1369 Lost Library

Their first goal was to find Jet and Effie. Cassie had been able to determine the general area where they were marooned, but not why... she was also not sure what dangers awaited the Chain Breaker in that hazardous region of the Great River.

However, she did have a lead.

The problem was that this lead was buried in one of the lost temples of Fallen Grace — the palace where a Defiled sybil had once been entombed alive. During the battle for the city, the temple had been unsealed, and the island-ships that could not be saved were abandoned.

Cut free, they had been left to the currents. The rest of the flotilla fled upstream, where it remained to this day... nevertheless, the Chain Breaker was moving into the past once more, searching for the lost districts.

Sunny, Nephis, and Cassie were going to find the lost temple, slay the Defiled sybil — if the creature was still dwelling there — and sift through the temple's library in search of information about the place Effie and Jet were trapped in.

Breathing heavily, Sunny leaned on the side of the ketch and cursed quietly. The ketch had been patched up and repaired, as well. With its masts dismantled and stored, it resembled a proper lifeboat. The craftsmen of Fallen Grace had also constructed an actual nest for it, with ropes and pulleys to lower the ketch into the water and hoist it back up again when needed.

Nephis was at the stern, controlling the ship, while Cassie was examining the damaged essence lines of the ancient vessel nearby.

Looking at her, he decided to rest for a few minutes and asked somberly:

"Why wasn't that sybil killed after succumbing to the Defilement, anyway? Simply sealing the temple does not seem like a reliable solution. Especially since it seems to have been done in a hurry, with all the valuables remaining inside. Who just goes and loses an entire library?"

The blind girl was distracted from her thoughts and turned to him, her golden hair fluttering in the wind. She lingered for a moment, then shrugged.

"I'm not really sure. It happened long before we entered the Nightmare, so... perhaps the people of Fallen Grace simply couldn't bring themselves to kill one of their sybils. You saw how conflicted they are about us. Perhaps sealing her inside and turning the temple into a mausoleum was simply safer."

She sighed and shook his head.

"I agree, though. It was a mistake. When I entered the Nightmare... we could have preserved the entire city if not for their misguided ways. There were two sybils left in Fallen Grace back then, and one of them had just succumbed to the Defilement. She was still new to her unholy powers, though. The battle was dreadful, but we could have won."

Her face turned dull.

"...It was not until the seal of the old temple came undone that disaster struck. Once that thing got out, there was no stopping it."

Sunny raised an eyebrow with a dubious expression.

"And yet you want us to seek her out?"

Cassie sighed, then smiled lightly.

"Well. I alone was not enough to both battle the creature and prevent the city from sinking. But the three of us together... that is a completely different story. I don't think we'll have too much of a problem dealing with her. If we do fail to take down a single Defiled, there's no point in even trying to conquer the Nightmare, don't you think?"

Sunny smiled crookedly.

"I guess."

There was another reason why they wanted to slay the Defiled sybil, as well. The conflict of the Nightmare seemed to be connected to the fate of Fallen Grace, and of the River People civilization as a whole. The natural ending of this story was complete extinction — which was why Sunny and Nephis were determined to destroy Verge and save the last human city instead.

But simply eliminating the source of the Defilement was not enough. Right now, the people of Fallen Grace were doomed — for no other reason than that they were all too old and weak to have children. To ensure that a new generation of the River People could be born, the city had to return to its previous position downstream.

Which was impossible because of the lingering presence of the Defiled sybil.

So, the creature had to go.

Sunny looked at the crimson sky, then asked:

"How does it work, anyway? Why was the entombed sybil so much more powerful than the one you killed?"

Cassie remained silent for a bit before answering.

"Simple, really. All the Nightmare Creatures we met before entering the Tomb had been corrupted countless years ago. There was barely a trace of their previous selves left. Corruption... is a gradual process, as it turns out. The sybil I killed had not been an abomination for more than a week. She was still mostly human. The other, though... had spent a long time sealed in that temple. The thing that broke free from it could barely be called a human. Its powers were greater, and it was much more used to them, as well."

Sunny sighed. It made sense.

With his curiosity satisfied, he decided that it was time to get back to the arduous practice. He was trying to master the sorcery of Names.

Sadly... Sunny was making zero progress.

Learning the Names themselves was not too hard, at least not the simple ones Nephis had done her best to teach him. Even though those Names were eerily odd, barely fitting into his mind and constantly fading from his memory, he possessed enough mental discipline to hold on to the knowledge of them.

The problem was actually trying to speak them. In that regard, Sunny was failing miserably. It was as Ananke had said... people needed an innate talent to master the Words. And it seemed that he severely lacked it.

'Curse it.'

Perhaps Sunny was being greedy by wishing to learn an entire new system of sorcery, but he still wanted to master the fundamentals of Shaping.

Today, his attempts to summon the wind were going even worse than usual. He was tired and drained, but there was no result whatsoever.

"Damned wind! Come on, blow!"

When Sunny's irritation reached a boiling point, Cassie suddenly straightened and turned her head slightly. There was a frown on her face.

"...Something is wrong."