1481 Emergency Repairs

The Chain Breaker was assaulted by hurricane winds as it plummeted into the heart of the colossal whirlpool. Nephis had yet to run out of essence, so their fall was controlled... for now.

However, that would change soon.

Sunny was still overwhelmed by the destruction of Aletheia's Island. Shaking off his reverie, he took a deep breath and forced himself to move.

All across the flying vessel, deep shadows stirred and surged forward, turning into inky-black hands. The manifested shadows pulled on the ropes, unfurling the horizontal sails. Those sails extended from both sides of the ship and were meant to help it glide on the winds.

At the same time, he nervously looked down.

...All Sunny could see was darkness.

It was not the true darkness that his sight had never been able to penetrate. Instead, the abyssal chasm was simply so deep for him to see anything.

'Great...'

By now, the slopes of the vortex had almost turned vertical. It was as if the Chain Breaker was surrounded by a vast wall of dark water, its current so fast that its surface was like a blur. At first, the dreadful maw of the whirlpool was dozens of kilometers wide, but the further they descended, the narrower it became.

Eventually, it was as if the Chain Breaker had entered a twisting vertical tunnel that was just a few kilometers in diameter. They were surrounded by absolute darkness, with only a scattering of lanterns illuminating the deck. It was like a small island of light in an ocean of nothingness. No one except for Sunny could see the spinning walls of the tunnel... which was, perhaps, for the best.

He knew that if the ship touched the water, it would be torn apart by the tremendous pressure of the current.

'What the hell am I thinking? It's not for the best! Not at all!'

The Chain Breaker was falling vertically, for now, but it was only possible

because Neph was still empowering its enchantments with her essence. Once her essence ran dry, they would have to move in a wide spiral along the watery walls of the tunnel to keep the ship balanced. Otherwise, it would be too easy for it to roll and overturn.

By then, not seeing where the darkness ended, and the furious current began, would be lethal.

Even worse, the tunnel was not strictly vertical. Looking down, Sunny could see it twisting and turning, like a descending tornado.

He gritted his teeth.

"Damnation..."

Could they even survive in this abyss without the Chain Breaker's enchantments?

He turned to look at the stern of the ship, where Nephis was struggling with the steering oars, but at that moment, Cassie's voice reached his ears:

"Sunny! Here!"

The blind girl was standing near the entrance to the main cargo hold, waving at him. Her voice sounded urgent.

Sunny hesitated for a few moments, then rushed to her side.

"What is it?"

She pulled him into the cargo hold, a grim expression on her face.

"I need your help... or rather, your Shadow's help. Summon her and make her as strong as possible. Please!"

Somewhat confused, Sunny lingered for a second, then called upon Saint and sent all six of his shadows to augment her. As soon as the taciturn knight appeared, her onyx armor shone with dark radiance, and a feeling of oppressive might emanated from her graceful figure.

Down in the cargo hold, various objects were neatly laid out on the wooden floor. There were amphorae containing strange liquids, brushes, stone etchings of complicated runes, mortars, and items that Sunny did not even know how to describe.

Most glaringly of all... the black stone from the hidden chamber of Aletheia's Tower was also there, illuminated by the faint radiance of the Guiding Light.

He gave Cassie a long look.

"What's this?"

The blind girl was already walking toward the black stone.

"We spent a lot of time inside the loop. Most of it was occupied by trying to escape... but I had plenty of time to think, as well. About how to repair the enchantment circuit of the Chain Breaker, in particular."

She stopped and pointed at the chunk of black rock.

"I need you to help me shatter it. I tried to do it myself... but I'm not strong enough."

Sunny felt a bit weird for a moment. It was as if she was asking him to open a jar of pickles for her... whatever that was. In any case, the jagged piece of black rock was not a jar of any sort. Instead, it was a mystical stone that was rumored to be a fragment of the Estuary.

Of course, Cassie was not strong enough to break it.

However, she was trying to finish repairing the runic circuit of the flying vessel, connecting its enchantments to the sacred tree. If Cassie succeeded in time... perhaps, they would not be torn apart by the current of the spinning tunnel.

