1352 Nearing the Edge

In the end, Sunny failed to get the wraith to say anything informative. Just as usual, all the answers he received were either vague and misleading, or outright insults that had nothing to do with the question.

Later, in a somber mood, he left the shadow of the sacred tree and walked around the ship, examining its state. Sunny felt odd in light of the things he had learned and suspected to be true.

'Ah, it's infuriating.'

He seemed to have stumbled on the truth, or rather, on a big chunk of the truth. However, there were still plenty of missing parts, and those were the parts that contained the most important answers.

His mind was spinning, coming up with one baseless theory after another. Sunny was unable to glean the true meaning of it all, but what he did manage to do was completely exhaust himself mentally.

Eventually, feeling foul, he threw the manic desire to get to the bottom of things right here and now out of his head and settled near the ketch to start weaving another Memory for Nightmare.

The fiery sunset lasted for the entirety of the day, and was then replaced by the ghostly radiance of the night. Here in the western reaches of the Great River, even the opalescence of the water was different. It was shifting between deep carmine, vibrant crimson, and rich maroon... as if they were truly sailing on a river of blood.

The nights they had witnessed before were dreamlike, but this one... this one was like a scene from a darkly beautiful nightmare.

Sunny and Nephis had not slept for a single moment, too wary to close their eyes.

In the morning, the impenetrable darkness of the night was once again replaced by a blazing sunset. It seemed like one of the seven suns was always within reach, drowning in the currents of time.

The further west they sailed, the dimmer the light became. Eventually, they were surrounded by a fiery dusk.

"Sunny... isn't the current strange?"

Neph's voice sounded tense.

Currently, he was holding the steering oar, while she was leaning over the railing nearby.

Confused, Sunny sent one of his shadows to take a look overboard. It took him a long time to understand what had alarmed Nephis.

'Strange.'

The current of the Great River... was changing.

Ever since they entered the Tomb of Ariel, it had always flowed in the same direction. But now, it seemed as if the currents were twisting, not only carrying the Chain Breaker forward, but also slightly pulling it to the side.

In the direction of the setting sun. He gripped the oar tighter.

"We must be nearing the edge."

The Great River was vast and flowed endlessly... but it was not limitless. That was one of the first things they had asked Ananke, hoping that there was a shore somewhere in this inhospitable world.

...But there was no shore.

Instead, the Great River was limited from west and east — from dusk and dawn, as the River People called these directions — but a bottomless dark abyss. It was as though the river flowed through nothing, suspended in the void by the power of the Demon of Dread.

And so, there was an edge instead of the shore. A colossal and unceasing waterfall where the waters of time spilled into the abyss and disappeared into the boundless darkness. Sailing close to the edge was tantamount to suicide.

They had not reached the truly dangerous waters yet — otherwise, the currents would have already been pulling the Chain Breaker toward the abyss with ferocious force — but the subtle change in the direction of where the water flowed indicated that the edge was already not too far away.

Which was good news.

Because it meant that they were even closer to Fallen Grace.

...And Dusk, the last sybil of the Estuary. Sunny inhaled deeply.

"Check the navigation tools again. It would be really awful if we overshoot Fallen Grace and end up deeper into the past than intended."

That would have been bad, indeed, considering that there was no one except Defiled further downstream than the last human city.

If the last human city was still standing...

Sunny frowned, remembering the time storm. They did not really know how long they had spent fighting against its rage, and especially how long they had spent in the eerily tranquil eye of the roving cataclysm, trying their hardest not to look at the water.

Who knew? Fallen Grace might have been consumed by the Defilement, already.

Even if it wasn't, there was no telling whether Dusk was friend or foe, let alone whether she was the one who had sent Ananke the message to find them through the dreams.

They had to be ready for battle.

While Nephis was trying to determine their location with the help of the

navigation tools, Sunny silently gave his Shadows a series of commands.

Standing at the bow of the graceful ship, Saint released her darkness with indifferent poise. Nightmare stirred in the shadows, his crimson eyes igniting with dangerous light. Fiend rose from the deck, infernal flames burning behind the black faceplate of his fearsome helmet.

Soon, Nephis put the tools away and looked downstream.

"Everything seems fine. We should be very near... of course, the city might have migrated in any direction by now. Still, it couldn't have moved far without sacrificing its entire population of Riverborn."

Sunny nodded slowly. Indeed... although the floating cities of the Great River civilization could theoretically travel as far as their inhabitants wished, in reality, they were bound in place by the lifespans of the Riverborn. Migrations happened over the span of generations, not months or years.

"Replace me at the oar."

Nephis silently stepped into the runic circle, freeing Sunny. Right now, he was a more efficient fighter between the two of them...

More importantly, he had no idea how to berth a ship. If the people of Fallen Grace were indeed friendly... it would be really embarrassing to crash into their pier first thing after arriving.

'Yeah... I'll handle the fighting, if it comes to that.'

Sunny secretly looked around, checking what the Sin of Solace was doing. Making sure that the sword wraith wasn't up to no good, he let out a mental sigh of relief and extended his shadow sense as far as he could.

After that, all they could do was wait.

An hour passed in tense silence, then another. The drag of the abyss was still mild, but it was slowly growing faster. Surrounded by eternal sunset, Sunny found it hard to measure time.

The Chain Breaker sailed through crimson dusk. The waters of the Great River reflected the burning sky, and seemed to be engulfed in flames themselves in turn.

Then, finally, Saint shifted and slightly turned her head.

...In the distance, Sunny saw a spark of light shining above the horizon. Somewhere out there, a white flame was burning at the top of a tall lighthouse.

They had found the last human city in the Tomb of Ariel, it seemed...

After months of wandering the perilous expanse of the Tomb of Ariel, they had reached Fallen Grace.