

Before my very eyes lay a sight so unimaginable that I couldn't help but question my own perception. I instinctively closed my eyes and rubbed them, hoping to dispel any illusions, yet the astonishing reality remained. The astonishment wasn't exclusive to me. Everyone remained motionless, almost like everyone had momentarily forgotten to breathe.

In my childhood days, while playing, I accidentally broke a window with a rock, etching a peculiar, deformed diamond-shaped hole surrounded by cracks. It is this memory that comes closest to describing the enigma that loomed before me now. However, unlike a mere window, there was no physical barrier here—just an inexplicable chasm that seemed to fracture space itself, defying all comprehension—a misshapen crack of blackness maybe 3 times my size in height.

Just what is that? A crack in space-time? I can't find how to describe something like that. I can feel the cold we have felt all this time coming from there.

"In the name of [Imris], what is that?" I heard Arthur's voice ask.

Everyone began to move cautiously, approaching that black spot. At that moment, I turned to see Syvis, and she also had her gaze fixed on that crack without blinking and with an expression of surprise.

"Hisa, what is that?" Seto asked.

"How am I supposed to know that," Hisa replied.

Maya was leading the group, marching ahead with unwavering confidence. She looked curious and couldn't resist stepping closer to get a better look. But just as quickly as she had approached, she suddenly made a big jump backward.

"M-Maya?" One of Maya's party members questioned her in confusion.

"Don't get too close! As I got closer, I felt a force that pulled me to that thing." Maya said loudly for all of us to hear.

The mere mention of that sends shivers down my spine. It was only for a second, but I managed to notice how Maya's body was dragged into that thing before she jumped. A samurai girl from the Oblivion guild, for some reason, tried to get closer, ignoring Maya's warning, and was also dragged into that thing. It looked like a magnet pulling in metal. Luckily for her, Kiara managed to grab her with her shadows and pulled her back before touching that thing.

"Does anyone have an idea what that thing is?" Arthur asked.

A few hushed whispers could be heard, but no one dared to speak up. It wasn't until Hisa broke the silence with her observation. With a hint of uncertainty in her voice, she spoke, "It doesn't seem to be an illusion or really any magic that I'm aware of."

"Magic? Come on, let's be realistic here. There's no way magic could do something as bizarre as that," Celeste remarked with a hint of skepticism in her voice while gazing at the peculiar anomaly before us, "It's almost as if someone took a pair of scissors and sliced through the very fabric of reality itself."

"Space-Time magic, ...perhaps," Syvis spoke.

As soon as the words escaped Syvis' lips, the attention of everyone there was immediately drawn towards her. All eyes were fixated on her, eagerly waiting to hear what she had to say next.

"Space-Time magic?" Kase asked.

"I'm not affirming that what is in front of us is that, but there are records that that kind of magic existed in ancient times. Whispers from the annals of time suggest that some of [Zrephia's] royals were capable of employing that very kind of magic. It's the only explanation I can think of." Syvis continued.

"What nonsense are those, Dark Elf?" Celeste replied, sounding irritated, "I've never heard anything like that. Also, do you see anyone from [Zrephia's] royal family around here to do something like that?"

The tension between them was almost tangible. It was clear that there was some kind of animosity between Syvis and Celeste, but given the gravity of the situation at hand, it wasn't something that mattered now.

Still, what Syvis had just revealed was incredibly intriguing. The fact that there had been a time in history when such powerful magic existed was something that I had never even considered before. And yet, it made perfect sense that Syvis would know about it - after all, she had always been fascinated by the history of Zrephia and its alchemists. She has said that the best alchemists that ever existed were also from there. I got the impression that Syvis wanted to find a way to create a potion like the orange ones she makes but have a permanent effect.

"If nobody knows what it is, let's not waste any more time trying to speculate, and let's find a way to get out of here before we freeze to death in this place," Maya spoke.

After some more discussion, everyone split up to try to find something useful or a hint of what all this is about.

"AHH!"

The sound of Syvis' sudden scream jolted me out of my thoughts, causing me to turn towards her in alarm. Her eyes were fixed on something in the distance, and I could see the surprise etched on her face.

"Darx, wait here," After those words, she removed my arm from her shoulder and took off in the direction of whatever had caught her attention.

