poetic twists of fate, after all.

Still...

How had the runes of the waking world language ended up on the piece of flotsam? Sunny remained motionless for a long time, looking at the desolate expanse of Weave.

Eventually, the glowing waters dimmed, and the seven suns emerged from the river. Sunny sensed the shadows move in the adjacent rooms, telling him that Ananke and Nephis had woken up.

He closed his eyes for a few long moments. Trying to chase away the heavy thoughts, he then dismissed Saint and Imp.

It was time to meet the new day. Hopefully, he would get some answers after reaching Fallen Grace.

'I need to strengthen Nightmare as soon as possible.'

The Mad Prince had invaded his dreams once, and there was no guarantee that it would not happen again. Sunny needed to protect himself while he slept, and since helping the black stallion evolve was also the only way for him to strengthen himself in the short term, he could achieve both goals at once that way.

'I'm going to have to craft some Memories.'

Luckily, with the Crown of Twilight supplying him with essence, weaving strings of it

to create Memories would not be as taxing and long of a process as it had been before.

Thinking about how many soul shards he had and what Memories to create, Sunny rubbed his face and went outside to meet his companions.

They were going to leave Weave soon.