1440 Desperate Measures

There were several places on the island that Sunny had not dared to explore yet. They were too dangerous, and lay off the route that led to Effie — he was already tormented enough by dying while trying to reach her, so losing his life meaninglessly to satiate his curiosity did not seem like a good idea.

That said... Cassie was right.

It was not as though Sunny had not considered grasping at straws by venturing into these dangerous territories before. He knew that he would most likely end up searching for a solution there eventually... but not before exhausting all other choices.

Well, his choices had been exhausted. Cassie had become aware of the loop just when they had, so he allowed himself to grow hopeful for a few hours. However, she was now reminding him of the harsh reality...

Even if there were two people who remembered the previous revolutions now, it was still not enough to solve the diabolical puzzle of Wind Flower. Even with everything he had learned, there was no feasible way to achieve their goals.

Which meant that they had to expand their efforts to the most dangerous corners of the hellish island.

And the tower... it was the most dangerous of them all by far.

Sunny had already tried to enter it once, during one of the earlier revolutions. However, before he could even cross the bridge... he had died without even realizing what had killed him. The bones of the dreadful Nightmare Creatures and the abominations standing motionlessly on the bridge only solidified the fact that the stronghold of the Seeker was absolutely deadly — more deadly than the overgrown port, the harrowing shrine, and the eerie circle of black obelisks.

He stared at the map silently.

'...Can't say I'm not curious to get inside, though.'

Wind Flower was just too mysterious. Sunny had been exploring the dreadful island for about two months now, and although he was now familiar with its landscape and dangers, he did not know a lot about its history.

Who was the Seeker that had lived here before, exactly? How had that person been able to not only survive inside the loop, but also build the tower, the port, the shrine, and other structures within it? Or had the vortex not existed yet when they called Wind Flower home? If it had not... was the Seeker responsible for creating it?

Sunny knew, of course, that Wind Flower had not always been trapped within a loop of repeating time. Otherwise, there was no explanation for the existence of the bone orchard, the steps cut into the cliffs, and many other landmarks of the nightmarish island.

Even the line of footprints they had found in the white sand predated the starting point of the loop. They looked like they had been left only a few hours... but in reality, the person who had leapt off the edge of the island must have done so many centuries ago.

Sunny wondered if those were the footprints of the mysterious Seeker. He also wondered...

'If the loop was really created by someone... can't it be destroyed, as well?'

If there was a place where he could find answers to at least some of these questions, it was the Seeker's tower.

Looking at its crudely drawn image and Cassie's finger pointing to it, Sunny let out a heavy sigh and nodded.

"Alright. Now that there is no other choice... we will explore the tower."

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The tower was just like it had been before... but also a little different. This time, Sunny and the members of the cohort — including Effie —approached it from the northern side. Wind Flower was also shrouded in impenetrable darkness, so the sight of the lonesome spire rising above the forest was even more foreboding.

The light in one of its highest windows seemed even brighter now, shining above the dreadful island like a beacon.

The Seeker's Tower... was not exactly ominous in and of itself. It was not a gargantuan structure like the Crimson Spire or the great ivory pagoda of the Kingdom of Hope. Nor was its architecture particularly menacing —in fact, it was rather beautiful.

The grey tower was perched atop a tall black cliff, airy and austere.

Nevertheless... it emanated a sense of absolute, harrowing threat. Every time Sunny looked at it, he could feel a chill run down his spine.

The frozen figures of terrifying Nightmare Creatures that stood on the bridge did not help one bit. Even now, he was staring at them with a dark expression.

The members of the cohort were doing the same as they hid between the pines.

"Is that... a Great Beast?"

In the sinister silence of the misty forest, Effie's whisper sounded as loud as thunder.

Sunny glanced at her and nodded solemnly. "Indeed, it is."

One of the abominations caught by the bridge was a towering monstrosity that seemed to be made entirely out of bulging muscles, sharp claws, and harrowing fangs. It was almost unnoticeable in the darkness of the Fragment, but because the light shining from the window reflected from its pale hide, a vague silhouette could be seen.

Effie gulped. "D—damn..."

That reaction did not surprise Sunny. After all, only a fool would not be scared by a Great Nightmare Creature.

"...I want to eat it so much! It's not fair that only you and Princess got to feast on a Great abomination. That turtle's meat must have tasted heavenly, right?"

Sunny remained motionless for a few moments, then shook his head 'Never mind...'

He wouldn't have deemed the gluttonous huntress with an answer, but sadly, his Flaw compelled him to.

Gritting his teeth, Sunny lingered for as long as he could, and then said reluctantly:

"Yeah. It tasted pretty amazing."

In the darkness, Nephis carefully touched his shoulder. When Sunny turned to her, she asked in a low voice:

"What do we do now?"

He studied her beautiful face for a few moments and sighed. What was there to do?

"We will try to cross the bridge. Right... all of you, prepare to die."