1478 Soul Reaper Jet

Weighed down by an instinctual fear, Sunny used an old ally to overcome it... spite. With its help, some of the invisible chains that were holding him back snapped.

But not all of them.

Working together with Nephis and Saint, Sunny managed to stall Undying Slaughter. The three of them surrounded her, but they were in no position to attack. Instead, they were barely managing to stay alive while protecting each other and concentrating on defense.

The mist wraith was slowly pushing them back.

Sunny's spiteful nature was enough to help him overcome the memory of agony and death, but it was not powerful enough to dispel a deeper, far more painful fear. The fear of watching those he cared about die.

The memory of that helplessness, that sorrow, that guilt... was incomparably more dreadful than the memory of having his own life snuffed out. Death was merciful, after all. The dead felt no pain.

So, to struggle free of the remaining chains, Sunny needed to find a more resilient source of strength within his heart. He could not rid himself of the lingering scars delivered to him by Aletheia's Island with just spite.

As he searched for that source, Undying Slaughter moved like mist, suddenly appearing behind Nephis. Her ghostly blade lashed out silently, almost piercing Neph's chest... if the young woman had not dodged at the last moment, one of her soul cores would have been destroyed.

Sunny froze for a moment...

And then exploded with ferocious might.

'Ah. I think I found it.'

Finally, the fear that had been holding him back was vanquished. Sunny had found the strength he needed to free himself of it... and it was an obvious one, at that.

His desire to protect those he cherished was much more powerful than his vindictive desire to avenge himself. It made sense, really... since the fear of losing his companions was stronger than the fear of losing his own life, the resolve that had to do with others would naturally be larger than the resolve that only had to do with himself.

Payback was fine, but protecting the people he loved was a much more powerful source of motivation... incomparably so, really.

Feeling as if a great weight had been removed from his heart, Sunny shook off the lingering trauma of having endured the loop, and threw himself into the battle with boundless determination.

His killing intent soared, not at all inferior to the murderous will of the dreadful wraith.

...And yet, Sunny did not allow that intent to rule him.

Coldly and callously, he reminded himself of what their goal was. It was not to defeat Undying Slaughter in battle... it was to prolong the battle to the point where her Flaw would destroy her without their help, or at least weaken her enough to doom her.

Now that Sunny's mental state was cleansed, he entered the familiar state of combat clarity. His movements turned sharper and more precise. His wildly beating heart calmed down.

'We can do it.'

Killing the mist wraith was, perhaps, out of their reach. But resisting her for a while? That, Sunny and his companions could accomplish.

As Aletheia's Island shuddered and quaked, they continued to fight Undying Slaughter on a crumbling bridge.

Sunny, Nephis, and Saint held out for as long as they could. Eventually, though, even their inexhaustible bodies had grown heavy with fatigue. This was one of the most intense fights Sunny had ever participated in —the perilous battle with Dire Fang seemed mild in comparison to this harrowing clash. Of course, they couldn't keep up with this level of intensity for a long time.

They had done their part, though. The essence that Undying Slaughter had absorbed by killing Devouring Beast was already somewhat exhausted in her battle against the Nightmare Creatures. The three of them had forced the mist wraith to waste even more, draining her reserves. She had already abandoned her ghostly form, facing them as a creature of flesh and bone.

Still, if things continued in that manner, the Defiled Saint would inevitably kill them.

However, Undying Slaughter possessed one fatal weakness.

...She was alone.

And no one survived in the Dream Realm alone.

Just as Sunny was feeling that they were about to die, he shouted hoarsely and withdrew. Nephis and Saint dashed away at the same time.

Jet and Fiend took their place, followed by Nightmare, who rose from the shadows. The retreat and advance were performed seamlessly, not giving the wraith a chance to give chase.

A moment later, Jet's frosty glave collided with Undying Slaughter's ghostly blade. Soul Reaper grinned.

"My back is still itching from the last time we met. Prepare to die... again... you filth!"

Sunny staggered back and leaned on the Cruel Sight, breathing heavily. He did not know how long this respite would last, or even if the island itself would last much longer. All he knew was that he had to be able to rejoin the battle as soon as possible.

