1426 Pathfinder

Before the Terror could swallow them all, Nephis appeared in its way. Her pike was already pressed against the uneven floor of the cavern, supported by her foot, the sharp tip pointed at the approaching monstrosity. Her eyes were calm and full of resolve.

A moment later, Saint was by her side. Sunny, Cassie, and Fiend were not far behind. 'Will it work?'

Before Sunny could even finish the thought, the Terror plunged into the row of pikes.

There was a deafening sound, and he felt a terrible force wrenching his arms. If not for Bone Weave, his bones would have probably snapped and shattered into a thousand fragments.

'Ah...'

Sunny had already increased his weight as much as he could, turning into an immovable monolith. Still, he was thrown back. Cassie had been flung back, as well — the blind girl twisted in the air and nimbly landed on her feet.

One of the pikes actually broke despite the Supreme material it had been made of, forcing Fiend to stagger back with a dumbfounded expression.

However, Nephis and Saint somehow withstood the terrible impact. More importantly, the charge of the Terror had been stopped, at least temporarily. The creature had only partially emerged from behind the broke wall, most of its revolting body still hidden from view. Neph's Pike had become stuck between two of its mandibles, while the one held by Saint was pushed against the black, glossy membrane of its eye.

And yet, there was still not even a crack on the impregnable chitin. 'Damn it...'

Even weapons crafted from Supreme material were not able to break through the Terror's armor, it seemed.

However, most of them had not shattered from the impact, and the cohort was momentarily a safe distance away from the trembling mandibles. The pikes were doing their job.

Rushing forward, Sunny put his whole weight into his own, joining Nephis and Saint. At the same time, he called upon the shadows. Tenebrous chains rose from the floor of the cavern and fell from its ceiling, wrapping around the Terror to immobilize it.

The Terror snapped its mandibles, trying to break the pikes. Its massive body moved, making the black chains groan.

"Jet!"

Right at that moment, a black steed leaped over their heads. Landing on the back of the giant creature, it rushed forward — its rider had already slid out of the saddle, the long pike held in her hands disappearing into the depths of the Terror's body.

The abominations shuddered and let out a terrifying, ear-piercing shriek.

The chains holding it down snapped, and the giant insect-like horror tried to throw Jet off its back. But at that time, Neph's eyes suddenly shone, and the soft radiance of her skin was extinguished. At the same time, her pike suddenly ignited with incandescent light.

Noticing it, Sunny sent the shadow that had been augmenting her body onto the pike, as well.

The crude weapon finally managed to break through the enemy's armor, cracking it slightly. The damage done to the Terror was not too serious, but it momentarily pinned it in place.

That moment gave Jet enough time to catch the pike that Cassie had tossed into the air before Nightmare even landed on the creature's back. Soul Reaper did not waste any time, dashing forward and delivering another vicious strike.

The creature shuddered once again. Visibly weakened and tormented by harrowing pain, it continued trying to resist... but it was already pointless.

Staring at the Terror, Sunny remembered his first meeting with Undying Slaughter and smiled spitefully. He knew better than anyone what the bastard was feeling right now.

"Kill it!"

...Before too long, the battle was over.

The actually managed to slay a Corrupted Terror without losing a single member of the cohort. The dreadful creature was dead.

'What... the hell... it's so much easier when I'm not alone...'

Sunny winced and shook his head, perplexed by his own thoughts. 'What am I thinking? Of course it is, you fool...'

He was sitting on the floor, catching his breath. Nephis was massaging her forearms with a small grimace. Cassie had retrieved the Guiding Light from the sling on her back and was now leaning heavily on it heavily.

Jet had just jumped down from the dead Terror's massive carcass. There was an amused smile on her face.

"What would you know... I received a Memory." Sunny smiled weakly.

"Congratulations."

He had earned a few Memories himself inside the loop, as well as a fair number of fragments. Sadly, none of them remained. At the start of each revolution, the fragments were erased, and the Memories disappeared as if they had never existed.

The world was returned to its previous state, with no exceptions.

...Apart from the Sin of Solace, and the wear and tear accumulating on both his mind and his soul.

Jet stared at the giant corpse doubtfully, and then asked: "Should we dig out the soul shards?"

Sunny shook his head.

"No point."

The carcass was too large. Retrieving the shards would take too long, and their benefits would be gone at the start of the next revolution, anyway.

He let out a sigh and stood up.

"We should continue moving. There should be no more abominations until we leave the caves... at least on the route I chose. Once we reach the chasm, though, it's going to be a little rough. There are these millipedes, you see..."

Nephis, Cassie, and Jet listened to his description, their faces slowly turning a little green.

Nevertheless, they followed him without voicing any objections.

Getting out of the chasm had indeed turned out a little rough. Cassie had to sacrifice one of her Echoes to buy them enough time, and even then, everyone ended up thoroughly wounded.

The smell of blood attracted a few Nightmare Creatures in the forest, as well. Luckily, Sunny knew which paths to take, so the combined strength of the cohort was enough to fend them off.

...But they wasted too much time.

It was already too late to try and return to the Chain Breaker by the time they reached the northern edges of the island.

Walking through the mist, Sunny suddenly raised a hand, signaling the others to stop.

Then, he shouted:

"Effie! It's me, Sunny! Don't throw your spea..."

In the next moment, he cursed and hurriedly dodged to the side. A grey spear flashed passed him and hit Saint's shield with a loud crack.

The graceful knight was pushed back several steps. "Goddammit! Every time! Every damned time!"

Sunny raised himself from the ground and looked into the mist with a resentful expression. There, Effie stood, supporting her belly and looking at him with wide eyes.

"Doofus?"

She turned her head slightly, finally noticing the rest of her cohort. Bright joy flashed in her eyes.

Jet secretly let out a sigh of profound relief.

"Damned glutton... I knew you'd be alright..."

Cassie lingered for a moment, then tilted her head slightly. ...Nephis, however, was frozen in place.

Her eyes were strangely wide.

"Effie? Why... are you... why are you..."

The huntress looked at her in confusion, then glanced at her belly and grinned.

"Oh... I guess you wouldn't know. You see, Princess... when a man and a woman love each other very much..."

As she continued talking with a sincere expression, Neph's bewildered face slowly turned pink.

Looking at her, Sunny felt delightfully vindicated.