

Abyssal A 1011

Chapter 1011: Five's Name

With the discovery of the black material, everyone was allowed an earlier break than usual.

Of course, no one complained since it meant they could avoid work for a day.

With the reveal of the black material, the atmosphere of the pit changed. There were more distortions in the air along with a myriad of sparkles.

The boss stopped shouting. Even when one of them accidentally bumped into him, he didn't kill out of frustration. Instead, he simply chose to ignore the kid for the moment.

This decision alone was enough to tell the slaves in the pit the severity of the situation.

Whatever Five had discovered had just changed everything.

Five wanted to stay. To keep digging.

But against her will, the boy dragged her away. Pushing her luck against the boss would only cause her death rather than achieving what she wanted.

Instead, they should be using this chance to figure out what's going on.

Five was reluctant. If it was before... she might've ignored him. But she knew he wanted to help her at the end of the day and chose to listen.

Leaving the pit, the slaves were ordered to wait for the boss's return.

She sat facing the pit. Felt the wind brushing against her face.

Now that she saw the strange void, the material that came from it... It felt as though a piece of her heart was now full.

She pressed her hand against her chest, felt the excitement bubbling from deep within.

Five felt... 'complete'.

Was this what she had been waiting for? The missing piece of her life.

Her eyes were fixated on the pit, on the flashes of the strange realm.

To her, this was something far more beautiful than the sky above. Something she could touch with her own hands.

Next to her, the boy sat down.

"It's big." She took the initiative to speak.

"It is. We can't even put a dent in it. Who knows how far that material stretches." He shrugged.

For all they know, this material could stretch beyond the confines of this pit.

"Do you think it's a piece of that strange place?" Five asked. It radiated the same aura with the only difference being their state of matter.

The fissures were... distortions in her vision. Something that only she could see. But this? Everyone saw this.

"Maybe. It doesn't feel like it belongs to this place."

Five nodded in agreement. Something this beautiful definitely didn't belong to this dull world.

It must've come from someplace more magical.

"I can touch it. It's not like the stars in the sky. This one I can touch." She tilted her head back. There was an excited glimmer in her eyes as she couldn't hold back a smile.

Revealing a slight smile, the boy glanced back at the pit.

"If we're smart with it, we might be able to sneak a fragment away. But that depends on whether or not there are any loose pieces for us to take."

He knew Five wanted it no matter what. The question now was how to do so without drawing the ire of the boss.

"But..." Five furrowed her brows.

She wanted it.

Every part of her being screamed for possession of that material.

This piece of the sky... She wanted it no matter what.

There was a feral possessiveness in her gaze that the boy had never seen before.

Even with the sky, Five didn't show a reaction like this.

The sky was out of reach. Maybe that's why she held herself back.

But this was different.

"They're taking what's mine." She stared at the pit.

"It's... not fair." He breathing started to speed up.

She never felt this way before.

Finally finding a missing piece of herself only for it to be taken by someone else.

She hated it.

As though sensing the change in her emotions, the boy patted her head before giving her a hug.

"It'll be fine. I'll find a way for you to get some okay?"

Five paused. She wanted more but... If the boy said he'll get her some, then maybe it's not so bad.

By this point, she realised something.

She had been so enraptured by the sky and now this distortion that she didn't even know his name.

All she knew was what he looked like and never what he was called.

What number was he?

"Name. What is it?" She lifted her head, staring at him, waiting for his answer.

The boy was taken aback.

Five hardly took the initiative to talk to people never mind going as far as asking for names.

This... this was probably the first time she ever did something like this. A smile appeared on his lips.

"Noah. You can call me Noah."

"No...ah?" Five furrowed her brows. It wasn't a number like the rest of them.

"But I suppose my 'real' name would be Two. I'm the second one that boss bought. I don't like that name though so I chose Noah." He chuckled, understanding Five's confusion.

"Does it matter?" Five tilted her head.

Noah folded his arms. After a brief pause, he nodded his head.

"Of course it matters." Noah chuckled. "With numbers, we're simply items. Tools to be used and discarded when we break. But if we have actual names, we're people as well. Even if we're different to others."

Blinking her eyes, Five went silent.

Humans instead of tools...

"Did you give yourself the name?" She asked.

Noah nodded his head.

"Do you think the boss would've given it to me?" He laughed.

Five shook her head.

Their boss was someone who wouldn't even bat an eye to their deaths. He wasn't the kind who would give them names.

Since Noah was the one who gave himself a name...

"Name. Can you give me one too?" Five asked, pointing at herself.

She wanted something else that belonged to her. Like that piece of the sky, she wanted a name as well.

Noah closed his eyes. A name for Five...

Someone who loves the sky along with that strange distortion. Someone who seemed to have a hidden feral side when it comes to the things that she loves.

In that case...

"Ferus. Let's call you Ferus."

"Ferus..." She mumbled the name.

As she repeated the name in her mind, her eyes glimmered with life as this was something that belonged to her.

A name.

"Mnm! I like it. Ferus... That's my name." She grinned.

With this name, it's almost as though she had been reborn.

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Floating in the Void, a single tear fell as dark tendrils of energy were connected to Feris' body.

"Why is she crying? Is she in pain?" A girl asked, looking up at the sleeping realm ruler.

"No. Not in the pain that you're thinking about." Nyer shook his head, picking up the girl.

"So... she's hurting on the inside?" She tilted her head.

"Yes. A hole in her heart that she can never fill. So that's why we give her a good dream. It's a mercy."
Nyer nodded.

"I see... I hope she can find whatever she lost in that dream. But... can her body handle it? Isn't doing this too much?"

Around them, the Void was already starting to change as strange fog was now present on the different islands.

Like a boat that was now leaking, Nightmare energy was slowly filtering into the Void, transforming it.

"She can handle it." Nyer reassured.

Feris is a realm ruler. Her body won't break like the other experiments.

Not like the young girl that he needed to take such good care of.

With her, a lapse in focus could cause her body to break down in ways that couldn't be allowed.

Not at this stage of his plans.

"Once we're done, can I finally go see Alice?" She asked, turning to Nyer.

"Please don't tell me you're going to say not yet again."

A helpless smile could be seen on his face as the girl thrashed her legs in frustration.

"You always tell me to keep waiting. Always not yet. Always next time. When will next time become okay?"

She already apologised and had to restrain herself after the incident before during their game of tag.

Yet even after so long, she still didn't know when it would be allowed to see her.

"Soon okay? Things are almost done." Nyer sighed.

The girl puffed up her cheeks.

He understood that it'll take a lot more to convince the girl this time.

Thinking about it for a moment, he decided a small meeting should be fine.

But only if he prepared for it properly. To ensure that even if they meet, a clash wouldn't occur.

Falling silent, Nyer thought about it for a moment before glancing up at Feris.

"How about this. When your sister reaches the Capital, I'll arrange a playdate for you. One meeting, nothing more." Nyer suggested as the Girl immediately stopped pouting.

"Okay!"

No hesitation.

"However." He stopped her before she could get carried away. "One meeting. That's all I can give you. And if things start to go wrong, I'll stopping the meeting immediately okay?"

"Ehh..."

"Either that or you don't meet at all."

The girl jolted.

"F-fine... I'll try my best to behave. But you're not allowed to stop the meeting early!"

Nyer smiled and nodded his head.

"Only if no mistakes occur."

Clenching her fists, the girl creased her brows.

No matter what, she'll make the meeting with her sister a success. Even if bystanders interrupt, even if enemies appear, she won't let that get in the way of their reunion.

After all...

In this world...

They only had each other. No one else was even remotely similar to them. They were special beings created by Nyer.

Chapter 1012: Village In The Snow

Alice furrowed her brows.

Of all the things that could happen...

Why did it have to be like this?

She couldn't help but let out a deep exhale. One of resignation.

"My, my, don't you just look adorable," Enris grinned.

She had returned to her female form, and unlike her usual careless presentation, she had actually taken the time to dress for the occasion. Perhaps it was because they stood within Verona's dream. Perhaps she simply felt like indulging herself.

She had long grey hair that fluttered in the wind, contrasting with her slightly tanned skin. A pair of pale violet eyes held a trace of amusement.

Her bangs framed the side of her face.

This form was different from the one Alice was used to seeing. A different appearance, yet the divinity flowing through her body was the same.

Her clothes sat somewhere between uniform and casual wear.

A large white jacket hung loosely around her shoulders, leaving her arms free. Beneath that was a black-and-white dress that stopped at her thighs, paired with black tights and boots.

Simple, elegant, and definitely the kind of outfit that presented her as someone of high standing.

Then, compared to Enris, Alice couldn't help but look down at herself.

She was...

Shorter than usual.

Much shorter.

So short, in fact, that she might have lost in height to a somewhat large plush toy.

Alice had regressed in age within this dream, to the body she had when she was around fifteen years old in the prison, halfway through her time locked up.

But it wasn't quite the same either.

Her hair was still split between two colours, just like her eyes. More than that, though, red spider lilies decorated her left arm like a strange birthmark, with some climbing up her neck and onto her cheek.

She wore a simple, clean white dress, yet lacked any form of footwear.

Flicking her eyes between the two of them, Alice couldn't help but feel as though this treatment was a little unfair.

"Honestly, why do you look so glum? At least when you look down, you can see your toes," Enris teased.

Alice tilted her head down.

With her regression in age, the modest bosom she had developed was now flat as a cutting board.

"Hehe..." She let out a self-mocking laugh before turning to Enris. "So why did you even bring me here? Surely you're not just going to stand there and mock me for being flat-chested now, are you?" Alice asked.

"Oh no, far from it. In fact, I want to show you what kind of world this dream can bring. Perhaps we can even come to an agreement between the two of us." Enris narrowed her eyes as Alice creased her brows.

With her love for chaos, there was a good chance that Enris was indeed planning on betraying Nyer.

