

Abyssal A 1031

Chapter 1031: Taking What's Her's

With the escape now planned, the plans were formed quickly. Noah was careful about who he shared it with. Only those who truly intended to leave were told. The more people who knew, the greater the risk. It only took one person to report them to the boss for everything to fall apart.

But thankfully, with how busy the boss had been, even if someone wanted to, they never found the chance.

Whenever the guards brought food, they were always present. Any attempt to speak out of line would mean instant death for the one who tried.

And just like that, two days passed.

Tonight was the night they would launch their escape plan.

Based on the observations of another kid, the guard on duty tonight tended to fall asleep rather easily. Sneaking past them shouldn't be an issue.

A group of children moved along the outer edge of the compound, keeping low as they kept an eye out for patrols.

No one spoke. The nervousness of the situation chilled their blood. One wrong move... one mistake.

They swallowed their saliva nervously while Noah led the group with two others.

His gaze flicked between the paths ahead and gestured for the others to follow closely.

Feris kept herself near him, making sure not to fall behind. Though... the pain in her heart made it difficult to focus.

Her mind wanted to go with Noah, she had even agreed on it. And yet... when she thought about leaving behind the crystal, reluctance filled her actions.

"It's okay. Just focus on me." Noah reassured as Feris nodded her head.

She kept herself occupied with just keeping up.

Soon, they reached the edge. They had evaded the guards for now, as they rarely checked whether the kids were sleeping. But what came next was the hard part.

The entire place was surrounded by tall walls, far from any trees. One guard sat by the entrance, yawning as he hovered on the verge of dozing off.

Noah narrowed his eyes.

He had the others stop for now. They needed to wait for the guard to sleep or else they'd never get out.

The group waited patiently, making sure not to make too big of a sound else they disturb the guard's rest.

They had plenty of time before the next guard shift.

A few of the kids were getting restless, but Noah managed to calm them down. All they had to do was wait. That's how simple it was.

Yet the longer they waited, the more impatient the kids got. Some even suggested they kill the guard since they had brought along a couple of pickaxes and shovels.

However, that was too risky, as all of the guards had at least one Sigil, not to mention the fact that they were adults.

They weren't something the kids could take on without care.

Then, as a few of them turned around, their pupils constricted in panic.

A second guard.

He approached from the main path with steady steps. Unlike the one by the gate, there was no hint of drowsiness in his expression or posture. His gaze was sharp as a frown appeared on his face when he saw the other guard.

Clicking his tongue, he gave the other guard a kick, waking him up.

"Oi." He called out. "You've been dozing off again. How many times has that been?"

The first guard cleared his throat and sat up straight.

"I wasn't asleep."

"Bullsh*t." The second guard scoffed. "A few people are already starting to complain. They've caught you slacking on the job quite a few times already."

Stepping next to the first guard, he leaned against the wall with his arms folded.

"It doesn't really matter, does it? Or what? Is the boss scared of people sneaking in? No one even knows about what he found."

However, the second guard reached out and slapped him across the head.

"You stupid f*ck. How would you even know when you're sleeping? We have to do a good job here for a high payout."

"Why don't we... take it ourselves? If it's so precious, can't we just blackmail him with it?" The first guard rubbed his hands together.

But the suggestion only caused the second guard to roll his eyes.

"We don't even know what it does, so how will we take advantage of it? All we know is that standard crap can't break the damn thing. Even with Sigils. And with that giant block, do you really think we can deal with it?"

The first guard scratched his cheek awkwardly and nodded.

If they wanted to make a move, they had to wait. So right now, the key was for them to do a good job so the boss kept them around.

With this, the first guard also started to pay attention as things took a turn for the worse for Noah.

There were two guards now, and his expression darkened.

This wasn't part of the plan.

Behind him, the group shifted uneasily.

Taking on one guard might have been possible if they got lucky.

But two?

"What do we do now?" one of them whispered, barely holding back so the guards didn't overhear.

Noah clenched his jaw.

If they waited... a better chance might appear. However, that also risked the guards finding out the kids were missing from the rooms.

But if they moved now...

His eyes flicked between both guards.

Impossible.

Was going back the only choice they had?

Yet... trying to retreat from this place had its own complications. They needed to make sure they were quiet and didn't get discovered early.

"Let's move back for now. Be careful you don't make a sound." Noah clenched his fist.

This was the best they could do for the safety of everyone here.

Clink...

Dread. Noah's eyes slowly widened as everyone turned towards the back. One of the kids had turned around too fast, and his shovel hit the tree they were hiding next to. His face was pale, and so was everyone else's.

The two guards stopped talking as their heads snapped towards their general direction.

"Who's there!?" The second guard shouted, drawing his blade slowly as he walked over.

"RUN!"

One of the kids screamed, turning around and sprinting.

Yet the moment he stood up, the guard lunged.

He twisted his body and threw his sword. It spun through the air, slashing into the kid's back as his body was split in half. Guts and blood splattered across the rest of them as panic erupted.

Fear and terror dominated their minds as they turned and ran.

The guard hadn't expected so many of them to be hiding nearby as Noah tried to get them all to calm down.

But it was too late.

Now that they had been discovered, the best option was to kill the guards and run, not go back to the rooms.

And yet... none of them listened to him except for a small handful.

"F*ck! They think they'll be safe if they pretend they weren't with us!" one of the older kids who worked with Noah on this plan cursed.

"Noah, what do we do now?!" another shouted.

Noah glared at the guard who had thrown his sword.

"We kill!"

They had no other choice. They had to make a move now or die trying. Going back and pretending nothing happened was impossible by this point.

Feris stood still in this panic. Her eyes were kind of absent as chaos erupted around her.

One of the kids bumped into Feris while running away, and she was thrown to the side, crashing into another kid.

"Feris!" Noah noticed and looked back.

"Stupid! Don't look away!" another warned Noah, lunging towards the guard.

Feris crashed into a tree and fell onto the ground.

She let out a slight cry as the crystal escaped her hand.

Panic filled her eyes as she tried to pull herself up.

By this point, the first guard had stood up and walked towards the crystal that rolled across the ground.

"Well... what do we have here?"

He picked up the crystal with his fingers and lifted it into the air.

Feris widened her eyes, her breathing speeding up as her eyes trembled.

"Give it back..."

"Hah? Give it back? You stole something that doesn't belong to you. If anything, shouldn't you be giving it back? Stupid kid." He mocked with a loud laugh.

"Give it back!" Feris shouted, running after him, but he simply kicked her away.

Feris slammed into the ground, clutching her stomach as tears appeared in her eyes.

She glared at the man who was holding her crystal.

"You want this? Too f*cking bad." Stuffing it into his pocket, he drew his sword.

