1549 Scouting Mission

Everyone was more than a little stunned by the sight of the massive landmass in front of them. They had seen Verge from far away, while traversing the empty void — however, the ice and the pale soil covering it were indistinguishable from the flowing water at that distance. Nothing in the records left behind by the sybils indicated that the foundation of the city was so monumental, either.

All that was mentioned on the slates, as well as passed by word of mouth between the citizens of Fallen Grace, was that the Seekers of Truth had established a city at the farthest reaches of the past, as close to the inception of time as they could, to serve as a staging ground for their attempts at reaching the Estuary.

So, they had expected something similar to the fleet-cities of the sybils, or perhaps a settlement built on a massive carapace of an enormous abomination, like Twilight. Maybe a levitating island like the one Aletheia had created, or even a network of them.

What they had not expected was an entire land of ice surrounding Verge. Sunny was both troubled and impressed.

There was a whole day of sailing on the Chain Breaker left between them and the Defiled City. That was a vast distance to cover on foot, at least for a mundane human. Which meant that the mass of ice forming the foundation of Verge was truly immense.

...Which posed a problem.

Sunny studied the lifeless landscape of the frozen land in front of them, then glanced at Nephis.

"So, what are we supposed to do?"

Now that they couldn't sail further, there was a decision to be made. Namely, they had three possible paths, each offering its own pitfalls and benefits.

The simplest path was to raise the Chain Breaker into the air and proceed forward, flying above the vast sheet of ice. This, of course, would offer them the highest speed and defensive advantage, since the graceful vessel was nothing less than a mobile fortress.

It would be very hard not to notice a ship flying above ground, though.

So, they would alert the Defiled of their approach long before reaching the city.

The second path was to abandon the ship and proceed toward Verge on foot. That way, they would become much slower, and much more exposed once the fighting started. However, it was much easier for seven humans to infiltrate the landmass stealthily, remaining hidden until the very moment they reached the Defiled city — or even sneaked past its walls, reaching the First Seeker unseen.

The third path was to circle around the landmass first, studying it in detail from afar, and come up with the plan of attack later. This was the most passive approach, but not the safest — the longer they spent in these dangerous waters, the higher the chance that Torment would sense their presence.

Nephis hesitated for a while, thinking. "What are your opinions?"

She addressed the members of the cohort, wishing to make use of their experience and intuition. However, the opinions were split. Some were in favor of leaving the ship behind and using stealth to approach Verge, others did not trust the treacherous expanse of the desolate landmass and wanted to keep the durable hull of the Chain Breaker between themselves and whatever could be hiding beneath the ice.

Sunny himself was undecided, as well.

He felt somber at the fact that he would not be able to use the shell of the onyx serpent in the upcoming battle, considering that Verge lay deep inland. However, there were plenty of other shells he could create, by now, including the giant version of his human body... and even though most of them were not as detailed and powerful as the great sea serpent yet, the versatility they offered made up for that.

Overall, he felt that having solid ground beneath their feet was a good thing. He was sick and tired of fighting while surrounded by water, away from their natural element. So, perhaps not having the hull of the Chain Breaker to rely on was not that bad.

Nephis listened to everyone, then turned to Cassie, who had remained silent up until then.

"What do you think?"

The blind girl was not in a hurry to speak. After thinking for a while, she shrugged and said:

"We don't need to decide right now. We wanted to anchor the Chain Breaker and scout the approach to the city stealthily, anyway... all that changed is that we can do it on foot now, instead of swimming and flying. So, why don't we explore this desolate place first before making the final decision?"

Sunny moved slightly when she spoke. He threw a long look at the blind girl, and then asked nonchalantly:

"What is the best way to explore this place quickly, in your opinion?" Cassie hesitated for a moment, then said thoughtfully:

"One person has to stay with the ship. The rest should split into three teams. One team will proceed straight forward, the other two will move slightly inland and then move along the western and eastern shores of the island. Everyone will regroup back on the Chain Breaker tomorrow and share what they discovered."

His expression darkened slightly. Nephis, meanwhile, nodded.

"Splitting up might be dangerous, but it's the only way to cover a lot of ground quickly. We can reduce the danger by making sure that none of the satellite groups strays too far away from the central one — that way, each team can be reinforced by another promptly, should the need arise."

She remained silent for a few moments, pondering.

"Mordret should be the in forward team — his ability to see through reflections will allow him to keep an eye on both satellite teams at the same time without sacrificing strength. He would also be able to travel between reflections to aid them. The second member of the central team should be someone who does not have a mobility Ability... they could be transported through the mirror realm..."

She considered things for a bit before finally assigning each member of the cohort the optimal role.

Mordret and Jet were assigned to the central scouting team. Kai and Effie would explore the eastern reaches of the frozen landmass. Nephis herself would be exploring the western reaches, accompanied by Sunny.

Cassie would be remaining on the Chain Breaker.

It was as solid of a plan as they could come up with, considering the situation. The three teams were powerful enough to defend themselves, while at the same time being flexible enough to swiftly come to the aid of the other teams.

The plan was solid...

However, Sunny disagreed with it.