2059 : Final Step

By the time Sunny was nearly finished with the weave, two of his four incarnations had collapsed and turned into shadows. The shadows then crawled across the emerald grass tiredly before wrapping themselves around the third.

That third incarnation, which had been responsible for weaving the vast and intricate tapestry of radiant strings, did not look too good itself. Its four shadow hands had been shredded and rebuilt so many times that their shape was now vague and immaterial, not quite intangible, but also far from being solid.

And although the countless terrible burns and bone-deep cuts he had suffered were already healed by the purifying white flames, the burden of having suffered them remained, making him look ragged and frail. His eyes were like two pools of deep darkness, obscuring the fragile state of his exhausted mind.

Sunny took a deep breath, and then allowed the four shadow hands to dissolve into nothingness. At the same time, the incarnation standing in front of Nephis swayed and collapsed into a shadow, as well. The warmth permeating his entire being ceased, leaving him feeling cold and alone.

Nephis looked at him with a silent question.

Sunny smiled weakly.

"I wish... you could see it."

Above them, below them, all around them… the world was permeated by a grand weave of radiant strings. They stretched in all directions, almost invisible in the breathtaking brilliance of the seven suns,

reflecting in the resplendent ocean of the Soul Sea like a constellation map of a vast and distant heaven.

It was utterly beautiful.

It was also a weave of a much greater scale than anything he had ever created before, and his masterpiece — if he could be so bold as to praise himself so unapologetically.

No one else in this era could perceive spellweaves, anyway, so there was nobody to praise him but himself.

Sunny sighed.

"It is almost finished… I hope you slept well."

Out in the real world, his original body knelt on the floor, breathing raggedly. He pressed his forehead against the floor, hoping to find a reprieve from the scorching inferno of the overheated forge… but there was no coolness to be found, and therefore no respite.

The forging was over.

A beautiful silver longsword lay on the anvil in front of him. Its elegant blade was long and narrow, flawlessly sharp. Its crossguard was straight and devoid of useless adornments. Its hilt was carved from a piece of ivory, while its pommel was cast from the same silvery alloy.

Even laying there motionlessly, the sword emanated an oppressive feeling of cold, inevitable lethality, as if simply touching it could draw blood and rob one of their very life.

It was deadly and beautiful… just like the woman it was meant for.

Forging it had been a daunting trial.

Sunny was utterly drained and exhausted, both physically and mentally. He had barely remembered the last time he was that tired — and in such pain, as well.

The memory of his hands being burned by the white flames made him shudder. He had suffered the harrowing agony for many hours, each feeling like an eternity. Every moment, every movement, every breath had felt like hell.

…But the appalling had been helpful to him, too.

Because feeling a distant echo of the pain Nephis felt every time she used her Aspect strengthened his determination to forge a sword worthy of her resolve, and imbue the essence of the sword with it.

He had forged the blade, polished and sharpened it, affixed the crossguard, hilt, and pommel…

He had also woven a complicated weave of enchantments into the silvery sword.

But his work wasn't over.

The most complicated part still remained.

Inhaling deeply, Sunny gritted his teeth and slowly rose to his feet. Grasping the hilt of the beautiful sword, he lifted it from the anvil and remained motionless for a few moments, gathering his strength.

Then, he stepped over the deep cracks covering the floor of the forge and slowly climbed the steps to the first floor of the Brilliant Emporium. Walking outside, he looked at the radiant sky of Godgrave and dismissed the Marvelous Mimic.

The brick cottage behind him disappeared.

The strain of having to encompass the forge during the creation of the sword had been too much for his Shadow. It had done its best to withstand the storm of dreadful forces unleashed by Sunny's hammer, but in the end, the Mimic still sustained considerable damage — now, it had to spend some time in the nourishing darkness of his soul to restore itself.

Walking across the emerald grass, Sunny passed through the jaws of the dead dragon and entered the Ivory Tower. Once inside, he ascended the stairs to the highest level of the great pagoda and approached the bed where Nephis was sleeping peacefully, surrounded by a softly glowing runic circle.

Sunny simply stood there for a few moments, studying her exquisitely beautiful face. It looked much softer than usual while Nephis slept, devoid of the usual stoic severity… and much younger, too. Strangely vulnerable.

Finally, Sunny silently raised the silver sword above her head.

At that moment, his shadow rose from the ground, turning into a perfect copy of him.

While Sunny's original body held the sword above Nephis, his avatar summoned Weaver's Needle and grasped a black string woven out of shadow essence.

The physical vessel of the soulbound sword was complete, and so was its weave.

Now, all Sunny had to do was unite the two.

Holding his breath, Sunny reached forward with Weaver's Needle…

And pierced the shadow of the sword, threading a string of dark essence through it.

Then, he moved his hand and pierced Neph's shadow, as well, connecting them together.

Weaver's Needle — which had been bathed in the blood of the Demon of Fate — easily pierced that which was supposed to be intangible, stitching the shadow of the sword to the shadow of its wielder.

However, that simple action echoed in Sunny's soul like a cataclysm, making him stagger.

His hand had only traveled a little distance, but in the same distance, he had bent the world to his will.

Bending the laws of existence to one's will was the providence of gods, and Sunny was no god. So, there was a punishing backlash.

However…

He was a Transcendent Terror, and the flame of divinity burned in his soul.

More importantly than that, his will and his spirit were tyrannical enough to lay claim to divine authority.

And so, even though sewing two shadows together was not supposed to be possible, Sunny made it possible.

Because that was his will, and because he was the Lord of Shadows.

A pained smile twisted his lips. Drawing a hoarse breath, Sunny sensed the spirit essence flow into his soul through the coils of the Soul Serpent and made the second stitch.

And then another, and another, and another…

And a thousand more.

Slowly, the shadow of the sword was being drawn closer and closer to Neph's shadow.

Inside the dream, Nephis flinched and looked up, as if sensing a sudden change in the tranquil peace of her Soul Sea.

Sunny inhaled deeply, struggling to keep the vast weave from coming undone under the pressure.

"What is happening?"

He struggled to speak, overwhelmed by the need to fight against the laws of existence to force his will onto them.

"It is… the last step."

Sunny tried to inhale.

"Nephis…"

She looked at him, concern apparent on her face.

Sunny tried to smile.

"Wake up, Nephis. This dream… should be over."

She frowned, as if only now remembering that they were inside a dream.

In the next moment, her expression changed subtly, and the world around them started to crumble.

But it was of no matter.

Because Sunny had already accomplished everything he wanted to accomplish here.

The two parts of the vast weave he had woven were being tied together.

They were becoming whole.

A shadow was deeply connected to one's soul, after all, and so were one's dreams.

So, by weaving an enchantment onto the dream of Neph's soul, and by sewing the shadow of the sword to her shadow, Sunny had managed to connect the two.

The weave of the physical vessel of the sword united with the weave of its dream counterpart seamlessly. It was a perfect fit… of course it was. Sunny had designed the two to be one whole, after all, and had executed his design flawlessly.

And as the two weaves connected, the vast tapestry flashed with blinding light… becoming visible to the naked eye for a short moment.

That was the last thing Nephis saw before waking up.

Opening her eyes in her chamber at the top of the Ivory Tower, she looked around dazedly, and then sat up.

The runic circle around her bed was slowly losing its ethereal glow.

Sunny was kneeling in front of the bed and resting his head on it, as pale as a ghost.

And there was something else…

Feeling a cold weight, Nephis looked down.

There, a dreadful, beautiful sword was resting easily in her hand.

As if meant to be held by it.