1474 End of Days

'What the hell?'

Instantly tense, Sunny looked away from the Quiet Dancer and outstretched his hand, ready to summon the Sin of Solace.

His first thought was to Shadow Step into the hidden chamber below the floor of the tower. The tower was shaking, and Cassie was there, at the heart of Aletheia's sorcery. Cassie had also been rather mysterious lately... unpredictable...

However, a moment later, he shook his head, feeling slightly ashamed. Why was he suspecting the blind girl? It was his first reaction, even.

Instead, Sunny concentrated on his shadows and took a closer look outside. What he saw made his expression darken.

"What is happening?"

Jet had woken up from her nap and was now looking at him, a deep scowl on her face. Effie had almost lost her balance when the tower shook, and was now holding her belly, alert. Nephis had jumped down from where she had been carving more meat from the corpse of the Great Tyrant, white sparks igniting in her striking grey eyes.

Sunny hesitated for a moment.

Outside the tower... the ancient pines were swaying. Which meant that it was not just Aletheia's Tower that had shaken. It was the entire island.

'Damnation.'

Sunny noticed Cassie appearing from the stairs to the hidden chamber and answered:

"I'm not sure. But... I think something happened in the port."

Apart from the deadly circle of black obelisks, there was only one place built by Aletheia they had never visited on the island — the port, which was enveloped by green vines and turned into a nest by an especially dreadful Nightmare Creature.

The ancient building was not included in the plan Sunny and Cassie had made, because there was nothing they needed there. In truth, the port had nothing to do with the time loop, the protective enchantments of the tower, or their way to freedom.

It did serve an important role, though. It was there that the mechanism keeping Aletheia's Island in the air was located.

So, unless Sunny wanted to drop the entire island into the vortex, there was no need to fight the current master of the port and enter there.

But he had never thought that the mechanism would be damaged in the extinction war between the prisoners of the island. It had remained intact for countless centuries and was never damaged in any of the revolutions. What kind of terrible might an abomination had to possess to breach the impregnable defenses of the ancient enchantment?

...One particular horror came to mind.

'The Devouring Beast... it had to be her.'

For a few moments, Sunny was filled with cold terror.

However, noticing that the island was not plummeting into the dark abyss, he calmed down a little.

"I... I don't think that the damage dealt to the levitation mechanism is serious. It was probably just shaken a little."

Just then, the tower trembled again. This time, the tremor was not as powerful, but they still felt it.

Neph's expression grew bleak.

"Still... it's not good news for us."

The island was not falling yet, but who was to say that it would not in the future?

Sunny sighed.

"Yeah. We should probably accelerate our plans."

The members of the cohort looked at each other.

The meaning of his words was simple. Sunny was telling them that the inevitable battle with the Plagues, which they had all been dreading and preparing for during this short period of peace, was now almost upon them.

Cassie sighed.

"I feel like we have at least a couple more days. Staying on the island for longer... might be dangerous."

Sunny nodded.

"Then we'll make our move in two days. For better or worse."

He had already told his companions all he knew about the two Defiled Saints. They had already discussed every possible strategy. Now, all they had to do was prepare themselves mentally and venture out into the mist one last time.

Jet sighed and walked over to the Covetous Coffer.

"I better stop saving those fruits, then."

She was right. Before, they thought that they would try to stay in the tower for as long as possible. Now, however, there was a clear limit to how much time they had. She still had a few of the golden fruits to spare, so absorbing as much essence as possible in preparation for the fight was more important than buying time.

Soon, everyone got busy making their final preparations. Sunny, meanwhile, continued to monitor the outside.

The island quaked several more times in the next two days. The mist, too, grew very thin, allowing him to see far and wide.

And what Sunny saw...

Was truly stunning.

Now that Aletheia's Island had almost lost the obscuring veil of mist, it resembled a ravaged battlefield.

The forest of the ancient pines was almost completely gone. Most of the trees had been shattered or toppled, carpeting the ground like brambles. Here and there, gargantuan corpses lay, surrounded by vast pools of blood. Some of them were terribly torn apart and partially devoured, others were eerily intact.

The few landmarks he remembered were either erased or misshapen and recognizable. Not too far away, a single broken wing of the Hollow Butterfly lay on the ground, but the rest of the Great Monster was nowhere to be seen.

It seemed that he had underestimated the primal fury of the Nightmare Creatures imprisoned on the island. By now, there were only a handful of them — the most dreadful and powerful — left.

Sunny saw several chilling scenes, as well. The most terrible of them happened at the dawn of the second day, when the towering shape of Devouring Beast appeared from afar.

The bestial giantess was moving slowly. Then, however, she suddenly froze and looked up.

Countless tendrils descended from the cloudy sky, assaulting her like a tide. Each of them was hundreds of meters long and tremendously powerful — enough so to send shivers running down Sunny's spine.

Devouring Beast swatted away several of the tendrils, but several more wrapped around her arms, her waist, and her neck, both strangling the Defiled Saint and trying to lift her off the ground. Sunny even felt a sliver of hope that she would be killed by the dreadful horror of the sky, the Harvester.

A frenzied howl shook the world.

Grinning madly, the bestial giantess sank her teeth into one of the tendrils, then strained her muscles and grabbed those that were entangling her arms. Bending at the waist, she growled... and pulled the creature hiding in the clouds down. The ground under her feet exploded, turning into a deep crater.

As Sunny watched in shock, a revolting creature descended from the sky, forcefully thrown down. It was unlike anything he had ever seen... a mass of wriggling flesh that looked like a tattered sail from afar, or a dark star that emanated fleshy tentacles instead of rays of light.

Dozens more tendrils shot toward Devouring Beast, but before they could trap her, the giantess suddenly crouched, and then jumped.

Soaring hundreds of meters into the air, she tore into the Harvester with her fingers, and then plummeted down while grasping it in her hands.

Not long after that, the horror of the skies was completely savaged, its tendrils torn and devoured, its grotesque body mutilated beyond recognition.

The Defiled Saint received many terrible wounds... but her enemy was entirely destroyed.

Less than a dozen minutes later, the Harvester was no more.

...Hidden inside the tower, Sunny trembled. His heart felt heavy. Letting out a quiet sigh, he closed his eyes and whispered:

"That thing... does not seem hungry at all."