Feris clenched her teeth until her gums bled.

That crystal was hers... how dare he?

She left behind everything for Noah. She didn't want much. Just the small shard was enough. She was happy with this small shard. But they couldn't even let her have that?

How much more did they want to take?

She found that crystal first. She dug it up.

It should belong to her, not them!

Her fingers dug into the ground. Rage filled her heart.

People were shouting, but she couldn't hear them clearly. Just a constant ringing in her ears and one desire dominating her mind.

That crystal... how dare he touch it. How dare he take it from her.

"That crystal..." Feris mumbled as her vision blurred.

Distortions appeared in her view, similar to what she saw when she was in the pit.

"It's mine!" Feris shouted as purple veins spread across her arms.

She appeared in front of the guard faster than he expected as her fingers plunged into his eyes. Opening her mouth, she bit down on his throat and tore off a large chunk.

With the guard gasping and grasping at his throat in fear, Feris glared at the other guard.

"Are you also taking what's mine?" she asked, her eyes bloodshot and murderous.

Noah couldn't say anything.

Right now...

Feris looked no different from a wild beast.

One that had tasted blood.

Chapter 1032: Escaping With Feris

The other guard froze.

His pupils trembled as he couldn't believe what he had just seen.

Confusion, doubt.

Did the girl just kill his fellow guard in front of him? No matter how careless he had been, he would've been able to react to a kid jumping at him. But now...

He was gasping for air. Bubbles appeared in his throat as blood rushed to escape his body.

He looked at the dying man, then at Feris, then back at the dying man.

Regardless of what the truth may be, death had occurred. This was no longer a situation where he could be careless!

"You f*cking brat!!!" he shouted as a Sigil lit up on his neck.

Grabbing the nearest kid to him, the man twisted his body and threw him towards Feris.

Feris wanted to dodge, but her body refused to move. She clenched her teeth as her flesh felt as though it was about to be torn off.

Bracing herself, the kid slammed into her as both of them collided with the wall.

*BANG!!!

Her head hit the wall as blood started to stain her hair.

Her vision distorted as she lost the strength to move even a finger.

Feris's eyes lingered on the guard lying on the ground.

She didn't care about the other guard walking towards her. Right now, her focus was only on the crystal.

She wanted to hold it again.

Yet... how could she if she couldn't even move her body?

"Crystal... Mine..." Feris mumbled. She crawled towards the man using her chin.

Glaring at the girl, the man picked up the dead guard's sword. Just as he was about to slash at Feris, a shadow loomed over him.

His eyes widened.

"Who the hell do you think you're trying to kill!" Noah shouted.

Twisting his body, his pickaxe hooked into the guard's eye as he stumbled back screaming.

But he wasn't done.

He had to make sure the man died before he could use his Sigil!

Kicking the man away, Noah turned to one of his friends.

"Shovel!" he shouted as one of them threw one over.

Catching it, Noah held his breath.

Adrenaline rushed through his body as his grip on the handle tightened.

A familiar action that they had done time and time again.

Wind back the tool, swing with all of your strength!

Noah hacked down with the shovel as it crushed the man's throat in an instant.

In a panic, he flung the sword around as it cut Noah on the arm, but he didn't stop.

He could only stop when this man was dead!

A second swing.

His shovel dug deeper, blood poured out as the flesh was cut.

Not enough though.

Again!

With the fourth hit, the spine was broken as Noah finally exhaled. Panting heavily, he stepped back. The guard was dead. A pickaxe stuck in his eye and his neck broken.

Even with Sigils, there was no way for this man to survive a wound like this.

Throwing the shovel back to his friend, Noah yanked the pickaxe free.

He walked over to the other guard and found Feris's crystal.

Even now, Feris was still crawling with her chin.

He dropped the pickaxe and returned Feris her crystal.

"It's not going anywhere. It's yours and yours alone," he comforted as Feris finally calmed down.

With the crystal in her hands, the purple veins faded away. But as they disappeared, Noah noticed the scars on Feris's arm.

That kind of power... he didn't know what it was, but it wasn't something Feris should use often.

Especially if it left her body in this kind of state.

Giving her a hug, he pulled her into a princess carry. By this point, fatigue took over Feris as her eyelids fluttered. Slowly, she fell asleep while Noah glanced around them.

Most of the kids had run without looking back.

The one whom the guard threw into Feris had fallen at a bad angle and died on the spot, his head twisted the wrong way.

As for how many of them were left...

Including him and Feris, there were three others. Two guys and one girl.

"Should we..." one of them glanced back at the fleeing silhouettes in the distance.

"Forget them. We don't have time to waste. If they couldn't stand and fight in a situation like this, how can we trust that they won't abandon us in the future if things get tough?" another spoke up as Noah nodded in agreement.

Their lives would become more difficult going forward.

Free? Yes.

But that freedom came at a price.

"Let's leave. Carry the swords. We might be able to use them or sell them. Take the pickaxes and shovels too," Noah suggested as the others quickly carried out the orders.

Glancing back at the direction of the pit, Noah creased his brows and turned around.

He was leaving that life behind.

Sitting by a window, a woman had her chin resting on her palm while she looked out at sea.

She was observing the passing clouds and let out a slight yawn. There was a slight smile on her face despite the lazy look in her eyes.

"Is there something interesting in the sky? I don't believe there are any stars for you to see at this time of day," a man asked, sitting opposite her.

He was a muscular man. Not muscular as in large, but more so on the lean side. One that had both power and agility.

He wore a mercenary's outfit with rags and old jackets. His sleeves were rolled up to reveal his firm forearms, one having a rather large scar.

"Nothing much. I'm just bored," the woman replied, stretching her body while playing with a small piece of crystal.

"If you're so bored, maybe you should help out a little. The next job is a pretty big one after all," Noah smiled helplessly, looking at the woman Feris had become.

After their escape that night, Feris lost a lot of her energy, spending most of her time sleeping or staring out at the sky.

They went to doctors and other medical professionals to try and figure something out, but none of them had an answer for him. Some even concluded that she was simply lazy.

Feris stuck out her tongue.

"You're the one who dragged me out, right? Gotta take responsibility," she grinned cheekily, causing Noah to roll his eyes.

"Yes, yes, take responsibility. How many years has it been now? I'm going to break my back covering for your workload at this point," Noah let out a slight groan.

Another thing that had changed over the years was their power.

Once they found a bit of shelter, they started to earn money using whatever way they could think of. With money, they could afford food. With food, they could work for more money.

But there were some jobs that only the strong could take.

In which case, they needed power. And power came in the form of Sigils.

By this point, Noah had become a mercenary with four Sigils and a first Resonance. The strongest of their group. The others were still on their second, and one on his third.

