

[Adam POV]

I had escaped Irene's clutches, and still, instead of being grateful I had been given the chance to leave without any harm, I felt angry, angry that I hadn't been able to fight her.

I knew that was a stupid feeling.

My odds of beating her right now were below zero, entering the realm of negative numbers. But even then, even when I knew without a shred of doubt that I would've stood absolutely no chance against her, I was angry.

Now that I think about it. This is not the first time I have experienced this kind of feeling.

It also happened with Gildarts during my S-Class Trial.

I remember being fucking thrilled at the idea of going against him, even though I knew without a doubt that I would lose.

Am I turning into a battle-crazed kind of man?

'Perhaps,' Zanryuzuki muttered, and I could feel her presence in the depths of my mind, like a faint breeze that rumbled through my inner world.

I sighed.

I suppose if that's the case, I better make fucking sure that I'm always stronger than those I face against.

"To think Alakitasia had such terrifying mages," Mavis muttered floating right beside me, her face a mask of disbelief and horror, but more than anything, concern.

So she didn't know?

I wonder if she knows who's the King of that continent.

I sighed, the scorching heat of the desert sun beating down on me without mercy. With each step I took, particles of sand flew up with each motion, coating parts of my skin with a fine layer of sand mixed with sweat. "Good we found out now, and not later."

Mavis' green eyes met mine for a moment, her lips pressed together in a tight line as she pondered over my words. "Yeah, you're right, at least now we know what to expect. Unlike before."

I knew very well what to expect before I made my way to the capital. The thing is, even knowing what to expect had left me staggeringly unprepared.

Next time it would be different though.

"So, Mavis," I said, tilting my head slightly in her direction, "How long before we reach the place where the gems are located?"

Mavis let out a sigh, arching her back as she drifted around in the weightlessness of her condition, her body quickly shifting into a graceful, yet very slow backflip as she hummed out. "I'd say an hour or two if we keep this pace."

An hour or two?

Not bad.

Considering we have been moving for more than twelve hours, most of which I have covered using Shunpo, I say we are advancing fast, all things considered.

On that note, I can't help but wonder what exactly makes this last ingredient so difficult to acquire.

I guess I will have to wait and find out.

Fifty minutes later of sand.

I had arrived at my destination.

I won't lie, the fifty-minute trek across the sun-bleached desert was not fun, at all. It was nothing more than a haze of yellow sand and red rocks, seasoned with the punishing midday heat that seemed beyond determined to kill me.

Alas, despite the terrible conditions, here I was, at the foot of the ruins of an old temple, its timeworn walls a reminder of a great civilization that had most likely long been forgotten.

Taking a deep breath, I approached the old temple and as I do so, I can see the remnants of a once magnificent structure rising out of the desert sand.

From what little I could gather, the temple was built in the shape of a giant fortress or something similar, with high walls made of sandstone blocks that looked like they had been eroded by time, wind, and sand.

The walls were covered in ancient hieroglyphics that depicted scenes of great battles, victories, and offerings to some kind of god.

As I walked through the massive entrance gate, I find myself in an open courtyard full of skeletons, from animals to humans, surrounded by columns that I supposed once supported the roof that has long since collapsed.

In the center of the courtyard, I could see the remains of a massive altar. If I had to take a guess, I would say it was once used for sacrifices to the god this temple was dedicated to.

The altar as everything else so far was broken and weathered, and for the most part, covered in sand.

Walking through the temple and past the altar, I can see the remains of once-beautiful statues and carvings that have been worn down by the passage of time.

On the walls behind the statues, there were many inscriptions, some of which according to Mavis, depicted the glory of the god and his role in the battles his followers had, while others depicted the offerings made to the god by his followers in order to appease him or please him.

In one corner of the temple behind two broken pillars I had to cut down, I found a small room that has, in comparison to everything so far, been partially preserved.

Here, I can see the remains of various armor sets, weapons, and other battle gear-related items, possibly offerings to the god, or rewards the god in question would give to his followers.

The room in question had an eerie feeling as if someone was present, but not really.

