

After I saw an unconscious Syvis lying motionless on the ground, I rushed over to her. To my relief, I found that she was unharmed and simply asleep. I accommodated her head on my thighs so she could rest while I was still trying to process everything that happened.

So many things had occurred that it wasn't until now that it dawned on me that Syvis and I were the only ones present here. It was hard to tell exactly how much time had passed since we were trapped inside the portal. However, I assumed it had been a couple of hours from the moment we first stumbled into that place to now. Still, I find it strange that none of our companions were here. Did our companions assumed the worst and left us behind? Did they give up hope and move on without us?

I couldn't help but think back to Selgoth's final words before he died. He had mentioned that once the portal was gone along with him, all the traps in the area would vanish. This meant that our companions should have been able to find their way back without encountering any false paths, so theoretically, they should have been able to make their way back without having to worry about false paths.

I also couldn't help but notice the sudden change in temperature. The once cold air surrounding the cave was now replaced with an uncomfortable warmth. It was as if I had been transported to a completely different climate altogether. My body was already starting to heat up. Beads of sweat formed on my forehead, trickling down my face. It was clear that the portal was the source of the cold that had permeated the cave before. Yet, I couldn't help but be surprised at how quickly the cold had dissipated.

Looking around, the portal is not there either. Instead, I see traces of a few bonfires all around. I wonder if our companions camped here for a while? I'm sure those bonfires weren't here before. Although it didn't make much sense since they left in such a hurry. But then again, nothing about this situation made much sense. I turned to Syvis, hoping that she would wake up soon. Maybe together, we could catch up with our companions and figure out what was going on.

After a while, Syvis finally woke up.

As expected, Syvis jolted awake in a state of panic and disorientation. She stumbled to her feet, frantically scanning her surroundings.

"D-Darx!? What happened?" Syvis asked me after seeing me, still looking confused.

"Calm down, Syvis. We're back in the cave. We're safe," I reassured her, hoping my words would anchor her to reality.

After hearing my words and as her gaze swept across the familiar surroundings, a gradual sense of recognition seemed to wash over her, easing her panic. She held her head as if trying to piece together the events, and then she asked me again, "Darx, what happened?"

"What is the last thing you remember?" I asked her.

Syvis fell silent as she stared at the ground, looking as if she was trying to remember, "I-I remember being in your arms in that dark place, and then there was a light..." her voice trailed off as she struggled to recall the missing fragments of her memory, "Then I wake up here... After that light, I can't remember anything. I-It's all just a blur," Syvis admitted, frustration coloring her voice, "I don't understand how we got out of that vortex."

"Syvis, what I will tell you now will be hard to believe and will sound like lies, and even for me, it is still hard to believe it, but I promise you all is the truth," I reply, "After what you remember when the light appeared, well that's when the goddess [Imris] appeared."

"T-the goddess [Imris]?" Syvis repeated in shock.

I began to explain, recounting the extraordinary encounter that had taken place. I detailed everything from the luminous figure descending toward me, her words, and what I felt at that moment. Syvis listened to me in silence, letting me talk with a mix of awe and disbelief, her eyes widening as I spoke about the goddess.

When I finished speaking, Syvis did not say anything right away and remained silent for a few seconds as if trying to understand all the information that I had just given her, to then, finally starting to talk, "If it were someone else who was telling me all this, I would think he is crazy, but I know you well, and I know you wouldn't tell me this unless you really believed it."

"Even though I saw all that, I'm also having a hard time believing what I'm telling you," I continued after a short pause, "To think we were trapped in that strange vortex, and then a goddess appeared to save us... sounds like a wild dream..."

Syvis continued talking, looking a little more serene, "Although thinking about it that way, maybe a goddess was the only entity that could have gotten us out of a place like that. Still, I wonder why she appeared like that in front of you. I hadn't heard of anything like this happening before," After a short pause, Syvis then looked at me with worried eyes, "Are you alright, Darx? You said the goddess did something to you. Something about your darkness."