"Just show me what you want to show me. And make it quick." Alice gave up.

It wasn't like Enris was showing hostility at the moment. Simply going along with the flow was probably the best choice she could make.

"Fufu~ Come on then. I wonder what kind of identity we should take. After all, I doubt Verona will perceive you as who she knows you to be. And if you cannot blend with this world, you'll be rejected." Enris reached down, trying to pick Alice up, only for her hand to be slapped away.

"I can walk on my own. If anything, give me a pair of shoes." Alice clicked her tongue.

How dare she think she could pick her up as though she were her child.

"I'm afraid I have no power over you in this dream. It doesn't belong to me, after all. It belongs to the Queen. The most I can do is change my appearance and give myself some nice clothes." Enris let out a soft laugh.

". . ."

"If you don't like it, why don't you give it a try as well? Don't you have plenty of experience in dreams? Or are you saying... this is beyond you?" she smirked.

A vein bulged on Alice's forehead as her smile twitched.

It was clear that this was provocation. However, Alice refused to be beaten.

Closing her eyes, she focused her mind.

To construct clothes in the Nightmare...

". . ."

She didn't know how to do it. In the first place, what were the clothes even made of?

Her struggle was clearly noticed by the god, and her grin widened.

"What's wrong? Struggling? Should I give you a hint?" Enris leaned over Alice, who pushed her head away.

"Tch, I'll just get some shoes later. Just lead the bloody way." She huffed as Enris shrugged and walked ahead of Alice.

Strangely enough, even though her steps were the same as usual, the pace she walked at was much faster.

In the blink of an eye, she was already far ahead of Alice.

"Can't keep up? And here you were telling me to lead the way." She mocked, but Alice wasn't bothered.

In fact, Alice welcomed it.

Right now, Enris was the one who wanted to show Alice something, not the other way around. If she wanted to walk ahead, then she was free to do so. But at the end of the day, she was the one who had to dictate their pace.

And since that was the case, Alice was going to take her time.

Alice trudged through the snow one step at a time, slowly waddling through the field of white as Enris' smile twitched.

"What? Can't walk ahead now?" Alice taunted after reaching Enris.

She would reach the destination in due time, but not at the speed Enris wanted.

Enris had to hold back a curse as she eventually let out a sigh and snapped her fingers.

A piece of her jacket broke off, transforming into a pair of shoes.

"Satisfied?" she sighed.

"Only if you give me my original height as well."

"No can do. That's modifying your body. These shoes can be considered an extension of my clothes, after all." Enris shrugged as Alice let out a grumble but sped up slightly.

Soon, they arrived at a strange village surrounded by snow. Even from a distance, they could hear laughter while a large fire was kept alive in the centre.

Alice raised her eyebrows while Enris wasn't surprised.

The closer they walked, the clearer the situation became.

An artificial paradise.

The village felt alive, as there was not a single house where the light was turned off. Smoke drifted up from the chimneys while the silhouettes of families could be seen through the frosted windows.

They were happy.

Not pretending to be. Not forcing smiles for one another's sake, nor the kind that comes from mind control.

Truly happy.

A full meal.

A hot fire.

This was the kind of life that Alice also desired. One with Allura and Kaden and the others who were just as important in her life.

People like Alyss and Cayla.

This was fulfilment. The kind that could keep you going even after a long day of hard work. When things seemed tough and it became hard to continue.

Once you were submerged in this environment, you could feel your stress and worries disappearing.

That soft exhale after entering a hot bath, the kind that relaxed every muscle in your body.

The knowledge that tomorrow would come. And when it did, the people around you would still be there.

Safety.

That's what it was.

"It's different, isn't it?" Enris smiled softly at the sight before them. "The harsh reality is that the North suffered through a period of heavy famine. Partially of my own creation, I must admit, but even so... they are alive. Here in this dream."

"Perhaps it's self-indulgence, a reminder of what she couldn't achieve. Most of these people are likely dead, after all." She shrugged.

Alice was silent.

"This has happened twice now to poor Verona. The first was during the great famine. The second was during her failed ascension. How many people do you think are still alive in the North?" Enris asked.

Alice clenched her fist. "How many?"

"Less than a city. The ascension was devastating, after all. When the divinity split itself off to become the false herald, it took countless lives with it to fuel its survival," Enris revealed.

"As a being that defied the natural order of this world, it spread corruption throughout the entire region. Had it not been for the Lords, Verona, and even a... strange entity filled with Eldritch energy," she narrowed her eyes, "it would be safe to say that everyone in the North would be dead, minus the strong."

". . ."

Alice's pupils trembled as the severity of the news hit her like a hammer.

Most of the North was dead.

Even if Verona survived, even if they cleansed the land...

The people were no longer there...

"The Verona Queendom has fallen. What you are seeing before you is a Queen in denial." Enris did not care for the harshness of her words.

After all, it was the truth.

Like it or not, Alice had witnessed, or rather, seen, a moment that would be written down in the history books.

The year the nation of the North disappeared from the map for good.

"It's a shame, isn't it? Losing so many people." Enris exhaled softly. "Verona wanted power so that she could protect the North. But in doing so, she doomed it to its fate. Tell me, who do you think is at fault for the state of our world?" Enris glanced at Alice.

"But pointing fingers and blaming someone is ever so simple. The real question is..." She smiled.

"What must be done to avoid such a situation? How does one 'fix' this world of ours?"

Chapter 1013: A Moment Worth Giving Everything

"What must be done to avoid such a situation? How does one 'fix' this world of ours?" Enris asked.

Alice simply stared at the scene before her and shrugged her shoulders.

"Isn't that what Gods are supposed to figure out? Do I look like a god to you?" Alice sighed, shrugging her shoulders.

"That's true. Right now, you are not a god. Yet. But you can't trick my eyes. I see divinity in that body of yours." Enris chuckled, narrowing her eyes. "Or are you saying that you'll reject ascension? To squander Veli's gift."

Alice's eye twitched slightly.

Enris was spot on. No matter what, Alice didn't want to squander the gift that Velouria left behind.

But at the same time... she couldn't see herself becoming a god.

All she wanted was a peaceful everyday life with her family.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Was that so much to ask for?

Alice let out a deep exhale.

"What answer do you expect me to reply with? Should I be like 'We should kill Nyer and stop his plans' or 'Nyer is right, this is a better world'." She asked, turning the question back on Enris.

"Pft, if I knew why would I bother asking you? Girl you might be more stupid than I gave you credit for." Enris sighed as Alice had to actively hold back the urge to punch this god of chaos.

"I'm asking you because I want to know what kind of God you will become." Enris finally turned serious as she folded her arms.

"Lumiria is a jealous one. Seeing this kind of view, she'll seek to take it all for herself. Even if that meant killing everyone in that room and taking their souls, shattering their peace and immortalising it in lunar crystal.

"Not the kind of God you'd want to see a scene like this." She shook her head.

"Solaris on the other hand, would want to make the celebration about him. If they're happy, they better be happy because they're in his presence. If they dare to be happy about something else other than him, well... I'm sure I don't need to explain how petty of a God Solaris is." Enris chuckled.

"Then what about the sinful god of the Eclipse? The one who breathes war and famine into this world. A god who desires blood and sacrifice from her followers, sparking endless battles in her name. The absolute enemy of all." Alice narrowed her eyes.

Enris didn't shrink away from the glare. In fact, she welcomed in.

"Fufu~ I would turn those smiles upside down. I want to see them suffer and cry. This meal? How amusing would it be if it turns out that they're eating one of their children? With a snap of a finger, this joyful family meal becomes one of chaos and fear." Enris revealed a twisted smile before shrugging.

"At least that's what I would say years ago."

"So now it's different?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

"When you live as long as I do and do the same things over and over, they are bound to become boring. The same mead will lose its enjoyment if you drink it every second of every day, don't you agree?"

"First of all, blasphemy. Second of all, I'm not stupid enough to overindulge to the point of losing my love for mead." Alice countered but Enris shook her head.

"That's the problem. When you have so much time on your hands, you no longer have a choice. It's inevitability. A matter of when rather than if. You will become bored of mead when you live as long as I do." She chuckled ominously.

"So what would you want to do now? If chaos and heresy is all you knew back then, what's different now? Aren't you still lusting over chaos?" Alice frowned.

"My tastes are... more refined. What I wish to witness is something more interesting. Fulfilling even. So that I can rest feeling 'full' of satisfaction. And when I drift off into that slumber, I hope to never wake again."

Alice pursed her lips slightly.

"You remind me of Astrelya. I knew she's a freak but don't tell me she's like a super high ranking member of your cult."

"That child... is a unique case. But you are right in that she follows my doctrine of the Eclipse." Enris nodded.

"Tch, no wonder she wants to die a happy death. Like god like follower I guess." Alice clicked her tongue.

"Is that so wrong? To die in a blaze of glory when both fighters have put their all to bare. When they're locked in a moment that only exists for the two of them. To me, that sounds rather romantic."

For a moment, Alice wasn't sure if Enris was being serious or not. But after seeing her expression, she understood that Enris was being 100 percent serious.

Letting out a sigh, she decided to humour Enris for now.

"You said it sounds romantic? All I feel is wasted effort." She shook her head.

"Throwing your life away for what? Battle? A final hurrah? Yes, it sounds good. But it's only for the moment. Can you really be satisfied with that?" Alice asked.

"The loser dies. Their joy is cut short. And arguably, they get the better ending. The one who won? They only get emptiness. When you pour so much emotion into a singular task, the instant it ends, you need to find something new to fill that hole.

"If you don't, that emptiness will keep growing uncontrollably. Then what? Why is the winner more miserable than the loser? Because the way you and Astrelya make it sound, both fighters need to put everything into that fight. To be prepared to discard everything else in their life for that singular moment." Alice spun on her heel, turning fully to Enris.