They kept as a tightly knit group. Three guys, two girls.

However...

Even though everyone else had received Sigils through the shamans and Hunts... the only one who didn't get anything was Feris.

Not because she didn't want to, but rather, the Shamans couldn't find anything for her.

In their words, it was as if she was completely incompatible with the Abyss.

No bounty, no blessing. Nothing.

Which only confused Noah more considering what they saw in the past. Looking back, the power that Feris demonstrated that night wasn't normal.

Her speed surpassed what should've been possible for them. Otherwise, how else was she able to take a guard by surprise? Then there was her ferocity and the purple veins.

It was too strange to be simply dismissed as a trick of the light.

It had something to do with the crystal in her hands.

"Don't blame me. Blame the shamans who didn't give me a bounty. It's your job to protect me now, right?" Feris shrugged.

"I'm the cute mascot of the party." She struck a slight pose.

Noah chuckled and nodded.

"Alright, miss mascot, come on. We need to do a briefing on the mission details." Noah stood up, surprising Feris.

Usually, she didn't have to join these meetings since she had no combat potential.

Yet... if she was being dragged along, then whatever was involved, she needed to hear about.

"Is it dangerous?" Feris frowned.

Noah thought about it for a moment.

"Depends. I think it's fine though." He smiled.

Feris had a bad feeling, but with Noah saying it was fine, she could only sigh.

The crystal had been turned into a necklace of sorts as she hung it around her neck.

Then, she raised her arms.

"Pick me up." She wiggled her fingers at Noah.

"You're a grown woman now, Feris. You can walk," he rolled his eyes.

"Don't wanna." She grinned.

With no other choice, Noah pulled her up and onto his back.

"Yippee~ my favourite bed," Feris giggled as the two of them went downstairs.

"Ah! Feris! You're using the boss as a bed again!" one of the men pointed out as Feris stuck out her tongue.

"Alright, let's not shout and disturb the others. We've got a job to talk about," Noah smiled, placing Feris down on the chair.

"What's so bad about this job that the boss has to get everyone? Even our mascot?" another asked as Noah rolled out a piece of parchment.

"This job is important because..." he trailed off, pointing at the centre of the map.

"It has something to do with the crystal Feris found years back."

At the mention of the crystal, Feris sat up as her heart started to pound against her chest.

Chapter 1033: Client's Request

"It has something to do with the crystal Feris found years back."

At the mention of the crystal, the others turned serious. Even after so many years, they couldn't forget the life they lived in that pit. The days of endless mining and hoping they didn't die by some freak accident.

Then there was the escape. It was the first time they fought back and saw death in such a manner. The kids that got cut in half, the ones who died trying to reach freedom. The adults they killed in order to escape...

"I finally found news about it. It's been kept as a tight secret for the rich, but news about it leaked out," Noah continued. "They've found pieces of it scattered throughout the world. Small shards not unlike the one that Feris found. However, no one was able to use it properly until recently."

Subconsciously, they glanced at Feris.

During their escape, she showcased a strange power that was never used since. They didn't know the source, but had an inkling that it was probably something to do with the crystal.

And now... that had been indirectly confirmed.

"There was an... incident during a noble banquet. An assassin used a power different from Abyssal energy and wrought havoc. It took several guards sacrificing themselves before the man was killed." Noah pulled out a newspaper article and placed it on the table.

There, they could see the man with strange purple veins spreading across his body.

"They found out that prior to this assassination, he was actually powerless. No Sigils at all. A weak farmer. But after getting his hands on one of these, he actually took out guards with three Sigils. So now the nobles are scrambling to get their hands on any pieces they can find."

"Let me guess... our employer is a noble who wants a piece, and we have to get it for them?" Yama, the oldest of the group aside from Noah, asked, but Noah shook his head.

"No. The crystals aren't her main priority."

The party paused, surprised by this fact.

When everyone was going crazy for the crystal, the client was actually ignoring the shards?

"What she wants to know is where it is and where it came from. In other words..." Noah turned to Feris.

"This is a mission for us to research the crystal."

Feris clenched her fist.

She had almost given up on it, content to live her life without feeling the emotion of fulfilment again.

And yet...

"Are you sure? You better not be joking around," Feris asked hesitantly, fearful of raising her hopes.

"Yes, I'm sure. We'll be given a budget and as much manpower as we need to locate the crystals. As long as we find the locations, our client will be satisfied. It gives us the money we need to harvest and research since they gave us an additional gift," Noah nodded with a smile.

"If we can get to any of the pieces before anyone else, we're allowed to keep the shards," he added.

"What the hell?!" Yama stood up in shock.

"Did you get scammed?!" Rika unfolded her arms in disbelief.

"Boss, did you take a bad fall?!" Tobi, the youngest who looked up to Noah, blinked his eyes in a mix of surprise and confusion.

Three shouts of concern erupted back to back as Noah was almost blown back.

"No, no, I promise, guys. I even made a law of agreement to ensure that everything is fine. She won't take the crystals back. Whatever we find, we get to keep. As long as we find out where the crystals came from, she'll be happy," Noah reassured while the other members only found it more and more suspicious.

"Boss... did she ask for the location because she wanted the crystals at the source? The ones too big for us to take away?" Tobi asked hesitantly.

Noah coughed awkwardly. He hadn't thought that far.

"I knew it. Boss loses his brains whenever it's something to do with Feris," Tobi sighed.

"So we don't know what her true goal is." Yama scratched his hair in annoyance while Noah simply laughed it off.

"Regardless, it's still true that she is giving us the budget and manpower to research this crystal properly. We get to keep the shards, and honestly... just finding information would've been enough to convince me," Noah smiled.

The others looked at each other before smiling helplessly.

Indeed. If they could find out what was wrong with the crystals, they might be able to understand why Feris was the way she was. A sense of being incomplete.

"Of course, we're not entering this contract blindly. I've arranged a meeting for all of us at a later date. We're going to meet up with the client and get more information from her directly."

While Noah explained their upcoming schedule with the group, Feris found herself gazing into the crystal in her possession.

That spark of life in her chest finally coming back after all these years.

It was a difficult feeling to explain. One that Noah tried his best to understand, yet fell just short.

That feeling of emptiness that lingered in her chest. The fatigue that built up silently throughout the day.

Feris didn't know how long she had zoned out for, but she had been staring at the crystal for hours before she even realised what had happened. Blinking her eyes, she let out a slight yawn and noticed Noah sleeping by the table.

There were a bunch of documents and books spread out around him.

Information on existing crystal sites that had been heard through rumours.

Feris stood up and walked over, looking at the notes and markings he left on the map.

The best routes to take, the dangers they would face.

