1802 Restoration

The concept called "tether" by Masters and Saints was a mysterious, but simple thing. It was a sort of Imprint one could leave on the world by using their essence. The spot marked by the imprint was where one's soul was anchored to the world Masters could only imprint themselves on the waking world, but Saints could imprint themselves on the Dream Realm, as well.

In addition to that, the tethers placed by Saints were much more expansive and deeply rooted in the fabric of the realm than those placed by Masters. In fact, Sunny was quite certain that they were entirely different things - it was just that both served the same purpose, so humans just used the same word for both.

The reason why Transcendent tethers were so much more robust than the Ascended ones was because of the nature of Saints. The soul of a Saint was connected to the world, and so, it interacted with the world much closer.

For example, Saints could absorb spirit essence from their surroundings.

In rare cases, they could also pour their soul essence out into the world.

There was no need to mention how vital the former was, but the latter was more or less useless. The soul essence would swiftly dissipate if it wasn't poured into a special vessel - like a Memory, for example.

However, one time when pushing one's own essence onto the world was necessary was the process of creating a tether.

If manipulated in a special way, the essence would leave an Imprint on the area where it had been unleashed before dissipating. That imprint was the tether, and since it maintained a faint connection with the Saint's soul, it was possible to pull on the connection to step between realms and return to the place where one's soul was imprinted.

Only two tethers could exist at a time, one in each world. It was necessary to break the connection with the old one before creating a new one... well, in Sunny's case, each of his incarnations could place two of their own.

Regardless, that was what Sunny was doing now he was pushing his essence into the world and controlling its flow to create an imprint. The process took some time, and was quite arduous.

However, he was not doing it blindly.

Instead of allowing his essence to cover the area freely, he tried to concentrate all of it in an isolated spot. Namely... the Gateway of the ancient temple.

Soon, his tether started to take form.

And then, something unexpected happened.

There seemed to be a strange reaction between the Gateway and the forming tether. It was as if the two had been created to exist together all along - not only the strain on Sunny lessened significantly, as if the process had taken on a life of Its own, but he also felt as if the imprint was becoming deeper, and also different in some way.

At the same time, Sunny felt something changing within his soul.

It was as if a mystical bond was being established, connecting him to the ancient temple.

He... he felt very strange.

Diving into the Soul Sea, Sunny saw that the vast expanse of still water was still no more. Instead, it was surging, boiling almost, with great waves rolling on the dark surface.

As if someone had thrown a huge boulder into the black water, sending ripples spreading across the silent expanse of his soul.

'What...'

As Sunny watched, astounded, the water at the very heart of the Soul Sea suddenly foamed.

And then, a familiar black edifice rose from beneath the waves.

IA perfect replica of the nameless temple - how it had been before its roof collapsed, and its gates were broken - slowly rose from the lightless depths of his soul, bathing in the dark radiance of his six soul cores.

Soon enough, the surging waters calmed down, and the Soul Sea grew still and silent once more. It was as if nothing had happened.

Only... there was a great temple of black stone standing on the still water now.

Sunny stared at it with wide eyes.

‘…I'll be damned.’

That was... pretty cool.

He regretted not being connected to the Spell once more. Sunny could feel a deep connection to his newly claimed Citadel, but did not know what he could do with that connection, and what it was meant for. If he was still a carrier of the Spell, there would be hopeful runes to guide him to the necessary understanding, without a doubt.

But then again, the Spell did not even explain the enchantments of the Memories it created to most Awakened. Who knew how helpful it would have been in case of a Citadel?

Sunny knew that he would have to explore and investigate this matter personally.

Until then, however...

'What do I even do now?’

He had not been planning to come in possession of an unknown Citadel. Ruling one was not in his plans - right now, he was in the middle of traveling to Godgrave.

After hesitating for a while, Sunny sighed.

"Well, whatever. I can spend a few days here. Having a secret lair to return to wouldn't hurt, anyway.”

His original body was anchored in the Nameless Temple now. So, he had no choice but to consider it in his future plans.

There was one silver lining to the unexpected situation, though.

At least, Sunny wasn't homeless anymore.