"That's just sad and selfish. To discard everything for a single fleeting moment. What about the other people in your life?"

If Allura or Kaden decided to go out in a blaze of glory, Alice would want to protest. How can they fill her heart with such emotions only to throw themselves into battle without care?

What about her? What about the hole they'll leave behind once they die?

They can't just enter her life then leave behind a hole that's ten times bigger.

"Selfish huh?" Enris mumbled as she focused her eyes at the scene of the happy family.

For Gods, this scene was both mundane and foreign. Something that looks so simple yet completely out of their reach.

Perhaps it was a natural flaw that came with being a god but Enris found herself unable to properly understand.

"So to you, are the attachments that you make in life the bars of your prison? If so, isn't that more selfish than my desire of having them die in a blaze of glory? "

Alice furrowed her brows.

"You call it selfish to throw one's life away for that singular transcendent moment. To cast aside the present and the future. The comforts of everyday life. A warm meal, a quiet home." Enris turned her gaze towards the rest of the village. "I agree. It is selfish. Selfish beyond measure. Throwing away such precious luxury's may be a foolish move in your eyes. But for me?"

She paused.

Enris closed her eyes as she recalled the countless wars she's witnessed. The stories of each hero. Their motivation, that glimmer in their eyes as they put their lives on the line for the better everyday of the common folk.

That was the height of beauty in her eyes. When humans were most true to their nature.

The pinnacle. When one can discard everything so that others may gain everything.

"Such sacrifice is what gives their life meaning. If one has nothing to lose then the sacrifice is cheap. It's empty and devoid of meaning. Without weight, it's simply another person throwing themselves for indulgence.

"But when they have experienced warmth, family, love and yet even after everything, still choose to wager their life for something they deem worthy... That is the beauty I desire." Enris smiled.

"Solaris wants recognition. Lumiria wants indulgence. As for me? I want meaning behind sacrifice. I want that final death to have some real weight behind it.

"You say that the winner is miserable. Left with a hole in their chest. Perhaps you are correct to some degree. But think of it like this.

"Doesn't that make the rest of their life more meaningful? Knowing that at one point, they stood at the cliff where everything could've been gone. Would they not cherish the time they have left even more delicately? This was the life they risked everything to achieve.

"And having won the clash, it is only right that they now get to enjoy it in its fullest. They might still feel empty. But that's simply a sign that what they felt, what they experienced in that fight was irreplaceable. Another memory for them to hold close to their chest."

Enris turned to Alice and for the first time, Alice felt as though she could see the core of the god beyond the trickery and façade.

This was her deepest desire. The truest side of the god who ruled the Eclipse.

"There are moments in this world that happen only once. That final violent clash, the thought of whether or not this is your last. And willpower to still throw your entire being into such a class... That's what I chase after. That is the final desire that I hold in my heart.

"At the end of my life. At the end of my purpose... I don't wish to die as a god." Enris smiled.

"I wish to die as a 'human' who has found a moment worth giving everything for."

Chapter 1014: The God Who Wished To Die A Human

Alice stared at Enris.

For a moment, she wasn't sure what to think.

A god who had this kind of desire... the one who sits upon the divine throne wants to die as a... human?

"Is that why you're showing me all of this?" Alice asked as Enris simply laughed.

"Maybe, maybe not. Perhaps this is simply another one of the whims belonging to the God of the Eclipse."

But Alice didn't move her gaze away.

There wasn't a need to say anything because the god knew the truth had been revealed.

Shrugging her shoulders, Enris leaned against the wall of the house.

"So why are you planning on going against Nyer?" Alice finally asked.

She wanted to know what Enris would gain out of doing this. What made her change.

Something must have happened to affect her.

"Well..." Enris smiled, coiling her hair around her finger.

"Someone had been rather... honest, let's say. That the end I desire is one of acknowledgement and respect. Killing people... well, that'll only give me rage, according to them. Not acknowledgement." Enris exhaled through her nose.

"If I follow along with Nyer's plan, I won't get the end I desire. He's someone who will do everything and anything to bring back Veli. Like me, he is merely an empty shell of desire at this point." She glanced up at the sky.

"And if I am alive in the new age that he brings about... I doubt Veli would give me the end I desire. She's not someone who can give up everything for a fight. She cares too much about the world and its people."

Alice nodded her head in agreement. Velouria wasn't someone who could fulfil Enris' wish.

Not in the way she wanted it.

"So you think I'll be the one to give you it?"

Enris held back a laugh and shook her head.

"You? Well... I had hopes for you at the start. I thought that you, in all of your abnormal power, would be able to give me the wish I desire. But not anymore." Enris smirked.

There was a sense of... resignation in her voice. Like someone who had accepted that she'll never get what she wants.

"If you know, then why go so far? Wouldn't it be easier for you to just... watch everything unfold?"

Enris tapped her finger.

Why?

Such an easy question, yet so difficult to answer.

"Because I see the end of the world approaching, and it's different from what I wanted. At least..." Enris paused. "That's the first answer that comes to mind. But that could also just be trickery. These days, I just don't know anymore."

Enris pushed herself off the wall with a deep sigh.

"So I figured... as the only one I could truly call a friend back then... why not honour Veli's desires one more time?" She smiled, patting Alice on the shoulder.

"Help out her successor a little while figuring out my way through life."

"Can I trust your words?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

"Trust? Me? PFT!!! Ahahaha!" Enris couldn't hold it back anymore as she clutched her stomach.

"Girl, you clearly haven't seen the kind of stuff I've done in the past. Trusting my words is the last thing you should do." She wiped away her tears.

"Don't get me wrong. This is not me begging for your forgiveness or redemption. This is the whims of a god wondering if this path is the one to carry me to my Elysium."

Enris grinned.

"I'm evil and will always be so. Just because there's a greater threat doesn't mean I'm not evil. Me helping you doesn't pardon me of the chaos I've caused in the past. In fact, I might take so much offence at you forgiving me that I might just turn around and help Nyer instead."

"What the f*ck is wrong with you, woman?" Alice's smile twitched.

One moment Enris was sad, the next she was happy, and now she was proclaiming herself as evil.

A chaotic and spontaneous god like no other.

"A lot of things are wrong with me. How else can I establish the Cult of the Eclipse?" Enris shrugged.

"But that's enough fun for now. This dream here serves two purposes." Enris took a deep breath to calm herself.

As much as she was enjoying this, she couldn't get too carried away.

There's a reason why she brought Alice here.

"The first purpose is to let you see what kind of realm Nyer is trying to bring to our reality. One where each individual can 'dream' their ideal world. For Verona, it would be her home village, with everyone she cares about being alive along with the others that died during the famine." Enris turned to the village centre where a fire was keeping the surrounding people warm.

Even though they were in the dream, it felt like nothing could interact with them. At least not for the moment.

"I'm guessing there are complications with giving everyone a dream world." Alice exhaled through her nose.

"Of course. When everything goes too well, the human mind will naturally be sceptical. How do you think people will react when they realise their reality had all just been a dream?" Enris nodded.

"There are probably bigger complications, but that's something revealed by the passage of time rather than a small realm like this. The second purpose... well. Rather than showing you this dream, it's more so to save Verona herself."

"Save Verona?" Alice frowned.

"You know about what happened in the North. Verona had split herself from the false divinity in order to save her life. But how could it possibly be so easy? Trying to cut yourself free from the divinity is akin to cutting apart your soul.

"With its separation, a piece of Verona's identity had disappeared. If I had to describe her current state... she's like embers. The flame has died, leaving behind the glowing embers." Enris explained. "In this state, you either give her new fuel, that is healing her soul, or watch as she dies, unable to reignite."

Alice knew the situation in the North wasn't great. But hearing this from Enris, she finally had a rough idea of how bad a spot Verona was in.

"So what does this dream accomplish? Is it giving her new fuel? A foundation to work with?"

"I wish." Enris chuckled. "This dream works similarly to a foundation. But it's only temporary. I took advantage of what Nyer has already put into place and turned this into scaffolding for the soul, I suppose."

"So long as Verona remains in this dream, the slower her body will die. It should give the people around her plenty of time to try and figure out a solution for her current predicament.

"Do you know what happens to the soul if it leaves the body for too long?" she asked.

"The body and soul desynchronise, and the soul can't return to the vessel, right?" Alice replied instantly, surprising Enris.

Her knowledge on souls was deeper than average.

"I'm starting to think you forgot I was the one who killed Kazira." Alice creased her brows.

"Killing and knowing are two very different things. You can kill a god, but do you truly know everything that goes on in the background?" Enris flipped the question back to Alice.

"Fair point."

"But yes, this dream is only a temporary solution. It's to slow things down rather than an actual fix."

Reaching this point, Alice scratched her head in frustration.

"I see now. You're just using this moment to confirm multiple questions, right? What I'm fighting for, how I'll react to you, and my thoughts regarding the dream." Alice turned to Enris, who smiled a devious smile.

"Right you are. I'm simply letting you know about Verona's condition. But a warning first. Since Verona has split off a portion of her soul due to the mistake of the false divinity, she'll start 'forgetting' pieces of herself. Why she does things and so on.

"But this dream is a reminder for her. If her willpower is strong enough, she'll turn this place into a foundation that will support and prevent the collapse of her soul. And if she fails..." Enris narrowed her eyes. "Then she dies. Simple, right?"

"I suppose if you dumb things down like that, it can be considered 'simple'. So what do you want me to do about it?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Leave things as they are. Focus on the Void along with the wound in the sky for now."

Do nothing.

A simple command.

Yet Alice pulled a face of annoyance.

To do nothing was probably the worst thing Enris could ask of her.

In the first place, what does "do nothing" even entail? Should she just waste her days drinking mead?

Alice didn't know.

"If you can't... well, tough luck. If you can't handle something like this, how can you even think about succeeding Veli?"

Clapping her hands, Enris disappeared with a swirl of snow as Alice waved it away with a light cough.

