1563 Terrors of the Past

Sunny raced to the Source, afraid of the passage of time. It was ironic, really...

Before the fateful conversation with Cassie, he had been tense and concerned about how the cohort would survive the battle for Verge. Now, however, he was concerned that they would destroy it too soon.

He had been worried for Nephis, but now, he was wary of her.

Changing Star seemed like something almost inevitable, now that his fate — or lack thereof — depended on how fierce and unrelenting her assault on the monstrous First Seeker would be.

Human mind was funny that way. It was colored by what one desired, making the same thing appear entirely different depending on the circumstances.

And so... Sunny needed to hurry.

He guided the ketch, pushing the currents forward with the help of the Crown of Dawn. The graceful boat seemed to be gliding on the water, moving with incredible speed. The shore of Verge had long disappeared from view, and there was nothing in front of him except for the vast expanse of the Great River.

The air itself felt different here, at the dawn of time. The waters were treacherous and full of peril. Now that Cassie wasn't with him, Sunny had no way of knowing where danger lurked. So, he remained as alert as possible, extending his shadow sense as far as he could.

That caution saved his life on more than one occasion.

The far reaches of the past, which corresponded to the very dawn of the Age of Gods, were not only full of bizarre and lethal hazards, but also of all kinds of harrowing Nightmare Creatures.

This span of the Great River was just as dangerous as the far reaches of the future, where Sunny had faced the Azure Serpent, the Black Turtle, the Dark Butterfly, and the countless other abominations that had almost feasted on his flesh.

There were Great Nightmare Creatures here, too, each of them vastly more powerful than Sunny was, despite all his growth. Most of them were faster than him, as well, and possessed senses that reached much further than his.

So, Sunny was in constant danger. He couldn't even outrun these abominable monstrosities... but, luckily, there was one thing at which he was superior to most, if not all of them.

It was flexibility, and being able to adapt to almost any situation.

When some inconceivable being rose from the depths to pull him under the water and devour him, Sunny summoned the shadows and turned into a giant butterfly, carrying the ketch with his six long legs.

When a terrifying abomination descended from the sky, he turned into the onyx serpent, hid the ketch in his maw, and sought safety in the depths.

There were other forms he could shape himself into, as well, each helpful in its own way. Of course, maintaining the shell cost him a lot of essence, so, afraid to drain his reserves of it, Sunny mostly remained in the ketch, guiding it away from potential perils by hand.

Still, on that first day alone, he almost lost his life a few times.

There was a moment when the water under him suddenly boiled and moved at incredible speed, threatening to overturn the boat. Sunny instantly summoned Saint, using her weight to balance the ketch, but that was merely the start of the disaster.

An enormous span of the Great River, as far as the eye could see, instantly turned into a furious vortex. The speed of the current was so terrible that the hull of the ketch almost splintered, bombarded by powerful waves. It was pulled sideways, sliding deeper and deeper into the whirlpool.

Desperate to save himself and his vessel, Sunny opened the gate of the Shadow Lantern and called upon the shadows, forming the shell of the Dark Butterfly. His vast wings moved, throwing him into the air. His six legs grabbed onto the ketch, lifting it from the raging water.

Luckily, he was fast enough.

As Sunny rose high into the air, he was able to observe the cause of the catastrophic turbulence that had turned the current of the Great River into a death trap. When he did, his very soul shuddered.

There was a colossal, inconceivable maw hidden beneath the waves, stretching from one horizon to another. The terrible whirlpool that had almost shattered the catch was caused by these titanic jaws opening and sucking in an immense plain of water.

And entire span of the Great River disappeared into the harrowing maw of the underwater colossus, whose body mercifully remained unseen.

...Sunny fled into the sky, never looking back.

At another time, he noticed the air far in the distance trembling, as if from heat. However, as Sunny drew closer, unable to avoid the strange area, he realized that there was no heat. The air was not trembling, either.

Instead, there were fissures in the fabric of space itself above the current, hidden in the sunlight and almost invisible. If not for his intuition ringing alarms, Sunny might not have noticed the hidden fractures in the world at all.

When he did notice them, however, and tried to glimpse what was hidden in the folds between the broken pieces of space, he saw millions of dark eyes looking back at him, full of hunger.

The current was pulling the ketch right into the area of the River plagued by the fractured space.

Horrified, Sunny assumed the form of the onyx serpent and dove into the depth, hoping to hide from the gaze of the hungry abyss that hid in the fissures. However, the space was broken beneath the waves, as well.

Only there were no eyes there. Instead, hidden in the shattered space, there were countless corpses of dreadful Nightmare Creatures, all broken, twisted, and partially devoured.

Diving deeper and deeper into the darkness, until the pressure was crushing enough to almost destroy the mighty shell of the sea serpent, Sunny escaped that horror, as well.

But there were many more to come.