1547 Dawn of Time

The next day, Effie appeared on the deck of the Chain Breaker, carrying her baby. She was still recovering, and in truth, it would have been better if she stayed in bed for a few more days… but time waited for no one.

Luckily, Effie was an Ascended, and possessed a body that was much more robust than that of a mundane woman — or pretty much any other Master, really. So, even though she looked tired and drained, her vitality was returning at a frightening pace.

Perhaps she would indeed be ready to fight by the time they reached Verge.

The Chain Breaker was traversing the abyssal void, with the radiant ribbon of the Great River surrounding it like a twisting ring. The seven suns revolved around it, making the inconceivable flowing realm shine. There were no stars in the impenetrable darkness of the false sky, but the light of the river was enough to illuminate the vast expanse of silent darkness.

Holding the baby, who had just woken up, Effie smiled.

"Look! That is pretty impressive, right? Nothing like a boring medical ward in NQSC. Leave it to a child of mine to arrive with such style…"

Frightened by the howling of the wind and the coldness of the void, the baby opened its mouth and let out a shrill cry. Soon, the sound of his voice drowned out the wind. At the same time, the leaves of the sacred tree rustled a little louder, as if concerned for the tiny human..

Sunny stared at them for a while, then shook his head.

'That kid… is bound to have a very unique life, I guess.'

Sunny's own birth was rather unusual, considering that it had happened during a solar eclipse and on a winter solstice. But being born in a Nightmare taking place inside a pyramid built by a daemon from the corpse of an Unholy Titan? That took the cake.

Of course, the seven of them had to conquer the Nightmare first, for Effie's child to have any kind of life.

Letting out a sigh, Sunny went to keep Effie company.

They traveled closer and closer to their destination.

In the next few days, nothing much happened. Everyone was alert, afraid that the black void would be hiding horrors of its own, but it was truly and utterly empty. The members of the cohort spend time training, meditating, and hanging out with the baby.

Sunny himself did not particularly see the charm. For now, the infant was indeed no different from a dumpling… all he could do was sleep, cry, and suckle on Effie's breast. There was little sign of intelligence in his eyes, and he did not really emote or react to anything.

In short, the baby was ugly and boring.

But… being with her son seemed to make Effie very happy, so Sunny could not hold it against him. Everyone had their faults, after all. Plus, while the infant himself was a bit of a letdown, watching how everyone reacted to him was rather fun.

Kai seemed to be absolutely smitten. Cassie allowed herself to show her soft side, which had been hidden behind the mask of composure for so long that few people remembered what it looked like. Jet seemed to be in the same boat as Sunny, but she was also a bit intrigued by the tiny human.

Perhaps she was holding herself back, though.'

Even Nephis showed some reactions, acting perplexed, bewildered, and slightly mortified when Effie forced her to hold the infant. Which was a very rare sight, and therefore precious.

…Mordret was not allowed anywhere near the baby, which seemed to suit him fine. He did, however, seem a bit fascinated by the whole thing. Motherly love must have felt alien to him, who had spent most of his childhood being raised by a sinister Sovereign.

Sadly, they did not have a lot of time to pay attention to the newborn. The battle for Verge was approaching, and so, everyone was concentrating on that dire ordeal.

About a week after Effie had given birth, the Chain Breaker returned to the Great River. This time, they did not pass above one of the Edges, landing directly in the middle of the vast flowing expanse, under the azure sky.

The sky was the same, the seven suns were the same, and the currents were the same.

However, here at the dawn of time, the air itself somehow felt different.

If the span of the Great River where Sunny had first found himself corresponded to the present day — the Age of the Nightmare Spell — then these distant waters, situated very close to the misty Source, corresponded to the earliest days of creation… the Age of Gods, when the six deities battled against the remnant abyssal beings across the newly born world, aided by the living creatures they had created, as well as the daemons.

It was hard not to feel a bit of awe at simply being near such mythical times.

It was also hard not to feel pressured.

Not only because Verge was near, but also because this region of the Great River was especially treacherous. There was only one place more dangerous in the Tomb of Ariel — the place far upstream that corresponded to the world-ending Doom War, and was the source of the time storms.

The battles between the gods and the daemons had been furious and harrowing enough that the Great River was forever twisted by their echoes. But the battles between the gods and the abyssal beings that had escaped the sealing of the Void must have been just as dreadful.

Therefore, any traveler had to be extremely careful while traversing the waters near the Source.

And there was the risk of running into the Defiled abominations, too.

Soon after landing, the members of the cohort gathered at the bow of the Chain Breaker, looking at the distant horizon. Their faces were solemn.

They had made sure to land close to Verge, but did not dare to approach it yet. Nobody knew what was the state of the Defiled city, how many abominations populated it, and what Torment had in store for the potential invaders. Therefore, they had to proceed with caution and gather as much information as they could — if they could — before coming up with an actual plan of attack.

Nephis remained silent for a few moments, and then said, her voice even:

"...This is it."