But as the snow settled, Alice noticed a figure staring at her.

The young form of Verona was staring intently at her.

Then, after a slight pause, she opened her mouth.

"Alice?"

###

Enris sat atop a hill that overlooked the village.

She took a deep breath and brought a small cup of alcohol to her lips.

All that talking... and she was reminded of her mistake with Velouria.

"Not sure if the girl shares your morals. But it seems like she's one that the people of this world can count on."

Enris half expected Velouria to reply. But at the same time, how could she? Velouria was long gone, and she was one of the reasons why.

A bitter smile appeared on her face as she raised her cup to the sky. A drink offered for the dead.

"I wonder if I can reach my Elysium this time."

Tilting her head back, Enris swallowed the drink in one go.

Chapter 1015: Meeting Verona Again

"You certainly look different compared to how we last met." Verona smiled while the two of them sat around the campfire in the centre of the village.

She grabbed a few skewers and offered Alice a plate.

"You as well. I'm surprised you can still remember me, considering you look like this right now." Alice accepted the plate.

Like her, Verona had regressed to her childhood form. The one that suffered through the famine.

"Even if I look like this, it's still me in the end. I doubt I can forget the things that happened." Verona chuckled. When she looked at the village, there was a sad smile on her face.

"It's surprising, isn't it?" she asked, glancing at Alice.

"There's more than one surprising thing here. Care to specify?"

"This village. You'd think that, as the Queen of the North, my desire would be something far bigger than this. Something akin to an idealised North, I suppose. A grand queendom that won't fall no matter what." Verona leaned back.

Compared to her usual serious self in the past, this version of her was far more cheerful. As though the weight on her shoulders had disappeared. Not completely, of course, as she understood that this was a dream. But she didn't care.

"I suppose so. Though... I understand you. This kind of mundane life... it's the best, right?" Alice chuckled, a slight smile appearing on her face.

Despite being powerful, she too wanted a simple life.

This kind of desire wasn't foreign to her.

Verona blinked before letting out a loud laugh.

"Yes... yes indeed. Even the most powerful rulers desire simplicity like this every now and then. But the responsibilities of reality tie us down. Chain us to our duties and forge a prison of iron around the heart." Verona closed her eyes, enjoying the northern wind.

"But no more."

After a brief pause, she opened her mouth.

"Did Enris bring you here? Or did you figure out a way to enter by causing an anomaly?" Verona asked curiously.

"If Enris didn't bring me here, I probably would've figured out a way in anyway." Alice shrugged. "I know a few people who can control the Nightmare to some extent, along with my own powers."

"As expected of you. First you come to my nation and cause a storm, then you make my best blacksmith owe you pieces of equipment. You even use your favour to try and reverse engineer mead rather than anything else." Verona chuckled and shook her head. "What do you think about this place?"

"A little sad, but understandable." Alice replied honestly and without hesitation.

"Ouch, harsh." Verona kicked her legs.

"But you're not wrong. It is a little sad, but I'm simply indulging myself for the moment." Verona exhaled through her nose.

"I know I failed the people of the North. I don't intend to run from my responsibilities. Even if I want to stay here forever, that's not something I'm allowed to do. I need to be there to help them survive the coming age."

Her response surprised Alice.

Considering the way Enris had phrased things, she had half expected Verona to be on Nyer's side when it came to this memory.

"What's with that look? Did you think I'd lose myself in my delusions?" Verona smirked proudly.

However, a fist came down from above, knocking her on the head.

"You don't introduce me to your friend, and now you're lying to her?" a man asked with a helpless smile. His hair was tied into a low ponytail, and he wore casual attire.

Yet despite the lack of armour, Alice recognised him as the red knight who had stood as her enemy in the dream.

Aldric.

"This girl is not being honest at all. I'm sorry you had to put up with her." Aldric chuckled while Verona started hitting his leg.

"You're ruining my image! I'm still a Queen, you know. What about my dignity?" Verona creased her brows, but her punches did little.

In response, Aldric simply ruffled her hair with a grin while Alice couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

"Shoo! Isn't there something else you need to do?" Verona tried to push Aldric away before he embarrassed her further.

"I wouldn't be here if someone was more honest. Do you still remember what we talked about?" Aldric laughed.

Verona grumbled before nodding her head.

Seeing this, Aldric glanced at Alice and gave her a wave before walking away, allowing Verona the privacy she wanted.

Folding her arms in annoyance, Verona clicked her tongue.

"Fine. I was thinking about it. This dream isn't that bad. The dead can come back, though... I know it's just my own delusions. Still, living a life in a place like this didn't sound terrible."

"I'm guessing he changed it for you?" Alice gestured toward Aldric with her chin.

"Yeah. He gave me a lecture and everything. Long story short... I'm only staying here to stall things out for now. My soul is too damaged for me to walk around in reality for too long. Since you came with Enris, I'm sure she told you the state of my body."

"Yep. You're basically a walking corpse on a timer. Can't exactly stay here for long either." Alice nodded.

"Caera and the others are doing what they can. They even met up with someone else who knows you as well. Said her name was Rosalyn or something along those lines." Verona smiled.

"The f*ck? Rosalyn's there too?" Alice blinked.

"Not just her. It seems like your group split up, and a few of them got trapped in Terminus with the rest of us. Caera is working on a path out of Terminus with everyone else." Verona recalled.

If she had known she was going to meet Alice, she would've told the others. At least then, she would've been able to pass along a message or something.

Alice folded her arms.

If the others were with her...

Then calling for reinforcements might not be a bad idea. Especially if Caera was there with everyone else. Having all of them meet up again would be ideal, since Alice doubted she could resolve everything on her own.

But stepping into Extalia meant being 'tainted' by the Nightmare. Without knowing the full extent of what this might bring, and with the memory device still in its testing phase, Alice wasn't sure she wanted the others to step into Extalia just yet.

"Can I ask you to pass along a message?" Alice asked, and Verona nodded.

Whatever was happening in Extalia, it was clear that Alice was deeply involved. As for the severity... whoever was behind this was trying to overturn the natural order. Their experiments in the North, along with this Nightmare, were proof.

"Can you ask her to bring the others to Extalia? Preferably to the capital, since I'm planning on going there. Tell her that Allura and Gin are making their way over, and to be wary of the Nightmare. I don't know how you were dragged in, but for others, the moment they step into this nation, they'll be subjected to this realm."

"Alright, I'll pass it along." Verona nodded.

"I will say one thing, though. I'm sure Sigurd would love to help, but his power is tied to his location rather than anything else. He won't be much help in an actual battle. Myself... well, I'm sure I don't need to explain." She sighed.

If she could fight, she would. To take revenge against the culprit who was the root cause of everything. To kill the man who destroyed her nation and murdered her civilians.

She might've failed them, but the least she could do was take revenge for them.

Verona glanced down at her hand. Despite wanting to fight, despite wanting to get revenge...

She was lacking in power right now.

"It's fine. I don't expect everyone to fight, since this is not a battle everyone can partake in." Alice shook her head.

The fight against Nyer and everything he had prepared was one beyond conventional means. Unless they had powers that allowed them to bridge this gap, fighting Nyer would be impossible.

"If anything, I just want you to handle the fallout with the others if he does decide to unleash the Nightmare on the rest of the world." Alice smiled.

"Since your soul is wounded, I think I might be able to fix you, or at least try."

"You can?" Verona turned her head with a slight frown.

Since when could Alice fix soul damage? Was she a disciple of the Moon?

"Yes, I can. I have three Sigils that let me tamper with a person's soul. As for how much I can actually do, I still don't know. But if I see the damage with my own eyes, I should be able to figure something out." Alice shrugged. "Sadly, it's a Sigil ability, so I can't exactly use it in the Nightmare."

Verona wasn't even sure how she should respond.

How strong had Alice become in the time since she last saw her?

Hunters spent years getting used to their power and hunting for the next. Yet Alice was now tampering with souls.

"Anyway, I'll take my leave here. There are still things I need to sort out, but I'll come visit to see what's going on. Still, it's been good seeing you again." Alice stood up and stretched her body.

As nice as it was to stay in this village, she couldn't remain for long.

There were too many things that required her attention.

Chapter 1016: Free Of Worry, Regrets, Responsibility And Enemies

Here's the formatted version:

Leaving Verona's dream, Alice found herself in front of the boss arena. Like before, Verona and Aldric were sitting in the centre. There was no reason for Alice to hunt them since this worked as a gateway to their dream.

Resting by her branch, she decided to give Plume a visit.

However... going there could risk seeing Monika.

"I suppose I might as well ask her about the Void and see what she thinks about the situation." Alice mumbled before closing her eyes.

Honing in on the branch in Plume's room, Alice teleported over.

Opening her eyes, Alice paused, unable to quite comprehend what she was seeing.

"Ehh??? But I need this..."

"You can't keep taking garbage with you! It can be tracked!" Monika tried to pull a bag of items away from Plume.

However, Plume only grabbed the bag harder, refusing to let go.

"Boss will track us down anyway if we go. I don't see why we can't just stay!" Plume complained while Monika held back the urge to smack the girl over the head.

They soon noticed the new arrival as Alice gave a slight wave.

"Yo..." Alice's smile twitched, unsure what she was even looking at.

Monika cleared her throat before summoning her staff. Sitting on it, she crossed her legs.

"What brings such an esteemed guest here? Last I checked, you were in dear Verona's dream."

She leaned back slightly.

But even if she tried to act nonchalant, the image of her struggling to tear a bag from Plume was already ingrained in Alice's mind.

"I was planning on asking about the wound in the sky, but... if you're busy, I can come back later. You seem... occupied." Alice tilted her head, glancing toward Plume, who dragged the bag back into the corner of her room.

A lot had already been packed up. They were clearly planning on relocating.

