1480 In a Day's Work

Without the deadly Nightmare Creatures hiding in the mist and blocking the way, it took them a surprisingly short amount of time to reach the hidden bay. Sunny struggled to believe how much blood he had spilled in the past to traverse the dreadful reaches of Aletheia's Island... now that its prisoners were gone, the island had fallen silent.

Of course, it was hard to recognize the places where Sunny had fought, struggled, and died. The forest was no more, with most of the ancient pines laying on the ground, either toppled or entirely destroyed. The mist was largely gone, too, revealing the scene of startling destruction in all its frightening glory.

Massive carcasses towered above the devastated landscape here and there, some of them partially devoured. Rivers of blood flowed between the toppled trees, turning the remains of the forest into a vile swamp. It was like a scene out of a feverish nightmare...

Well, of course it was. They were in a Nightmare, after all.

As the cohort hurried to reach the Chain Breaker, Aletheia's Island was starting to fall apart. It was shuddering and quaking, making it hard to advance at a steady pace. More cracks appeared in the bloodsoaked soil, some of them leading all the way down to the darkness below. Sometimes, a wide chasm would open right in front of the cohort, forcing them to change course and rush to circle around it.

It felt like they were running out of time.

...But, in the end, the did not.

Sunny was starting to feel rather restless, but just then, the cohort finally reached the stone steps leading down to the white beach. Cassie was riding Nightmare, while Effie was once again being carried by the Covetous Coffer. Sending the two of them ahead, he joined Nephis and Jet in descending from the cliffs in a much faster way...

They simply jumped off the edge and used their Memories to glide down.

Finally, they saw the Chain Breaker in the distance. The graceful vessel was where they had left it, crashed against a black cliff, its bow buried in the white sand.

"Hurry!"

As they raced across the white beach, the whole island seemed to have tilted. A thunderous sound of something impossibly large breaking rolled from behind them, and Sunny felt his heart skipping a beat.

They reached the Chain Breaker and wasted no time climbing aboard. The dawn had come and gone before the battle with Undying Slaughter, and dusk was still too far away. The timing of their escape was not at all optimal, but they had little choice but to make do. The task of raising the ship into the air once again fell to Nephis.

While Effie and Jet were looking around with stunned expressions —neither of them had seen the Chain Breaker during the last cycle of the time loop, after all — Nephis dashed to the enchantment circle at the stern of the ship. Cassie had disappeared to somewhere under the deck, while Sunny simply stood where he was, looking back at Aletheia's Island.

That cursed place.

The fact that he was finally going to escape this harrowing hell did not feel real. After all the pain, all the suffering, all the deaths... with how elusive time had been inside the loop, the months Sunny spent repeating the same desperate actions over and over again felt like an eternity.

"Who says you can escape?"

The Sin of Solace had appeared from somewhere, unnoticed, and was now standing behind him.

"Who says that your suffering is over? That your pain is over? Fool... ah, you don't even know how pitiful you are."

Sunny smiled darkly.

"Be quiet. At least I'm not as pitiful as you."

Just at the moment, the island quaked once again. In the distance, the black cliffs rising above the beach crumbed and collapsed, falling down like a black avalanche. A giant crack appeared on the ground, the sand spilling into it like water, and crawled in the direction of the Chain Breaker.

Then, the flying ship moved, as well.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster, it rose above the ground and soared into the sky. Nephis was guiding it away from the disintegrating beach.

Sunny watched Aletheia's Island break apart in silence. He had lost so much here...

But he had gained so much, as well.

Jet and Effie were now safely back with the cohort. That had been the reason why Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie had come to the mysterious place known as Wind Flower, in the first place... they had achieved their goal.

Unexpectedly, what they had gained, the forces of the Defilement had lost. Two members had rejoined the cohort, while two of the Six Plagues had perished. That was a truly surprising, but indescribably beneficial outcome. Sunny could hardly believe their luck...

Of course, it wasn't just luck. It was a combination of good fortune, their unrelenting efforts... and, to a large extent, of the nefarious schemes of the Mad Prince.

That was another thing Sunny had gained — knowledge. Knowledge about the Mad Prince, yes, but also about so many other things.

Some of the greatest mysteries of existence had been revealed to him on Aletheia's Island. The nature of the Dream Realm, the past atrocities of the Nightmare Spell, even the origin of his own world...

Perhaps even more importantly, Sunny had also learned a few things about himself. How he felt, what he wanted... and what he feared, as well.

Oh, and he had also become a Terror. His soul possessed six cores now, and he possessed six shadows. His power had once again grown, and there was now only one step separating him from its pinnacle.

Sunny had died countless times on Aletheia's Island. He had battled and slain many harrowing Nightmare Creatures, honing his skill and earning priceless battle experience. Some of them were far too deadly for a Master to face, and yet, in the end, all of them had perished, while he survived.

The entire island shuddered one last time and broke apart, falling into the abyssal darkness below. All the horrors, secrets, and treasures left behind by Aletheia of the Nine disappeared with it.

Standing on the deck of the Chain Breaker, Sunny let out a quiet sigh.

"...All in a day's work."

It was not a bad result.

The flying ship hovered in the air for a few moments, and then slowly started climbing down.

It was heading for the same lightless abyss that had swallowed the island...

Diving into the darkness that lay at the heart of the Great River. Soon, the darkness welcomed them into its silent embrace.

[End of Part Two: Keeper of Truths.]