1953 One Small Step for Shadow

Sunny definitely knew what the smart decision would be.

The smart decision would be to concentrate on weaving for now, slowly consider the potential perils of venturing into the Shadow Realm, and make thorough preparations before entering the Lantern.

For example, he had to decide which of his incarnations would explore the Shadow Realm. Would he send the Lord of Shadows and his three companion shadows, to have as much power as realistically possible in the current situation at his disposal there? Or would he send a single incarnation as a scout, to reduce the damage to a minimum in case it was destroyed by an overwhelming threat?

It would also be best to consider many things, do extensive research, consolidate his recent breakthroughs, and make arrangements before passing through the Gates of Shadow.

That said...

'Ah, to hell with it'.

The allure of an unexplored Divine Realm — the Realm of Shadows — was too irresistible. Even though Sunny knew that it would be wiser to remain patient, he could not imagine delving into the slow and meticulous process of crafting Memories without satiating his curiosity and fascination first.

How was he supposed to concentrate on weaving intricate patterns of ethereal strings when there was a portal to a literal Divine Realm resting basically in his pocket? And not just to any Divine Realm, either, but one that had belonged to the very god from whom Sunny's powers originated.

It would be way too hard.

Granted, he had no ambitions of going on a true expedition yet. Rather, what Sunny wanted to do was to take a first look at the Shadow Realm and explore it a briefly, simply to know what awaited him there, and from what he would have to protect himself.

With that knowledge, he would be able to prepare for the actual expedition better. He might even want to craft a few specific Memories to help him face the perils of the Shadow Realm, so it had to be done before he dove into weaving.

It had to be done now.

Sunny turned around, walked to the middle of the basement, and outstretched his hand. The

Shadow Lantern hung freely from his fingers. Following a mental command, the little morion gate opened, revealing a dark entrance.

He remained motionless for a few moments, absorbed by solemn silence.

Then, he looked down, at his shadow.

"...Well, what are you waiting for? Chop-chop! Get inside."

The gloomy stared at him in shock, then pointed at itself with a finger, as if asking...

"Who? Me?"

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Why, of course. I mean, who else? What, did you think that I'll banish my original body to the Shadow Realm?"

He scoffed.

"Of course not. That's the Land of Death, you know!"

The gloomy shadow was dumbstruck for a few moments, then lowered its hands... and slowly clenched its fists, staring at Sunny with a murderous gaze.

Sunny ignored its antics and activated Shadow Incarnation, taking direct control of his shadow.

'Here we go.'

He glided up his leg, onto his arm, and toward the open gate of the Shadow Lantern.

'Shadow Realm...'

In that short moment before entering the darkness within, Sunny considered what he knew about it.

Truly, it wasn't much, and most of what he did know had come from the description of the Fragment.

[When Shadow made death, he has become death. Everything that Shadow swallowed died, and everything that died was swallowed by Shadow. Death was an absolute law, and thus, that which was everchanging was everchanging no more. Time was an absolute law, and thus, that which was everlasting was everlasting no more. Space was an absolute law, and thus, that which was endless was endless no more. Wielding time, space, and death, the gods defeated and bound their enemies.

However, there were those who defied even absolute laws. One of these beings broke free of the Shadow Realm after being swallowed by it, and in doing so, splintered several small fragments of it. This is one of the fragments.]

It was strange, really. The Nightmare Spell seemed to make no distinction between Shadow God, his Domain, his Realm, and death itself. It almost sounded as if the Shadow Realm was located... within Shadow God.

Dying and being swallowed by the God of Death was used interchangeably. Everything that he swallowed died, and everything that died was swallowed by him, thus ending up in the Domain of Shadow... in the Shadow Realm.

So...

'Is Shadow Realm... Shadow God's soul sea?'

The idea did not seem that far-fetched, but it also was not entirely plausible — mainly because Sunny did not know much about the gods, who were unfathomable.

Had the gods even possessed souls of their own?

Had they possessed physical bodies? If so, how had they looked?

Everyone knew that the gods were dead, but where were their corpses?

Godgrave was called so because people assumed that the titanic skeleton had once belonged to a god, but Sunny did not share that belief...

A moment before his incarnation entered the Lantern, Sunny suddenly shivered.

If he assumed that Shadow Realm was indeed Shadow God's soul sea, or at least a divine equivalent of one...

Then, didn't it sound disturbingly similar to his own lightless soul?

After all, the shadows of everything Sunny killed ended up in his soul sea. In a sense, those he killed were swallowed by him, as well.

He remembered the description of the Shadow Realm, too.

'Everything you cherish, everything you nurture, everything that starts with you will one day be mine, be welcomed by me, swallowed by me, and find peace within me. This is the mercy of Shadow...'

The silent shadows contained within the tranquil darkness of Sunny's soul were, indeed... quite peaceful.

His eyes widened a little, and a seed of an thought appeared in his mind.

But before it could blossom and sprout, his incarnation passed through the Gates of Shadow...

And found himself somewhere else.

Sunny gasped.