"No, no. Let's talk. We might as well take this chance to discuss a few things since..." Monika paused before smiling.

"It'll be a bit more difficult for you to contact us from now on."

Alice raised an eyebrow.

A table and chairs formed and she took a seat.

"I don't suppose it has anything to do with you moving out?" Alice gestured toward Plume as Monika nodded.

"Things are changing. I'm sure you've noticed. The realm is evolving in a way that... I can't exactly guarantee mine and Plume's safety. So we're bailing." Monika stuck out her tongue.

"Bailing? You?" Alice tapped her finger in surprise. She had always thought Monika would observe until the very end. Not leave so early.

"Yes, we're bailing. Yvael died because she got too greedy with what she could see. I'm not about to make the same mistake, even if I'm just a fragment of her." Monika chuckled.

"I see... I'll admit, I'm surprised. Where do you plan on going? Do you even have a physical body?"

"Who knows. And I'm sure you understand why I can't say too much."

"Cogs?"

"Cogs."

"Jeez... what a pain." Alice clicked her tongue. "You're not even bound by special rules like a certain someone, yet you still can't say sh*t."

The answers were so close yet so far. Always within sight yet out of reach.

"That's the problem with knowing about the Cogs. A price everyone pays once they see too much. Fate doesn't like being changed. Especially once it's been observed." Monika smiled before clapping her hands together.

She created two teacups and offered one to Alice.

"But even if I can't tell you everything, there are still things I can do. I'll simply continue working from the background, as I always have."

Alice smiled helplessly.

"Take care of yourself, okay?"

She reached for the teacup and drank it in one go.

Monika blinked in surprise.

Alice knew what drinking it meant and yet...

She had gone from denying it to drinking without hesitation. Was it because this might be their last meeting? Or something else?

Monika didn't know.

She simply sat in silence and watched as Alice finished.

"Not bad. Honestly, if it wasn't for the cog stuff, I might drink this more often. Though... mead is still better." Alice grinned.

Smiling softly, Monika refilled her cup.

"Don't worry. I made sure these ones won't let me peer into your fate. I don't want to see something I'm not supposed to. Especially when you're involved."

Alice's eyes shimmered as she took a second sip.

"The Nightmare will remain for less than a year. The foundations are almost complete. Soon, everything will converge and a battle to determine the fate of this world will begin." Monika spoke as Alice glanced up.

"The Sun, Moon, and Eclipse will all be involved. As with the guardians of old and the forces of the new era. Are you confident you can survive something like that? Or rather... are you prepared to make sacrifices?"

She wasn't reading Alice's fate this time. She simply wanted to hear her answer.

Alice tapped her finger.

"The Sun will be replaced. Solaris has overstayed his welcome. Gwen will fight, she has her father and her aunt behind her. But if she needs more, I'll help. I'm sure she'd do the same for me." Alice smiled fondly.

"The Moon will fall. Lumiria is clearly going after Arwen and Tristan. Then there's Isolde. She hates, and I mean HATES, the Moon. But I don't think she wants the throne, so we'll need to find someone else."

She doubted Tristan wanted to replace Lumiria either. He would rather live quietly with his sister than carry the weight of a God.

"And the Eclipse..." Alice sighed. "That one is probably the hardest."

She leaned back.

"A lot of people absolutely hate the Eclipse. Even if Enris is helping us now, the sins that cult has committed are too severe to simply overlook. But I also can't deny that the Eclipse serves a purpose. Without something to gather the world's sins, they'll simply spill out into the streets."

She exhaled.

"Which is why I think a fourth force is necessary. Something to keep things in check. But that's all future talk. I can't think about overthrowing Gods until I actually have the power to do it."

Monika listened with a quiet smile. There was one thing she found interesting, however.

"Sounds like you don't plan on reviving the Abyss. Aren't you the successor?" She rested her chin on her palm.

Alice scratched her cheek.

"I just... don't think I'm 'Goddess' material, you know? Tell me, when you look at me, do you see a God? Or do you see a cutie pie you'd catch skipping through a city?" She struck a pose with a peace sign.

"I'll admit, you lack a certain level of elegance for a Goddess. Solaris and Lumiria may fall short as divine entities, but they at least carry the presence of one." Monika nodded.

"Right? I'm just not suited to leading people. I won't reject the mission I've been given. Reviving Ayr, saving the world, I'll try my best at all of that. But..." Alice smiled bitterly.

"There's a big difference between saving and leading. Killing a threat can be done. But leading people to a better future isn't something just anyone can do. And I know my limits. How can someone who's only seen the world for a few short years lead anyone?"

In the grand scheme of things, it hadn't been long since she left that prison in the Zenia family. The world was still a mystery to her.

To ask her to lead everyone was simply impossible.

"And honestly... I don't want to. If I lead, how can anyone relax around me? Leaders are lonely. They wear masks to reassure the people around them and carry burdens that never go away. I just want to throw myself into a bar and laugh the night away with strangers who share the same hobbies."

Standing up, Alice placed a foot on the table and rested her elbow on her knee. A grin on her face, one hand on her hip.

"Free of worries. Free of regrets. Free of responsibility and free of enemies. That is how I want to live once everything has settled."

She laughed.

"With a desire like that, how could I ever lead properly? A leader worries about the safety of their people. A leader regrets the choices they didn't make. A leader is buried in responsibility and surrounded by enemies. Isn't that the opposite of everything I want?"

Monika nodded.

"Seems like you're starting to understand your own desires. Despite being a creation of Nyer, your actions are beyond his control. You've surpassed your own design."

Through her experiences, through the world she had touched and the people who had touched her back...

The experimental existence created by Nyer had solidified into something he never intended.

A being with a soul entirely her own.

The human, Alice Agnelia.

Chapter 1017: Cleansing

"You might not know this, but your final Hunt actually affects the title you get quite a bit. Far more than most people realise." Astrelya yawned while sitting on her cloud.

Next to her, Ria listened carefully.

"It isn't decided by what you hunt. But rather, what you're most compatible with at the moment. Though most people like to simplify things a little too much. When you become a Lord, you gain two things." She held up two fingers.

"First is your Sigil ability. You're familiar with this one. It's the ability you steal from whatever you hunt. The second on the other hand, is the Authority. The power granted to you through the title you earned.

"For me, that'll be the authority over stars." Astrelya flicked her finger and starlight converged into a constellation that hovered near her.

"You may certainly think of this as the prelude to your third Resonance. Granted you actually kept all of your Sigils to be the same type.

"Now, the real question is whether or not you know how to increase your chances of getting a good title. I'm sure you want a powerful title that grants you control over storms of something of a similar scale rather than... static shocks." Astrelya chuckled while Ria raised her eyebrow.

"I get to choose? I thought I was granted a title?"

"Of course you get to choose." Astrelya shrugged. "You're thrown into a strange realm, and at the end of it, you make a decision. One that you can actually handle. Choose wrong and..." She paused for a moment. "Well. You might just blow yourself up."

That did not inspire confidence.

Ria frowned.

"What feels powerful isn't always useful," Astrelya continued. "Some titles carry overwhelming presence but end up being complete garbage in practice. You can't just chase what sounds impressive. You have to trust your instincts. Pick something you actually resonate with."

She folded her arms.

"In the past, I've seen Lords aligned with the Eclipse choose titles that felt grand. Something worthy of fear. Only to end up with abilities that were... underwhelming."

Astrelya clicked her tongue in annoyance recalling that incident.

"I don't even remember his full title. I just called him the Lord of Paper Cuts because of how sh*t it was."

"He made a big show of it. Declared an impressive title only for his attack to barely break skin. When the fight started, I had a small cut that didn't even draw blood."

Ria's smile twitched.

A Lord that should be someone impressive yet remembered as... The Lord of Paper Cuts?

Not only that, but he barely damaged Astrelya in a fight. But could you even call that damage? It didn't even draw blood.

"You're joking."

"I wish I was." Astrelya shrugged.

"So anyways I killed him after that."

". . ."

"But that's not what's important. What's important right now is for you to understand a few things you can do to increase your odds of getting a good title." Astrelya closed one eye.

"What you experience during the seventh hunt and your experiences leading up to it will dictate the quality of your title. Your resolve. How you adapt under pressure, the choices you make and what your heart desires when pushed to its limit.

"When I became a Lord, my heart yearned for the great beyond. That perhaps out there, somewhere, there is someone or something that could fulfil my desires." She pointed at the sky and leaned back.

"This is also where your mentality will shape your future. How you've lived up to this point will condense into titles that best suit your personality.

"Say you have a coward who only knows how to run. Or someone who crumbles under pressure. When they get a title, that title will reflect that habit. In other words, even if they become a Lord, they're a waste."

She turned her body, looking at Ria.

"So you have to ask yourself, what do you desire and what kind of life have you lived."

Ria exhaled slowly.

Allura was always talking about mentality being important for a Hunter.

It seems like she had been preparing her for this moment specifically. For the moment she challenges for the seventh.

What kind of Lord did she want to be? What kind of power did she desire?

What did she wish to accomplish.

Erasing the Eclipse was simply one step along the way. After that...

"You know I'm not asking you to figure out your life right? If someone as old as me can't do it, what makes you think a young lil' sh*t like you can?" Astrelya smirked as Ria held back the urge to smack the Lord on the head.

"What I'm telling you to focus on is your strongest desire. The burning fire in your heart that drives your every move. The stronger the emotion, the easier it is to find a suitable title."

"Strongest emotion huh..." Ria mumbled.

Killing Enris was a priority but... Not to the point she was willing to discard everything.

If killing Enris wasn't her main goal then...

"Cleansing this world." Ria mumbled.

Astrelya blinked her eyes.

"F*cking hell, okay tyrant. I expected something wild but not like that. What are you going to do? Rain lightning on anyone you don't like? If you're going to do that then you're not compatible with the Eclipse than I thought. And that's coming from me of all people."

