1457 Hunting Stronger Beasts

In the end, Sunny had once again drawn the map of Aletheia's Island on the ground. Only, this time, it was much more detailed. He also knew where most of the truly dangerous Nightmare Creatures would be at any given point... his time map was complete.

The members of the cohort studied it for a while, listening to his explanations. Sunny described the prisoners of the nightmarish island in as much detail as he could, sometimes relying on Cassie to provide the most crucial pieces of information. As the two of them spoke in turns, the faces of their companions grew more and more somber.

Eventually, Sunny looked at the map with a dark expression and fell silent for a few moments. When he spoke again, his voice was even:

"Destroying the loop will not be easy. However... it is what comes after we destroy it that is truly dangerous."

He pointed to the map.

"We will still be trapped on the island after the loop is broken. And... the rest of its prisoners will be, as well. These terrible Nightmare Creatures, as well as Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast. But this time, none of us will be revived by the loop, should we die"

Sunny looked at his companions.

"Which means that we will have only one attempt to escape this hell alive."

Despite his solemn tone, Effie suddenly chuckled. He threw her an annoyed glance at her, then asked:

"What's so funny?"

She shook her head.

"No, nothing. Sorry... but that's how it usually goes, isn't it? If you die, you die. Cassie and you might have been living by a different set of rules recently, but for the rest of us, everything is pretty much how it has always been."

He sighed.

'Well... she's not wrong.'

No matter how much he tried to avoid it, the loop had messed with his perception of life and death. But for Effie, Jet, and Nephis... what he had warned them about was already perfectly natural.

Sunny shrugged.

"Well, good. Keep that attitude. In any case, what I meant is that there can't be any mistakes. We will have one day to destroy the loop. On that day, three things need to happen."

As he spoke, the tip of the Sin of Solace traced a few marks on the map:

"The shrine, the lake, and the tower. We must retrieve the enchantment key from the shrine and find something on the bottom of the lake before entering the tower. Once inside, we will be able to achieve our goal. If we do it before the day ends..."

His voice grew somber:

"We will still be stuck in the middle of the island. And we won't know where the Nightmare Creatures are anymore — once the loop is broken, most of the knowledge Cassie and I have so painstakingly gathered will become worthless. Returning to the Chain Breaker will be just as dangerous as our first exploration of Aletheia's Island."

Sunny grimaced.

"...Just for your information, we all died during that first exploration. Well, at least I think we did — I wouldn't know, actually, because I died first."

The rest of them studied the map somberly. Eventually, Nephis spoke:

"But we don't need to go to the Chain Breaker straight away, do we?"

A subtle smile appeared on his face.

"Neph gets it. Good job, Neph!"

Pointing to the tower with his sword, he said:

"Aletheia's Tower is more or less the safest place on the island. Once the loop is broken, the Nightmare Creatures will continue killing each other... or, at least, Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast will continue killing to satiate their Flaws. So, the smartest thing we can do is lock ourselves in the tower and wait for them to massacre all the abominations that would have swallowed us on the way back to the beach otherwise."

Finally, Sunny grinned.

"And then, just before the dust settles, we can slip away, board the Chain Breaker, and escape."

Nephis looked at him with a complicated expression. After a few moments of silence, she said:

"Or... we don't escape."

For a moment, there was dead silence.

Sunny looked at her impassively.

"What do you mean?"

Of course, he knew exactly what she meant. He had considered this course of action himself, despite how risky it was. It was just that... Sunny was not sure if he should mention anything.

Nephis shrugged.

"Two of the Six Plagues are right here, on the island. Why don't we kill them before we leave?"

Jet smiled darkly.

"I would love nothing more than to get rid of Undying Slaughter. But, Nephis... you haven't seen that thing. You haven't fought her. Do you know how lethal she is? How are we supposed to kill older, scarier, more powerful versions of ourselves?"

Unexpectedly, it was Effie, not Neph, who answered. Looking up from where she sat on the ground, the huntress said:

"That's the thing, though. They are us, so... we know their weaknesses. We can exploit those weaknesses — that is how you hunt a stronger beast."

She smiled.

"We know their Flaws, don't we? I mean that we should wait for them to grow weak from hunger, then finish the wretches off to make sure that they don't get a chance to escape."

Listening to her, Nephis nodded.

Effie looked away, her smile dimming. After a moment of silence, she added quietly:

"I might not be the most useful member of the cohort currently, but I think we should try."

Nephis seemed to share her opinion.

"Undying Slaughter and Devouring Beast might die on this island, anyway... but they might also escape the same way we are planning to escape, or through some other means. There won't be a better opportunity for us to strike down two of the Plagues. So, I think we should try, as well."

Cassie remained silent, while Sunny shrugged.

"I don't know. I think I'd rather just leave them behind and run the hell away."

All attention concentrated on Jet. She did not speak for a while, then asked with a faint grin:

"Aren't you all forgetting something? Effie and I have the same Flaws as those two monsters. If they starve, we'll starve, too."

Sunny hesitated for a few moments, then let out a resentful sight.

"That... can be solved. Not a problem."

Soul Reaper glanced at him briefly, then shrugged.

"Well, then... I vote we kill ourselves, too."

She blinked a couple of times.

"I mean, kill our future selves. You guys get what I mean, right?"

Sunny let out a stiffled chuckle and nodded.

"Yes... we get it. Let's kill some Plagues, why don't we?"

They spent the rest of the revolution discussing the plan in great detail. Once it was over...

A new revolution started, just like it always did.

But this one, hopefully, was going to be their last.