1838 Palace of Imagination

Soon, a tide of shadows swallowed the Mirror Maze, and they continued their meticulous exploration.

Sunny did not really hope to reveal the secret of the maze tonight. In fact, by now, he was starting to suspect that he would never be able to reach its heart that way — simply because what he was doing was inherently wrong.

It was impossible to reach the Tomb of Ariel no matter how long one marched across the Nightmare Desert... at least during the day. He believed that the only way to approach the great pyramid was to brave the sea of dunes at night, when it was the most dangerous.

Similarly, there must have been some trick to traversing the labyrinth of mirrors. Perhaps by drowning the maze in shadows and neutering its mirror walls, Sunny was preventing himself from making any progress.

He sighed.

Behind him, Cassie hesitated for a few moments, and then said quietly:

"That girl in the Song Domain..."

Sunny glanced back with a neutral expression, knowing what she wanted, but couldn't ask.

"... She is someone precious."

The blind seer remained silent for a while.

Eventually, she smiled and said with a hint of wonder in her voice:

"It is funny, isn't it? The entire world is frozen in fear and anticipation of a great war that will shape history. And yet, no one is aware that something no less important has happened in the desolate wilderness of the Dream Realm, witnessed by nobody except for a young Legacy girl, you, and me. A human of the waking world Awakening without being cursed by the Nightmare Spell. Your achievement... is remarkable. ”

A pale smile appeared on Sunny's lips, as well.

"Funny? It is a bit funny, I guess."

Her remained silent for a few moments, and then added:

"However, this achievement can only become important in the future. She can only make a difference in the future. Right now... it is up to people like us — you, me, and Nephis — to make sure that there is a future for people like her to make history."

His smile turned a little bittersweet.

"In fact, if there is a future... I hope that what we did becomes all but forgotten, and only what they did is remembered. Such a wish is quite ironic coming from someone like me, isn't it?"

Cassie chuckled.

"It is... especially when expressed to someone like me. Although, I must say — I doubt that there is someone like you or me out there. Or will ever be again."

Sunny couldn't help but laugh quietly.

"Gods. I hope not."

It would be quite sad, if someone in the future had to suffer like him, and was forced to do the same terrible things that he had done or was yet to do, still, just then, they made another turn... and froze.

His eyes widened.

’... I'II be damned. ’

Sunny had not expected to discover anything in the Mirror Maze tonight, but, unexpectedly... he did.

Out there in front of them, the narrow corridor opened into a vast hall. The mirror walls that had been pressing down on them expanded, disappearing into the distance. The floor of the underground chamber was sloping downward like a bowl, and the ceiling was out of sight.

The spherical hall was so vast that Sunny could not see the other end of it. In fact, he couldn’t see anything, as if something was obscuring his vision. His shadow sense was similarly suppressed.

All he could feel was that the hall was enormous, ancient... and dangerous. Sunny's instincts were screaming that he needed to retreat. This sense of dire danger reminded him of the worst horrors he had experienced in his life... . Then, there was a sound in the darkness.

Chilled to the bone, Sunny looked down and felt something that did not make any sense, and yet filled him with a sense of terror.

A wave of cold water rolled over the floor and licked his boots, pieces of ice drifting in the foam, then receded... as if he was standing on the shore of a freezing ocean.

Then, there was another sound.

The rustle of countless leaves and the creaking of enormous branches.

Wisps of mist drifted in the darkness, brushing against his skin like cold tendrils.

The ghastly smell of the outskirts assaulted his nose.

Before anything happened, Sunny grabbed Cassie and pulled her back into the corridor. Then, feeling that it was not enough, he stepped through the shadows and brought them back to the stone chamber.

Letting go of the blind seer, he leaned on the wall heavily.

His vision returned. Both of them were deathly pale, and trembling.

"W—what... what the hell was that?"

Cassie’s voice was subdued.

Sunny forced himself to calm down and let out a stifled laugh.

It wasn't easy to scare two Saints, and yet, here they were.

"The Demon of Imagination... damn."

Cassie raised her eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

Sunny slowly straightened his back and brushed his hair back.

"This castle was created by the Demon of Imagination once, wasn‘t it? So, there have to be traces of her power left here. The mirrors are one such relic. The hall we found... I think it is another."

The blind seer frowned.

"The icy water, the rustle of countless leaves, the mist... what do they have to do with the Demon of Imagination?"

Sunny slowly shook his head.

"Nothing. But... when we entered the hall, I felt a sense of danger, and couldn’t help but remember some of the most harrowing encounters of my life. And so..."

He hesitated for a few moments, struggling to believe in the theory that had formed in his mind.

Eventually, though, Sunny finished his thought in a low tone:

"And so, the hall made them real."

Cassie’s face paled.

"You mean... you mean to say that that place can make What we fear into reality?"

Sunny lingered for a while, then shook his head again.

"No... if I am right, then it is not what we fear."

He shivered, and the added in a somber tone:

"It's what we imagine."

Come to think of it, he must have gone blind there because of Cassie.

’Damned daemons... ’

What did every one of them have to be scarier than the next?

Cassie seemed a little shocked by his suggestion, too.

She hesitated for a while, then asked in a small voice:

"Then, do you want... to go try again? There is still time before dawn..."

Sunny laughed.

"Are you crazy? Just think about what is hidden there, in our heads. Let’s not even mention that one of us might accidentally think about having their limbs severed or skin peeled off. Can you control your thoughts completely? What if you imagine that Cursed Tyrant, Condemnation? What if you think about the Forgotten God?"

He took a deep breath.

"I knew that there would be some kind of challenge at the heart of the Mirror Maze. But this... this is beyond what I have imagined. Pun intended. Conquering that hall is a lethal task, even for us. No... especially for us. Because we have seen too much, and remember too much."

It definitely wasn't something that could be accomplished in a day.

If he wanted to reach the heart of the Hall of Imagination... he would need to prepare thoroughly... . Sadly, there was no time.

Sunny looked at the door of the stone chamber with regret, and then sighed.

"It doesn't matter. I had a small hope of finding what I seek here before the war, but I can find it after we win, too. By then, there will be no King of Swords and no Clan Valor. I won't need to hide in the darkness and come here only once a month. So... I will return to this eerie place then."

With that, Sunny offered Cassie his hand and forced out a smile.

"Let's leave, for now. There is a lot I have to do in these next few days."

It was true. Because these...

Would be the last days of peace.