Potential Hunter teams they might come across and...

Where the pit was located.

Feris sat next to Noah and rested her head on the table.

She stared at his sleeping face as an indescribable emotion appeared in her chest.

Ever since they were children in that pit, Noah had been working hard for her sake.

Especially now.

He might not mention it, but Feris knew how hard he had worked. The information brokers he had talked to in order to find details on what happened in the pit.

In his free time, he kept working tirelessly to help fill the void in her heart.

She knew how blessed she was to have someone like Noah in her life.

Her gaze softened.

And now... they were finally one step closer. The promise he made so many years ago on that night.

"Thank you..." Feris mumbled.

Unable to help herself, her hand slowly reached up and brushed his hair slightly to the side.

Seeing the way his face scrunched up, she couldn't help but let out a small laugh as she quickly held it in before she woke him up.

Looking around her, Feris quickly found a blanket and threw it over Noah's shoulder.

However, she wasn't planning on letting him sleep alone.

Sitting down next to him again, she made herself comfortable and grabbed a small section of the blanket for herself.

"Goodnight..."

Yet the moment she said this, Noah's eyelids twitched as he slowly opened his eyes.

In front of him, he saw a surprised Feris with a blush slowly creeping up her face.

She slowly reached forward with two fingers and closed his eyes again, acting as though that would put him to sleep.

Yet with her face being the first thing he saw after waking up, trying to fall back asleep wasn't exactly an easy task.

"What are you doing?" Noah asked slowly as Feris's fingers trembled.

"Nothing."

"Your fingers on my eyes speak otherwise," Noah chuckled, causing Feris to purse her lips.

Letting out a sigh, she removed her fingers as Noah sat up and gave his body a good stretch.

"Are you worried about tomorrow?"

Feris thought about it for a moment before eventually nodding her head.

As excited as she was to make progress towards reclaiming the crystal, a part of her was worried. It felt too good to be true.

And that only made things worse.

"I'm a little worried too. But it's also the best chance we're going to get. The whole world is looking at this incident and realising that there might be another path to power. One that doesn't require them to hunt large beasts in the Abyss," Noah exhaled softly. "If we don't get ahead of the competition, we'll be left picking up the scraps."

Feris creased her brows.

But right as she did, Noah reached out and tapped the space between her brows with his finger.

"Stop scrunching so much, you're going to get wrinkles." He massaged gently as Feris stuck out her tongue.

"Just leave it to me. I'll make sure you get the crystals again. I promised you after all." Noah smiled.

Seeing this smile, Feris felt warm on the inside.

Closing her eyes, she grabbed his hand and brought it to her cheeks.

"I know. But I still want you to be safe. I chose to leave with you instead of staying behind after all... what use is it if you're not there when I get the crystals?"

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The journey took roughly two days as they needed some time to pack everything up and prepare for the trip ahead.

After meeting their client, they would be immediately on the road to the other crystal sites. And with that in mind, coming back to the base wasn't going to be likely in the short term.

Looking at their base of operations, emotions surged through the party's chest.

Noah saved them from the pit, and that allowed them to live this kind of life. Now, it was their turn to repay the favour. To help Feris find the missing half of her heart.

And for that, they began their trip across the nations.

Chapter 1034: Ciel

As they arrived, the group was silent. It started as a simple silhouette but as they got closer, the structure became too large to ignore.

White stone walls and iron gates that stood twice as tall as the height of a man. Patterns etched into the surface and through the gaps of the gate, they saw a long path that stretched inward to the mansion in the distance.

No guards stood at the entrance but who would dare break into a house like this?

"Boss... Are... Are you sure this is the right place?" Tobi asked hesitantly.

Noah didn't answer immediately, he simply wanted up and rang the doorbell.

They couldn't hear anything yet after a brief pause, all of them felt a chill.

Someone was looking at them from afar.

All of them held their breath except Feris.

There was... something about this stare that felt familiar.

Which was strange considering she never felt anything like it. But deep inside, it felt as though it was resonating with her on another level. A familiarity like seeing your own reflection.

Was the one behind this gaze also like her? Someone missing their other half?

With a soft creak, the gates started to open as the party looked at one another with concern.

But Noah pushed ahead as he had been here before.

They made their way through the garden with a frown. Though the aura may not be hostile, just approaching the area felt as though they were walking into danger.

A constant pressure surrounding them, making even just the act of breathing difficult.

After what felt like an eternity, they finally arrived at the front door. A butler was waiting for them.

"The lady is awaiting your presence inside." The butler bowed, opening the door for the group.

Once the party was in, he closed the door behind them before leading the group to the second floor where their client was waiting.

The closer they got, the stronger Feris's feeling was.

Then, as they entered the room, they saw her.

A woman who stood facing the window that revealed the garden.

The first thing that stood out was her hair. A platinum blonde that reached past her shoulders and down towards her lower back. A blonde that gradually faded into that of a aqua blue.

Turning around, she revealed a graceful smile along with a pair of striking red eyes. A shade of crimson like that of ruby. And in the centre of her eyes, two star shaped pupils could be seen, illuminated by a strange gold.

Eyes that Feris had never seen before.

The woman wore a white dress that clung to tightly to her body.

Seeing the group enter, she maintained her calm before pausing after laying her eyes on Feris.

'How peculiar...' She thought to herself.

"Please, take a seat. Glad I am to see that you've decided to accept my commission after all." She smiled, gesturing to the sofas as the group sat down.

Feris walked over next to Noah and sat down without a word. For these kinds of discussions, she didn't say anything. She simply listened without input. Hence why the others joked that she was here as a mascot rather than as a member of the party.

A description Feris didn't disagree with.

"Miss Ciel, to clarify on these matters, we will be given money and resources to pursue these crystals right?" Noah asked as Ciel chuckled and nodded her head.

"Indeed. I'm simply content with knowing the locations. Should you come across any crystal that can be removed from the site, by all means, you may keep them. I have no use for it." Ciel explained.

"I believe we have made a Law of Agreement to ensure that what I say is the truth and nothing but the truth."

Noah glanced down momentarily before turning back to her.

"Pardon my rudeness but... For someone of your strength, I don't see why you would need to hire a band of people like us to find the site for you? Can't you obtain that information with ease yourself?"

Ciel smiled and nodded her head.

"There is little I cannot get in this realm. After all, it's no different to the garden behind me. What I wish to get, I simply need to pass down the order. I will put on some gloves and simply pluck it out." Ciel waved her finger.

The windows opened as a gust of wind carried a single flower to her.

Plucking it out of the air, Ciel brought it to her nose before throwing it out the window again.

