1565 Traversing the Mist

Ananke's ketch was floating through a world of mist. The thick fog surrounded it from all sides, suffused with somber twilight. All sounds seemed both muffled and exaggerated, echoing across the vast expanse of shrouded water. Sunny could not see very far. Even his shadow sense was dulled by the mystical mist.

It was a familiar sight.

'Indeed... I've been here already.'

This was the exact same place where Sunny had found himself at the start of the Nightmare.

The Source.

Here, covered by mist, the Great River flowed into itself, and the past turned into the future. He could not feel the current anymore, but it was still there, strangely jumbled and disjointed. The ketch was moving, yet Sunny could not tell in what direction it was being carried.

If he allowed himself to be pulled by the invisible current and reached the edges of the Source... he would be sent back to the day he had entered the Tomb of Ariel, as well as to the point upstream where the person whose role he took had been at that time.

'No... I can't allow that to happen.'

Sunny did not know if he could endure another cycle of the Great River. Much more importantly, the Six Plagues — and the Mad Prince — had broken the rules of time, somehow, and invaded a cycle they were not meant to exist in.

He did not know if their existence had become a part of the Great River by now, or if their heretical presence would be erased should a new cycle start. If it was the latter, then all the effort the Mad Prince and Torment had put into ensuring that all members of the cohort survived until the end of the Nightmare would be for naught.

More than that... that end was so close. Nephis would be reaching Verge soon, armed with the means of destroying the First Seeker. Sunny desperately did not want to live through the horrors of the Tomb of Ariel one more time, especially since the result would be hanging in a fragile balance.

No, he could not allow himself to get lost in the mist and miss his opportunity to enter the Estuary.

Because there, at the heart of the great pyramid, lay the key to his shackles. His chance to gain freedom.

Luckily, Cassie had made sure that he would have everything he needed to accomplish that goal.

He had the Guiding Light to lead him to the entrance of the Estuary. He had the Mirror of Truth to resist the Defilement once he entered it.

And he had the Sin of Solace, which had made it all possible.

Speaking of the sword wraith, as soon as the mist surrounded him, the bastard had disappeared somewhere. He must not have been in the mood to talk, or simply unable to manifest within the Source. Either way, Sunny did not miss the company of the loathsome apparition at all.

'Stay away for as long as you want...'

Picking up the Guiding Light, Sunny studied the radiant crystal that was supposed to show him the way.

Its light was behaving... strangely.

It pointed in a certain direction, but after a few minutes of sailing through the mist, the light would suddenly change, pointing in an entirely different direction. That repeated over and over again, with the radiance of the sacred relic jumping around and shifting chaotically.

It was as though the entrance to the Estuary was constantly moving. 'No... it's not moving. I am.'

Sunny knew that it was true. The Estuary was stationary, but space itself was unreliable in the Source. It was Sunny who was being thrown around without any order, moving a few meters to one side only to find himself several kilometers to the other.

It was no wonder that the Seekers of Truth, despite all their might and knowledge, had failed to discover the Estuary before Aletheia of the Nine showed up.

The mysterious sorceress had even constructed her island in the image of the Great River, going so far as to create her own time loop, and her own sea of mist. Had it all been in order to learn how to navigate the Source?

Sunny did not know, but he suspected that she had not succeeded in finding the Estuary by accident.

How tragic it was, then, that all Aletheia had found there was her own doom... unless that was exactly what she had been searching for, of course.

Who knew what goals the Nine had pursued?

In any case, Sunny was not someone capable of raising a flying island in the middle of a mystical whirlpool and taming the time to make it flow endlessly in a circle. Therefore, he would have never been able to find the Estuary without the Guiding Light.

Was it how he had found it the first time, as well? Or had his versions from the previous cycles come up with their own solutions?

There was no point in guessing. Using the sacred relic of the sybils to illuminate the way, Sunny allowed the ketch to sail forward, moving the steering oar in accordance with where the radiance was pointing.

There were no Nightmare Creatures in the Source, no danger... except for the danger that the Source itself presented. So, traveling through the somber mist almost felt peaceful.

Sunny quickly lost his perception of time, so he did not even know how long he had been traversing the fog. It could have been an hour, a day, or an eternity... well, maybe not an eternity. Nephis would have obliterated the First Seeker long before that.

Still, he had to be getting closer.

'I wonder what Aletheia found in the Estuary.'

He wondered what the Mad Prince had found there, as well.

What secrets had Ariel hidden in the heart of his pyramid? What was the hideous truth he couldn't bear? Why had he hidden it all the way before time, away from the gazes of the gods?

One way or another, Sunny was going to find out. And break the chains of fate that bound him tightly in the process.

Just as he had always wished.

He was growing tired of the dancing radiance of the Guiding Light. His hand was growing numb as it held the steering oar of Ananke's ketch. Time... was flowing.

And then, finally, Sunny felt it.

The same thing he had felt before being expelled from the Source the first time.

He thought that he saw two tall pillars protruding from the mist far ahead, and then, the invisible current suddenly turned violent and turbulent.

There was the sound of roaring water, similar to what the waterfalls of the Edge sounded like, and he felt the ketch being pulled forward at incredible speed.

Then, there was a sense of weightlessness. And then, only darkness remained.