"Wha- No- I didn't mean it like that." Ria pinched the bridge of her nose.

"By cleansing I meant getting rid of corruption."

"What corruption is to you might not be for someone else. I think corruption as literal corruption. But what about emotional corruption? People doing evil in politics or something along those lines. Sh*tty nobles who sacrifice others." Astrelya rolled her eyes.

"Well... yeah. That's kind of what I meant."

"Then what about a brother who sacrifices himself to save his siblings? Or what if they do something out of desperation. Are you going to smite them too?" Astrelya eyed Ria who was at a loss for words.

"Obviously not. Why would I do that?"

"So you're going to judge them on a case to case basis? Jeez just thinking about that feels exhausting. See what I mean? I said desire something reachable not delusions. Cleansing the world isn't that easy kid, otherwise people would've done it already." Astrelya reached out, flicking Ria on the head.

Clutching her forehead, Ria let out a frustrated sigh.

"I just don't want others to suffer like I did. Do the things I did. Is that too much to ask for?" Ria pouted.

Astrelya nodded her head.

"Of course it is. You can't get rid of suffering without getting rid of human nature. If your desires come to pass then congrats, we're all just blank slates that can't evolve. You can hate it but you can't deny that suffering is part of human history." She sighed.

"Do you know how stupid of a thing you have to say for ME of all people to lecture you on it? A Lord belonging to the Eclipse, someone who's willing to commit atrocities to get a good death. I revel in chaos and disorder, laugh in the face of madness and genocide. Yet even I know what you want is too f*cking far fetched girlie. Dreaming is nice but make sure it's achievable."

"Then what? What else am I supposed to wish for. I just don't want more people like me to appear in this world." Ria sprawled out on the cloud, looking up at the sky.

"Suddenly I look like a therapist to you? I have my own problems to deal with." Astrelya clicked her tongue.

Ria held back her curses.

"Don't dream too big. Just focus on what's in front of you. At the end of everything, what do you truly desire? Something that makes you happy. A dream that brings warmth to your heart. Rarely are these desires ever so grand yet the simpler the desire, the harder it is to achieve.

"Do you think 'cleansing the world' like a tyrant will give you happiness? Satisfaction? Eclipse is all about self satisfaction. And as someone who's spent her whole life pursuing that moment, I can say you won't reach it through this method."

Ria stayed silent.

The land beneath her flicked past as the two of them travelled through Terminus in search of a communion point. A potent one that'll expand the selection of targets for Ria's hunt.

This time, Ria was silent.

She thought long and hard about her desire.

A simple desire.

Yet... a part of her still longed to help this world. To make it a better place for those who come after.

A stubbornness that she couldn't change. After all, it stemmed from her own pain. Her own experience.

Now that Astrelya had truly put her desires into perspective, Ria didn't know what she could even say to defend it.

Indeed, how could she cleanse the whole world? To eliminate suffering... what kind of consequence would that even bring? Just like trying to erase misfortune, life simply doesn't work in that manner.

It is through misfortune that they find fortune. Without one, how can you tell the other exists?

Ria thought deeply.

The simplest desire that she wanted to achieve...

"Strength." Ria creased her brows.

"I want strength to save the people in front of me. I might not be able to save the world but I can at least try my best."

"Should I praise you or should I tell you about the flaws? If you want to save the people in front of you, does it involve your enemies? From a different perspective, those people also want to be saved."
Astrelya chuckled.

Yet Ria's response surprised her.

"If they are redeemable. Then yes, I will give them another chance. For them to atone and do as much good for the world as they can. An apology to the dead."

Cleansing wasn't simply a case of killing. No, she had to make sure the world is better than it was yesterday.

A smirk appeared on Astrelya's face.

"My my... How greedy. If you want that kind of power then the beast we have to Hunt is one that can accommodate such a desire. And I think I know just the one."

Chapter 1018: Accursed Radiance - Hayil

Ria let out a deep exhale as her foot stepped over fractured earth.

Countless cracks in the ground spreading as far as the eye could see. And within those gaps, something evil slithered. A strange black liquid not quite eldritch yet vile all the same.

There was a tingling sensation to the surface of her skin. Her heart beat unevenly and she could feel her hair stand on their ends.

Every part of her was warning her of this location.

What she wanted to hunt, what Astrelya had suggested for her to kill, was within this location.

The beast that'll grant her the power to achieve her desires.

Ria looked up.

It was hard to believe a place like this existed within Terminus.

This didn't feel like a location.

It felt like she had stepped inside something.

The ground shifted beneath her feet, not enough to throw her off balance, but enough to make her aware of it. A slow, subtle undulation, as though the land itself was breathing. Massive slabs of stone drifted and collided in the distance, grinding against one another.

These pieces of land floated atop the strange black liquid, thick like tar.

And within that liquid, streaks of red pulsed like veins.

The gravity in this place wasn't quite normal either. Large chunks of debris floated in the air while towering structures twisted and warped.

In the distance, there was a strange fortress nestled in the middle of this hostile territory.

Above, the usual dark skies of the Abyss was nowhere to be seen.

It wasn't ominous looking, dyed in a deep red nor was it simply a black sky. Instead...

There was light.

Not the kind of light you felt on the surface but rather... an artificial muted light.

A white light that coated the land in a monotone hue the closer you got to the fortress.

Leading up to the fortress, massive thorn covered tendrils curved like open ribs.

Ria continued to stare.

She should take a step forward, to keep walking and face her enemy.

Yet...

Her body needed time.

Time to accept what she was about to walk into.

Like staring down on the edge of a cliff. That first jump was always the scariest. The uncertainty in your own action. In what you're about to do.

"Getting cold feet?" Astrelya smirked.

"F*ck off." Ria clicked her tongue.

"If you can't handle it, we can always turn back? There are more ways of becoming a Lord than to throw yourself toward death." She chuckled but Ria only shot her a glare.

"I've come this far. I'm not about to give up right now."

After all... What they were hunting was a 'beast' directly blessed by the Eclipse.

A creation who had been modified by a God and a Madman. A walking calamity with a slither of divinity surging through its blood.

Ria could still remember the moment Astrelya suggested it.

###

"You want me to hunt what now?" Ria blinked her eyes.

"I want you to hunt the Accursed Radiance known as Hayil. A kind of fallen angel I suppose you can call her." Astrelya nodded.

"An... Angel?"

"Yep." Astrelya gave her a thumbs up.

"First of all, do you mean something that looks like an Angel, or do you mean a literal angel?" Ria frowned.

"Literal."

"F*ck." She cursed without hesitation.

Angels were a strange existence. Both a myth yet creatures that exist beneath the divine thrones. Celestial beings who help spread the word of the Sun, Moon or even... Eclipse.

But their existence was one that had been questioned time and time again as how does one define an Angel? What is the difference between them, a Abyss Lord and the Apostles?

Yet the answer was that an Angel was none of them. It wasn't a Lord nor was it an Apostle. They were simply a manifestation of a God's power.

If so, Astrelya was essentially asking her to hunt a Demi God who hold the same authorities as the gods they splintered from.

Allura had explained them more like an accidental birth than anything so it's rare to even see one. After all, that power could be kept with the host god instead of being 'wasted'.

"Would you look at that... Seems like you're educated on their existence." Astrelya raised an eyebrow in pleasant surprise.

"Hayil is a bit unique. When she was created, she was given only one directive.

"Survive. No matter what happens, no matter what's done to her, survive at all cost. Endure and come back stronger than ever." She chuckled, leaning back and crossing her legs.

"Her birth was a collaborative effort. An experiment between Enris and the Betrayer. It was a test to see whether or not they can create a 'vessel' that can hold divinity.

"But... They failed. The experiment was a failure and Hayil could not become the empty vessel the Betrayer hoped she could be. However... even if the experiment was a failure, Hayil couldn't be considered to be one.

"Instead, she is better described as a happy accident I suppose. Through this failure, she had become something else entirely. Not an empty vessel that can hold divinity. But rather, she had become a reflection of the God's power."

Ria froze. If what Astrelya was saying is the truth... then what she wanted her to hunt was essentially a tiny Enris.

"So despite losing worth for a certain betrayer, she had actually increased her value for Enris. She kept her around, wondering if the angel could grant her a speck of entertainment."

"I'm guessing she succeeded since she's still alive." Ria sighed but Astrelya actually shook her head.

"Hell no. Hayil may have become something else entirely but it didn't change the fundamental issue at her core. In fact, it only made it worse. There was no entertainment to be found but perhaps her existence could spark something else instead.

"So Enris kept the Angel around in hopes that she'll be of use in the future. She was also too precious of a subject to simply discard without care after all."

"And we're just going to kill it?! Did you even ask for permission?" Ria widened her eyes in shock.

"Hell no. Does it look like I had time to ask for permission?" Astrelya rolled her eyes.

". . ."

"It'll be fine~ As long as something entertaining happens Enris won't bat an eye to you killing it. Well... It's either you killing it or you die." Astrelya gave a thumbs up before shrugging.

"But anyways, I think Hayil is the perfect target for you precisely because of these experiments. When she... transcended her design, even if through failure, she gained quite a bit from it.

"In her body she contains the powers of War, Famine and even some of Enris's divine authority." She listed out.

The more Ria listened, the more ridiculous this sounded as she was literally being sent to kill a miniature version of Enris.

"If she has all of this, why was she considered a failure?" Ria asked.

"Oh because she's batsh*t insane. Yeah the experiment broke her mind and her soul. There is literally no hope for her. It's like what you said about me a while ago. She is nothing but a husk of desires who's only goal is to survive and kill." Astrelya waved casually.

"She mainly relies on territory and weapon creation so keep an eye on that. The authority of War and Famine to a lesser extent but if you kill her, they should be transferred to you without much issue."

"Wait wait wait." Ria cut in, stopping her as the Lord glanced up.