Sunny wasn't sure if he was strong enough to crush the black stone, either. But Saint was a Transcendent Devil, and augmented by six shadows on top of that.

Glancing at the indifferent onyx knight, he gestured at the black stone. Her ruby eyes shone darkly, and, summoning her tenebrous blade, Saint took a step forward.

The black sword fell on the jagged piece of rock... and bounced away, not leaving even a single scratch on it. She lingered for a moment.

Then, a flood of darkness flowed from beneath Saint's armor, entering the black blade. The blade itself rippled and changed form, turning into a long, elegant lucerne.

The dark lucerne might have been elegant, but both its beak and hammerhead were capable of delivering truly devastating blows. A weapon such as this was far better suited for piercing armor and breaking bones than a sword was... so, it had a far better chance of shattering the mystical stone.

Saint took a step back, then slowly raised her weapon above her head... And struck down with enough force to make Sunny stagger.

There was a flash, a shockwave, and a thunderous boom.

When he regained his vision once again, Saint had already lowered the lucerne. Her ruby eyes were cold and indifferent.

The black stone lay broken into several pieces. Cassie pointed to them and said hurriedly:

"Again!"

Soon, the large pieces had turned into smaller ones, and then were finally ground into fine dust inside one of the mortars. The stone dust was then mixed with the strange liquid stored inside the ceramic vessels... some of which turned out to be blood. Hopefully, that of Nightmare Creatures.

By the time they emerged from the cargo hold, Nephis was running out of essence, and the Chain Breaker was growing more and more unstable.

Cassie hesitated for a moment, then pointed to the stern.

"Go! Help Neph!"

Sunny nodded and used Shadow Step to appear by Neph's side. Using his ability to see in the dark, he helped her guide the flying vessel into a spiraling descent. Nephis steered the ship, while Sunny played the role of a navigator.

Cassie, meanwhile, crawled along the grooves carved into the deck of the Chain Breaker, feverishly drawing runes on the ancient wood. Essence poured out of her, making the runes glimmer slightly before being absorbed into the deck. The sorcerous ink created from the dust of the black stone disappeared without leaving a trace.

Jet and Effie were helping her by carrying the amphorae containing ink and handing her brushes — each one only lasted a dozen seconds or so, gradually dissolving into thin air.

The flight of the Chain Breaker turned more and more unstable.

Eventually, Nephis gritted her teeth and slumped slightly, the runic circle surrounding her growing dim.

The flying ship shuddered.

With no more sorcery supporting it, it glided through the darkness,

carried only by inertia and the wind pressure, which created a lifting force under the horizontal sails. Neph continued to hold the oars, trying her best to keep the Chain Breaker from plummeting into an uncontrollable fall.

Standing by her side, Sunny uttered a silent curse. 'Which idiot thought that this was a good idea?' Oh... it was him. He had thought so.

The ancient vessel descended into the darkness, its speed increasing at a frightening rate. The angle of their descent was increasing, as well, slowly approaching the point where it would turn into a fatal nosedive.

Some distance away, near the sacred tree, Cassie threw the remains of another dissolved brush away and raised a hand to receive a new one. Patches of skin on her delicate hands had begun dissolving as well, and fresh blood mixed with the sorcerous ink.

'Are we going to have to abandon the ship?'

Sunny had the Dark Wing and the Heavenly Burden in his soul arsenal. He could also temporarily turn into a crow. The other members of the cohort had their own Memories to help them if not fly, then at least glide. Theoretically, they could continue the descent using those...

But somehow, he did not think that they would survive the depths of the Great River without the impregnable hull of the Chain Breaker.

The ancient vessel shuddered once again...

And then, the darkness was suddenly dispelled by a soft radiance. Raising his head, Sunny watched the sacred tree in stunned silence. Its leaves were shining with a pure, beautiful light.

At the same time, the runic circle surrounding Nephis ignited once more, and their flight turned as smooth as it had been before... much smoother, even.

Bathed in the radiance of the sacred tree, Cassie let out a tired sigh and slumped on the deck.

Finally, the enchantment circuit of the Chain Breaker had been fully restored.