1344 On Course

The weave of a Shard Memory was subtly different from an ordinary one. They possessed some unique qualities, after all, like the ability to remain in existence after the owner's death, or the hidden purpose of manifesting the Oath Keys after all seven had been gathered in one place.

Luckily, Sunny possessed two Shard Memories of his own — the Midnight and Moonlight Shards — so he already knew how to find and isolate these sections of the tapestry, which was supposed to make the task of deciphering the rest of it easier.

...In theory.

In practice, the spellweave of a Shard Memory was even more

labyrinthine than that of a normal Memory. Sunny had managed to gain a sufficient level of understanding of the Midnight Shard — enough so to apply a part of its enchantment to the Siege Souvenir — but the Moonlight Shard still remained beyond his grasp.

Which was a shame, because the ghostly stiletto possessed one of the most useful enchantments Sunny had ever seen — it was able to appear instantly, without wasting any time manifesting itself from the sparks of essence. If Sunny could master that single enchantment, all Memories he created would gain a lethal edge.

The more powerful a Memory was, the longer it took to manifest. So, as the Awakened reached higher Ranks of power, they had to be more and more strategic about when to summon their Memories.

Considering that he was unable to master the weave of the Moonlight Shard to this day, the Dawn Shard could very well prove to be a similarly tough nut to crack.

As Sunny stared at the vast tapestry of ethereal strings hidden within the band of bright metal, the corner of his eye twitched.

'Yeah...'

This... was not going to be easy. 'But I can do it.'

He was certain of it. Recreating the whole weave was out of the question, but modifying it... armed with the insights he had gained and would gain from Ananke's Mantle, he felt confident in his chances.

It was just going to take a lot of effort, and a lot of time.

'How do I transplant a new nexus without collapsing the whole weave? How do I ensure that superior essence actually produces a superior result? How do I prevent the less resilient sections of the weave from being torn apart by the increased burden on them?'

All these questions required answers... there were many more problems to solve, as well. Sunny had never tried something quite as ambitious as turning a powerful Ascended Memory into a tremendously more powerful Supreme Memory.

One thing was certain — it would require an inhuman level of finesse and precision. It would also require a lot of additional essence strings.

And a lot of ingenuity, of course.

The task was daunting, but Sunny did not feel discouraged. Instead, he felt almost... excited.

It beat patching up sails or drowning in a foul mood, at least.

Comfortably resting his back against the bending surface of the tall aplustre, he moved the oar a little and peered into the shimmering spellweave.

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By the time the seven suns rose from the water, Sunny felt like his head was on the verge of exploding. However, he also felt satisfied with his progress.

Standing in the runic circle at the stern of the graceful vessel, Sunny was holding the Dawn Shard in one hand. His other hand was resting on the steering oar.

...His other four hands danced in the air and weaved strings from his flowing shadow essence. Those were manifested from the shadows, of course.

Sunny had been long accustomed to using an additional pair of shadow arms — it was not too hard for him, considering his experiences in the Second Nightmare. The most difficult part was actually learning how to manifest sufficiently intricate hands from shadows, but he had mastered that in Antarctica, as well.

While studying the weave of the Crown of Dawn, though, he understood that the finesse he would need to alter it was not something a human could achieve. Two hands and ten fingers were simply not enough... and neither were four hands and twenty fingers, at least not at his current level of skill.

So, remembering his dream of being Weaver, Sunny tried to manifest not two, but six additional arms. Finely controlling eight hands at the same time had turned out too much for his mind, however. Even with the help of the Shroud of Dusk, he could not manage that many.

It was one thing to pull on the ropes to raise sails, or rip Nightmare Creatures to shreds. Those were crude actions that did not require a lot of finesse. Weaving, on the other hand, demanded absolute precision. Displacing a string by a hair's breadth could mean the difference between success and failure.

In the end, Sunny had to dismiss two shadow arms and be satisfied with only having six hands.

'Who walks around with only six arms? That's simply unreasonable... embarrassing, really!'

At that moment, Nephis emerged from the lower deck, rubbing her face sleepily. She glanced at Sunny and nodded... then froze and looked at him again.

After a while, she shook her head slightly, sighed, and continued on her way to examine the ship and practice her swordsmanship.

Some time later, the smell of delicious food being cooked reached Sunny's nose.

He smiled.

'Time for breakfast, I guess.'

Commanding Saint to replace him at the steering oar, Sunny dismissed the Dawn Shard and went to find Nephis.

They ate in the shade of the sacred tree, enjoying the warm sunlight and the refreshing breeze. After a while, she asked:

"Aren't you going to rest?"

Sunny leaned back, satisfied, then shook his head.

"Not yet. I can go without sleep for a couple more days... there's a lot I want to achieve before we reach Fallen Grace."

He had to continue studying Ananke's Mantle, alter the spellweave of

Dawn Shard, create Memories for Nightmare to consume... and more.

She frowned a little.

"Mental fatigue will slow you down. Your mind needs time to recover,

too. II

He smiled.

"I know. I have the Shroud of Graceless Dusk, remember? The same Dusk we are on our way to visit. It helps me recover from exhaustion, both physical and mental, faster. I'll be alright."

Time waited for no man, and there was no rest for the wicked. Sunny was not overestimating himself, he just knew exactly how much he could endure.

Nephis hesitated for a few moments, then nodded. "Alright. Suit yourself."

He suddenly remembered something.

"Ah! After I am done with the Dawn Shard, I want you to teach me how to use the Sorcery of Names. I didn't want to split my focus before... but now I feel like it can help me advance faster in my own skills. Probably. Alright?"

She nodded again.

After finishing the breakfast, they used the esoteric navigation tools to make sure that the ship had not strayed off course. Then, Nephis took her place in the runic circle again, while Sunny sat on the deck a few meters away and continued studying the Crown of Dawn.

Several days passed in that manner. The two of them spend most of their time together, and some time apart. They resumed their sword training, involving Saint as well. The deck of the graceful ship was often filled with the sound of clashing steel.

When the two of them were not sparring, though... Sunny had a different task for the graceful knight.

Now that Fiend had grown into a proper Devil, it was time for him to learn combat mastery, too.

The steel Shadow's most fearsome weapons were his claws and teeth, so Sunny instructed Saint to teach him in hand-to-hand combat. Since she was a master of all types of combat, that did not stump her one bit.

...Hearing Fiend crash into the wooden deck over and over again, Sunny smiled from the corner of his mouth and continued weaving. Memories of his own painful training with Saint, all that time ago in the Dark City, made him feel a bit of compassion for the ravenous steel ogre.

Of course, the lucky bastard possessed the [Marvel] Attribute, which made him capable of learning new things at astonishing speed. Sunny was actually curious to see which of them would absorb Saint's lessons faster.

Granted, Sunny had learned combat mastery from her while hunting down lethal abominations in the Dark City in order to survive. Fiend, in comparison, had all his needs cared for by a kind, generous, and benevolent master.

Who wouldn't learn fast with such a benefactor?

Everything was peaceful for these first few days.

Then, they suffered the first attack.