1496 Bygone Battlefield

They traversed the old battlefield for several more days. By the end of the second week, there were so many dead Nightmare Creatures and ghostly ships floating in the still water, surrounded by debris and broken weapons, that it became almost impossible to navigate between them. A strange haze hung in the air, limiting how far they could see.

With no other choice, Cassie raised the Chain Breaker higher, and they flew above the scene of harrowing slaughter.

The Great River was littered with rotten husks of massive abominations, debris, and shattered ships. Shrouded in the somber twilight, they covered the water like a horrid carpet. That carpet stretched into the distance, eventually disappearing in the haze.

Sunny was appalled and shaken by this sight. 'How many people died here?'

He was no stranger to battlefields, but this one seemed especially somber and poignant.

Although there were much less broken ships than there were slain Nightmare Creatures, this section of the watery battlefield alone must have taken the lives of countless warriors of Twilight. Not all of them had been Ascended, after all... desperate to escape a dying world and create an army of Saints to reclaim it, Daeron had led most of his surviving subjects here, both Awakened and mundane. Before the fall, they had been truly numerous.

"What is this place?"

Effie's voice was low.

Nephis glanced at her, then looked back at the dreadful scene.

"...It's the outskirt of a battlefield. This is where our predecessors, warriors of the Twilight Sea, faced the Defiled legion of Verge."

The Serpent King had once led his people to besiege the cursed city of Verge, but was forced to retreat after failing to destroy the First Seeker. The forces of the Defilement must have launched an war campaign in retaliation, and this was the morbid result.

Sunny studied the floating corpses.

'No wonder the Defiled have been slow in obliterating Fallen Grace.'

The Six Plagues and their tainted army might have been the victors of the siege of Twilight, but the casualties they had sustained were immeasurably severe. Verge did not possess an infinite number of soldiers, after all. With how many of the Defiled abominations seemed to have perished here, in the haze of dawn, there would not be enough of them left to continue an aggressive conquest.

'Was it different during the first cycle? I wonder...'

Perhaps, without the Six Plagues, Twilight would still be standing. Same for Weave, and some of the cities ruled by the sybils. The cohort would have been able to travel across the Great River, slowly gathering allies and building a vast army to destroy Verge.

Sunny and Nephis would have obtained the support of the Followers of Weaver, Cassie would have become the saint of the River People, Jet and Effie would have gathered the tribes of the River Nomads, and Kai would have earned the trust of the king of Twilight with Mordret's help.

...But maybe not. Maybe Twilight had always been destined to fall before the new challengers arrived, and the Serpent King had always been destined to descend into madness and become a mindless beast.

In any case, that past was gone now, and there was no way to uncover its secrets.

Instead, Sunny had to carry the weight of King Daeron's crown, and of Wind Flower's trust, to finish what the people of the Twilight Sea had started.

He gritted his teeth. 'I'll use your gifts well.'

"Let's proceed."

Guided by the light of the sacred relic of the sybils, the Chain Breaker flew above the carpet of dreadful corpses, the broken ships, and the forests of broken weapons.

The Edge was drawing closer and closer. They could not see far because of the haze, but the wind brought with it distant whispers — the endless waterfall was not that far, by now.

Cassie had lowered the speed of the flying ship to a crawl, afraid that

something would unexpectedly attack them from below. This way, at least, they would notice an approaching threat in advance.

Sunny was peering into the distance when a swift shadow suddenly fell from the sky, and a black crow landed on Jet's shoulder. Her Echo had been scouting ahead, and seemed to have brought news.

Soul Reaper looked at Crow Crow and raised an eyebrow.

"What did you find?"

The crow opened its wings and cawed:

"Shai-nee! Shai-nee!"

Jet frowned.

"Shiny? You found something shiny?"

The Echo stared at her for a couple of moments, then clicked its beak and flew into the air again. Jet glanced at Cassie.

"We should probably follow."

The blind girl hesitated for a bit, then moved the oar, leading the Chain Breaker away from the direction where the Guiding Light was pointing.

They continued to fly in the direction which used to be downstream, at the same time moving closer to the Edge. After some time, a towering edifice revealed itself from the haze.

Unlike the carcasses of the leviathans, the structure was clearly made by human hands. A mighty wall rose high above the water, crowned with battlements. The base of the wall was littered with massive spikes, as if to prevent the Nightmare Creatures from reaching it. There were plenty of dead abominations impaled on these spikes.

Several enormous chains stretched into the distance from both sides of the structure, disappearing into the haze.

It was a floating fortress.

Sunny studied the fortress, impressed by how imposing it looked in the dim twilight of the early dawn.

However...

For every spike that remained whole, more were bent or broken. Most of the massive chains that had been connected to the sides of the fortress once were torn and covered by rust. The mighty walls were breached and had partially collapsed.

The battlements were littered with human bones, with tattered flags hanging lifelessly in the forlorn stillness.

The ghost fortress stood empty and conquered, and only the rare rattling of rusty chains broke the hollow silence that surrounded it.

Crow Crow was heading directly to the battlements.

Landing on the parapet of a partially collapsed bastion, the black bird raised its beak and cawed loudly. Its caws echoed above the water, spreading far and wide. Frowning slightly, Cassie brought the Chain Breaker to a halt.

The members of the cohort gathered on the bow, studying the breached fortress. The Guiding Light was still pointing away from it, so...

Why had Jet's crow brought them here?

Sunny was just about to speak when he noticed something from the corner of his eye. Out there, atop the collapsed bastion, something had just shined brightly.

Turning his head, he narrowed his eyes with a frown.

'What is it?'

A moment later, there was a bright shine again, but it disappeared almost immediately.

'There...'

There was a skeletal corpse in polished steel armor laying on the battlement, its back leaning against the locking mechanism of one of the chains. As the chain swayed in the water, the corpse was pushed lightly up and down. When it moved, soft sunlight reflected from the polished surface of its breastplate... almost as if inviting them to come.

Sunny tilted his head.

'That armor...'

It was mostly covered in grime, but some of it was clean, revealing lustrous, polished steel.

That steel was so perfectly polished, in fact, that it was almost like a...

'Mirror.'

He took a deep breath.

...It seemed that Mordret, the Prince of Nothing, was welcoming them to Twilight.