

The Compass

Through the blizzard and treacherous terrain, the compass faithfully guided Matreus to this secluded location. His purpose was the only thing standing between him and the raging elements. Now, standing before the imposing double doors, he prepared to uncover what lay within. After one final, tense scan of the area, he cautiously pushed open the heavy wooden doors and stepped into the dimly lit corridor.

The corridor stretched out before him, identical paths leading in both directions. The compass's needle pointed downward, a silent, insistent urge. Though his legs ached with fatigue, he resisted the urge to rest and forced himself ahead, trusting in the compass's guidance.

After what felt like hours, Matreus arrived at another set of doors, marked with signs indicating the correct path. He hesitated briefly, considering a momentary respite for his weary body. He took a deep, shuddering breath and forced his legs to move, propelled by a will that mirrored the compass's unwavering lead.

As he ventured deeper, the chamber he entered was shrouded in darkness, save for a single torch casting a faint glow. The shadows danced and twisted on the stone, their movements eerie and mesmerizing. Matreus surveyed the chamber, noting the subtle yet unsettling shifts. He resolved to push aside his unease and uncover the secrets hidden within this place.

It was then that his eyes fell upon the figure responsible for the shifting shadows: a weathered old man, sitting cross-legged against a pillar that seemed part of the very mountain itself. Clad in a plain white robe, he emanated an aura of unsettling familiarity.

The stranger spoke softly, breaking the profound silence that enveloped the chamber. "About time it brings you here," the old man said, his voice a whisper in the stillness.

Matreus blinked, struggling to clear his mind from the shock. Recognition flickered within him, and memories flooded back. It was his long-lost mentor, Marcus, the great explorer whose disappearance had puzzled the academy for years.

"Professor?" Matreus finally uttered, his voice tight with astonishment.

Marcus nodded, acknowledging Matreus's realization. "Hello, Matreus."

"I... everyone thought you were lost during your expedition," Matreus stammered, his emotions swirling.

Marcus shook his head, dispelling the misconception.

"I was never lost, Matreus. My physical body may have vanished, but my spirit roamed freely, exploring the world. It's how it has been since we parted ways. We explorers are bound to our bodies, but our spirits are untethered."

The revelation left Matreus perplexed, his mind grappling to comprehend the profound implications. The old man's words painted a picture of mystery and untold secrets lurking within these lands.

"What does it all mean?" Matreus implored, seeking answers.

Marcus evaded a direct response, gesturing vaguely behind him. "This place belongs to another, a powerful entity. I chose not to return, for it holds countless enigmas yet to be unraveled."

Matreus's gaze shifted to the book he held, the unfinished work of Marcus himself, entrusted to him long ago. The weight of its knowledge and purpose resonated within him.

"You brought me here to continue your journey, to learn from this place," Matreus realized, his voice a mix of awe and determination.

Marcus smiled, a glimmer of pride shining in his eyes. "Indeed, your journey is incomplete, just as mine remains unfinished. The compass, a guide for explorers like us, has chosen you to carry on the quest it set upon when it found its way into your hands."

A wave of frustration, rather than resolution, washed over Matreus. He stared at the compass, its needle no longer wavering but pointing steadfastly towards Marcus.

"Why are you making *it* choose for me?" Matreus demanded, his voice gaining a hard edge.

Marcus remained silent, a knowing expression on his face. The compass began to glow, its intensity growing until it outshone the torches that lit the chamber.

In a whirlwind of emotions and questions, Matreus clutched the compass tightly. Its spinning needle gradually slowed, aligning itself not with a direction, but with the wall, seemingly toward the place where Marcus had stood.

Marcus sat up, a smile gracing his lips. "Ah, yes. Your journey holds much yet to be learned and taught, just as I once guided you. The compass points to me because it recognizes that it must return to its rightful explorer, to assist and complete the path it had set upon when it first found you."

A surge of defiance swelled within Matreus, and he glanced at the compass once more. The sacred relic of the academy seemed to demand its reunion with Marcus. *Was this his only purpose—to be a delivery boy for a relic?* Was this a test, a trial to prove his worth?

With a firm, decisive motion, Matreus placed the compass back into his bag, sealing it tightly.

"No," Matreus declared, his voice resonating through the chamber, firm and resolute. "My journey isn't finished."

The compass glowed once more, intensifying until it enveloped the room in brilliance. And then, as suddenly as it had begun, the glowing ceased.

When Matreus opened his eyes, he found himself alone in an empty chamber. The stone walls, floor, and ceiling stood as silent witnesses, holding the mysteries of this forgotten place.