"However... These crystals sites are a little different. You can think of those as my neighbour's garden. I cannot exert my influence over it and that is why I must ask you or anyone else who is willing to take on this job. I will give you all the money you need to hire people for the job. Simply find these sites and report back." Ciel shrugged helplessly.

Noah nodded his head.

Like earlier, she was telling the truth.

Ciel cannot exert her influence over these crystals.

The party looked at one another before nodding.

"Alright. I believe last we talked, you mentioned have a lead for us."

Ciel flicked her finger and the butler stepped into the room.

"Please follow me. I will show you the information we have gathered thus far."

Watching the group leave the room, Ciel leaned against the table.

That girl Feris... She felt 'empty'. Not in the way that there's nothing on the inside but rather the fact that a part of her soul was missing.

Incomplete.

'Could it be...' Ciel thought about it for a moment before shaking her head. A ridiculous idea.

The likelihood of that happening was highly unlikely.

However, in the event that it does happen...

Ciel narrowed her eyes.

It might be best to take care of the girl before she becomes something else entirely.

###

Feris tugged at Noah's sleeve after they left the room.

"Hm? What is it?" He glanced back as Feris pulled him in for a whisper.

"Ciel. She felt... similar..." Feris frowned.

"Similar?"

"Mnm. Like she's also got a hole in her heart but... she filled it? I don't know." Feris shook her head.

It was a feeling that's hard to put into words. At least right now.

But if there's anything she was sure about, it would be the fact that Ciel somehow managed to fill that void in her chest.

A secret that Feris wanted to know so that she could stop feeling 'empty'.

"Do you want me to ask her about it?"

Feris thought about it for a moment before rejecting the idea.

Even though she felt 'similar' her gut feeling was warning her about the decision.

"Sorry, ignore what I said." Feris sighed.

###

A young girl pursed her lips as she watched tears fall from Feris's eyes.

"Nyer... she's having a nightmare again." She called out while Nyer glanced back.

"I'm aware. Right now, she's in a nightmare of her own making. Reliving the days leading up to her coronation as a Realm Ruler. It is a nightmare she wishes to forget but can't." He explained as the girl wanted to wipe the tears away but held herself back.

"Do you have those nightmares as well?" She asked as Nyer paused.

Thinking about it, he nodded his head.

"Yes. I too have nightmares that I wish to forget but cannot. It's why I'm working towards a better world right now." He admitted as the girl tapped her chin.

Skipping over to Nyer, she tugged at his sleeve for him to lean down and patted his head.

"If you cry, I can help you wipe away the tears okay?" She smiled.

Seeing this smile, Nyer felt a pain on the inside before chuckling.

He picked her up and ruffled her hair.

"Don't worry. It's been a long time since I last cried. I don't think you'll get the chance to wipe away my tears ahaha." He joked.

"Isn't that a good thing?"

Nyer shook his head.

"Depending on the reason behind tears, it serves as a proof of your humanity. My tears have long dried up so in a sense, you can say I can no longer prove my humanity."

Tears have already been shed. All that's left for him is the burning rage that shimmers in his chest.

"I still have tears. Should I cry for you?"

". . ." Nyer closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Once I've done what I need to do, there will be no need for tears. And... It seems like we have an intruder. I didn't think anyone would be able to find this place so soon." Nyer opened his eyes as a projection appeared in front of him.

A portal opening into the Void from the roots of the World Tree. An elven woman who's come to investigate Feris's whereabouts.

Setting the girl in his arms down, Nyer adjusted his cuffs.

"I will go deal with the intruder. Make sure Feris doesn't wake up okay?" Nyer requested as the girl nodded.

Taking a step, his form disappeared as the girl was now left alone.

Walking over to Feris, she kneeled down while looking at the crying realm ruler.

Her lips trembled, muttering a single sentence over and over. Desperation and helplessness merged into one.

"Don't... leave me alone..."

The girl exhaled slightly, holding back the urge to pet Feris on the head.

Even though her suffering was needed, it didn't mean she enjoyed seeing Feris cry like this.

All she could do was sit next to her and keep her company.

Chapter 1035: Prison In The Void

"Don't you ever... Urgh... Don't you ever! Do that again!" Elias grumbled, holding back the urge to throw up as he held onto a tree trunk.

Every time he spoke, he could feel his breakfast trying to crawl back out. With how fast Alice was going through the Void, he was surprised that he didn't throw up mid-flight.

Alice, on the other hand, didn't respond.

Usually, she would be enjoying the situation. Yet with her mind on what's been happening in the Void, it was hard to enjoy Elias's suffering.

Lab, on the other hand, was barely affected. She was still freaked out by how fast they were travelling, but her body was far more durable than Elias's.

"How far do we still need to go?" Alice asked, as she had taken a break only because Elias looked like he was reaching his limits.

"I believe three more jumps or so, covering the same distance, should bring us directly to the outside of the Capital. Though I must warn you, the closer we are, the more likely it is for you to run into defences placed by the royal family." Lab reminded as Alice nodded her head.

It was to be expected.

After all, as the capital of Extalia, she doubted the Royal family wanted someone to just drop a giant bomb in the middle of the city via the Void.

Once she had given Elias enough time to recover, Alice launched them through the Void for the second time.

The closer they got to the heart of Extalia, the worse the Void looked. In fact, there were certain parts that made Alice question whether or not this was still the same realm.

It was simply too... disgusting to be considered the Void.

'Can this place even be 'fixed'?' Alice asked with a frown.

Even though the Void wasn't habitable, seeing it mutate in such a manner was painful to watch. Especially knowing that this realm was practically Feris's home.

[Depends on how long Feris wants to spend fixing it. If she even wants that, if I'm being honest.] Cayla exhaled with a frown on her face.

[I mean, just look at the Abyss. You saw how different it was when Velouria was in charge. The rules set in place, the layout of the realm, and so on. But after her passing, everything went to sh*t.]

Alice reluctantly nodded her head.

Indeed, when Velouria was still around, the Miasma was controlled to some extent. While not completely absent, there were more zones where people could relax properly without suffocating from Abyssal Miasma.

But now... it was safe to say that even if she rebuilt Ayr, unless she had a way to purge the miasma, getting people to live there was impossible.

Just as Alice was about to create an exit portal from the Void, she noticed something in her peripherals. A strange reflection...

An empty location with a single 'cage' located in the centre.

But what truly caught her attention, what made her freeze in shock... was the aura left behind.

Without hesitation, Alice broke the bubble and created a platform for her to launch herself from.

Soaring through the Void without care, her heart slammed against her chest as anxiety dominated her mind.

Yet before she could reach that cage...

*BANG!!!

Slamming into an invisible wall, Alice was thrown back as blood dripped from her nose.

Veins bulged on her temple as her impatience was beginning to show.

