1542 Last Journey

And there it was.

They had left on the last journey of this tumultuous, dreadful Nightmare.

For Sunny and Nephis, it was especially poignant, because they had come from the far reaches of the future — and were now on their way to the furthest reaches of the past, where Verge stood.

It must have been especially emotional for Cassie, as well, because she was leaving the city she had spent a whole year ruling and trying to preserve. Now, its fate depended on whether they would be successful in their battle against the First Seeker.

In any case, she would never see Fallen Grace again.

None of them knew if it would even exist, in any kind of way, should they prevail. However, it was inevitable for Fallen Grace to be destroyed should they fail.

The blind girl did not look back. Instead, she stood at the bow of the flying ship, facing the setting suns. The others gave her some space, knowing that there had to be a storm of complicated emotions weighing on her heart..

Only Sunny could see her face, visible to the shadow that was hiding close by.

Cassie's face was not wistful or sad. Instead, it was full of resolve and determination… impatience, even. It was as though she had been waiting for this moment for a long, long time.

Which was true, of course. Apart from Mordret, she had spent by far the longest in this Nightmare. Sunny knew that he was sick and tired of the Tomb of Ariel. The blind girl had to be feeling the same, but much more intensely.

'We've been here for so long.'

Sunny had come to Ariel's Tomb far away from here. He had spent time with Nephis, come to care for and then lost Ananke, traveled to Fallen Grace and got to know the culture of the River People there, fought against all kinds of underwater horrors on the way to Aletheia's Island, withstood the insidious hell of the time loop, dove into the depths of the Great River and emerged from the other side, battled against the Defiled Saints in Twilight…

It was hard to believe, but he had spent more time in the Tomb of Ariel than in Antarctica, not to mention the Kingdom of Hope.

Cassie, though… she had been here longer than even on the Forgotten Shore.

And that was without even counting the unknown number of cycles the seven of them had lived through before arriving at this one… hopefully, the last.

The Chain Breaker soared above the waves, flying toward the Edge.

Sunny spent some time enjoying the view of the blazing river, then rubbed his face and retreated to his cabin. There, he concentrated on preparing for the alteration of Neph's silver blade.

Now that they were en route to Verge, he felt a sense of urgency and wanted to finish with it as soon as possible.

A day passed in meticulous work, then another.

On the third day, they reached the duskward edge of the Great River.

It was much like the dawnward edge, but also different. The enormous, inconceivable waterfall was the same. The powerful current that threatened to destroy anything plunged into its crushing embrace was the same. The dark void beyond the Edge was the same, as well.

But the light here was entirely different from the soft lilac glow of dawn. Instead of the tender radiance, the water here was burning with an intense crimson glow, almost like it was on fire. The inconceivable waterfall that stretched in both directions as far as the eye could see was painted vibrant red, as well.

It was almost as if a sea of blood was spilling into a boundless, dark abyss.

Enthralled by that dreadful sight, the members of the cohort gathered on the deck. The distant whispers of the falling water had grown into a deafening roar, making it hard to speak.

So, they remained silent.

The Chain Breaker crested the breaking point of the waterfall and flew into the abyssal darkness, leaving the Great River behind.

Soon, the roar of the Edge grew quieter, and then disappeared in the howling of the wind. They had returned to the dark abyss of the interior of Ariel's Tomb.

This time, however, their journey was going to be different from the previous time they had visited the boundless darkness. That was because, unlike the first time, the Chain Breaker would be crossing the space within the loop of the Great River, as opposed to the empty space between it and the walls of the pyramid.

None of them knew what exactly would be waiting for them there, but at least there was no threat of the terrifying swarm of the Dark Butterflies becoming aware of their presence — since they would not be coming anywhere near the walls of the pyramid, where the Great Monsters slumbered.

They also did not know how long the journey across the empty space in the middle of the looping river would take. The last time, they had arrived back to the surface of the Great River rather quickly — but that was because space itself behaved strangely inside the pyramid.

Still, it was going to be much faster than simply sailing all the way to the dawn of time. They were going to reach the waters surrounding Verge in a week, two at most.

If nothing unforeseen happened.

Sunny studied the darkness for some time, feeling both wary of the challenge ahead and ready to face it.

Then, he gritted his teeth and went back to working on the silver blade. The mind-numbing complexity of weaving calmed him down, eradicating all unnecessary thoughts.

'Soon… this Nightmare will be over soon.'

Sunny refused to think that they would fail.

However…

Now that they were nearing the end of this dreadful tale, the thoughts that he had banished a long time ago were returning.

The thoughts about the fate of Antarctica, of the refugees he had so desperately tried to protect. What was happening to the waking world right now? How was Rain doing? Was she healthy and safe, or infected by the Nightmare Spell and in the throes of going through her own trials?

Knowing that he could not allow himself to get distracted at this critical point, he suppressed these thoughts again.

He was going to find out sooner than later, anyway.

If he survived.

So, what Sunny had to do right now was make sure that he survived, and that hisfriends survived, as well.

He had to fulfill the promise he had given, and conquer this Nightmare. At all costs.