I hesitated for a moment, unsure of what to do, before following her with difficulty walking at a slower pace. As I drew closer, I saw Syvis bend down to pick up a bag from the ground. It was her magic bag, the one she always carried with her. Did Syvis lose her magic bag when she fell? In a flash, Syvis pulled out a bottle of bright orange liquid from the bag and drank it down in one desperate gulp. I knew what that potion was for. It was the only thing that could suppress Syvis' natural instincts as a Dark Elf. Without it, she would be at the mercy of her impulses.

It dawned on me that if Syvis didn't have her bag, she had been without her potion for several days now. Ever since I met Syvis, I had noticed her strange. Was that the reason? No, wait... before that... when I found Syvis, she was with Ka-

"I've been expecting you."

Out of nowhere, the sound of a sinister voice echoed through the cave, sending shivers down my spine and causing everyone to draw their weapons in a state of alarm, ready to defend ourselves against any potential threat. I, too, unsheathed my sword. We scanned our surroundings, trying to locate the source of the ominous voice.

The eerie silence lingered for a few seconds before the chilling voice resurfaced, sending shivers down my spine once again, "I didn't expect that it would be a group of Humans and Beast-Kind who would come here after such a long time." Its tone was deep and husky. The voice sounded loud but, at the same time, as if the source of the voice was very far away.

It was difficult to pinpoint where it was coming from. However, we could tell that it was emanating from the black crack. We stood there, perplexed and on guard surrounding that dark crack. It sounded like an old man, but what was someone like that doing in this desolate cave? And why did it suddenly speak to us?

"Who are you? Show yourself!" Kase yelled, looking at the crack of darkness.

"Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to show myself, but if you wish to know, my name is Selgoth, one of the Demon King's generals."

A-A demon king general!? It is a well-known fact that every Demon King has his own set of generals who are the most powerful demons under his command. These generals are known to possess immense strength and power, often surpassing even the mightiest of S-Ranks. I

wonder if this person claiming to be one is telling the truth. If so, what could have possibly brought someone of such high status to a place like this?

"You expect us to believe that?" Maya spoke, "Show yourself if you want us to believe what you say."

"I simply cannot comply with your request. As you may have noticed, I am currently confined within this portal, rendering any need for you to remain vigilant unnecessary. Please, take a moment to unwind and let your guard down."

"Do you expect us to believe that?" Arthur asked.

"I can't demonstrate that what I say is true, but I assure you that I have been locked up in this place for a long time," Selgoth spoke, "However, I am curious to know what a group of adventurers like you are doing in this place. The last thing I heard from the 2 guards who were here before they left and didn't come back was that the war would start. Tell me, the war is over?" Who won?"

"Do you know about the war?" Arthur asked, "The war is just abo-"

"Shut up, Arthur!" Kase said, cutting him off, "You expect us to give you information for free?" Now talking with Selgoth, Kase continued, "Tell us what this place is and what you're doing here first if you want us to answer your questions."

"That's a strange question you're asking, but it sounds like a fair deal," Selgoth replied, "This place is a prison, specially made for high-level Demons like me. Many of you are human, so you should know that."

We should know that? How could we possibly know any of that when this place has been underground for so many years? Also, Selgoth is trying to sound nice, but something tells me he's not someone we should trust.

"Do you know the way to disable the traps to get out of here?" Arthur asked.

"I know, but it's now my turn to ask."

"Keep answering!" Maya yelled, "If what you say is true, what did you do to be in this place? And even more so, who locked you up here?"

Selgoth was slow to respond, creating a silence that, for some reason, gave me chills.

"...I told the Demon King that trusting the Red-Eyed Princess was a big mistake. I-I tried to make him see the error he was making," Selgoth answered, but this time it sounded different. As if the

kind tone he had been having had disappeared, and he seemed instead to be talking to himself in frustration, "As his faithful subject, I did what had to be done."

"Red-Eyed Princess? What are you talking about?" Maya asked.

"HAHAHAHA! What else? It was all that Princess's fault!! I had to kill her! KILL HER! AHHHHHHHHHHH!" Selgoth said, sounding like a madman.

W-What's wrong with him? Is he losing his mind?

"So what did you do? Di, you killed her?" Kase asked.

"I-I try... I try, I try, I try I... I-I destroyed many villages and killed many of her people to force her out of her castle, HAHAHAHA!"