As I glanced at Syvis's face, I could see her worry and concern for me on her face. It was evident from her expressions that she was deeply concerned about my well-being. The way she had put her own life in danger by accompanying me through the portal was a testament to her selflessness and love for me. It was moments like these that made me realize how much I loved her and how lucky I was to have her in my life. I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed with emotion.

"I'm okay!" I reply with a smile, "But what about you? How are you feeling? After all, you are the one who fell off a bridge and has been trapped in a strange portal in just a couple of days. I should be the one who felt concerned about your well-being."

"I'm fine too!" Syvis reply with a cute smile, "I've been in worse situations than this."

I must admit, Syvis never fails to impress me with her competence. It's like she was born with an innate ability to handle any task thrown her way. But what's even more remarkable is the way she does it. She somehow manages to do it in a way that I find sexy and cute at the same time.

Leaving that aside. Now that I think about it more carefully, I actually really feel good! Before I went through the portal, I felt super weak and could barely walk, but right now, I feel like I just woke up after a good night's rest. I don't feel the fatigue of the trip at all. How strange...

"Darx!" Syvis called me, snapping me out of my thoughts, "For now, we should get out of here and try to catch up with the others. Once outside, we can talk about everything else a little more calmly."

I nodded in agreement, "Yeah, we should try to catch up with the others."

As we prepared to leave, my gaze fell on the circular platform on the cave floor. Strange hieroglyphs glowed in blue, visible only to me. I knelt down, my fingers tracing the symbols.

"Darx, what are you doing?" Syvis asked, unable to see what had captured my attention.

"Look, there are these glowing symbols on the ground. I had seen them before on the walls marking the paths that were not traps, though I had never seen them on the floor," I replied, pointing at the hieroglyphs, "I can't read them, but they seem important. Those are bigger than the others."

"Glowing... symbols?" Syvis asked, looking confused.

"Oh, that's right. I hadn't mentioned that to you before. For some reason, I can see some strange symbols and letters that glow in blue. Those symbols are above the entrances that take us back, and it is how I was able to identify the illusions of false paths. Although I don't know why only I can see them."

"That's what Dante was referring to, right!? When did he say you could lead us back on the right path?" Syvis asked.

"That's right!"

I returned my attention to the symbols that were on the circular platform, and I started trying to read aloud what I thought those words were saying, but before I could make sense of them, a low hum filled the air, and the platform beneath us began to levitate. Syvis gasped, grabbing my arm for support. The ground gave way, and we slowly rose with the platform into the air.

"W-What on earth is happening?" Syvis exclaimed.

I could only manage a faltering, "I-I-I don't know!"

As we stood on the circular platform, it slowly began to ascend with us on top of it. Watching how little by little we began to move further and further away from the solid ground, Syvis and I exchanged confused glances, unsure of what to do or how to react to this unexpected turn of events.

"S-Should we jump off before going higher? I asked.

Syvis's expression looked like she was analyzing the situation positioning her hand pensively beneath her chin before offering her insight, "I think this circular platform is a mechanism for vertical transportation, facilitating movement upwards and downwards within the depths of this cavern."

I said with cautious optimism, "So, you believe it's safe?"

"Yes, it appears so," Syvis responded as the platform persisted in its upward trajectory, "We are now sure this place was a prison for the people of [Zrephia]. This place is made to not let anyone out with the long labyrinth and the traps that make it almost impossible to find your way back. Even so, it's logical to assume that a method for traversing this complex network efficiently must exist. Your unique ability to perceive and interact with these symbols likely triggered this very mechanism somehow. Even so, I have no idea what kind of magic is in those symbols to achieve something like this."

The platform kept ascending at a steady pace, then suddenly, speed increased slightly. I realized that we had missed our chance to jump off while we were still at a lower height. The platform continued to rise, and we soon found ourselves entering a circular hole in the ceiling that led to the top of the cave. Everything got quite dark, and the only source of light came from the glowing blue marks around the platform, which were now visible to Syvis as well for some reason.