Gathering energy into her palm, Alice prepared to punch through the realm if needed.

[ALICE!] Cayla shouted as Alice finally glanced back.

[Take a better look. Even if you break it, it won't open a path to the location. If anything, we'll just lose our only clue.] Cayla forced Alice to calm down as she took a step back.

Closing her eyes, she calmed down her mind.

Once she was calm, she glanced at the reflection once more.

An 'empty' location with a single cage. Blood stained the inside of the cage while raven feathers littered the ground.

Based on the energy left behind... Alice was confident that the one held within this cage was Kaden at one point.

There was no doubt about it. But that wasn't the only thing.

Hidden inside that energy was... an aura belonging to the Eclipse.

Kaden was wounded. And it was by Famine, of all people.

The moment she realised that, she couldn't stop herself anymore.

'Kaden won't die so easily. The fact that he's not here means that he's probably found a way out. The key is for us to figure out where he might've gone.' Alyss reminded.

[Alyss is right. Breaking this is not the right choice at this moment. If anything, it's best if you memorise what's happened here and make preparations to look for Kaden once we've regrouped with Allura.]

Alice glanced back at the cage and narrowed her eyes.

The aura leaving the cage was exceedingly weak, a far cry from what Kaden's aura was usually like.

Biting her lip, Alice turned around.

To find Allura or to track down Kaden.

On one hand, she knew where Allura was going. On the other... Kaden was definitely not in a good state after having left the prison.

'We're speeding up. Once we find Allura, I'm turning the Void inside out to look for Feris and Kaden. Feris can complain about what I'm doing to her home after she wakes the f*ck up.' Alice clenched her fist as she made her way back to Elias and Lab.

###

"Ha..." A slow exhale escaped Nyer's lips as he glanced back at the woman behind him.

"I thought I told you to keep an eye on Kaden. To make sure he's restrained. And now you're telling me he's escaped?" Nyer creased his brows in displeasure.

He thought that surely the Apostle of Famine would be able to look after one prisoner. It wasn't a difficult task after all.

Yet...

Kaden had escaped.

Deva couldn't say anything back. She simply clicked her tongue in response.

Shaking his head, Nyer turned to her.

"Can you track where he's gone?"

Deva shook her head.

"No, the aura is too weak for me to track. It was only strong at the moment of escape."

Tapping his finger, Nyer made up his mind.

"I have a new job for you. Take care of it and forget about Kaden. If you find him... I believe it should be within your best interest to run."

Deva frowned, shooting Nyer a glare. But seeing his expression, she held back her complaints.

He wasn't asking for her cooperation right now. This was a demand.

"Tsk... fine. Just tell me what you want me to do." Deva sighed.

"I want you to go to the capital. There, you should find a direct lineage of the Royal Bloodline and bring them to me."

"You want me to be a kidnapper?" Her expression twisted in disbelief. An insult to her power. An apostle relegated to kidnapping duty?!

Nyer didn't say anything.

Deva could feel the silent warning. If she rejected his demand, if she proved that she was of no use to him...

"Fine." Turning around, Deva left while Nyer shook his head.

"A troublesome woman, wouldn't you agree? You would think that someone with her power would do a better job. But then again... her opponent was Kaden. So I suppose, in the end, it's to be expected." Nyer turned back to the intruder of the realm.

*Cough...

Blood rolled down the corner of Renna's lips as she struggled to take a breath. Cuts could be seen across her body as her outfit was stained with crimson.

She leaned against a piece of mutated debris, a spear stabbed through her stomach and pinning her against the ground.

She wanted to remove it but lacked the power to do so.

"Have you had a change of mind yet? I believe my offer was not an unfair one. Accept, and you wouldn't have to suffer this kind of torment." Nyer asked again as Renna forced a smile.

Even if she lied, he could easily see through it. She'd already made her stance clear after all.

"Lord of the Sacred Grove, surely you see the benefit of our collaboration." Nyer asked again.

He was planning on taking care of her at the start of the fight. But after finding out her authority, he realised it would be too much of a waste. A woman of her talents should be put to use rather than killed.

But she was making it very difficult right now.

"I know you can speak, so why must you be so difficult? I can see it in your eyes. You're not someone who wants to die."

Three times.

Three times had Nyer tried to convince the woman in front of him after their fight.

But her answer was still the same.

"Go f*ck yourself." Renna laughed as blood caused her to choke.

She could feel the strength leaving her body with each passing second.

Right when she had finally tracked down Feris's aura, she ran into this monster.

Still... she was glad it was her and not someone else.

At least Nyer would stop with her.

But if she had sent the others... how many would've died before they realised what was happening? In fact, it might've even caused Nyer to travel to the grove in order to kill those who would know of Feris's location.

Therefore, Renna was glad she made the first move. At least with this, she reduced the casualties to some extent.

At least she hoped she did.

Taking hold of the spear in her stomach, her eyes turned bloodshot as she ripped it free.

Abyssal energy erupted from her body as Nyer took a few steps back.

Stabbing the spear into the ground, a verdant domain expanded in an instant as Renna reached into her pocket.

She knew what was going to happen. There was no delusion running through her mind. Just the understanding that all things must come to an end.

But at least she could choose the way she ended it.

"I told you that bottle would be wasted on me. But little did I know I would be taking the last sip so soon." Renna laughed bitterly as she pulled out the bottle Alice had gifted her.

The final sip of the drink.

Swinging her head back, she savoured the last drop.

Then, with a maniacal laugh, she plunged her hand into her own chest and crushed her heart.

In her last moments, she'd offer up her blood, flesh, and soul!

As she lunged towards Nyer, a final smile appeared on her lips.

'I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise...'

'Drinking buddy.'

Chapter 1036: Unexpected Appearance

Standing on a hill, Alice let out a soft sigh as she closed her eyes.

She felt the wind brushing against her hair as the mix of Abyssal and Nightmare energy could be felt through the air.

As expected, the closer they got to the capital, the more barriers Alice sensed. Trying to force past them would destabilise her portals leading to disastrous consequences.

However, even though they had to exit the portals early, they could still see the capital in the horizon.

"I believe an hour or two of travel by foot should get us to our destination within good time." Lab walked up to Alice while Elias was sprawled out on the ground.

Alice nodded her head silently while looking at the distant capital.

Elyndor, capital of Extalia.

Also known as the city beneath heaven.

Even from afar, Alice could see a colossal white tower piercing the skies at the very centre of the city. A line connecting heaven and earth, vanishing into the clouds like a divine spear.

Around that tower, the city layered itself in its glory. Though from this distance, the only thing Alice could see was the tower.

A testament to the situation of Extalia. The nation where its laws are focused around the privileged few who sit at the top rather than those who support it as the foundation.