"This guy is crazy!" Seto spoke.

"If it hadn't been for Dhunitor, I would have finished that princess..." Selgoth continued, "Ahhhgg... why.... Ugm.... Ahhhhh!" Suddenly Selgoth's cries were heard. He just started to cry out of nowhere.

"D-Dhunitor!? You mean Dhunitor, The Oracle of Spells?" Syvis asked, looking surprised.

I turned to see Syvis, who seemed quite surprised to hear that name.

"Do you know who he is?" Kase asked her.

"Of course, I know! Everyone who is interested in magic knows his name. Much of the knowledge about the magic we know comes from him. He was a magician from the royal family of [Zrephia] who was considered the strongest magician of those times, which would make him automatically the most powerful magician of all time." Syvis answered.

"Y-Yes... I lost the fight against Dhunitor, and the damn Princess locked me up here." Selgoth spoke, "I waited and waited and waited for my fellow demons to come and get me out of this place. They are taking too long! Too... long..."

Selgoth's erratic behavior has left everyone on edge. It's hard to predict what mood he will be in from one moment to the next. He can go from being friendly and kind to being consumed by anger and behaving like a complete lunatic. There are even times when he breaks down and cries uncontrollably. It's clear that something is seriously wrong with him. Despite his unpredictable behavior, there is one thing that I'm sure everyone can agree on-he emits a powerful demonic presence from the portal. It's a palpable feeling that can be sensed even without any sensory abilities. This is a testament to just how strong Selgoth truly is. Given the intensity of this demonic presence, it's no wonder that everyone is acting cautiously.

"HAHAHAHA! But my waiting ends today... the day has finally arrived! The Demon King came for me! He will set me free! And once that happens, I will take my revenge on Dhunitor and that evil Princes, HAHAHAHAHAHA! Everything will go back to the way it was before."

"It doesn't make sense what you say," Maya spoke, "What makes you think that the Demon King will come for you today?"

"I felt him! He woke me up from my dream! Soon he will be here, and he finish you off! HAHA HAHA! If the war continues, I will take care of putting you inferior races in their place!"

Is that true? According to Dante and the rest, they felt a momentary powerful presence that obliterated the bridge where Syvis was standing. Selgoth said that that power belonged to the Demon King himself, but such a suggestion seems far-fetched and illogical. The latest reports indicate that the Demon King is still entrenched in his own territory, embroiled in a civil war and preparing for a conflict with the humans and other races. It seems highly unlikely that he could have made his way to the South undetected.

However, there were indeed demons present in the cave, and their purpose was seemingly to free Selgoth. It's possible that the powerful presence felt by everyone was actually Selgoth himself, exerting his considerable power in an attempt to break free from his confinement. It's difficult to say for certain.

"Unfortunately for you, that won't happen," Maya said, "There's no way the Demon King is here, and we have already eliminated the demons that were in this place."

"Ha! Damn liar! I answered your answers, and you decided to lie! But what did I expect from Humans and Beas-Kinds, after all, that's the only thing they know how to do," Selgoth said, sounding more coherent as at the beginning, "You can say what you want, but you can't fool me!"

"I can answer your questions honestly if you want, but more than that, even if you leave this place, your revenge is impossible. The people who put you in this place died many centuries ago." Maya reply.

"More lies! It's just more lies made by the Royal Family of [Zrephia]. I clearly heard you talk about the impending war between demons and the other races. You just want to bend my will, but you wo-"

"They are not lies. [Zrephia's] royal family ceased to exist a long time ago," Maya said, interrupting Selgoth, "The war between the Demons and the other races was won by us. The war we were talking about is another. You are just a ghost from the past looking for a conflict that no longer exists. To tell the truth, the position you are in is shameful, but I have no pity for you."

"Wh- y-you're lying! I'm sure it hasn't been that long... " Selgoth said, sounding nervous.

"I will answer your questions as you want," Maya continued, "The fall of Zrephia happened in the year 1121, and a few years later, we won the war against the demons. Now it is the year 1644. The Demon King you've been waiting for has been dead for hundreds of years."

"1644... t-that can't be... t-the Demon King.... dead... Selgoth said, almost muttering in shock, "You are lying... It's just another lie from that fucking lying princess! Does she really expect me to fall for her lies again?"

