1524 Bitter, Sweet

By the time Sunny woke up, it was night.

Even this place of endless dawn had a night, just like the crimson expanse of eternal dusk had one. However, nights were short and fleeting at the edges of the Great River.

Before he knew it, the sevens suns were already rising again.

The world became painted by the soft colors of the breaking dawn. With a sigh, Sunny rubbed his eyes and sat up.

He felt... strangely great. His body was in perfect shape because of Neph's healing flames, and his mental energy had been restored with the help of the Shroud of Dusk after having a good sleep.

Nightmare had also guarded his dreams, as well as the dreams of everyone else aboard the Chain Breaker. Here in the pyramid built by the Demon of Dread, that alone was more important than one would think.

'Great...'

Nevertheless, his good mood was diminished when he remembered what had transpired in Twilight.

'I... should probably be happy, right?'

Beyond himself, even.

And he was, to an extent. Two of the most dangerous enemies there were in the Tomb of Ariel had been slain, so why wouldn't he? Finally, the end of this Nightmare did not seem so distant as to be impossible anymore. Salvation was within reach, already visible far in the distance — just like the first rays of the rising suns were, shining from beyond the horizon to break the reign of night.

But Sunny couldn't feel completely happy. That victory of theirs had been too perilous, almost turning into defeat. In fact, it should have been a defeat, if not for a couple miracles.

Other than that... he was not happy with himself, personally.

Sunny had accomplished a few astonishing feats during the battle for Twilight, true — reaching the throne room of the Serpent King's palace, lifting the curse of frozen time, resisting the authority of the Dread Lord, fighting the Defiled Saint almost to a standstill while being inhabited by madness, and even realizing the full potential of his current level of mastery over Shadow Dance.

What other Master could boast that they were not only capable of transforming themselves akin to a Saint, but were also not limited to a single static form? Turning into monstrous serpents, winged horrors, and dreadful beasts... truly, the depth of his Divine Aspect was slowly starting to put the entire hierarchy of Awakened under question.

Most of the things Sunny had done yesterday, nobody else could have accomplished. And without him there, the cohort would have undoubtedly perished.

And yet...

In the end, he had been defeated. He had been defeated by the Dread Lord, and he had been defeated by the [King's Resentment] enchantment of the Crown of Twilight. Most of all, he had been defeated by his own lack of foresight and knowledge. He was only alive by chance.

Knowing that did not feel great at all.

Sunny sighed.

'Well, one can't win every time.'

He knew that such thoughts were immature and childish. He had long realized, after all, that his allies were a part of his power. So, their triumph was his triumph, just like his triumph would be theirs in turn. Still... Sunny couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed in himself. He had done remarkably well in this Nightmare up until yesterday. Experiencing a serious setback was a change of pace.

And then there was the fact that Nephis had to resort to using Shadow Bond in order to make him come back to his senses.

He... did not know how to feel about it.

Logically, there was no reason to be hurt or angry. It had been done for his own good, after all, and brought him no harm. It might very well have saved the lives of his friends, too. In fact, if Sunny had been able to think at that moment, he would have asked Nephis to use her power over him to help him escape from the insidious effect of the [King's Resentment] himself. That would have been a cunning way to cheat the system.

But humans were not logical creatures.

All Sunny knew was that he could not forget that moment. The horror of having his will violated in such a tyrannical fashion. The hopelessness he felt when his body and soul moved despite his wishes, refusing to obey him. Obeying someone else instead. The demented fury he had felt at that time only made the experience so much more disturbing and vivid.

That memory was like a shadow that hung over his head. Grimacing, Sunny shook his head and looked around.

A moment later, his expression soured. He noticed a pair of hateful eyes glaring at him from a few meters away... the Sin of Solace was back, looking at him mockingly.

"Finally awake, are you? So, how does it feel to be..."

"Shut up."

Sunny did not let the sword wraith finish and stood up, deciding to go find the other members of the cohort.

Nephis was still in the strange state of having had her... reserve of humanity burned away by the terrible torment of her Flaw. Usually, she would have already been up and about, preparing breakfast for the cohort, but today, that did not happen. Instead, Nephis was simply meditating at the stern of the Chain Breaker, unmoved and unbothered by anything.

The other members of the cohort had chosen not to disturb her. There was a tantalizing smell spreading through the air — Effie had taken it upon herself to cook up a feast, using the supplies stored in the cargo hold of the flying ship without sparing any of the ingredients.

Sunny heard his stomach growl, and realized how hungry he was.

Soon, all of them — even Nephis — had gathered on the mess deck, sitting around a table.

Cassie had regained consciousness, but was still pale. Kai seemed to be a bit out of it, undoubtedly digesting the many incredible twists and turns of this bizarre Nightmare. Effie and Jet were, more or less, their usual selves.

It almost looked like the good old days when the cohort shared meals together, with the added bonus of having Jet keep them company.

There was only one thing spoiling the atmosphere.

Mordret was also there, sitting near Sunny and looking at them with a curious expression.

The Prince of Nothing picked up a pair of chopsticks and smiled pleasantly.

"What's for breakfast?"