As I kept admiring what was happening and I was looking at the walls around us, thinking how long it took us to get down here, and now we were going up in such a seamless way. I took a moment to ask Syvis, who was focused on the symbols on the platform, "Syvis, what will happen to our companions? At this rate, we will exit the cave before them."

Syvis turned to look at me, "That's true, but it should be fine. They are a large group of high-level adventurers, and also, there are no traps anymore. Since we were lucky enough to have found this way to get out of the cave and save ourselves the trouble of looking for them in this labyrinth, I say we get out of here."

"Yes, you're right."

Despite the relief of finally getting out of this cave, I couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt for my team, especially for Shalia, who would have to suffer all the way back. I tried to console myself with the thought that at least the journey back would be slightly easier now that we had cleared out most of the monsters and there were no more traps. Additionally, the weather had improved, and the bitter cold that had plagued us before was no longer a factor. I hope they can get out without any major problems.

Just as I was thinking about all that, I looked up and saw the bridge where we found Syvis. Shit!

"Syvis, look up! At this rate, we'll hit the bridge!" I yelled.

Syvis, who was still completely engrossed in studying the intricate symbols etched into the platform beneath our feet. I watched as she traced her fingers over the lines and curves, her eyes narrowed in concentration. However, her focus was abruptly shattered when she heard me and looked up and realized the dire situation we were in.

However, before we could even begin to formulate a plan of action, the problem resolved itself in the most unexpected way. The platform, seemingly of its own accord, shifted to the side and deftly avoided colliding with the bridge. Syvis and I were both left speechless. My mind struggled to comprehend what had just happened.

But even with my astonishment, as we passed by the bridge, I couldn't help but notice the remains of various monsters strewn haphazardly across its surface. These creatures appeared to have been dead for quite some time, mostly just bones. I couldn't help but wonder if our comrades had been responsible for their demise, but something about the scene felt off. Those corpses already seem to have been dead for a long time. I racked my brain, trying to recall if I had seen those same corpses during our previous crossing of the bridge. Yet I don't remember seeing them there when we crossed. How weird.

As the topic of monsters arose, a sudden realization dawned upon me that there must be a lot of those bat monsters still clinging to the walls. Going up thought here it was only a matter of time before they launched an attack on us. I let Syvis know that, and we both braced ourselves for the inevitable confrontation. With our weapons at the ready, we ascended higher and higher, expecting to come face to face with those vicious beasts. However, to our surprise, not a single one of them appeared. It was yet another strange occurrence in this already bizarre journey.

As we ascend higher and higher, we reach the collapsed bridge from where Syvis fell. Gazing out into the abyss below, the sheer magnitude of the distance between this point and where I found her is truly staggering. Syvis really fell a long distance.

"You really fell from quite a height! How did you manage to mitigate the impact of your fall?" I asked her, feeling curious with amazement evident in my voice.

As she recounted her recent fall, I couldn't help but be in amazement at her ability to use her elemental summons to soften her landing.

Shyvis told how with her earth summon, she transformed the hard ground beneath her into a bed of soft sand. But she didn't stop there. She then used her water summon to make a sphere of water around herself, further cushioning her fall and reducing the impact upon landing. And if that wasn't impressive enough, Syvis also utilized her fire summon to propel herself upwards, slowing the speed at which she was falling.

I couldn't believe how calmly and efficiently Syvis had handled the situation. Her quick thinking and ingenuity had saved her from what could have been a deadly fall. It's moments like those that genuinely showcase Syvis's incredible abilities, which never cease to amaze me.

As we continued our ascent, our conversation flowed more freely and animated. We delved into all sorts of topics speculating about all sorts of things related to what had happened since we entered the cave. I was really enjoying talking with Syvis like this, without worrying about our roles as adventurers from rival guilds and all that. After a long time, I felt I was having a normal conversation with my girlfriend. Although at times, I noticed that Syvis, for some reason, looked uncomfortable or avoided looking me in the eye.