"You can believe what you want. I don't care. Now tell us how to get out of here?" Kase spoke.

"Even to lie, you humans are incompetent. If the Royal Family had really disappeared, you wouldn't have brought one of them with you! One of those wretched red eyes! I will never tell you how to get out of here."

Everyone turned to see me. The color of my eyes has always caused this confusion, "I-I'm not.."
I try to explain.

"That kid is not who you think," Dante spoke, "Your destiny was marked the day you were locked in this place, and there is nothing that can be done about it. If you don't want to help us get out of here, that's fine. We have a way to find the exit without your help." Saying that, Dante turned to see me.

Is Dante implying that I can see the illusion of the exits and I can find the right path!?

"Dante, is that true?" Maya asked.

"It's true! I'm not lying." Dante reply.

"Damn, why didn't you tell us anything? Celeste asked, sounding mad.

"We were already practically at the bottom of the cave, and I didn't know if Darx would wake up soon before that." Dante reply.

"Darx!? Can you really see the way back?" Maya asked me.

"Y-Yes, I think I can!"

As I stood there, I couldn't help but feel their collective gaze weighing heavily upon me. It was as if they were silently demanding answers from me. Now they will expect me to lead them out of this labyrinthine maze.

But the truth was, I wasn't entirely confident in my ability to navigate us back to the exit. The twisting corridors and endless twists and turns had left me disoriented and unsure of which direction we had come from more than once. However, as I scanned my surroundings, I could see a series of bright blue hieroglyphics etched into the walls around us that the others didn't seem to see.

"So Selgoth. Your help is not needed after all. You will have to keep waiting." Arthur spoke.

"NO, NO, NO, NO! I NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE!" Selgoth started yelling again, sounding crazy, "If you don't get me out of here, I'm going to kill you all!"

"Pay for your crimes, scum!" Hisa spoke.

"Let's not waste any time. Check the place for anything valuable or anything useful. Once we're done, let's leave this place," Maya spoke, then her eyes locked onto mine, and I could feel the weight of her gaze. "I have to ask you again, are you absolutely sure that you can lead us back?" she inquired with a hint of skepticism.

I took a deep breath and met her gaze head-on. "Yes, I'm sure," I replied confidently. "

Maya nodded slowly, seemingly satisfied with my response. "Okay then. Once we are outside, there are more things I want to ask you.

"O-Okay..." I reply.

Everyone began to move around, ignoring the threats of Selgoth.

"This wouldn't stay like this..." Selgoth spoke, "If you really don't get me out of here, I won't be able to exact my revenge..."

I heard how Selgoth began to cry again. But then something happened that I never expected.

"I see..." Selgoth said, almost muttering, "If this is the end, at least I'll take one of her blood with me! DIE!!!!!!!!!"

Suddenly the ground began to move. A strong demonic power was felt, causing the cave to shake. Right at that moment, I felt like my body was being pulled to that dark crack with great force. I tried to hold on to a rock. The demonic power that I felt was coming from the portal was immense. At that moment, I truly understood that Selgoth never lied and realized the true and terrifying power of a Demon King General.

It seemed that that demonic power did something to me because when I blinked, I was no longer in the cave, and now I was in front of Ophelia.

"Ophelia?" I asked, confused.

"D-Darx," I heard Ophelia say as well, sounding confused, "W-What's going on? Why do you feel like I know that presence? Who are you with?"

Before I could answer, I blinked again and was back in the cave, holding on to the rock, trying not to get pulled into that portal. However, I failed and couldn't hold for long because my body was still very weak.

Kiara tried to use her shadow to grab me, but she was too far away, and she didn't reach me in time. I heard the screams of everyone yelling my name, and just when my body was about to touch that dimensional crack, I felt Syvis hug me.

"S-Syvis..."

"Hold on to me, Darx!" Syvis screamed.

"SYVIS, NO!!!" I caught a glimpse of Kase yelling.

Syvis had run and jumped to try to pull me, but the force with which I was being pulled was too much, and we both ended up going through that portal. I had my eyes closed as I hugged Syvis. Then when I finally opened them, I saw nothing—just darkness.

"S-Syvis, are you alright?" It was my first instinct to make sure she was okay.

"D-Darx!? I'm fine... what about you?"