At first, I thought it could've been the souls of those that dedicated their lives to the temple, but as soon as that thought crossed my mind, I quickly dismissed it, knowing that if that was the case, I could've heard them by now, or seen them.

The nature of my powers made it easier for me to deal with the paranormal aspect of things, and this... this didn't feel like that at all.

Keeping my guard up, I continued to explore the temple, eventually coming across a staircase that led to the lower levels of the structure through several layers of spider web from what I could see.

Taking a deep breath, I descended the stone steps, listening to the sound of my boots echoing in the ever-expanding darkness, until I reached the bottom of the stairs and felt a cool welcoming gust of air brush past me.

"That's the first cool thing I have felt in this wretched continent," I chuckled, looking at Mavis.

Mavis' eyes lit at this, her enthusiasm becoming palpable as she began to explain even though I hadn't asked a question of any kind, "Temples, especially ones like this, were designed with a complex network of air tunnels and chambers that create a natural air flow system." She gestured with her hands as if to demonstrate the various paths the air took throughout the temple, even though I couldn't see more than two feet

ahead of me with how dark it was. "It's quite remarkable how they were able to optimize their ventilation techniques so well!"

Smiling at her antics that more than not made me forget she was older than me, I turned my attention ahead and continued walking until I found myself face to face with an immense door, of around twenty feet tall, made of marble and carved with intricate symbols, its age visible in its weathered surface.

Mavis was the first to move, as she cautiously stepped up to the intricately carved marble door, running her fingers over the symbols that were carved into it. "This must be the room of the god of this temple," she whispered, excitement clear in her voice. "Temples such as this one were known to have special rooms made just for the gods. It was a way of honoring their presence and making sure they had a comfortable place to stay if they ever visited."

"And let me guess, the gems are within the room, right?" I asked jokingly, already knowing the answer to that question.

"If there's any left in this temple, yes," Mavis replied, her eyes still fixed on the old marble door as if it was the best thing in the whole world.

Thought so.

"Ok, let's light up the place a little bit before moving forward," I said, as I held my left hand up, summoning a small, glowing yellow sphere of concentrated energy, which hovered in mid-air and illuminated the area around us.

This was a nameless Kido, one not intended to be used as an offensive tactic, or defensive, just as a way to train one's control over energy in general, nevertheless this nameless Kido could still be used as a makeshift lantern for situations like this.

As the room lit up with my spell, I was met with a terrifying picture. Everywhere I looked there were bones, some crushed beneath the fallen stones, others scattered in piles, their hollow eye sockets staring into eternity like silent sentinels of terror.

"I will go ahead and say they tried to enter the room as well," I replied, looking at the skeletons, some of which were pointing with their bony arms outstretched towards the door, as though they'd all been trying to reach it before they perished.

Mavis nodded in a grim manner, her lips pressed tightly together and her jaw clenched. "That's what I was afraid of."

I knit my brows together in a furrow of intrigue, my lips pursed ever so slightly. "Is this why you said it didn't matter who came, that Gildarts or I stood the same chance?"

Mavis slowly nodded her head. "Gods, unlike some might want to believe, are pretty real," she began, her voice barely above a whisper, "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. And trust me when I say that it's easier than you might think to rile them up and be the object of their wrath."

I could understand to some level why there were atheists in my previous world, but here? Where people pissing fire is about as common as the common flu? I really didn't understand how people here couldn't believe in them.

"It might be best if we leave," Mavis muttered, her shoulders sagging as she exhaled in resignation, before turning on her heel towards the steep, zig-zagging flight of stone we had climbed down. "There's always another temple."

I could see her point.

Angering a God had caused the unforgiving hammer of divine retribution to befall upon Zeref and her, damning them to forever wander and suffer more than their supposed crimes deserved.

That being said, I could feel an invisible pull towards the room, that despite the risks that lurked just beyond the threshold, it seemed to whisper an invitation, daring me to cross over.

It could be that...

Or the relentless heat I had been subjected to, alongside the unavoidable fact that I would be finding grains of sand in my body for months after returning home.

I was fucking tired of the desert.

Taking my decision, I unsheathed my Zanpakuto and raised it up, feeling the weight of its handle in my hands, before I swung down at the door firmly, cutting through the marble door with a single effortless stroke, sending shards of gray marble flying around the room.

