2050 : Catalyst of Improvement

Luckily, Sunny had no time to stress about the glaringly eschatological nature of his daily life… or about romantic date ideas during the literal end of the world.

Soon enough, Master Snow — the Scribe Knight and Spellsmith — finished working on the cuirass of a robust scale armor and lowered his hands with a satisfied sigh.

The craftsmanship of the armor piece was exquisite. It was not an easy task, to work with the scales of a powerful abomination, but the man handled it beautifully. It was even of a higher quality than it needed to be — after all, the cuirass was meant to become a part of a Memory, and Memories tended to fit the body of their masters magically.

Perhaps Master Snow was a perfectionist — a quality that Sunny grew to dislike as he matured.

The man looked over to his partner and cleared his throat.

"It's ready to be Infused."

Alice temporarily put down the arrowheads and concentrated on the suit of armor, pouring a subtle, but constant stream of essence into it. It seemed that the Aspect Ability that made her an Infuser was her Dormant one — therefore, she could perform the Infusion even while low on essence.

With that, Master Snow hesitated for a few moments before turning to Sunny and Nephis.

"...You are still here?"

It was quite a rude question, considering that Nephis was his superior both in the military hierarchy and in that of the royal clan.

She smiled lazily.

"You know, Master Alice reminded me that we are distant cousins. Still… I think I can get you executed for insubordination if I really try. Or worse, get you permanently assigned to the Luminous Memories crafting hall."

Master Snow paled.

"L—luminous… what? You wouldn't dare!"

But then, he frowned.

"Wait, why are we even quarreling? It was an honest question."

Sunny sighed.

He suddenly sensed something very disturbing…

The feeling of starting to understand how Aiko felt when dealing with him.

"Yes, we are still here. We had a very illuminating conversation with Master Alice, and were waiting for you in hopes of witnessing a genuine Spellsmith creating a Memory."

Master Snow looked at him in surprise.

"Ah! I see. Well… I guess it would be an honor for someone like you to see a real Spellsmith at work. No problem."

Sunny's polite smile remained in place, but his eye twitched.

'...It's my own fault.'

He should have shown them something like [Definitely Not Me] or [In Case of Emergency] instead of a rudimentary Memory knife… of course, that would have caused its own swarm of problems.

There was some time left while Master Alice was Infusing the cuirass, so Sunny asked with sufficient reverence in his voice:

"I can conceive how Forgers make mundane items into Memories. But you, Spellsmiths… honestly, I don't understand at all. Do people from the Valor bloodline simply possess Aspects that allow them to wish enchantments into existence?"

Master Snow gave him a dubious look.

"You should understand what a Memory is well enough, as well as where it comes from. So, no… it is not as simple as wishing them into existence. We do often unseal Aspects that have to do with craftsmanship and invention, though… and mirrors — hence the various abilities tied to replication that Forgers possess. However, Spellsmiths are an entirely different breed. We do not copy. We… improve."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"Improve?"

The man nodded.

"That sounds a bit like the job of an Infuser, huh? But no, what I mean is something else. Let's say that there is a sword, and a Spellsmith turns it into a powerful Memory weapon. From the side, it seems like the Spellsmith is placing enchantments on the sword — but in truth, he does not. Instead, he encourages the sword to improve. To become sharper, stronger, more lethal… to become closer to the flawless version of what it is meant to be. The sword itself is the source of enchantments. The Spellsminth simply serves as the catalyst of change, as well as its guide."

Sunny hesitated for a few moments.

"So the sword turns into a Memory… because it has always possessed the capacity to be one?"

It was a strange thought, but somewhat in line with Valor's lineage of War God.

War God was also the deity of craft, intellect, and progress after all. And life.

And life was a constant struggle.

So, Sunny could see a member of the Valor family being able to initiate the process of artificial evolution in something — the process of progress through iteration and struggle, just like natural selection was for living beings.

Of course, it was strange to consider that a chunk of sharpened metal could evolve.

Master Snow nodded.

"Just as a human possesses the capacity to be a god — the act which is revealed when one's Aspect is unsealed. You must have felt it as well, Master Sunless, on the day you conquered the First Nightmare… the fact that the source of power reshaping your soul and body was, and always had been, hidden within you. Not placed there by an outward force."

Sunny tilted his head, failing for the first time to maintain his polite facade. He was just too bewildered and engrossed by this strange… philosophy? School of thought? Nonsense?

In any case, he did remember feeling exactly what Master Snow had described. When the Spell helped him unseal the Shadow Slave Aspect, Sunny clearly felt that the source of the heat reforging him had come from somewhere within, from something that had been a part of him all along.

Even the word the Spell used hinted at fact.

[The First Seal is broken.]

[Awakening Dormant powers…]

Breaking a seal meant that the seal had existed somewhere inside him all along.

Awakening Dormant powers meant that they had been sleeping within him already.

Not that the Spell had placed the seal and the power into his soul as some form of reward… no, it had simply helped him access something that had already been there.

Sunny frowned.

'Actually… that makes a lot of sense.'

It was perfectly in line with what Ananke told them in the depths of the Tomb of Ariel about where humans had come from, and why they were so different from all other beasts and creatures.

It was because humans, just like the gods, had been born from the primordial flame of divinity… from the flame of desire. Their souls were formed from the sparks that had been cast when the Void was sealed in a net made from desire.

So, human souls came from the original source of divinity. Therefore, they could very well contain the potential for… everything.

An infinite amount of potentials — of all the Aspects that had existed, existed, and would ever exist. It was only when an Aspect was unsealed that the potential was realized, and therefore exhausted, turning infinite possibility into definite reality.

That was why Aspects came from within humans, and yet could very well have nothing to do with humans. Like Nephis, who had inherited an Aspect of a nephilim — or Sunny himself, who had inherited the Aspect of a divine shadow.

'Huh.'

Sunny narrowed his eyes a little.

'If I am the sword in this metaphor... then who is helping me improve?'

It was certainly not a Spellsmith.

Instead... it was the Nightmare Spell.