1389 Shifting Map

After entering the central chamber of the ancient library, Sunny felt his excitement diminish somewhat. The stone slates had seemed unharmed from the outside, but at a closer look, they were not in the best state.

The Defiled sybil had rampaged in this chamber, as well. Many slates were shattered, some turned to rubble, others to dust. The whole place was a mess, with deep cracks littering its walls and the ceiling. There were deep puddles on the floor, and the cold darkness shrouding the chamber echoed with the sound of falling water.

Still... there were many slates that were unharmed, as well.

Cassie remained motionless for a few moments, then sighed and sat down on a relatively dry pile of rubble.

Sunny gave her a stare.

"...What, you're not going to help us look?"

The blind girl smiled.

"I am looking."

He coughed and awkwardly turned away.

'Yeah, way to go, genius. Asking a blind person if she'll look...'

Although Cassie's Awakened Ability allowed her to navigate the world, it did not grant her sight — Cassie sensed the future as if she lived it, meaning that she remained blind.

It was her Ascended Ability that allowed her to see, even if it was only through someone else's eyes. Someone like Sunny or Nephis, for example — which meant that she could only look at the slates that they were looking at.

So, she could only help them identify the correct one, not find it herself. Hiding his embarrassment, Sunny cleared his throat.

"So, what exactly should we search for?"

Cassie lingered for a moment.

"We should probably separate all the intact slates first. Even those that do not contain the information we're currently looking for might be useful later."

Indeed... rescuing Effie and Jet was not going to be their last stop on the Great River. They would have to travel to Twilight as well, and then journey all the way to the dawn of time to attack Verge.

There was no telling what kind of dangers hid beneath the surface of the endless river. Even though the information recorded by the sybils was outdated by now, it was still immensely valuable.

Cassie tilted her head a little.

"Other than that... keep an eye out for any mention of flowers."

Sunny nodded. There was not much known about the place where Effie and Jet were trapped, but the inhabitants of Fallen Grace referred to it as the Wind Flower. The vague stories they had heard about that area of the Great River told very little, except for how no one ever returned from there.

It wasn't even known where the name Wind Flower had come from.

With a sigh, Sunny nodded and went about sifting through the rubble without wasting much time. Soon, he and Nephis were crawling through the debris, separating those slates that were only lightly damaged from those that were completely destroyed.

As they did, Sunny briefly looked at each one.

Although Ananke had taught them how to navigate the Great River — at least enough for them to make their way to Fallen Grace — he couldn't really read the maps engraved into the slates. The maps Sunny was used to were based on topography and landmarks like mountains, rivers, and craters.

What was there to put on a map of an endless, vast river? The system the sybils had used was rather elaborate. It was based on a convoluted method of assigning each slate a kind of coordinates that had to do with its relation to the edges of the Great River, the passage of the suns, and the approximate distance to the few stationary hazards plaguing the Tomb of Ariel.

None of the slates depicted the full map of the Great River, either. Instead, they were supposed to be put together and moved around as the areas described on them shifted their locations, with old coordinates being stricken from the slate and new ones added.

Since most of the slates had been destroyed, there was no hope of recreating the full map.

However... one great thing that the sybils and their servants had done was including a description of what was depicted on the slates, engraved on the back. So, instead of trying to decipher the markings describing the coordinates, Sunny read these descriptions instead.

His face slowly grew gloomy.

"A giant maw that opens underwater and swallows entire island-ships... a region where the wind literally cuts flesh... what the hell, an illusory island that can only be seen by the dying..."

So what, if he suddenly saw that island, it would mean that he was going to die in the next few minutes? Or was it the other way around, and it was seeing the island that killed people?

In any way, it was very much way too creepy.

Sunny knew that the Tomb of Ariel was a dreadful place, but now, he suddenly felt lucky to have made it to Fallen Grace in one piece.

Well... they had encountered the time storm, which was pretty terrifying even as far as the local perils were concerned. So, calling himself lucky might have not been quite correct.

'Whatever...'

After a while, the two of them settled into a rhythm. Sunny was looking for those slates that were in one piece, while Nephis collected those that had been broken into pieces, but could be restored, and put them back together with the help of the Dark Shaper.

Cassie, meanwhile, rested on the pile of rubble for a while, then got bored and stood up to take a walk around the chamber.

She hovered near them for a bit, then put her hand on the wall and slowly traced the perimeter of the chamber with her fingers. Since there was rubble everywhere, it took her a long time to complete the circle and get back to the entrance.

...Actually, hadn't she been gone for too long?

Suddenly worried, Sunny pulled his attention away from the slates and concentrated on his shadow sense. It only took him a split second.

To his relief, he could still clearly feel Cassie's shadow. Turning around, he looked at the far end of the chamber and saw her delicate figure there, standing in front of the cracked wall. She seemed deep in thought.

Frowning slightly, Sunny called out to her:

"Hey! Is that wall very interesting? Come here and keep us company!"

Perhaps it was foolish, considering that Cassie could sense the future... but Sunny was not absolutely sure that the flooded temple was safe now, and having the blind girl outside his immediate reach made him feel uncomfortable.

What would happen if they were suddenly attacked?

Hearing his voice, Cassie hesitated for a few moments, then turned to face them and pointed to the wall.

"Actually... it is interesting."

She paused for a moment, and then added with uncertainty:

"A slight wind is coming from the cracks. I think there is another room behind that wall."