When one peers into Extalia, they would only see the prosperity brought forth by its noble families and the Royals.

Squinting her eyes, Alice gathered her energy into a single tiny spark and took aim.

*BANG!!!

Just as she fired the energy, it collided with the outer most barrier.

She could see a ripple spreading across the barrier as it dispersed the energy used in her attack.

While it wasn't a very strong attack, Alice could already estimate the durability of the outer most barrier.

'Even if a six Sigil Hunter strikes this, it'll take considerable force for them to break through.' She folded her arms in deep thought.

If you cannot bypass this barrier and step through, you'll be placed under a kind of pressure that limited your power usage. The closer you got to the capital, the stronger this effect became.

But like her triggered casts, this barrier seems to be one with conditions attached to it. The stronger you were, the more potent the rules were. Yet if you were weak, these rules meant nothing. A safety net put in place to ensure the safety of the capital.

"Is that... the capital?" Elias mumbled, rolling himself back onto his feet as his movements were sluggish.

"You've never been here before?" Alice asked as he shook his head.

"I spent most of my time trying to figure out a cure. Do you think I'll have the time to explore Extalia?"

"Do you even go anywhere?" Alice raised her eyebrows.

Ever since bringing him out of the Abyss, Elias has show little to no knowledge about the outside world. The only thing he cared about was trying to make a cure for side effects.

Nothing more, nothing less.

"For your information, yes, yes I do. But enough about me, why don't we focus on you. What was that back there? In the Void?" He asked as Alice shrugged.

"Thought I found a trace of someone I would consider to be my dad. Thankfully he's not there but he's injured so far. We're looking for my mother figure so that I can find my father figure."

Elias raised an eyebrow.

"Shouldn't you just call them mom and dad? Why are attaching figure at the end of it?" he asked curiously.

"If a kid you saved started calling you dad, would you be concerned? Or would you understand your importance to them if they compared you to what a father would've been in their life?" Alice rolled her eyes.

While she may call Allura and Kaden her mother and father figure, she also understood that both of them might not have the same perspective.

To them, she might just be a random kid they helped save.

But to Alice, they were different. She would give the world to see them happy and that was from the bottom of her heart.

Elias couldn't say anything in return.

Indeed, if a kid he saves called him dad, he would also be confused as hell.

"I simply perceive them as my parents due to everything they've done for me."

It now made sense for Elias. Why Alice would give up finding Feris in order to find Allura.

Meanwhile, Alice closed her eyes and spread out her senses. She wanted to see if she could find a trace of Allura now that they're close to the capital.

However... there was nothing. Not a single trace in fact.

Was she too early? Was Allura not here? Or... Was she hiding her tracks?

Alice took a deep breath and exhaled.

She glanced up at the sky with a look of longing in her eyes.

She wanted to find Allura as soon as possible.

She wanted to talk about the journey she's had to endure thus far. The things she's learned, the friends she's made. She wanted to show Allura how far she's become. To help her resolve her curse with famine.

She wanted to help Allura and Kaden reunite. To see the two of them happy like she did in the reflections of the past that she experienced.

Then, at the end of it all, she wanted to stop Nyer from achieving his goals.

"Let's go." Alice spoke as she took a deep breath.

She stepped towards the capital and suddenly froze.

The moment she bypassed the barrier, a vile energy filled the air. Her pupils constricted.

She jumped back out of instinct, pulling both Elias and Lab with her. Both of them were surprised when they felt the repulsive energy spread from the barrier.

Abyssal energy instantly flooded Elias's body as his eyes shifted to that of a blue.

His Sigils lighting up one after another while Lab snapped her fingers.

Flames flashed across her body as her suit was transformed into a battle dress with plated armour around the shoulders and chest.

Clashing her fists together, a single longsword appeared in front of her as she drew it from the flames. Then, with her finger in front of her face, she flipped down an invisible visor that caused flare to cascade down her hair, transforming into a silver mask while a broken flaming halo floated behind her.

As for Alice, she didn't need the use of her resonance.

No, just her killing intent was enough as the world seemed to groan under her pressure.

The three relics of the Abyss harmonizing as she summoned Void Fang and transformed it into a sword.

"Pft my my, what a warm welcome. Is this how you speak to an old acquaintance? Now, where did the rest of the group go? I see... a doctor and a Lord. Two unfamiliar faces with fresh stories to share." A man stepped out of a rip in space as Alice narrowed her eyes.

While his appearance may be different...

That aura and tone of voice was unmistakable.

Zal-Ka'Rith, the Writhing Script.

An outer god that had 'betrayed' them.

His new appearance was both... 'normal' and abnormal at the same time.

He wore a simple suit with a long coat tail, a white shirt and a black vest. A pair of white gloves that reached up and adjusted his tie. As for his appearance however, that was where the abnormalities showed up.

His flesh was dark and from the stump of a neck, strange black wispy shadows could be seen drifting upwards before fading away.

If one looked closer, they would notice that these wisps were in fact words that have been closely packed together at a small font. It was a flow of script mimicking the movements of fire.

Then, from that flow of words, a single eye opened with a spiralling pupil. Once again, crafted from words.

He had a wide smile on his face as he approached Alice who simply flicked her wrist.

An arc of energy crashed down inches away from him, preventing him from walking further.

Zal-Ka'Rith paused for a moment before laughing.

"My what FEROCIOUS aura. Ah~ It simply wets the appetite upon seeing such a delicacy refined to such an extent." He moaned softly causing Alice to frown in displeasure.

"Why the f*ck have you shown your face before me. Last I checked, you f*cked off with your buddies after stealing what's mine. And what about Isolde? I thought you promised her that you'll help her kill Lumiria. Don't tell me you're going back on your word." Alice spat in annoyance as golden chains coiled around her right arm.

It wasn't a complete manifestation, just enough where Velouria's lingering seal could be used to fight against Eldritch entities if needed.

Zal-Ka'Rith folded his arms and tapped his chin.

"Would you believe me if I said I still intend to keep all of my promises? And I believe even though I may have 'betrayed' you as you perceive it, I still helped you kill Kazira did I not?" He laughed.

This was news for Lab as her eyes turned to Alice in shock.

A six Sigil hunter managed to kill... an Apostle???

Not a Lord, not one who's reached the pinnacle. A young girl who's yet to achieve Lordship has killing someone beyond that of Lords!

"Yes, yes you did. But that doesn't change the fact that your allegiance changed. Why should I listen to you ramble right now instead of straight up killing you?" Alice asked as she took a step forward.

In that instant, it's like a malevolent beast had descended into the realm.

