1343 Crown of Dawn

The deck of the Chain Breaker was dark, illuminated only by the pale glow of the iridescent water that gleamed below. The radiance of the Great River at night was usually beautiful, but today, it seemed ghostly.

Sunny was not disturbed by the darkness, of course, but he had to think about Nephis as well.

'We should probably place a few lanterns around the ship.'

The light of the lanterns could potentially attract Nightmare Creatures, but that was not really a problem — not because they were not wary of the abominations, but because gaining their attention was more or less inevitable.

Thinking about when their first battle would happen, Sunny approached the stern of the ship.

Nephis was still standing in the runic circle, holding the steering oar. There was a luminous Memory placed on the deck near her feet, creating a small island of warm orange glow in the ocean of darkness.

In that orange light, her beautiful face was pale and lifeless. She had been guiding the ship the entire day, and the accumulated fatigue was taking its toll.

He listened to the wind, determining its direction.

'It's blowing from the future.'

Stepping into the light, Sunny smiled and gestured to the oar. "Go rest. I'll take it from here."

He could not use the sorcery of Names yet, but since the winds were on their side, the Chain Breaker could do without its support for now. Losing some speed was not going to delay them by much.

In fact, both Saint and Fiend were intelligent enough to keep the ship on course. Sunny preferred to let them stand guard for now, though. Studying his face for a few moments, Nephis nodded and let go of the

oar. As she stepped out of the runic circle, Sunny entered it.

"Wait."

He caught her hand in his own and lingered for a few moments. She stared at him with an incredulous expression.

"That Memory of yours, the Crown of Dawn. Can you lend it to me for a few days?"

Nephis raised an eyebrow.

"Sure? Why?"

Sunny simply shrugged.

"I want to see if I can improve it a little. Don't get your hopes up, though... chances are, nothing will end up happening. It's worth a try, at least."

She hesitated for a couple of moments. Then, a spark of energy traveled from her hand into his own.

The Spell whispered, its voice as enigmatic as ever:

[You have received a Memory, Dawn Shard.]

Sunny smiled.

"Thank you. Now, go rest. I'll wake you up if some abyssal horror attacks us from below the waves, I promise."

Nephis stared at him somberly.

"...You could have just said 'sweet dreams', you know?"

He grinned.

"Oh, I do. But where's the fun in that?"

Shaking her head, Nephis freed her cool hand from his grasp, picked up the luminous Memory, and left. Sunny remained standing in the darkness for a while, staring at the empty space where she had just been.

Then, he sighed, glanced at his empty hand, and placed it on the steering oar.

"Ah. It's so lonesome, sailing across a river of unholy titan's blood in the

dark... II

With that, Sunny summoned the Dawn Shard.

A simple band of bright metal appeared in his free hand, decorated with a single gem. The Crown of Dawn did not look that impressive at first glance. It was more austere than opulent... and yet, that simple circlet was the reason Sunny, the members of the cohort, and the Fire Keepers had been able to return from the Forgotten Shore.

Its single enchantment was extraordinarily powerful. The Dawn Shard empowered all Memories in a large radius around it. Back on the Forgotten Shore, that empowerment had been strong enough to elevate the Awakened weapons of the Dreamer Army to resemble Ascended ones in terms of lethality.

Which was an inconceivable boon, considering that there was no limit to the number of Memories the Crown of Dawn could enhance. It was a passive enchantment, as well.

That was how they had been able to slay Fallen abominations.

Sadly, its usefulness diminished more and more as Nephis and her allies grew stronger and acquired better equipment after escaping the Forgotten Shore. The Dawn Shard could still empower Ascended Memories to a substantial degree, but nowhere near elevating them to an entire new Rank. The effect on Transcendent Memories was even more modest.

Considering the type of enemies Sunny and the members of the cohort would have to face in the Third Nightmare, that augmentation was all but insignificant.

But what if he elevated the Crown of Dawn itself from an Ascended Memory to a Supreme one?

Sunny doubted that he would be able to perform a flawless alteration. But even if he managed to make the Dawn Shard as powerful as a Transcendent Memory by outfitting it with a Supreme soul shard, the result would already increase their chances of prevailing against Great Nightmare Creatures by a lot.

Before, he would not have even dared to try...

But now, he had two advantages. The first one was the push studying Ananke's Mantle had given him. The second one was the nature of the Crown of Dawn itself.

The first time Nephis had used it, Sunny saw the weaves of his Memories growing more radiant, each nexus and ethereal string shining with brighter light. The augmentation either strengthened the Memories by empowering their weaves, or made the weaves stronger to withstand the increased power of the Memories.

In any case, the result was the same. The essence strings became more robust.

And the first Memory the Dawn Shard empowered was itself. Its weave was always augmented by its own effect... perhaps that was the reason why this Ascended Memory could possess such an unreasonable power.

So, it was more or less a perfect Memory for Sunny to try and transplant the Supreme shard into. His major concern was that strings weaved from lesser essence would not be able to withstand the burden of channeling superior energies, but what if they were made more durable by those very same energies?

The weave of the Crown of Dawn was much too complex for him to recreate, but modifying it was different... probably.

He wouldn't know until he took a look.

Sunny shifted his perception and peered into the bright metal, trying to discern the underlying weave of the Shard Memory. Soon, an inconceivable tapestry of ethereal strings appeared in front of his eyes, shining in the darkness.

Holding the oar, he smiled wistfully and took a deep breath

"Let's get to work..."