1386 Forests, Plains, Rivers, and a Vast Blue Sky

The next few murals depicted the battles between the six radiant figures and the vague shapes hiding in the darkness of the abyssal void. Sunny found them quite funny... he already knew that the war between the gods and the unknown were waged with weapons like death, time, and space. It had truly been a war beyond human comprehension.

However, the ancient people had drawn the murals according to their human imagination. In them, the gods battled the void creatures with swords, spears... and even fists, from time to time. Imagining a god having a fistfight with a primordial horror was rather comical.

Sunny shook his head.

"It's curious, isn't it? The gods are always said to be the enemies of the void creatures... but really, they are void creatures themselves. Just of a different breed."

Both the unknown and the gods had been born from the void. So, the gods were unknown themselves — primordial beings from before anything remotely human had ever existed. It was just that they were a very special kind of these ancient abominations. A kind that was inherently opposed to the abyss that had spawned them, and everything it represented.

Nephis slowly nodded.

"Indeed. But does it matter?"

Sunny lightly shook his head.

"I guess it doesn't."

Awakened and Nightmare Creatures were also two sides of the same coin. That didn't make them the same.

The three of them continued forward, studying the murals. Eventually, the void creatures seemed to have been defeated, albeit not destroyed. Beaten and diminished, they crouched in a dark corner of the abyss, surrounded by the six radiant figures.

'This is interesting.'

Sunny knew very little about how the war between the gods and the unknown had ended. The description of the drop of ichor only said that the void had been bound... but not how it had happened.

Finally, the three of them stopped in front of the second to last mural. On it, the six radiant figures seemed to be holding a net made from what was left of the golden flame, surrounded by a whirlwind of sparks. They threw the net on the crouching creatures of the void, engulfing them in radiance.

The last mural depicted a familiar landscape — the black abyss was gone, replaced by forests, plains, rivers, and a vast blue sky.

He looked at Cassie expectedly. She had been the one to spend a whole year with the inhabitants of the Nightmare, after all. If anyone knew their myths, it would be her.

The blind girl sighed.

"In the end, when the old ones were defeated, the gods took direction and used their weapons to wrap it around the void. That was how the void was sealed. And... that was also how the world was created."

Sunny stared at the last mural, overcome by an eerie feeling.

'Wait a second...'

The forests, plains, rivers, and a vast blue sky... the crouching beings enveloped by a net of golden radiance...

He already knew that these murals had been drawn according to the limited imagination of their creators. So, if he looked beyond what was drawn, at the underlying meaning...

Desire, direction... order... the absolute laws like time and space that the gods had created to use as weapons.

Did it mean that the gods had created the world... the universe, rather... by sealing the void in the cage of universal laws?

And if this was how the world had been born... He shivered.

"So... wait... does it mean that everything we know is basically a cage for the abyssal beings of the void? That... that everything is just the outer shell of a prison buolt to contain the abyss?"

Cassie and Nephis turned to him somberly.

After a while, the blind girl said, her voice strangely calm:

"I think... not quite that literally, but yes. The void was never destroyed, it was only bound. And the world is what binds it... not the waking world, and not the Dream Realm. More of... existence itself, as we know it."

Sunny remained silent for a while, not knowing what to say. What Cassie said sounded terrifying. It was as though he was standing on the surface of a deep, dark ocean, separated from its lightless depths only by a thin, fragile film of ice.

That ice was all of existence.

'Damnation...'

Why was he so bothered by some stupid myth, anyway?

The answer was obvious. It would have been easy to dismiss the whole thing as an ancient superstition if not for one detail. The Spell had put the same story in the description of the drop of Shadow God's blood, which meant that there was at least some truth to this myth, no matter how distorted.

'Curses.'

Eventually, he let out a shaky breath and said in an unconvincingly carefree tone:

"Well... that's a bit disturbing, isn't it?"

Indeed, it was.

Much more than that, however...

It raised so many questions.

Was his interpretation of the myth close to truth? How had Weaver entered the void if it was sealed by existence itself? What had the Demon of Fate witness there, exactly?

Come to think of it, the creation myth explained a lot of things, but one thing it failed to explain were the daemons. Where had they come from? Who was the Unknown, whose children they supposedly were? How were the daemons and their progenitor connected to the gods and to the void?

There were much more fundamental questions, as well.

For example, the path of Ascension led to divinity, while the path of Corruption was opposed to it, leading to unholiness. And since what opposed the gods was the void... was the true meaning of "profane" and "unholy", as used by the Spell, actually "having to do with the void"?

Was the abyss sealed within the world the source of Corruption? Was the vile darkness permeating the souls of Nightmare Creature a manifestation of the everlasting void?

And how did the Nightmares, the Spell, and Weaver's mysterious schemes fit into all of this?

Sunny suddenly shuddered as a certain thought entered his mind. Now that the gods were dead...

Was the spreading Corruption a sign that the seals containing the void were weakening?

Was the cage the gods had created slowly falling apart?

The disturbing chill he had felt after learning the truth of the last mural was washed away by curiosity... but now, the feeling of dread was back.

He hesitated for a few moments, then cleared his throat and looked away from the ancient, damaged, fading image of forests, rivers, and plains.

...The net of black cracks covering the painted vastness of a blue sky did not look ominous at all.

"Let's go find that damned library and get the hell away from here as fast as possible, shall we? This place... it seriously gives me creeps..."