1396 Approaching the Vortex

During the battle in the flooded temple, he had observed Cassie's artificial Echo in action. Even though it did not seem that powerful, that was only because their enemies that time had been of both a higher Rank and a higher Class than the blade mannequin. Sunny would not have wanted to face that thing in battle as an Awakened.

The most impressive thing about it, though, was the very fact that it was artificial.

After interrogating Cassie and Nephis on the topic, he had found out that the forgemasters of Clan Valor were capable of creating not only Memories, but also Echoes. Making one was an extremely long process, though, and one that demanded a lot of precious resources. So, there were actually very few artificial Echoes in existence, all of them belonging to the most valued members of the clan.

Nevertheless, Sunny couldn't help but wonder if he would be capable of weaving Echoes one day, as well. So, he had spent most of his free time studying the blade mannequin.

It was not going well, for now, but Sunny wasn't disheartened.

His attempts to learn the Sorcery of Names were not bearing any results, anyway. Although his horizons were somewhat expanded, being able to actually use this power seemed to be beyond him. If there was one consolation, it was that Cassie was having just as much trouble with it.

Being talentless together was less of a bitter pill to swallow.

Her mastery of runic sorcery, though, was slowly growing. In fact, there seemed to be a positive loop between the Sorcery of Names and the Sorcery of Runes — both were founded on invoking the True Names of things, after all, albeit in a different manner. So, Cassie and Nephis were able to help each other improve.

As a result, the blind girl had indeed managed to restore some of the enchantments permeating the Chain Breaker. Just as she had told them, the graceful vessel was now once again capable of flight — it just couldn't fly for too long, or too fast. The strain of supplying the ancient ship with essence was dire enough to drain even Neph's reserves in less than a minute.

It would have to be enough to carry them to the island at the center of Wind Flower.

...Now, all they needed was to actually find it.

As Sunny stared at the horizon and tried not to feel too anxious, a swift shadow glided across the deck of the Chain Breaker. Then, a black bird landed on the branch near him.

Crow Crow was back. Strangely, though... the Echo seemed less grumpy than it had been recently. Instead, it looked excited.

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"What is it?"

The crow hopped a couple of timed, and then cawed while spreading its wings:

"Jet! Jet!"

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Jumping down from the tree, Sunny landed noiselessly on the deck and dissolved into the shadows. A split second later, he appeared on the bow of the ship, gazing tensely at the horizon.

Saint, who was standing nearby with a bow in her hand, spared him an indifferent gaze. Her ruby eyes glowed silently, not betraying any hint of emotion.

'If only I could be this calm all the time...'

Sunny remained motionless for a few minutes, then sent mental messages to Cassie and Nephis:

[I think we are drawing close.]

Indeed, out there, far in the distance, the flowing surface of the Great River had grown a little hazy, as if obscured by mist. Considering Crow Crow's excitement, it had to be Wind Rose.

'Hurricane winds, destructive currents, and suffocating mist... we'll see how terrible that place is, exactly, very soon.'

A few moments later, Cassie joined him at the bow. Nephis remained at the stern, holding the steering oar, but she did respond through the link of the Shroud of Dusk:

[I see.]

Sunny sighed, then glanced at the blind girl. The soul shard crowning her wooden staff was glowing, its light pointing precisely at the distant haze.

"There is no doubt, then."

Cassie slowly nodded.

"Yes. We have arrived."

The branches of the sacred tree rustled as the Chain Breaker took a turn. Nephis moved the ship in a wide spiral, positioning it directly upstream of the approaching hazard. By the time she did, Sunny could already see wisps of mist flowing over the surface of the restless water.

'Time to get to work.'

Concentrating, he called upon the shadows. The three of them had long discussed how to tackle the titanic whirlpool — there was not much they had to do, really.

The first obstacle they were going to face was the repelling wind. So, Sunny lowered the sails to diminish the repelling force. The ship would be carried into the vortex by the current, and once they approached close enough, Nephis would invoke the True Name of the wind to lessen its fury.

The second obstacle would be raging currents. Sunny's authority over water was not strong enough to calm them, but the Chain Breaker was sturdy enough to withstand the fury of the elements. It was not going to overturn, either — all they needed was a skilled helmsman and something to guide them through the mist.

Cassie was going to accomplish both tasks with a little help from the Guiding Light. She was quite skilled in controlling the Chain Breaker —more than any of them were.

However, she was not going to be able to guide the flying ship through the last, and most dangerous, of obstacles.

Once they were close enough to the island at the center of the vortex but not deep enough into the whirlpool to be swallowed by it, the Chain Breaker had to lift into the air and reach the shore before its helmsman ran out of essence. Nephis was a Terror, and possessed the lineage of Sun God as well — which, among other things, drastically strengthened her soul.

Her reserve of essence was the largest among them, so it would be her task to take up the steering oars in those last moments.

...As the first wisps of grey mist touched the bow of the Chain Breaker, Sunny suppressed a shiver and looked into the approaching wall of fog with a dark expression.

Mist, mist... nothing good ever happened when there was mist around. Here in the Dream Realm, it was always a herald of something dreadful approaching.

'We have prepared for this.'

Taking a deep breath, he glanced at Cassie and smiled.

"Let's go find Effie and Jet, then."