"Adam what have you done?!" Mavis gasped as she turned around staring at me, her green eyes widened in shock at what I had done.

"What does it look like? I just mowed the lawn," I replied in a joking manner, gesturing to the now broken marble door, before sheathing my Zanpakuto back.

I gave Mavis a sly glance before stepping over the broken pieces of marble that lay on the ground and entering the tunnel that if Mavis was right, would lead to the main chamber of the temple.

Inside, the air was still, and the room was illuminated by torches that hung from the walls, revealing its pristine

condition. Carefully navigating my way through the hall, I rounded the corner and stepped into an immense chamber.

The chamber in question was lushly decorated, with towering statues of marble and granite lining the walls. Piles of gold coins were heaped atop chests of jewels, glittering in the light from the gilded chandeliers.

"Adam, we have to go..." Mavis whispered urgently.

I could honestly understand her apprehension, but I had traveled far too long to simply give up. Besides, Cordelia was running out of time, so any detours could be the difference between saving her or not.

"After I get the gems," I replied, my eyes darting from corner to corner, looking at every single hidden nook, searching for the gems or their possible location.

Maybe that which I was looking for was inside one of the chests.

With that in mind, I stepped forward reaching out to one of the many chests around in order to search inside them, however, as soon as my fingers brushed against the chest, the room erupted in chaos.

The statues that decorated the room suddenly sprang to life, their stone limbs cracking as they leaped off from their pedestals and lunged at me.

Surprised by this, I looked at the statues coming at me and deftly dodged their first attack with a swift sidestep.

As I did this, more statues converged on me, their movements mechanical in nature, but powerful and fast. Calmly, I continued to evade their blows, wondering if this was the actions of the God of this temple or just a defense mechanism set in place.

Pushing those thoughts aside, I leaped over the outstretched arm of one of the statues, tucking into a roll as I landed on the other side, before spinning on my heel, kicking another statue square in the chest and shattering it into a thousand pieces.

The remaining statues circled me warily, their eyes fixed on what I could only assume they saw as their prey, a nimble one at that.

I smiled, waving at them to see if I could get any kind of reaction. Seeing none, I decided to stop playing around, and shatter the rest, however, just as I was about to make my move, I heard a loud rumbling from deep within the temple.

The statues froze, all signs of life leaving them just as soon as it had come to them.

"Well that was... anticlimactic," I said, my eyebrows furrowed in confusion as I surveyed the now quiet room. I'd been expecting the statues to fight to the end, not to go back to their decorative purpose the moment one crumbled down.

Beyond that.

Just what was that rumble I heard a moment ago?

Whatever it was, it was clearly the reason behind the statues going back to being just that, plain old statues.

As I pondered about this, the sound of someone clapping their hands reverberated through the air, coming from right above us. Reacting at the same time, Mavis and I turned our heads up following the sound we were hearing, to see a figure hovering above us midair, clad in a shining set of Spartan armor, his face hidden in the shadows of a polished helmet as he slowly descended to meet us.

The man glided down from the air, his feet touching the ground with a loud thud. Once there, he surveyed the area and noted the mild layers of dust and cobwebs around that had probably formed since the last visitor to the temple. "It's been a while since anyone visited," he commented aloud, his voice echoing in the chamber.

Mavis widened her eyes in shock, and that was enough to tell me what I was dealing with. A God.

I shifted uneasily in my spot, my gaze lingering on the man in front of me, who still continued to survey the room without paying much attention to me. "Well, to be fair, it appears that most of the people who have come to visit this temple have unfortunately died before being able to do anything."

The man turned his head towards me, his spartan helmet covering most of his features before he let out a booming laugh. "Right you are!"

The man slowly turned around to face me, much of his features covered by the helmet he wore. The man kept his gaze on me for a moment, before opening his mouth wide, releasing a loud and hearty laugh. "Right you are!" he exclaimed.

If the man was truly a God, I'll be the first one to admit that this was not how I expected my first encounter with a God to be.

"So, tell me, kid? What is it that you seek in my temple?"