"I wanted something to help further my own powers. Why are you getting me to kill mini Enris over here? Isn't that the opposite of what I want? It's Eclipse powers you know?"

Astrelya blinked her eyes.

"Since when did I say you were getting Eclipse powers?"

"Just now?" Ria tilted her head.

"I said territory creation, weapon creation. Authority of war and famine to a lesser extent. The main thing is still territory and weapon creation." Astrelya clarified.

"Isn't that an extension of Enris's powers though?"

"So if you buy a knife does that make you the same as a ritual caster from the Eclipse? If you get fire powers does that make you Allura?" Astrelya let out a sigh.

Ria couldn't reply.

"I what the authority that acts as a foundation not the powers themselves. Territory creation helps you refine and reinforce your personal realm at a higher level. Weapon creation crystalizes your achievements and stories into a weapon that best suits you.

"For war, you'll most likely gain some aspects of Tyranny which means establishing absolute law in a given location. Though probably and I mean most likely very limited since that ass hat known as the Will of the Abyss will intervene without a shadow of doubt.

"And finally, you'll probably gain the spread or the absoluteness of Famine. With all of that combined, isn't this exactly the perfect package for you?" Astrelya explained in further detail.

"If you want to make your ideals a reality, don't you need all of this as a foundation?"

Ria frowned. She struggled with the decision but in the end, she had to admit. It was the truth she couldn't deny.

"Fine. Say I want to kill Hayil, how can I even designate her as a target? I doubt I've done anything that would help push her into the pool of selection." Ria brought up the last problem.

Designating the bounty.

"Oh don't worry about that. I've already solved it."

"You what?" Ria blinked.

"Yep. That's why we're heading to a communion point right now. As a member of the Eclipse as well as a Lord of the Abyss, so long as I use my blood, it should act as a key that'll allow you into the vault of freaks that Enris had kept around." Astrelya smirked.

"Of course, just having my blood won't be enough. The location also matters but I have it all handled. Just focus on theorizing. You have to kill a mini Enris after all."

###

Staring at the desolate land leading up to the fortress, Ria let out another sigh.

As promised, Astrelya's blood worked as a key and they were able to designate Hayil as a target. All that's left now...

Was to kill an Angel.

Chapter 1019: Facing Hayil

Ria stepped toward the fortress in the distance.

The moment she took a step, an invisible pressure crashed down on her. Her knees almost buckled as veins bulged on her neck. The strain of keeping herself upright.

However, it wasn't just weight. This pressure pushed down from all sides, making it hard for her to even breathe.

On the other hand, Astrelya floated without care.

She wasn't affected by this pressure at all and in fact even looked relaxed in this.

"Don't look at me, focus on walking instead." Astrelya gave Ria a wink as the girl clicked her tongue.

She took another step.

Her jaw tightened as this felt similar to the time Allura dropped Alice and herself into the depths of the Abyss.

That time, she had called in a favour from a beast on the verge of Lordship.

The pressure she felt at the time was similar to this.

Only the scale was much different as she had gotten stronger.

The third step.

Her vision distorted momentarily. Static crept in from the edges of her view as her eyes almost rolled back.

*BANG!!!

The fourth step.

Ria pushed herself forward.

Then the fifth.

She stopped counting after this. There was no point in thinking about the steps she had to take. Just the thought of pushing her foot forward weighed on her mind.

If she kept her goals short, it became far more manageable to achieve. Easier to take one step than the thought of needing to take one hundred.

Astrelya watched silently. The smile on her face widened while watching Ria take her steps toward the fortress.

What was this feeling rising in her chest?

It wasn't the excitement she was pursuing. The kind that gave her peace in death.

This was something else.

She knew the secret behind this land.

The ruins of Ayr. A place where Nyer decided to focus a portion of his experiments.

And...

Where fallen Divinity was actively leaking out.

Baptising the land in its filth thus resulting in such devastation, leaving Ayr nothing but a shallow husk of what it once was.

###

By the time Ria reached the base of the fortress, sweat was now covering her from head to toe. Exhaustion overwhelmed her as she felt helpless at the tribulation that spread ahead of her.

The final flight of stairs.

Each step required her to fight against the pressure pushing down on her. To ascend toward the giant doors keeping the fortress shut.

She took a heavy laboured breath. If she rested now, she didn't know when she'll be able to stand up again.

*CRACK!!!

The first step destroyed the material of the staircase beneath her. Ria felt the urge to cough up blood then and there.

Then she saw Astrelya walk beside her.

She was no longer on her cloud but instead walked.

"I'll take the last steps with you. A show of respect. Not to you of course. But rather, to this place." Astrelya smiled, nonchalantly making her way up.

Ria was about to take another step when she saw a hand in front of her.

Astrelya had reached out.

Ria glanced up in surprise.

"Unless you have a method at countering fallen divinity, I suggest you take my hand. As much as I enjoy seeing you suffer, I want to see you suffer against Hayil not the land itself."

"Tsk. You know, there are better methods of saying you're concerned." Ria sighed before accepting her hand.

Immediately, the pressure around her lessened as she let out a sigh of relief.

It wasn't gone completely but far better than what she had to endure just now.

Astrelya didn't acknowledge the help she was giving. She simply kept walking and Ria followed.

Soon, they reached the doors and Astrelya let go of Ria.

But instead of the pressure returning, it disappeared entirely. As though this place was a holy sanctuary and that the fallen divinity had no place here.

"Your hunt awaits inside. Know this, the moment you step through that door, you'll be entering Hayil's territory." Astrelya warned.

Before coming to the Ruins of Ayr, she had already told Ria a little about the authorities of War and Famine.

While Hayil won't be able to use all of it, one could safely assume that she'll be able to access one, maybe two, rules from the authorities granted by Enris.

Astrelya turned around and looked at Ria.

This time, there was a hint of seriousness in her expression.

"You may not desire it but I will pray for you. A blessing from Enris."

Ria frowned and prepared to take a step back but Astrelya reached out.

She lifted her hand and her bloodied thumb pressed against the centre of Ria's forehead.

Red lines appeared as they crawled up Astrelya's arms.

An Eclipse ritual.

Ria felt betrayed for a moment and wanted to struggle but Astrelya's grip was firm.

"For the Eclipse that revels in chaos. For the one who smiles in calamity."

Ria clenched her teeth.

"Let her blade find its path. Let her strike carry the weight of her will. When hunger gnaws at her bones, when the world strips her bare and leaves nothing behind..."

"Let her endure.

"Let her cling to life with bloodied hands and broken bones." Astrelya paused for a moment. Hesitation in her actions, her voice, her eyes.

The realisation in what she's about to do.

Then... the acceptance.

"Let this youngling leave her home. Let her gain independence. Henceforth..."

Ria paused and Astrelya smiled knowingly.

"You are exiled from the Eclipse. May madness never stain your mind. May corruption never run through your veins. May your actions erase the mark of the Eclipse upon this land."

*RUMBLE!!!

Above, dark clouds gathered as blood pooled around them. With a shattering explosion, the clouds parted to reveal the fabrics of space being manipulated. And there, in the centre, the Eclipse hung while black ichor poured from the centre, submerging both Ria and Astrelya.

Ria was about to say something when she felt a burning sensation across her body. She gasped, choked and clenched her fist around Astrelya's arm.

Markings appeared across her body.

Ritualistic ones.

Then... it began to fade.

From the edges, the markings disappeared one by one until Ria's body was cleansed of the Eclipse's influence.

Panting heavily... Ria's arms trembled as she looked at Astrelya in disbelief.

"Did you just... why?" She questioned.

"Why not? You've already shown me you don't want any part of the Eclipse. What use is there to keep its mark on you?" Astrelya chuckled.

Through their time together, Ria had made her stance clear.

Even this hunt, while technically involved with the Eclipse's authority, wouldn't push Ria onto the path Enris desired.

It was clear to Astrelya.

Ria will never inherit the Eclipse no matter what.

Thus she released her from her duty.

"Now go, or do you need more time to rest?" Astrelya took a step back, snapping her finger as the eclipse and blood disappeared from the ruins of Ayr as though they never existed.

Ria opened her mouth but... what else can she even say?

"If you can clear this trial... I believe erasing the markings of the Eclipse like I've done shouldn't pose an issue for you at all." Astrelya yawned while climbing onto her cloud.

"Didn't you say you wanted to wipe out the Eclipse? I've given you the foundations of a weapon. Whether or not you can make it a reality is up to you."

Ria exhaled through her nose before looking up at the Lord of Stars.

There was only one thing she could say in this moment.

It wasn't to question why she had gone against Enris or the goal behind her actions.

Rather...

"Thank you."

"Go on, just make sure you entertain me with your actions from now." Astrelya chuckled before snapping her finger.

An invisible force pushed Ria towards the gate as Ria smiled helplessly.

The smile faded as she placed her palms against the material.

Now that her hand had come into contact with the door, she could feel the evil on the otherside.

*Krk...

Ria gave the door a push as she shifted her weight forward. She anchored herself down and exerted as much force as possible.

With a low groan, the door was pushed open as the interior revealed itself.

The first thing that Ria saw was the chains.

They hung from the walls, the floor, the pillars and even the ceiling.

Countless chains protruding from all directions, converging around a single figure at the centre of the hall.

Every limb was constrained, restricting her movements.

Rather than an experimental site, this felt more like... A prison.

Hayil was tall. Even kneeling, her size was evident. A size similar to Allura.

She had radiant gold hair that reached the floor. Some of the strands had lost its glow, turning into a white silver instead.

Behind her, tangled with chains, were wings. White feathers stained with blood around the edges.

There was a collar around her neck with metal teeth biting into flesh.

With the sound of Ria's arrival, the chains rang out from Hayil's movements as she glanced up, revealing her face.

Ria paused.

