1763 Sea of Dust

Sunny left the underground cell in a complicated mood. To be honest... he was a little rattled.

'Weaver said... that they would open the Gates.'

Who were the "they" Weaver had spoken about?

The gods? The daemons? Or someone else entirely?

There was one thing that made Sunny restless. it was the fact that no one knew who Weaver was, so the nebulous daemon was never referred to as "he" or "she". Instead, the Spell used the neutral "they" to describe the Demon of Fate.

So... had it been Weaver who unsealed the Void, perhaps?

That did not make a lot of sense, though, since the runes described something that the elusive daemon had said. So, it would have been "I will open the Gates", not "they will"... unless Weaver had had a habit of referring to themselves in the third person.

There was the issue of the runic language itself, as well, which did not necessarily follow the same pronounce conventions as the human language did. The runes written by the prisoner of the ruined cathedral did not hint that Weaver had been speaking about themselves.

But still, still...

'Until it was too late.‘

What did the description of Bone Weave mean, exactly?

If Sunny knew one thing... it was that Weaver had been the most frightening of deities, despite not being the most powerful. He did not trust the devious Demon of Fate one bit. Shaking his head, he walked over to the stone stairs, but then halted and remained motionless for a while.

Walking back, he stopped in front of the cell once more.

Summoning the Covetous Coffer, Sunny violently tore the massive steel door off its hinges and tossed it into the wardrobe‘s terrifying maw. Then, he pulled one of the torches from its slot and carried it away, seemingly unperturbed by the ghostly flame.

A person who had been tossed away by the world had to be practical.

Why leave good things behind?

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Sunny spent a few more days in the Dark City, exploring the ruins curiously. Before, he had been limited in where he could go and what he could see — there had been Nightmare Creatures everywhere, and his power had been woefully insufficient to walk around freely.

But now, Sunny was powerful enough to cleanse the entire Dark City in a matter of hours. Sadly, all the abominations he had not been able to hunt down were already dead, slain either by the Crimson Terror or Nephis.

Still, he could at least explore all the places he had wanted to visit. There wasn't much important information left to be found here, but there were plenty of things he could learn that would be only interesting to a researcher like him.

The rituals, the mundane details of everyday life, the culture... stuff like that. By the end of it, Sunny collected many pieces of information that would have made the Exploration Report on the Forgotten Shore more comprehensive. Sadly, all of them would have had to be placed in the "Not Related to Combat" addendum, which most Awakened never bothered to read.

"Barbarians..."

Finishing his business in the ruins, he left them behind. Next, Sunny started on the long tour of the remaining six statues of the heroes of the Forgotten Shore.

He visited the Priestess first, since she was just outside the walls of the city. Sunny climbed onto her hand and sat there for a while, remembering the day he had reached the Dark City with Nephis and Cassie.

He had been... barely seventeen back then, knowing nothing of the world. He had just learned that there was more to life than bitter survival.

Sunny watched the black sky for a while, feeling regret that the sun of the Forgotten Shore was gone for the first time. He would never see it rise again from the palm of the Priestess again.

Eventually, he wrapped himself in shadows and jumped down, gliding on dark wings to the distant ground.

Next was the statue of the Hunter, where the cohort had once burned the nest of the Iron Spiders. Sunny visited the giant arch of white marble on top of which they had rested and played games on the way, as well as climbed to the bottom of the canyon from where the Builder's statue had emerged.

Strangely enough, that rest stop on the white arch etched itself in his memories most vividly. Sunny felt remorse for never taking the members of the cohort to a real beach... now, it was too late. He would never have such an opportunity again.

Were there even real beaches left in the waking world? There had to be. Rich folk loved their leisure.

After that, he circled the distant city from the west and reached the monument of the Lord. That one, he had seen while marching with the Dreamer Army to the Crimson Spire. Sunny did not have any particular memories about this statue, but it was still quite significant.

That was because, if he was correct, the First Lord of the Bright Castle had once defeated a powerful abomination here, receiving the Dawn Shard as a reward. That Memory, altered by Sunny, was still one of the most powerful tools in Neph‘s arsenal.

It was the very reason why they had managed to escape the Forgotten Shore... a piece of precious inheritance they received from those who had fought against this cursed place before them.

Sunny bowed to the statue of the Lord and continued on his journey

After spending some time exploring the vicinity of the stone colossus, Sunny moved on and found the statue of the Slayer some days later. This one, he had never seen — Nephis, Cassie, and Effie had formed an expedition to acquire a Shard Memory here while he was living alone in the Dark City.

'What a pity.'

Sunny felt a bit regretful about not participating in that expedition. As a shadow user, he felt a special affinity for the Slayer, who had been a stealthy assassin. Her stiletto had served Sunny well before being destroyed when he lost the connection to the Nightmare Spell. It was thanks to its ghostly blade that he had defeated Harris, the monstrous servant of the Bright Lord.

Funnily enough, this place was also where Cassie had earned the Quiet Dancer. Sunny had never learned what kind of bizarre Nightmare Creature could leave such a strange Echo behind... was it really a sentient rapier? If so, the battle must have been quite a tough one. After exploring the vicinity of the statue, Sunny had indeed found countless broken blades buried in the dust. He could imagine the monument to the Slayer being surrounded by a vast sword grave...

By then, there were only two statues left on his list.

The unfinished statue of the Stranger was far to the south, on the precipice of the Underworld. Sunny hesitated for a while, but eventually decided to skip that one.

He did not want to go anywhere near the Hollow Mountains anytime soon — or, preferably, ever.

That only left the statue of the Knight.

...Which, ironically, was where he had spent his first night on the Forgotten Shore. Smiling faintly, Sunny summoned Nightmare and sent the dark destrier over the edge of the colossal crater.

He had crossed the crater on a makeshift boat made from demon bones the last time around. This time, the Dark Sea was gone, and the terrible wound left on the Forgotten Shore by the fall of the radiant being could be traversed on foot.

Sunny was curious to see what was hidden at its bottom, so he took his time exploring it at a leisurely pace.

He had found many hideous bones, but nothing that ignited his interest. Closer to the center of the crater, the ground had turned into black glass, and at its very heart, a round hole led into the depths of the earth. That must have been where the Dark Sea had come from at night, and where it had retreated to at dawn.

He stared into the darkness for a while.

'There must be several cavernous hollows below the Forgotten Shore, right? All that water had to go somewhere. Unless it spilled directly into some other hellish realm.'

If there were such a hollow, the entrance to one of them would be right in front of him. And with the Dark Sea gone, it would be empty. The idea of climbing down and spending a few months exploring the underground caverns seemed rather attractive... what kind of derelicts would he find there?

But eventually, Sunny decided against it.

He was sure that the great cavern, if it truly existed... would be incredibly dirty.

Plus, he had already been wandering the Forgotten Shore for a while. Visiting the statues was taking longer than Sunny had expected, mostly because he was taking his sweet time and exploring many interesting places on the way.

Now that the labyrinth of crimson coral was gone, many things had been revealed from beneath it. Old ruins, ancient bones... all too damaged to provide him with any useful knowledge, but still fascinating.

In any case, a lot of time had passed. His birthday was... when was it?

Sunny counted the months and realized that it was almost upon him. He had celebrated the previous one sometime during the hellish track over the Hollow Mountains, so he did not want to celebrate another one in a musty cave.

And... he had an appointment.

Looking east, Sunny smiled darkly.

There was a reason he had carried a creepy torch with him all the way from the Dark City...

He had a promise to keep, and a debt to repay.