"Silly, why did you jump?" I asked while hugging her tightly.

"M-My body moved on its own. I just didn't want to part with you again."

Syvis also hugged me tightly. I knew we were in big trouble, but knowing that Syvis risked her life like this for me gave me joy.

"Syvis, we have to get out of here!"

When we stood up, we saw the crack where we entered. On the other side, we could see our companions looking in our direction. I grabbed Syvis's hand and wanted to run in that direction, but it was impossible. We couldn't get close.

"Hahaha, don't waste your time. You will be here locked up for all eternity."

Syvis and I turned in the direction of that voice.

On the ground, we saw a demon but not like the others I've seen. Is he Selgoth? He sounds like him. His demonic presence tells me that at some point in his life, he was someone very powerful, but now this demon looked very old, with only bones and skin. It was noticeable that he could barely breathe and couldn't even move.

"Maybe I couldn't kill the Princess, but I'll leave happy knowing that I could at least get revenge on one of her Royal Blood."

"What did you fucking do?" I asked, mad.

"Hahaha, I used to be able to use gravity magic. With that, I pulled you to this place, even though it cost... *Coff* my life. *Coff* *Coff* *Coff* It seems that this body can no longer withstand my power, hahaha! *Coff* *Coff* Even so..., it is better to die than to be in this place for all eternity. Now you will suffer the same torment that I did."

"TELL ME HOW To GET OUT OF HERE!" I yelled at him.

"There is no way out of here. Once I die, the portal will close forever. You should be glad that once the portal disappears, the traps in the cave will also disappear, and your friends will be able to leave this place, *Coff**Coff* Y-You will feel what it is like to be abandoned! Hahaha!"

After saying that, I saw how his laugh became weaker.

"Ah? W-Wait..." Selgoth's smiley expression changed to shock, "W-Why can I feel her from you? *Coff* *Coff* W-Why can I feel Zaine from someone with your eyes....? *Coff* W-What the hell are you?"

"Zaine? What are you talking about?" I asked, confused.

"Darx, the portal!" Syvis yelled at me.

When I turned to see the portal, I saw how quickly the portal was getting smaller. I turned once more to see Selgoth and saw that he was dying.

"Noo!" I yelled.

With a sense of urgency, I tightly grasped Syvis's hand, and we bolted towards the portal. My heart was racing as I watched the shimmering gateway gradually shrink before my eyes. It was as if time was against us, determined to trap us in that desolate place forever. With each passing second, the portal's light grew dimmer until it finally vanished completely, leaving us stranded in that unknown place. The realization hit me like a ton of bricks-we were completely and utterly alone, trapped here.

"NOOO! S-Syvis, do you know any way to get out of here?" I asked, feeling desperate.

Seeing Syvis, she was in complete shock.

"I don't..." Syvis said, sounding defeated.

As darkness surrounded us, I felt a sense of hopelessness engulfing my heart. Syvis and I were trapped in this eerie otherworldly dimension, and I couldn't see a way out. The darkness seemed to be closing in on us, suffocating our every breath. Syvis clung to my arm, and I could sense her fear matching my own.

"Just hold on, Syvis," I said, trying to sound reassuring even though I had no idea what to do. "We'll find a way out of here."

But as minutes turned into what felt like hours, my hope dwindled. This place was like squeezing the energy out of my body. I lost track of how much time passed. Syvis and I just hold each other tight the whole time feeling like we're in nowhere.

As we stood there, surrounded by an endless abyss of darkness, I felt my heart sink. It seemed as if all hope had been lost, and there was no way out of this void. But just as I was about to give up, a glimmer of light caught my eye in the distance. That small point of light quickly began to expand, consuming all the darkness. The brightness was so intense that I had to shield my eyes with my hands, but even through my fingers, I could distinguish a radiant figure emerging from that light. Her luminous presence was illuminated the void.

"D-Darx," Syvis stammered, her voice trembling with disbelief.

As the bright light dissipated, my eyes adjusted to the dimmer surroundings. I found myself in a new place. I looked around, and the darkness had been replaced with a vast expanse of pure white. It was as if I had been transported to a new world.

"I am [Imris], the Goddess of the humans," I hear a feminine voice resonating in my ears.

I lifted my face and focused on the figure slowly descending towards me, enveloped in a halo of light.