By his side, Nephis sheathed her sword, looking at the battle happening in front of them with somber intensity. White flames were dancing in her eyes.

Jet, Fiend, and Nightmare were holding their own against Undying Slaughter... mostly because she was already running extremely low on essence and did not summon her unholy powers much. Her speed and strength also decreased.

But not by a lot.

Sunny gritted his teeth when Fiend was sent flying back by a devastating blow from the ghostly blade. His impenetrable steel carapace held, this time, but the infernal ogre looked rattled and pained by the Defiled Saint's strike.

Nightmare was the most vulnerable of the three, but he was by no means weak. His furious attacks gave Jet the opportunity to advance.

Soul Reaper was the tip of their attack formation.

Jet fought with cold fury, her glaive leaving afterimages in its wake. She met Undying Slaughter blow for blow, refusing to be pushed back. It was as if she had forgotten what hesitation was... in fact, she seemed to be enjoying herself. Her lips were twisted into a dark, murderous grin. Her icy blue eyes were like two lakes of frozen wrath.

The two of them were so alike that, sometimes, it was hard to tell which one was the valiant Master, and which one was the Defiled wraith.

"Wretch... you are such a... disappointment..."

Jet growled those words, and then staggered back.

At the same time, Saint struck her sword against her breastplate twice and lunged forward. Sunny followed.

"Go!"

They had replaced Jet, Fiend, a Nightmare again. This time, there was a slight delay before the tired fighters retreated and the rested... relatively rested... fighters advanced. However, a bone javelin fell from the sky, forcing the Defiled Saint to slow down for a moment.

Aletheia's Island was convulsing all around them. Large chunks of stone fell from the bottom of the bridge and plummeted into the chasm of the empty moat.

"Die!"

Sunny crossed blades with Undying Slaughter once again. They fought. They endured. They bought time.

Time was their greatest weapon, after all.

After a while, Sunny felt like he was going to drop dead. They had already advanced and retreated three times, but the mist wraith was still as overbearing and deadly as ever...

Or maybe not quite.

Her strength was decreasing, too. Her essence had to be running dry. Undying Slaughter still maintained an emotionless expression, her chilling blue eyes filling him with a sense of dread... but her behavior had subtly changed.

It was almost as if she was feeling... if not desperate, then at least pressed.

'We just need... to last... a little longer...'

At that moment, the surface of the stone bridge under his feet rippled and tilted. Startled, Sunny lost his balance — only for a split second, but it was enough.

The ghostly blade was already flying at him, inevitable as death itself.

Before it could ravage his soul, however, an incandescent sword appeared in its path.

Nephis had struck from an awkward angle and groaned when her sword clashed with Undying Slaughter's blade. It was violently thrown aside and slipped from her hands, disappearing into the darkness below the bridge. She was pushed back, as well, and fell down.

Saint was a step or two too far to help... Sunny's eyes widened.

But, strangely enough, the mist wraith did not finish either him or Nephis off. In fact, she seemed to have staggered, as well. This was the first time Undying Slaughter had shown a sign of weakness.

...It was also the last.

Before the mist wraith could regain her balance, a swift figure flew between Nephis and Sunny. He felt a cool wind throw his hair into disarray.

Then, he heard the air whining as it was cut by a sharp blade.

A split second later, Jet's glaive tore through the distance between her and the staggered wraith, plunging into Undying Slaughter's chest.

The two of them froze for a second, two pairs of icy blue eyes staring into each other with indescribable emotion.

The Defiled Saint raised her blade, as if trying to retaliate, but Jet simply twisted her glaive and gripped it tighter.

"You go to hell."

Her voice was as cold as a nameless grave. Jet batted the ghostly blade away, pulled her hand back, and then thrust her weapon into the enemy's soul once again.

Sunny thought that he heard the crystal ring of something breaking. And then, the chilling light of the Defiled Saint's eyes grew dim. The wraith swayed slightly... and fell back.

The moment her body touched the stone, it turned into mist and dissipatd, disappearing without a trace.

Undying Slaughter was no more.