1412 Misty Forest

Sunny had managed to survive longer than an hour. He had avoided clashing with Undying Slaughter, and even rescued Jet...

And yet, he was not very reassured.

As the cohort left the Chain Breaker behind and ventured into the swirling mist once again, he was not confident that they would survive at all. In fact, he dreaded Wind Flower even more.

"How many times do you think you can die before sanity abandons you completely?"

The Sin of Solace, who was walking alongside him, was not helping at all. The sword wraith laughed.

"Considering how thick your skull is... I'd wager a few dozen times more. Yes, after that, you'll probably turn into a drooling fool. Gods. I wonder if I'll still be stuck with you after you've become a vegetable..."

Trying to ignore the infuriating apparition, Sunny kept his eyes on the fog.

'In your dreams.'

He only had to take one look at Nightmare to know that a few dozen deaths would not break him. The Sin of Solace was simply gloating.

A few years of torturous deaths, though...

'We need to escape this horrible place as soon as possible.'

The cohort was advancing up the beach in a similar formation to the previous revolutions, but now, Jet was walking behind Sunny and Nephis. Cassie had summoned her Echoes, as well, who were now moving in front of Nightmare.

Together, they represented a formidable battle force... and yet, Sunny did not know if their power was enough to survive the suffocating fog of Wind Flower.

'I'm starting to understand why there are so few Saints around...'

This time, they chose a direction opposite of where the stone steps — and Undying Slaugher — were. Instead of moving directly toward the

cliffs, they followed along the edge of the island, eventually reaching the border of the bay.

There, they ascended the wall of black rock and reached the plateau above. Sunny used Shadow Step to arrive there first and guarded the landing until the other members of the cohort climbed up. By the time everyone did, the second hour since their arrival on Wind Flower should have been well over.

Above the cliffs, it was the same landscape. A forest of tall pine trees stretched in front of them, white fog swirling between the ancient trunks. Being in the mist had felt suffocating from the very start... but now that Sunny knew that a dreadful wraith could be hiding in it, the feeling grew ten times worse.

The Echo of the sybil glided forward, the hem of her red dress hovering just above the moss. The rest of them followed.

They followed the soft radiance of the Guiding Light into the murky depths of the forest. The fog swallowed everything behind, muffling the sounds and flowing slowly between the ancient trees. A few minutes passed in tense silence, then a few more.

It was hard to keep track of time in this misty limbo, but eventually, Sunny judged that another hour had passed. At that time, Nephis raised a hand and said:

"Stop."

She seemed to have recovered from essence exhaustion — enough so, at least, to regain access to her Dormant Ability. Now that she had, Jet could finally be healed.

Sunny and Cassie watched the fog as Nephis placed her hands on Soul Reaper's back. They shone with soft white light, and soon, Jet's face cleared. She took a deep breath and smiled in satisfaction.

At the same time, Neph's eyes grew a little cloudy. She sighed softly and took a step back. If Sunny did not know better, he would not have suspected that she was enduring harrowing pain.

"Let's continue."

They were about to move again when Cassie suddenly turned her head. The blind girl remained motionless for a moment, then jumped down from Nightmare's back.

"Something is approaching! Get ready!"

'Curses!'

Sunny snarled, holding the Sin of Solace in one hand and the Cruel Sight — in its short sword form — in another. Nephis swiftly drew her longsword and dismissed its scabbard. Jet raised her glaive into a high stance.

Saint, Fiend, Nightmare, and the two Echoes moved to surround the humans in a protective circle. The Quiet Dancer floated up and hovered above Cassie's shoulder, its tip pointing into the depths of the forest.

Everything grew still for a moment.

Sunny stared into the swirling mist, not knowing where the attack would come from. He couldn't see anything... couldn't hear anything. Even his shadow sense was suppressed.

"Above us!"

'Damna...'

Before he could finish the thought, something massive fell on them from above.

'...tion!'

It was a huge, grotesque Nightmare Creature that resembled a carcass of an enormous black leopard, its bones protruding from the rotting flesh. Its tale was abnormally long, segmented, and ended in a revolting circular maw that brimmed with needle-like teeth. The creature's own yellow canines, though, were much more terrifying — each was as long as a greatsword and covered in dried blood.

The abomination was so large that its shadow covered the entire cohort. Much worse... the moment Sunny saw it, he felt an invisible pressure wash over him, filling his heart with a sense of dread.

It was a Great Beast.

...Before the monstrosity could plummet on the cohort, two towering shadow tentacles rose from the ground and entangled its front limbs, slowing the creature down. The beast's skeletal jaws snapped viciously, obliterating the manifested shadows in an instant, but it gave the members of the cohort enough time, at least, to dash in different directions.

The abomination landed on the spot where they had been a split second ago. The ghastly tail of the creature was already shooting back with terrifying speed, its circular maw opened to bite into Cassie's flesh. The blind girl sidestepped, barely avoiding being torn apart by it, and brought her staff down on the segmented tail.

A moment later, she was flung aside like an ant.

On the other side, the beast swiped its rotting paw in the direction Sunny and Nephis. Augmented by the shadows and soul flame, both managed to dodge the lethal blow... even if it was just by a hair's breadth.

But as soon as they did, the creature's jaws were already in front of them, ready to snap shut and turn the two humans into chunks of torn meat. Neither Sunny nor Nephis had regained their balance yet — there was no for them to evade.

Luckily, at that moment, Saint crashed into the side of the abomination's head, using her shield as a siege ram. The power of the blow was terrible enough to bring a fortress wall down, but the skull of the Great Beast only swung to the side a little. It did not seem as if the creature had sustained any damage at all.

And all of that — from the moment the creature landed to now — only took a split second to happen.

'Not good...'

The Azure Serpent had been a king among beasts, while this one was merely a beast... and yet, it was a Great Nightmare Creature. It was too powerful, too fast, and too resilient.

'Can we defeat it?'

Sunny knew that they could. With his Shadows, Cassie's Echoes, and especially the Crown of Dawn... they had a non-negligible chance of defeating this monstrosity.

However, they could also all die here.

'I don't want to die...'

Even knowing that he would most likely return to the starting point of the loop, Sunny still shuddered at the thought of having his flesh torn apart and his bones ground to dust. He was even more reluctant to watch his companions be killed by the ghastly abomination.

'It's simple... don't die, then.'

Gritting his teeth, he lunged forward.