1479 Fractured Island

'She's... dead.'

For a moment, there was silence.

Sunny regained his balance, grunted, and hurried to help Nephis stand up. Saint lowered her sword, acting as indifferent as ever. It was as if they had not just narrowly escaped being slaughtered by a Defiled Saint.

But they had. The Defiled Saint was truly, undeniably gone. Slaughtered, just like she had slaughtered countless living beings.

'Hell...'

Behind them, Fiend and Nightmare were both battered, but relatively unscathed. Both Shadows were watching Jet with piercing intensity.

Soul Reaper herself stood motionlessly above the spot where her future self had perished. Her icy blue eyes were strangely distant. Finally, she let out a long sigh.

"So that's how it is..."

Suddenly, her figure was shrouded in cold mist. That mist flowed along the grateful lines of her supple body, finally forming into a ghostly blade. Then, the shape of that blade changed, elongating until it turned into a beautiful glaive... no, rather, a war scythe. Its dark steel possessed a dreadful sheen to it, with frost patterns decorating the sinister curved blade.

The ghostly scythe seemed to absorb all warmth from the world, emanating a frigid sense of lethal cold.

An amused smile appeared on Jet's face.

Raising an eyebrow, she turned to Sunny and said:

"You... won't believe what the Spell just said. I guess all I had to do was kill myself... to receive my Aspect Legacy..."

'An Aspect Legacy?'

Sunny was momentarily stunned. Jet was a strange existence — a person who was not quite alive, but also not quite dead. So, there was a strange and darkly poetic logic to her Aspect Legacy being locked behind the act of attaining the purest expression of one of these states... namely, dying once again. However, how had killing Undying Slaughter substituted true death?

And what kind of an insane requisite it was, to literally die?!

All Aspect Legacies had unique conditions of being unlocked, but still... wasn't the Spell going too far with this one?

Sunny opened his mouth to say something... but he never got the chance.

Just at that moment, the island shuddered once again, and the damaged bridge they were standing on finally collapsed.

Surrounded by stone debris, the members of the cohort plummeted into the dark chasm.

'Crap!'

The fall from such height was not going to kill an Ascended, but hitting the ground would not be pleasant, either... especially if a few pieces of the bridge decided to fall on their heads immediately after.

He dismissed Saint, Fiend, and Nightmare before calling upon the shadows and manifesting them into resilient chains. Grabbing onto them, the three Masters managed to control their fall and land at the bottom of the empty moat safely.

There, everything was a mess. Effie had shattered a large portion of the cliff's slope earlier, causing countless tons of black rock to slide into the moat. The Great Beast she killed later had also caused a collapse, sending an avalanche of stones and soil into the chasm.

Neph's incandescent sword was laying on the ground just a few meters away from them, its radiance illuminating the chaotic scene. She walked over and picked it up, then looked around somberly.

"Is everyone alright?"

Jet was the first one to answer. Dismissing the ghostly scythe, she seemed to absorb the torrent of frosty mist it had turned into and nodded.

"I'm fine."

Sunny answered a few moments later:

"Yes... no."

The first word was said in a relaxed tone, while the second was a bit shaky.

Standing at the bottom of the moat, he had glanced down and noticed a wide crack running through the rock surface beneath him. His right foot was on one side of the crack, while his left was on the other.

The fracture seemed to be rather deep... deep... extremely deep...

Staring into the darkness, Sunny realized that the fracture was not just deep. It was, in fact, bottomless. That was because it was not just the bottom of the moat that had cracked... but the bottom of the island, as well.

So, what he was looking at was actually the unfathomable darkness at the heart of the colossal vortex. The fracture pierced Aletheia's Island straight through, leading to the abyss beneath it.

Raising his head, Sunny stared at Nephis and Jet for a moment, then said in a bleak tone:

"I... I think that this whole island is about to fall apart."

He carefully moved his right leg over the crack and let out a small sigh of relief when it safely landed near his left one.

"So, how about we get the hell off before it does?"

He didn't have to ask twice.

However, climbing out of the moat had turned out harder than they anticipated. Just as they approached the wall of the chasm, Aletheia's Island quaked once again, the deafening sound of cracking stone echoing in the empty moat. The fracture Sunny had noticed grew wider, chunks of black rock falling into the darkness below.

At the same time, a rain of stones fell on them from above. Nephis frowned, obliterating an especially heavy boulder with one strike of her incandescent sword. Jet nimbly evaded a few more.

'Curse it...'

The shadow chains shot forward, protecting Sunny and his companions. Looking back, he saw the familiar golden rope appearing in Neph's hands. She threw it to him without having to say anything.

Sunny caught the rope and immediately dove into the shadows, stepping out of them on the crumbled remains of the bridge.

By the time he pulled Nephis and Jet up, Cassie and Effie had already descended from the stone steps. The island was shaking and convulsing around them, with almost no pause between the tremors anymore. Sunny's expression was dim.

"Let's go. It's time we escape this damned place."

They crossed the moat and entered the former killing field around tower. Now, it was simply the death field — carcasses of dreadful Nightmare Creatures littered the ground, which was soaked with their blood. The long bone javelins Sunny had crafted and Effie had thrown protruded from their flesh, each one as heavy as a bolt meant for an impossible siege engine.

Sunny would have loved to collect the soul shards from the dead abominations, but there was no time. Passing between the corpses, the cohort entered the shattered remains of the ancient pine forest.

All around them, Aletheia's Island was coming undone.