1443 Cutting a Mountain

Sunny remained silent for a while, looking at the blind girl with a strange expression.

'Aletheia... of the Nine?'

The words sounded familiar. He had met a person with a similar name a long, long time ago. The young Awakened swordsman from his First Nightmare, the one whom he called Hero... the Spell had called him Auro of the Nine.

Was it a coincidence, or something more? Sunny frowned.

What did he really know about Hero?

Not much. Hero had been alive during the twilight of the Golden Age, not long before the Doom War started. He was a soldier of a militant empire which worshiped War God and had conquered many lands. He was a warrior of considerable skill and had already Awakened at his young age...

Now that Sunny knew how long it took one to Awaken without the assistance of the Spell, that fact seemed even more impressive.

But Sunny had known that Auro of the Nine was not a simple person all along. Not because of his skill and talent, but simply because of all the people in the Nightmare, he was the only one whose name the Spell remembered.

That alone told Sunny that Auro was special. The Spell appraised Sunny's performance in the First Nightmare as glorious, which meant that he had deviated from the natural course of events to a great degree.

What would have happened to Auro if Sunny had never taken the place of the nameless temple slave? The slave would have died, most likely, while the young swordsman would have survived. If he lived on and escaped the mountain pass... what fate would have awaited him in the future?

And there was one more detail...

'What was it that he said to justify killing me?'

Right before their fateful confrontation, Auro had said something peculiar. Something about how he would have gladly faced the Mountain

King to let Sunny escape if his life belonged to him alone. But it did not, because the young swordsman had sworn to fulfill an... an unencompassable duty of some sort. He couldn't allow himself to die because of it.

What was the duty Auro had spoken of?

And why was the name of another person of the Nine inscribed on the base of the Seeker's Tower?

Who were the Nine?

Sunny took a deep breath and glanced at Cassie. "What do you think it means?"

The blind girl remained silent for a moment.

"Aletheia must be the name of the Seeker who used to live on this island.

He or she was proficient in sorcery, it seems. Other than that, it's hard to

say. II

Sunny sighed.

"Have you ever heard of the Nine?"

He did not really expect a positive answer, but to his surprise, Cassie hesitantly nodded.

"I might have. If I remember correctly, Nephis mentioned once that she had met someone with the same title."

Sunny blinked.

'Huh?'

How would Neph have met one of the Nine? 'It must have been in her Second Nightmare.'

If that was the case, then these Nine seemed to have a habit of popping up in many Nightmares. Just who were they?

Or had been, more precisely.

Shaking his head, Sunny made a mental note to ask Nephis about the person she had met, and turned his attention to the tower.

"Alright. So, this Aletheia was the master of Wind Flower, and left a powerful enchantment to protect the tower..."

Cassie shook her head lightly.

"The island might not have been called Wind Flower back then. It's just a name by which people of Fallen Grace call it today. When the Seeker resided here, it was probably called Aletheia's Island or something like that."

Sunny shrugged.

"Whatever. In any case... how do we break the enchantment?" He thought for a few moments, then asked:

"Will destroying some of the runes work?"

Cassie remained silent for a while.

"Not just any runes. But if the key ones are erased, the enchantment will fall apart. I can identify the ones we need to destroy..."

Sunny raised an eyebrow.

"I thought you said that you couldn't make sense of this strange enchantment."

The blind girl smiled.

"That's true. I wouldn't be able to recreate it... but breaking it is much easier than that. Nevertheless, don't be too encouraged. The runes are carved deep, and there are certainly measures in place to protect them. We'll have to shatter the entire slope of the cliff to erase them."

He chuckled.

"Leave that to me. I might not be able to cut a mountain with one slash of my sword, but breaking a cliff or two shouldn't be a problem."

Cassie nodded and fell silent, concentrating on identifying the key runes of the enchantment. Sunny, meanwhile, studied the black cliff.

A long time passed. On the far side of the island, Nephis, Jet, and Effie had hidden among the cliffs and shared a meal. Sunny watched them through the shadow and listened to the calming flow of their conversation. Neph was holding the Guiding Light, explaining how it had been found in the lost temple of Fallen Grace.

Finally, Cassie was done with her task. The two of them moved stealthily around the black cliff and reached the spot where the string of most vulnerable runes was located.

"There. Destroy that section."

She pointed to where Sunny needed to strike, but he shook his head. "Not yet."

They had to wait a little longer.

After about an hour, Sunny took a deep breath and rose. A whirlwind of scarlet sparks danced around his hand, forming into a black bow. He raised it and held the string.

At the same time, somewhere outside the mist, the seven suns were plunging into the Great River. It was dusk.

As the Crown of Twilight opened his soul to a flood of essence, Sunny drew the bow and activated its most powerful enchantment, [Death Dealer]. Usually, he would not have been able to use it more than a few times in a row — the strain on his essence reserves was simply too great.

But right now, it did not matter.

Releasing the string, he sent a black arrow flying. Then, without wasting even a second, Sunny grunted and drew the bow again. The second and third arrows streaked through the darkness before the first one even hit the target.

Then, the silence of Wind Flower suddenly exploded into a deafening roar of breaking stone. It was as though a furious storm suddenly descended, with booming thunderclaps shaking the world.

Black arrows struck the face of the cliff one after another... one, two, three, ten. Despite how harrowing the force of these strikes was, the weathered black rock held.

For a while.

Gradually, a net of thin cracks appeared on its surface. Then, the cracks widened. Not long after that, small shards of broken stone shot into the air.

Finally, the side of the cliff exploded and collapsed, tons of black stone falling into the turbulent waters of the wide moat.

Sunny lowered his bow and swayed a little, utterly spent. His breathing was ragged.

By his side, Cassie clenched her delicate fists in excitement.

"It... it worked! The enchantment is failing!"

Sunny lingered for a moment.

"Yeah... I can see. Crap."

There was no thrill in his voice

Out there on the bridge... the harrowing abominations that had been motionless before were already starting to move.