2046 : Spellsmiths of Valor

The forge Sunny and Nephis had entered was not the only space that the enchanters of Clan Valor used in the warcamp of the Sword Army. If anything, it was the less important of them — but he did not mind.

There was a small courtyard behind the outer wall, with harvested remains of the Nightmare Creatures piled neatly on the ground. Most of them had already been cleaned and processed, but there was still a heavy smell of blood lingering in the air.

Sunny studied the piles of hides, scales, bones, fangs, claws, tendons, and talons for a moment.

'Makes sense.'

Somehow, he had imagined this place to be full of metal and steel. But during the conquest of an untamed region of the Dream Realm, the main materials Awakened artisans would use were the corpses of the Nightmare Creatures — after all, they were readily available as a byproduct of the conquest itself, and often possessed amazing qualities as well.

Behind the material storage were the entrances to several crafting halls. Nephis led him to the central door, smiling softly in response to the reverent bows from the workers present in the courtyard.

"We are going to be visiting a pair of enchanters today. They are not the most senior, but also not without status… both are Masters, so you might want to treat them with some respect."

Sunny nodded.

Nephis knocked on the door, waited for a few moments, and then entered.

He could hear two voices coming from the inside:

"...Huh? What is it now?"

The first voice was female, hiding a hint of irritation.

"Oh, right. I forgot to mention. We have visitors today."

The second voice was male and quite nonchalant.

Sunny studied the two enchanters, a bit surprised. In his head, the forgemasters were all wizened, grey-haired old men. But these two look no different from most Masters he had met.

The first enchanter was a beautiful, petite woman wearing an emerald robe, with her hair gathered neatly into a bun.

The second enchanter was a seemingly absentminded man with messy black hair, dressed in peculiar patchwork garments. He wore plenty of accessories, too — both the clothes and the accessories seemed to be enchanted and self-made, making Sunny wonder what function each element was meant to play.

Nephis nodded.

"Master Snow. Master Alice."

The men responded with a nonchalant bow, while the woman suddenly froze.

Her eyes widened slightly.

A moment later, she seemed to regain her composure and bowed elegantly.

"Lady Changing Star, Master Sunless. It's an honor."

Despite her refined manners, Sunny couldn't help but feel like the gazes she threw at them were a little… heated.

'Is this the ally Neph mentioned, perhaps?'

He wasn't sure, but there was something familiar about these glances.

They were strangely similar to how mundane people usually looked at Kai, back in NQSC…

Sunny coughed.

"Pleasure to meet you."

The petite woman did not respond immediately.

Master Snow, meanwhile, studied him for a moment.

"So, is it true?"

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"What is?"

The man scratched the back of his head.

"That you are an enchanter."

'Ah.'

Initially, Sunny had wanted to hide the fact that he could create Memories — and it was still hidden, somewhat. However, once he started modifying Memories from the Fire Keepers and sending Aiko out to gather samples for him to study, it was hard not to reveal the fact that he could at least change their enchantments.

He nodded.

"I am indeed somewhat capable of enchanting. Look — I made it myself."

With that, he threw the silver knife to the forgemaster.

Master Snow caught it with a motion that betrayed more than a modest amount of battle experience, studied it for a few moments, then grimaced.

"Well… at least you are a decent blacksmith."

Forging the silver knife was an arduous process, but it only possessed the rudimentary enchantments shared by all Memories. By presenting it to the experienced spellsmith, Sunny painted himself as someone barely passing as an enchanter.

His little deception seemed to work quite well.

Master Alice gave her male colleague a scathing look.

"Don't say that! Yes, this thing can barely be called a Memory… and yes, I would have died of embarrassment if I showed it to anyone... but Master Sunless has many redeeming qualities!"

With that, she glanced at Nephis and smiled.

"Am I right, Lady Changing Star?"

Nephis raised an eyebrow.

"Well, yes. He is outstanding in many regards."

'That's right!'

Sunny struggled to maintain a polite smile on his lips.

Master Snow stared at him skeptically for a few moments, then sighed.

"Well, no matter. You are just here to observe, correct? We are not doing anything revolutionary today, but it still requires absolute focus. So… make yourself at home. But not too at home. Just… moderately at home, I guess."

The other enchanter nodded.

"Yes, yes… Lady Nephis, you can stand over there. The lighting there is the best… I mean, the view from there is the best. Oh, and Master Sunless, you stand next to her. Gods, they are so… I mean, I hope you are comfortable! We'll continue working, then."

As Sunny and Nephis moved to the wall opposite the entrance, the two enchanters continued what they had been doing while trying not to pay them too much attention.

Sunny was curious to see the process of enchantment, but for now, both were simply preparing the materials. From what he could tell, Master Snow was in the process of crafting a suit of scale armor. Master Alice, meanwhile, was carving something out of bone. It looked like... the hull of a toy ship? No, it had to be an elaborate arrowhead.

He lingered for a few moments, then asked:

"Are you both members of Clan Valor?"

The petite woman looked at him with surprise.

"Goodness, no. Well, he is — from a minor branch family. But I am a retainer… actually, I used to work for the government before the Chain of Nightmares. Later, I ended up in Bastion, and two Nightmares later, here I am."

The man, meanwhile, was fully consumed by his work. Sunny was not sure if the enchanter had even heard the question. He seemed like the kind of guy who would even forget to eat when obsessing over an interesting challenge.

So, Sunny looked back to Master Alice.

"Two Nightmares in four years… you must be quite impressive."

It used to be that people spent no less than a decade preparing to challenge the Second Nightmare. This timeline had shortened somewhat in recent years, but not to that degree.

The petite woman looked at him with a mortified expression.

"M—master Sunless… what are you... Lady Nephis is right here!"

He blinked, not catching her meaning.

Nephis seemed similarly confused.

'What? What did I say?'

Sunny forced out a polite smile.

"Please forgive me. Then, if you don't mind me asking… how, exactly, do the enchanters of Clan Valor create Memories?"