Truly befitting the name of Angel. A beauty that left Ria speechless. Even with the dark circles and exhaustion in her face, her elegance couldn't be hidden.

There was a sense of exhaustion in her eyes. A boredom seeing the new arrivals until...

Her pupils shook.

***RUMBLE!!!**

The entire building shook as Hayil lifted her torso. Her gaze unmoving as blood dripped from her eyes.

Beauty twisting into horror in the split of a second.

"Ah... ARGHHH!!!" She let out a cry as cracks appeared across her body. Her skin tearing against chains from the force of her actions.

"ARGHH!!!" A deep hatred that permeated her veins. Such visceral hatred that even Ria couldn't help but take a step back in shock.

How could someone, something harbour such anger, such wrath.

*BANG!!!

The ground fractured beneath Hayil as the chains started to snap one by one, whipping against pillars and shattering them in the process.

"ENRISSS!!!!!"

Chapter 1020: Fighting Hayil

Ria furrowed her brows as she summoned her blade. Hayil was restrained, yes. But those bindings weren't going to last very long and...

There was another concern.

Ria glanced to her side slightly.

Enris.

That's what Hayil shouted when glaring at Astrelya. Was it because of the Eclipse energy? Or... Ria shook her head.

There was no time to think about such things.

"ENRIS!!! ENRISSS!!!" Hayil screamed as the world around them began to warp.

A burst of energy so potent that Ria was forced to shield herself lest she got blown out of the building. Astrelya simply stood with a smile on her face.

"Keep an eye on her authorities. But don't be passive. If you let her control the rhythm of this battle, you'll lose~" Astrelya gave Ria a quick glance before turning to leave.

Starlight gathered around her, but Hayil wasn't about to let that happen.

*BANG!!!

Rusted weapons ripped through space, crossing the distance between them in an instant as Astrelya twisted her body, weaving through the attack.

"Where do you think you're going!?" Hayil glared as blood surged forth like a tidal wave.

*Sigh~

"I'm not your enemy today." Astrelya flicked her finger, splitting the wave in half.

*SHATTER!!!

Hayil broke out of her chains at the same time as a broken white crown appeared above her head. A sword of light converged around her hand and she disappeared where she stood.

*CLANG!!!

Astrelya caught the sword between her fingers, flicking her wrist as she threw Hayil away.

"Why!?" Hayil shouted, slamming her palms into the ground as rusted weapons shot towards Astrelya.

Snapping her fingers, constellations formed, creating a barrier that deflected the weapons, leaving her unharmed.

"I did everything for you! I bled for you! Suffered for you! Why!? Why did you abandon me!?" Hayil clenched her fist. A blanket of black mist rushed toward Astrelya as she revealed a smirk.

Clapping her hands together, ripples in space folded in on themselves, erasing the mist.

"Are you going to keep watching or will you fight your target?" Astrelya reminded her as Ria clicked her tongue.

Lightning crackled across her body as she immediately summoned her weapon.

"F*ck off!" Hayil shouted, flicking her head to the side as she dodged Ria's sword stab.

She reached out in an attempt to grab Ria, but Ria was already gone in a flash of light.

"It's me and you, buddy." Ria narrowed her eyes, sheathing her blade before swinging it in a wide arc.

*KRK!!!

A line of raw energy slashed forward, but Hayil simply glared at the woman.

"I've come to slaughter." Hayil chanted as red energy appeared in her eyes.

The space around them darkened, pulling the two of them into a world of darkness.

"I've come to feast."

Rusted spikes burst out from her back as she let out a gasp of pain before tearing out her own wings.

"I've come to corrupt."

Before the arc of energy could reach her, a flash of light appeared from Hayil's eyes as the slash was transformed then erased.

"Let my blood taint the land. Summon forth a hell of my own making."

Ria wasn't about to let her finish as she took aim. Lightning coiled around her arm as it was transformed into the power of magnetism. A single arrow aimed at Hayil's head.

*BANG!!!

Firing the strike, the recoil threw Ria's arm back as she winced in pain.

But she wasn't done.

A fragment of Enris won't be killed this easily!

Slamming her hands down, lightning nodes appeared around them as her entire body started to blur.

Silhouettes snapped into place as her speed was enhanced repeatedly until...

Shinsei Raikiri!

A pillar of lightning struck down as Ria's fastest strike was overlaid with her arrow.

"Let the Sun, Moon, and Stars weep at my arrival." Hayil glanced up at Ria.

The attacks were inches from hitting her, but she was unfazed.

"Glory to the Eclipse!"

*BANG!!!

A burst of energy crashed into Ria, dispelling her strike as her body was flung back.

She tumbled through the air before twisting herself and landing upright. She looked up. The world around them had shifted.

Though not in the manner of a Second Resonance.

No... This felt far stronger. The kind of realm where even if she used her own Resonance, it wouldn't overwrite this place.

"Territory creation." Ria mumbled.

Above them, a giant Eclipse hung in the sky, devouring all light. The edges burned with fury. Clouds turned black, lit only by the red glow along their edges.

Below, a land of war and destruction spread around them. Broken fortresses, corpses hanging from trees, jagged pillars with bodies crucified along their sides.

That wasn't the worst part either.

Ria's frown deepened as she glanced at her arm.

Her lightning trembled, struggling to sustain itself.

Her energy and output were being drained.

Authority of Famine.

Taking a deep breath, Ria gathered her energy into a single orb before firing it into the sky.

Second Resonance! Crowned Tempest, Heaven's Rift!

Even if it wouldn't overwrite the Territory, Ria needed it to reinforce what little she could.

Dark clouds gathered while a lightning halo suspended itself in the air.

Yet... the lightning was affected by Hayil's territory and took on a crimson glow.

A torrent of energy crashed down on Ria as her form shifted. Her hair turned neon blue, fading off into crackles of lightning at the tips. Her eyes transformed into a purple glow while markings appeared on her shoulders.

Ria glared at Hayil.

With her hatred of Enris, she could have made a great ally. Yet... she could also see the madness in her eyes. If left alone, she would kill every living thing in her surroundings.

The kind of burning rage that could never be controlled.

A vessel that had surrendered herself to hatred.

"It's just you and me! Don't think about anyone else right now!" Ria shouted, aiming toward Hayil using her left hand.

She was about to lunge when Hayil disappeared.

"!!!"

Ria widened her eyes. Hayil had already grabbed her by the face.

"I'll kill you first!" Hayil shouted, dragging Ria against the ground.

Ria let out a groan as the ground scraped against her back. Grabbing Hayil's wrist, she kicked the angel off her before shattering her sword into countless lightning bolts.

Unleashing a strike around her, Ria forced Hayil to step away.

"Removing restraints!" Ria clenched her fist.

A spear of lightning appeared in her hand as afterimages split from its main body.

One, two... three.

Having reached threefold lightning, Ria didn't stop.

What used to be her old limit was simply a record she must shatter!

Four Fold Lightning!

Cracks appeared across her body as the power was reaching the limit of what this vessel was allowed to hold.

"Oi! Hayil!" Ria shouted as the angel narrowed her eyes.

Then there was the fifth, and blood burst from Ria's arm.

Five Fold Lightning Tribulation!!!

Ria threw the spear as all five afterimages snapped forward, combining with the main body. Rings of energy appeared in front of the spear. With each one it passed through, the power would multiply!

Hayil widened her eyes and instantly raised her guard.

Yet a tiny bolt of lightning appeared behind her.

Confusion filled her mind, yet she didn't bother to guard against it.

What could that tiny speck of energy do?

"What could that tiny speck of energy do? Is that what you're thinking?" Ria's voice echoed out as her Sigil activated, swapping locations with the tiny bolt.

"!!!"

A wide grin appeared on Ria's face as her figure disappeared. In her place...

The Lightning Tribulation!

*BANG!!!

Rolling across the ground from the impact, Ria coughed lightly while glancing up at the cloud of smoke.

Her attack landed.

That she could guarantee. And yet...

An unsettling feeling washed over her chest.

One of her strongest attacks had landed. It should have been good news, yet Ria found no joy.

*CRACK!!! CRUNCH!!!

The sound of bone twisting and snapping echoed out as Ria immediately gathered her energy into a second spear.

If Hayil survived that then she had no choice but to prepare a second!

Lightning gathered as afterimages manifested once more.

"Enough of that." Hayil spoke coldly, her radiant eyes staring dead into Ria's as the two of them were now face to face.

Ria wanted to take a step back yet her body was stuck in place.

She couldn't move no matter how much she wanted to.

Hayil pulled back her arm as her palm pressed against Ria's stomach.

Rusted plates converged into a gauntlet as she lunged forward with a punch!

Every instinct Ria had told her she couldn't allow herself to be hit by that attack.

Lightning gathered. She wanted to swap locations but it was blocked by an invisible force.

Should she fight back with equal force?

Ria immediately dismissed that thought. She couldn't gather the power on such short notice.

Instead...

Ria narrowed her eyes and gambled. Right as the fist was about to strike her stomach, she punched, hitting the wrist just in time.

Lightning crackled and activated her power of magnetism!

She didn't need to change the direction completely. No, she simply had to divert it. To push it slightly off course!

***BANG!!!**

As the fist struck, Ria managed to jump back as the invisible force dissipated right before contact.

Crashing against the ground, Ria quickly adjusted herself as blood dripped from her wound. It wasn't a direct strike but...

She had no direct means of regeneration!

Taking a deep breath, she stared at Hayil, who took slow steps toward her.

This was what it meant to fight against someone possessing the Authorities of the Eclipse. An uphill battle no matter how many tricks she had up her sleeve.

Yet... a smile appeared on Ria's face.

Perhaps she had been influenced by Astrelya without knowing.

After all...

Her heart was slamming against her chest. Not from fear or exhaustion.

Rather...

Pure excitement. A difficult hunt made the reward all the more worth it at the end of the day.

This bounty would be hers no matter what.