1350 Familiar Pattern

By the time Sunny had finished the alteration of the Dawn Shard, they were not that far away from Fallen Grace. Neither he nor Nephis knew the exact distance they had to traverse to find the last city of the sybils, but the navigation tools Ananke had left them pointed to its approach.

Fallen Grace was situated in the western reaches of the Great River, where the sky was almost always painted crimson by the setting sun. As the Chain Breaker sailed deeper into the past, it was also leaving behind the pure light of day.

Gradually, the color of the sky above their heads changed. From vibrant azure to breathtaking magenta, and finally to the bloodred blaze of perpetual sunset.

It was like sailing into a sea of blood.

Sunny stared at the burning sky, awed by its fiery beauty... and its ominous dread.

'That's... not concerning at all.'

Why would the sybils build one of their cities in such a darkly beautiful, but sinister place? Surely, living in the warm sunlight of the central region of the Great River would have been much more pleasant.

Shaking his head, he returned to the shade of the sacred tree and sat down, resting his back against its white bark. He had just finished weaving another Memory for Nightmare, and was not in the mood to start on the next one just yet.

His study of the spellweave of Ananke's Mantle had also been producing fewer and fewer results. It would never stop being useful to him as a learning tool, but Sunny felt like he was nearing a dead end. He would need to gain more skill as a weaver before looking to the nebulous mantle for more lessons.

So, what else was there to do?

Feeling restless, he summoned the Estuary Key out of habit. Staring into the weave of the mysterious Memory had become like a ritual by now. Even though Sunny could not understand anything about it, the process itself was calming.

However... he had not taken a glance at the Key since before attempting the alteration of the Crown of Dawn. Who knew? Maybe passing such an important milestone on his path to becoming a proper sorcerer would change something...

"Are you playing with our favorite toy again? Why don't you toss it overboard and be done with it?"

The sword wraith stared at him disdainfully from the shadows of the tree.

Not paying the apparition any attention, Sunny held up the jagged black stone and peered into its weathered surface.

The inconceivable weave of ghostly strings was as unattainable as ever. He studied its dark tapestry, following the twists and turns of the black threads... like he had done a hundred times before.

'What a disappointment... I still can't even start to unravel its mysteries.'

Among all the odd things Sunny had seen and faced in the Nightmare, the Estuary Key was perhaps the most bizarre. He still had no idea how this Supreme Memory of the Sixth Tier had ended up in his Soul Sea, or what it was supposed to do.

...However, after spending countless hours staring at the staggering weave of ghostly strings, he had gained a vague, tentative feeling about it.

Sunny was mostly confident that the single, passive enchantment of the Estuary Key had two distinct effects. He did not know what these effects were, but felt that one was directed outward, while the other was directed inward, affecting the black stone itself... in some manner.

The latter was also much more vast and potent than the former. It was unusual that a Memory of the Sixth Tier only possessed a single enchantment — since it did, that enchantment had to be a powerful one. And most of that power went into ensuring the function of the inward effect.

'Maybe that's why I wasn't able to discern what exactly the enchantment does. It's only affecting the Estuary Key itself.'

Perhaps it was an enchantment that teleported the strange Memory into the souls of unsuspecting Awakened without their consent?

As Sunny was feeling amused with this theory...

His gaze suddenly caught on a minuscule part of the inconceivable weave. The lightless tapestry was vast enough that he might have never seen it before... or if he had, Sunny had not paid it any attention.

But now, he froze, staring at the inconspicuous pattern. 'What... what the hell is that?'

The pattern... looked familiar. Sunny had definitely seen it before, somewhere else. Recently.

Which was not that strange in and of itself — the Estuary Key was a Memory, after all, and as such, it shared many small parts of its weave with all other Memories — the patterns that created the rudimentary enchantments like the ability to be summoned and dismissed, repair itself, and so on.

However, Sunny knew these patterns by heart. He had woven them from scratch many times, after all. And this one... this one was not one of them.

'Where have I seen it?'

The complicated array of ghostly strings had a certain unique structure to it, which was different from the rest of the spellweave. He recognized its nature after a moment of contemplation — patterns like these were rare, but present in every Memory. It was how runes were expressed through essence strings.

Both the runic sorcery and shaping were based on True Names — one etching them through a written language, the other invoking them directly. However, weaving was different. It did not rely on words to create enchantments.

That said, there was still a place for words in a spellweave, and therefore for the runes inscribing them. These runes, translated from the corresponding string patterns, expressed the name of the Memory, its description, and the True Name of its master — if the master possessed one.

The problem was... that Sunny had long identified the patterns that inscribed the name and description of the Estuary Key, as well as his own True Name. And this particular pattern had nothing to do with them.

Why were there additional runes hidden in the weave of the black stone?

And why did the pattern of essence strings describing these runes look so familiar?

Sunny leaned forward with a frown and concentrated, trying to decipher the meaning of the pattern. It was not at all difficult... in fact, it was even easier than usual, as if he had read this exact pattern of essence strings many times before.

His pupils narrowed.

"Sin... of..."

Sunny suddenly straightened, a cold shiver running down his spine.

Standing in the shadows, the apparition yawned and covered his mouth with a hand.

"What's the matter?"

'...Solace.'

The Sin of Solace.

Written in ghostly strings, the name of his cursed sword — and the sword wraith born from its curse — was meticulously woven into the enchantment of the Estuary Key.