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Several days later, Sunny was sitting on the steps of the Nameless Temple. The sun was traveling across the clear blue sky, and the snow covering the mountain peak was shining with its light.

There was a stunned expression on his face.

The other five incarnations were resting on the lower steps, panting heavily. One was tiredly rubbing his shoulders. Another was leaning on a broom made by manifesting shadows. A third one was sprawled on the black stone, lazily staring at the sky. There was one who was pouring dirty water out of a bucket, and another one who was looking at them with disdain.

They had been busy cleaning up the temple for the last few days.

The cleanup was mostly finished, but the reconstruction had not even begun. Sunny knew that he would need special stone to rebuild the broken roof... he could scavenge some from the ruined cathedral of the Dark City, Durable wood for the beams, Would he have to visit the Burned Forest again to harvest some?

Luckily, he was good at all things having to do with craftsmanship, not only because of experience and practice, but also because of Bone Weave. His fingers were dexterous and responsive, like those of a master artisan. Any tool he needed, meanwhile, could be manifested from the shadows.

However, the scope of the work that had to be done to restore the Nameless Temple to a decent state was not the reason why Sunny was spacing out right now.

Instead, the reason was the discovery made by his original body.

While the avatars had been busy with cleaning, he had explored his new Citadel. Of course, he had discovered the mystical circle in the undertemple almost immediately.

However, it took him a while to figure out what that Component did.

The instinctual understanding of its purpose was hidden in the connection Sunny shared with the Citadel.

'So... it can move.’

He raised his gaze and studied the desolate mountain peak.

Sunny assumed that the Nameless Temple had been built here, and wondered what madness forced the builders to carry the great weight of black marble to the top of a towering mountain.

But now, he knew that the ancient temple had been built elsewhere, and had stood elsewhere, before appearing on this mountain peak one day.

He also knew that it could move again, now that it had an owner once more.

Slowly, a bold idea formed in his mind.

Sunny lingered for a while, then looked at his avatars and studied each one for a few moments.

Eventually, his gaze landed on the gloomy incarnation.

He smiled.

‘...Let's do it this way, then.’

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Some time later, a sudden commotion disturbed the deadly peace of Godgrave. A dark figure in an onyx armor reached the edge of the dead god's breastbone, covered in ash and blood. Behind him was a trail of severed flesh and broken bodies.

The man's face was hidden behind a ferocious mask carved from black wood.

Standing on the precipice of an abyssal drop, he gazed down silently, paying no heed to a wave of abominations rushing at him from behind.

Then, a great temple built of black marble was suddenly standing on the bone plain.

As the man wearing the demonic mask turned, three warriors clad in the same onyx armor walked out of the darkness under the eaves of the black temple. A graceful stone knight followed, wielding a black blade and a round shield. Then, a silvery fiend forged in the flames of hell, a tenebrous steed shrouded in the mantle of nightmares, and an enormous serpent with onyx scales.

The dark dwellers of the black temple faced the tide of abominations calmly, and a few moments later, more blood flowed on the white surface of the ancient bone. A great darkness spread, hiding the battlefield from the cloudy sky.

At the same time, far away...

A young mundane girl was being taught how to slay Nightmare Creatures by an eccentric shadow. And further still...

A trade caravan was approaching Bastion. Dozens of heavily loaded wagons were rolling down the road, pushed by monstrous Echoes. A sizable force of Awakened was flanking the caravan, protecting it from the dangers of the Dream Realm.

Their expressions were clear now that the lake city was in view.

A handsome young man with porcelain skin and onyx eyes was sitting on the bed of one of the wagons, leaning his back against a wooden crate and looking ahead with a beautiful smile on his lips. He didn't seem that strong, and wore an elegant black mantle instead of durable armor.

Far away, the awesome silhouette of a great castle was slowly revealing itself from the shimmering waters of a clear lake.

The young man looked at it for a while, then glanced down, at his shadow.

"It seems that we've arrived."

The shadow stared back at him, then shrugged indifferently.

He smiled.

"...Yes, I think so too."

Saying that, the young man looked up, at the silhouette of a white tower floating in the air above the castle.

His face turned wistful for a moment, and then he looked away with a quiet sight.

"Ah, it's so pretty... damnation!”