Still talking with my girlfriend made the time go by faster, and without realizing it, we reached the end of the cave hole right where we started the whole expedition in the circular area surrounded by doors all around. The platform was the perfect size to cover the pot in the middle.

Without wasting any more time, Syvi and I walked down the platform and touched the solid ground once more. It was a relief to be out of the labyrinth and close to the cave's exit.

"We're almost out!" I said happily.

Syvis smiled at me without much energy and just told me, "Yes, we save ourselves a lot of trouble going up this way."

After saying that, Syvis began to walk on his own towards the exit, which took me a bit by surprise. I couldn't help but wonder if she was feeling down. I've been starting to notice a mood change in Syvis the closer we get to the exit. It was as if she was preoccupied with something and was no longer fully engaged in our conversation.

Without a second thought, I made up my mind to chase after her and take hold of her hand. Syvis appeared taken aback by my sudden action, yet she didn't resist. We walked towards the exit of the cavern, our hands intertwined as if we were on a date. The feeling of her soft and warm hand in mine made my heart skip a beat. Even so, Syvis was still quite quiet, so I said anything that came to my mind, trying to break the awkward silence.

"You know, I had never seen the sea before. When we arrived at the coastal village near here, I managed to see the sea in the distance. I would like to see the sea up close! We'll have to wait for our parties for a couple of days, so what do you say if, while we wait, you and I enjoy the beach? That sounds like a good idea, don't you think?"

Once again, Syvis didn't answer me right away, and without looking at me, she just replied with a weary voice, "I'm not sure if that's a good idea. I'm also pretty tired."

"Y-Yeah, m-maybe you're right. I'm sure you must be pretty tired, and we're in the middle of a quest, so maybe it's not as good an idea as I thought..."

Despite my efforts to engage in conversation with Syvis, it appeared that I was the only one in high spirits. Syvis maintained a grave countenance, staring straight ahead and offering only brief responses if any at all. My attempts to break the silence were met with stony silence, leaving me feeling uncertain and uneasy. It was as if Syvis was preoccupied with something weighing heavily on her mind, and my attempts to lighten the mood were falling on deaf ears. I couldn't help but wonder what was troubling Syvis and if there was anything I could do to help.

Almost reaching the end of the path, I began to see the sun's rays entering the cave. We kept walking, and then we turned around a curve where I was expecting to catch a glimpse of the exit. However, much to my surprise, I found that the entrance had been sealed with wood. The feeling of confusion and disbelief washed over me as I stood there, staring at the wooden barrier that blocked our way. It was a strange sight, and I couldn't help but wonder why someone would seal the exit, knowing that there were many adventurers inside the cave.

Syvis and I continue walking until we reach the wooden barrier, looking at each other, confused as to why they would do something like that.

"Why did they put that here?" I asked.

Syvis looked at the wooden barrier from top to bottom and then replied, "If they wanted to keep the adventurers who entered trapped, they wouldn't use wood to seal the door, so I guess they put it so that outsiders couldn't get in. Still, it's strange that they did it when we were still inside."

Without wasting time, Syvis called upon her earth elemental to aid us, and without much difficulty, the summon made a hole in the wooden barrier so we could pass.

As Syvis and I emerged from the dark and damp cave, the bright sunlight hit our eyes like a thousand tiny needles. It was almost painful, and I had to squint for a few moments until my eyes adjusted to the sudden change in light. Breathing in the fresh air outside, I felt a sense of liberation I had not experienced in a long time. The musty smell of the cave was still clinging to my clothes, but the natural scents of the outdoors were overpowering it.

However, as I stood there, taking in my surroundings, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. It was an uneasy sensation that crept up on me, like a whisper in the back of my mind. I couldn't quite put my finger on it what it was. Perhaps it was just my imagination running wild, but I had a nagging suspicion that there was more to this than what met the eye.