1491 Dark Boundary

"Sunny, the sails!"

Before Jet's shout even faded, Cassie and Sunny were already moving. He called upon the shadows to raise the sails of the Chain Breaker, while she rushed to the runic circle. Nephis turned to look into the darkness, her hand resting on the hilt of her sword.

'What kind of disaster have we stumbled into now...'

Grasping the steering oars, Cassie skillfully turned the ship to borrow the force of the wind. At the same time, the runic circle ignited, absorbing strands of her essence — now that the enchantment circuits were repaired, it was not to power the sorcery of the ancient vessel, but simply to control it.

Finally, the Chain Breaker came to a halt, hovering in the boundless darkness of the Tomb of Ariel.

Sunny approached Jet and Effie, tracing their gazes into the distance.

"What is the... matter..."

His voice faltered.

Out there, far away...

The world ended.

It was hard to see, even for Sunny, because the end of the world was perfectly black, barely distinguishable from the darkness that surrounded them. But still... there was a vast, seemingly endless surface in front of them, stretching in all directions as far as the eye could see, like a boundary of the world.

Smooth and lusterless, like polished stone.

It took him a moment to realize what he was looking at.

'It's the... inner wall of the pyramid.'

The endless black boundary was just that... the wall of Ariel's Tomb, seen from the inside. However, it dwarfed anything he had ever seen. The towering walls of the Dark City were like a speck of dust in front of it. The great ramparts of Falcon Scott were like sand.

Looking at the endless black wall, Sunny was stunned by its sheer magnitude. For a moment, he wondered... was the interior of the pyramid truly large enough to encompass an entire realm, or was it him who had been reduced to the size of an ant?

Well, in any case... Jet's warning had come in time. The Chain Breaker was not going to crush into the endless wall of black stone anymore. They had already stopped, and there was plenty of distance between them and the boundary of Ariel's dreadful world.

But then, a slight frown appeared on his face. Turning to Jet, Sunny remained silent for a moment.

He could see the surface of the wall because of how special his sight was. She, however, did not share his ability to see in the darkness.

So how had Jet and Effie known to warn them?

"What is it?"

The huntress was looking forward with a somber expression. She remained silent for a moment, then grimaced:

"Can't you smell it? It reeks of Nightmare Creatures."

Sunny slowly shook his head and glanced at Jet, raising an eyebrow. Her icy blue eyes were radiating a chilling cold.

"There are souls... powerful souls, far ahead."

Soul Reaper was usually easygoing and relaxed, but now, her expression was grave. Seeing it, Sunny felt a shiver run down his spine.

His frown deepened.

'Jet wouldn't be wary of just any soul. What kind of power...'

Cursing inwardly, he turned to the distant black boundary and strained his eyes, trying to discern something... anything... to understand what was threatening them.

Knowing that Sunny had the best chance of discovering the hidden threat, the rest of the cohort fell silent.

'What is it... I can't see anything...'

Now that his initial shock of witnessing the inner wall of the Tomb had subsided, Sunny could study it in more detail... not that there was a lot to study. It was just a solid black surface, stretching endlessly into the darkness. He was too far away to notice anything else.

Well... if there was one thing, it was that the wall was not smooth, as he had initially thought. Rather, it was uneven, as if covered in countless ridges and bumps. Those ridges and bumps looked tiny from afar, but they should be dozens, if not hundreds, of meters across.

Sunny peered at the irregularities, thinking.

'There might be something hiding in the seams. Maybe there are caves in the stone? I don't see any entrances, though...'

Then, he suddenly froze.

Out there on the wall of the black pyramid, something had just moved.

The movement was tiny and at the very periphery of his vision, so if Sunny had not been looking at the wall of Ariel's Tomb intently, he would not have noticed it.

Turning his head slightly, he stared at a particular spot. What was it? He still couldn't see any creatures hiding in the recess between the strange, irregular ridges.

Then, his perception shifted slightly. It was just a mundane shift, like concentrating on a near object instead of a distant one, as well as a mental one, like trying to perceive something as a part of a whole instead of a separate entity.

It was at this moment that Sunny's hair stood on end, and his face became as pale as that of a ghost.

Instantly petrified, he swayed slightly.

'D—damnation!'

Powerful souls...

There was nothing hiding in the recesses of the endless wall. There were no caves hidden between the bumps and ridges where dreadful abominations could dwell.

...Instead, the entire surface of the wall was covered by abominations, who clung to it like moths.

The bumps and ridges... were the edges of millions of black wings.

The inner wall of Ariel's Tomb was obscured by a colossal swarm of numerous Dark Butterflies. There were myriads of these eerie Great Monsters resting on the endless black surface, seemingly asleep...

But also ready to awaken if anything disturbed their slumber. Sunny took an involuntary step back.

'This... this is the place Song and Valor wanted to conquer?'

One Great Monster was a calamity that only a few people in the waking world could quell. But there were countless Dark Butterflies dwelling inside the black pyramid... protecting its boundary... waiting for some fool to set them free.

Or maybe waiting to destroy anyone who would try to desecrate the tomb that the Demon of Dread had built.

Sunny shuddered.

'Ariel... that lunatic... just what did he build? And why?'

Turning his head slowly, he looked at Cassie with hollow eyes and asked quietly:

"Cassie... can you extinguish the radiance of the sacred tree?"

She seemed confused for a moment, then nodded. In the next moment, the beautiful light of the rustling tee grew dimmer, eventually disappearing entirely.

Sunny let out a shaky sigh.

The lanterns illuminating the Chain Breaker were extinguished, as well. Soon, the members of the cohort found themselves in absolute darkness.

Only Sunny and Cassie could move freely in the absence of light.

Unable to look away from the harrowing sight of countless black butterflies crowding the surface of the endless stone wall, he calmed his wildly beating heart and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Cassie, take us away from here. Back to the River... fast. As fast as you can!"

The Chain Breaker moved, slowly turning its bow. The creaking of the masts, the rustle of leaves, and the ripple of the billowing sails sounded like thunder to his ears.

'If they notice us... we die. I have survived many situations in which I had no business surviving. But this one... there's no surviving that.'

They had to get away.

Sunny gritted his teeth and waited.

A few moments passed, then a few moments more.

A minute.

The Chain Breaker was gliding toward the distant Great River, steadily gaining speed.

'Faster, faster...'

Sunny never expected that he would be praying to return to the Great River one day. But here he was, doing just that.

...Perhaps someone had heard his prayers.

Eventually, the dreadful wall of Ariel's Tomb disappeared from view, and the beautiful ribbon of the Great River drew closer.