1490 No Bounds

Truly, a treachery that knew no bounds. Sunny had succumbed to the Defilement and betrayed the cohort, only to betray them once again once they were made into the Six Plagues by him. Killing one of his masters in the process and weaving countless schemes to destroy the other.

He... did not really know how to feel about it. Was he supposed to be proud of or appalled by his former self?

'I might... have to stop resenting the Spell for calling me that.'

In any case, he felt a deep sense of regret.

Because he wouldn't be able to strangle the mad bastard with his own two hands.

Sunny sighed.

Well, there it was. The truth.

Of course, there were still many things that made little sense, or no sense at all. The most obvious of them, of course, was the paradoxical existence of the Six Plagues, who had not only traveled to the distant past of the River Civilization, but also lingered in the Tomb of Ariel despite the start of a new cycle.

'They really broke all the rules.'

Sunny also did not know where the Mad Prince had found the Chain Breaker before arranging for it to be discovered by him and Nephis. He also did not know why the vile madman destroyed Weave, denying them the support of the Followers of Weaver, and many other things.

Some of them, he was probably never going to learn. But it was alright.

The Tomb of Ariel had never been a place that could be fully understood by a mere mortal. And he already knew the general shape of things.

'So what?'

That knowledge, really... did not change anything at all.

Their goal remained the same. Travel to Twilight, retrieve Kai and Mordret... then gather whatever strength they can and attack Verge to slay the First Seeker. If anything, that goal had only become less impossible to achieve.

Not only were three of the Six Plagues already off the board, but there was no telling what else the Mad Prince had arranged to help the cohort conquer the Nightmare. Were the rest of the Plagues even alive? Perhaps he had already dealt with them, the same way he had dealt with Devouring Beast and Undying Slaughter.

'What is this weird feeling... it is as if I'm being helped by myself, from beyond the grave — and not only that, but that dead version of me is also a truly dreadful Nightmare Creature.'

Had a more bizarre sentence ever been spoken?

Although, technically, Sunny did not speak it aloud. And the Mad Prince was not technically dead... just erased from existence by traveling back in time.

'Yeah, that definitely does not sound just as bizarre.'

At that moment, Sunny realized that he had been kneeling on the deck of the Chain Breaker for quite some time, staring at the distant Great River and spacing out. It must have been quite a strange sight...

Before he could look around, however, a shadow fell on him. Raising his head, Sunny saw the Sin of Solace, who was looking at him with a dark expression.

"Fool... are you done acting like an idiot? Oh, wow. Judging by your stupid expression, that idiot brain of yours finally managed to digest some information. Pathetic. How long has it taken you to realize something that should have been apparent on day one?"

Sunny stared at the sword wraith, then smiled darkly.

"You know... I know. You rotten bastard. How many times have you poisoned me with the Defilement?"

Indeed, the Sin of Solace was the reason Sunny had become the Mad Prince. But, strangely enough, the sword wraith was also the reason why the Mad Prince had managed to preserve a shred of lucidity. Keeping him forever torn between two mutually exclusive states... and, therefore, forever in agony.

How sinister.

Sunny's eye twitched.

"Answer me, you piece of trash."

The Sin of Solace stared at him, fury burning in his eyes. He clearly wanted to say something... but he couldn't.

The Estuary Key forbade him.

Not only that, but it also prevented the innate connection that Sunny shared with the splintered piece of his mind from serving as a conduit for subconscious knowledge about the previous cycles of the Great River and the secrets of the Estuary.

And, on top of that, that Memory was the first one Sunny had ever seen that functioned even without being summoned. Its passive enchantment was in effect despite the Estuary Key resting within his soul, both silencing the sword wraith and preventing time from influencing the jagged piece of black rock.

'Amazing.'

Just how skilled of a sorcerer had he become after countless years of being a Corrupted Titan?

Sunny sighed.

It did not matter. The cost was much too high. It was unbearable.

Nevertheless, the Key of the Estuary was a promise of what he could potentially achieve, one day.

'Right. The others might be concerned about me suddenly going catatonic.'

Or maybe, they were petrified by dire revelations of their own. Looking back, Sunny saw the members of the cohort.

Cassie was staring at the distant ribbon of the Great River, her expression distant. She must have realized the same things Sunny had... perhaps even more. Nephis was even more expressionless than usual. She seemed to have grasped the truth, as well.

Jet and Effie, however, knew less about the Tomb of Ariel. It did not appear that they were interested in the sight of the Great River at all. Instead, they were on the opposite side of the Chain Breaker, staring into the darkness beyond.

By then, the inertia carrying the flying ship forward had mostly dissipated. They were slowing down.

Nephis sighed.

"So that is what the vortex is."

Sunny glanced at her in confusion.

"What?"

She pointed at the Great River.

"It's flat. Although its shape makes it so that the entirety of the river is one plane, there are actually two sides to it. The tunnel we traveled through is simply a passage that connects one side to the other. In other words, we did not descend to the bottom of the Great River. We simply passed through it, emerging from the other side."

And at some point, they were catapulted out of the vortex at such a tremendous speed that the Chain Breaker soared high above the surface of the river.

How long was it going to take them to come back?

Sunny winced.

'We don't even know how long we spent on Aletheia's Island. Months could have passed... years, even... before I became aware of the loop.'

Was Kai doing fine?

What about Fallen Grace? How were that brat Cronos and its other residents fairing?

'We need to return as soon as possible.'

There was also Effie and her baby. Sunny did not know what would happen if she gave birth within the Seed. Would the baby, who had been conceived in the waking world, be a Riverborn or an Outsider? What would happen to it after they conquered the Nightmare?

'Children are resilient...'

There was a reason why the Spell infected young people. Young souls were much more malleable, and could withstand the Awakening better. Of course, no infant had even been sent into the First Nightmare, so there was no telling what would happen.

This was not a First Nightmare, either. It was the Third.

If they conquered it...

Would Effie's child become a Saint as an infant? Or would the child's soul collapse under the strain of Transcendence?

Sunny did not know.

'Damnation...'

He remained silent for a while, then shook his head.

'It's going to be fine. I refuse to believe that it won't.'

Just as he thought that, Effie suddenly cursed.

In the next moment, Jet yelled:

"Stop this damned ship right now!"