2041 : Spellsmith

Eventually, they entered the Brilliant Emporium. Aiko was away, running errands beyond the Ivory Island — while Sunny and Nephis had enjoyed some respite, she had been busy in these last few days.

The logistics of an Awakened army were unusual and complicated. Soldiers would inevitably earn Memories as the number of battles and skirmishes mounted, but not all of these Memories would suit them well. Therefore, an elaborate redistribution system was required.

Usually, a dedicated quartermaster would handle these matters within the unit and cooperate with other units to help Memories find suitable owners. The Fire Keepers were far fewer in number than the other legions of the Sword Army, but their kill count was disproportionately formidable — and, therefore, the number of Memories being purchased and sold by them was quite high, as well.

So, Sunny had to do some actual work as their nominal Memory Purveyor… or rather, he had to make Aiko do it for him.

Nephis had used her punishment to deliver an arsenal that the Fire Keepers had accumulated on the frontline to the main camp, so Aiko was currently very busy visiting all the other quartermasters to arrange trades.

He felt a little guilty about overworking his assistant, but on the other hand, she was surely having the time of her life. After all, the Brilliant Emporium was receiving a commission from each transaction, and they were earning quite a lot of soul shards these days.

'...War is indeed a profitable racket.'

Sunny did not know whether to feel happy or disgusted by how true that statement was.

"Are you hungry?"

He himself had worked up quite an appetite since breakfast. Receiving a light nod, Sunny smiled and went about gathering a tray of snacks.

They took it to the workshop of the Brilliant Emporium, where a special crucible had been set up in recent months. Nephis used her Aspect to ignite the mystical wood gathered in the depths of the Hollows with her soul flame. Sunny watched the white flames dance for a while, then sighed and dismissed the Nebulous Mantle.

The shadows populating the basement instantly seemed to grow much deeper, darker, and colder.

He took off his shirt, as well, revealing his chiseled torso — his skin could easily withstand the sparks of the Transcendent fire, but his clothes could not. Plus, the heat of the crucible was simply too fierce…

Well, and Sunny secretly enjoyed the appreciative glances Nephis threw his way from time to time while he worked.

Currently, she was sitting on a workbench, enjoying the snacks and looking at him with a faint smile.

Sunny sighed and opened a small wooden box. There was a piece of strange ice inside, as well as samples of various precious metals. Another box contained a scattering of soul shards.

He manifested long tongs from shadows, and used them to place a specially crafted crucible above the soul flame. As Sunny poured a little bit of essence into it, a weave of runes ignited on its surface, dim and bleak in the radiance of the white flame.

His tongs survived just long enough to place the crucible in place.

Sunny looked into the flames, thinking about the task at hand. His mind became consumed by an endless tapestry of ethereal strings.

"...Tell me about your sorcery."

Distracted, he glanced at Nephis. She seemed to be enjoying herself, observing him with sparks dancing in her eyes.

Sunny smiled.

Saying things aloud was actually a good idea. Perhaps, that way, he would be able to come up with a new approach…

He pointed to the crucible.

"There are still a few problems I need to solve before attempting to forge you a worthy sword. Today, we will determine the perfect alloy to become its vessel. I have already experimented extensively with various metals and mystical materials, but soul flame adds an element of unpredictability into the processes. So, we'll be conducting the last experiment today."

Sunny remained silent for a few moments, and then added in a lively voice:

"Weaving is different from most other kinds of sorcery. The Sorcery of Names has existed from before time itself — it is founded in the natural laws of existence. The Sorcery of Runes is built upon it, and therefore shares its source. But Weaving is artificial, and thus unnatural… it was created by a sole individual. Weaver, the Demon of Fate."

His expression turned contemplative.

"I am not sure if weaving itself is founded upon some nebulous laws of existence, or if that sneaky daemon tampered with existence to make it work. However, it does work — not through Names or Runes, but through special patterns of strings that serve as guides for the flow of essence. These strings do not exist on the material plane, so it takes special eyes to see them. It also takes special hands to touch them."

Nephis chuckled.

"I get it, I get it. You are special, Master Sunless. You have special touch..."

Sunny coughed, then grinned.

"Very much so! That said, I am not unique. There were other weavers throughout history, especially among the priesthood of the Nightmare Spell… but in our era, I am the only one. Ironically enough, I think that the Spell itself is to blame. Unless one is fortunate enough to inherit an very unlikely combination of Attributes, it is almost impossible to gain sight that allows one to perceive spellweave, let alone the ability to touch it."

He shook his head.

"Within the limitations of one's Aspect, at least — and since the Spell provides a straightforward and convenient path to power, very few people ever feel the need to wander aimlessly in search of unconventional sources of it. Therefore, no one has stumbled upon the truth of weaving yet, except for me."

Sunny sighed.

"Of course, that was simply the first step. A caveman would not automatically become an engineer after witnessing a textbook on material science… similarly, I had to study long and hard to reach where I am today."

He remained silent for a bit, and then added neutrally:

"All for this moment."

After that, Sunny scratched the back of his head and added in a less serious tone:

"Well, not this exact moment! I mean… the entire forging process we are undertaking."

Nephis smiled.

"That is quite impressive."

Sunny nodded and picked up the piece of mystical ice.

However, Nephis wasn't done talking.

Leaning back a little, he sent a crimson raspberry into her mouth and said languidly:

"Ah, how hot…"

Sunny accidentally dropped the piece of ice.

Looking back, he saw Nephis fanning herself with a hand. She met his gaze and raised an eyebrow.

"What? The workshop, I mean. It's getting rather heated."

He lingered for a few moments, then bent down to pick up the piece of ice.

'I am definitely dragging her to the lake after this is done… and throwing her into the water, too...'