All of the anger, the helplessness, the frustration Alice felt upon seeing Kaden's cage, her rage towards Nyer, was directed at the Outer God in this moment.

Lab felt the threat of death as she subconsciously took a step away from Alice.

Meanwhile, Zal-Ka'Rith's pupil constricted.

His grin widened as excitement roared in his chest.

In the short time they've been separated, Alice had shown such growth. He wanted to feast on the story here and now! He wanted to break her apart and understand her!

But...

'No... I must control myself. If I eat the 'meal' before it's reached its conclusion, I would only live to regret my actions in the future.' Zal-Ka'Rith held himself back.

After all, losing to one's desires was the mark of a fool.

And all he desired was to enjoy the finest story at its conclusion.

"You see..." He smiled.

"I've come here with a proposition for you."

Chapter 1037: Alice Vs Zal-Ka'Rith

"I've come here with a proposition for you." He chuckled, causing Alice to frown.

Anytime the Outer God wanted to cooperate, the situation was never good. They are fundamentally beings who are only faithful towards their own desires. And for Zal-Ka'Rith, that would be the script.

Stories he wishes to digest and understand.

And right now, Alice understood that she was the main dish for his dinner.

"Bold of you to assume I want whatever you're offering." Alice narrowed her eyes while Zal-Ka'Rith simply laughed.

"Oh but I'm sure you do. After all... it pertains your dearest Allura. The Apostle responsible for severance. A woman whose life slowly slips through the cracks in the hourglass."

Alice creased her brows.

Zal-Ka'Rith knew too much. Trying to bargain with this man was dangerous. Especially when he held all the cards.

If so...

***BANG!!!**

The floor fractured beneath them as Lab and Elias widened their pupils. Alice was gone!

Void Steps!

Appearing behind Zal-Ka'Rith, Alice was already in her resonance state as energy roared from her body. Tiamat's wings looming over the Outer God as energy was being absorbed into Alice's body.

In her hands, Void Fang trembled as a ludicrous amount of energy coursed through its body. Yet thanks to its unique properties as a weapon, it was holding on!

"Wow! Such a hot blooded approach!" Zal-Ka'Rith jumped away.

"Gotcha!"

Triggered Cast!

Sigils lit up across Alice's body as she clawed down with her spare hand.

Space folded in on itself as the gap between Alice and Zal-Ka'Rith was reduced in an instant. He had been pulled back!

Veins bulged on Alice's arm as she held her breath. A singularity spun to life before being infused into Void Fang. Her eyes turning bloodshot as Zal-Ka'Rith realised this was not the time to joke around.

Void Axis!

*KRK!!!!

An arc of violet energy tore forward, ripping through the space around them as a grimoire was quickly summoned.

"A tale about- sh*t!!!" His cast was interrupted as silver swords manifested in the air.

All of them infused with Tiamat's power as they Alice was not holding back in this moment!

The abyssal artifacts, physical resonance, bloodline release, forced level up, personal artifact resonance. Nothing was spared with the exception of her personal realm.

A trump card that must only be used to guarantee victory as she was helpless once it was down.

Discarding his grimoire, Zal-Ka'Rith quickly wove through the blades as he clenched his teeth.

Whispering a few words, he sacrificed his left arm to tank Alice's Void Axis.

Sliding out of the harms way, his eye darted around, trying to locate the furious split haired girl.

Above!

Snapping his gaze upwards, Zal-Ka'Rith slammed his hand into the ground.

The realm started to collapse but Alice was ahead of him.

Her personal artifact shifted, four swords rained down, piercing the expansion of Zal-Ka'Riths realm before shattering it.

So long as she could use Ruinous Void, no one can use their resonance or personal realm!

"A tale about tenacity."

Dark tendrils burst out of Zal-Ka'Riths arm as his wound was regenerated.

"A tale-"

"About me kicking your ass." Alice activated Void Step, breaching Zal-Ka'Rith's defences as she twisted her body.

Her heel slammed into his chin, launching him into the sky as Tiamat's Wings were inverted using the power of Duality. What was gathering power now became a weapon to output the energy she's been absorbing since the beginning of this fight!

Throwing Void Fang into the air, Alice split it into countless tiny fragments as they will serve the core of this next attack.

Her sixth Sigil activated, Void Fang's strongest form traced using Kazira's power as countless blades appeared in the sky.

Each fragment became its own weapon. While lacking the durability of the original Void Fang, their power was just as ferocious!

For the first time, both Lab and Elias saw what Alice was like when she was fully serious.

Without giving Zal-Ka'Rith a chance to fight back, Alice flicked her finger and every single blade shot towards him with the intent to kill!

"A tale about a Warrior who can't be harmed by blades!" Zal-Ka'Rith defended himself yet as the first sword struck, a cut appeared across his body.

"These aren't normal blades dipsh*t." Alice slammed her hands together, creating a singularity between her palms.

"Every single one of these are a fragment of Void Fang imbued with the power of the Void. The edges of these weapons aren't made of metal. It's the result of space between pushed in opposite directions. Friction between realms!" Alice threw the singularity into the air.

She didn't care about how big of a spectacle she was causing.

After all, without her being able to track Allura, the best way to see whether or not she was in the capital was to flare her aura as much as possible!

***RUMBLE!!!**

The land began to tremble as the clouds parted ways to reveal the singularity that was now growing in size.

Zal-Ka'Rith clenched his teeth while defending against the countless sword slashes trying to tear him apart. If he didn't die to these things, whatever Alice was charging above him would finish the job!

With no other choice, he closed his eye and opened his grimoire. He didn't want to push things to this extent but if he did nothing here, the consequences would be disastrous.

"A tale about the world eater with a voracious appetite."

The moment he finished his sentence, he felt his body transform as his eye turned bloodshot.

"Alice my dear! Know that you're the one who pushed me to do this! Do your best to stop me!" Zal-Ka'Rith laughed.

It was in the face of danger did the hero show what they're worth.

This 'disaster' will simply become another page in Alice's story. A test to see whether or not she was truly worthy to be consumed when the time is right rather than for him to lose himself in his desire.

The first to transform was his jaw.

A wet crack echoed out as his mouth unhinged to form a ghastly maw. The letters flickering from his head transforming into flesh as his body was made into the vessel housing this 'story'.

Skin tore apart at the corners of his lips, teeth pushed out from flesh and blood dripped down his neck.

His body arched forward, skin bulging outwards. A skull was crafted on his head, his eyes bursting part as black mutated flesh swelled around the bone.

Veins spread across his face like countless crawling worms.

His suit tore apart, his ribs tore open, transforming into jagged hooks that held his chest open.

A sickening laugh unlike Zal-Ka'Rith echoed out. It lacked the refinement and elegance that he carried himself with. This was... primal.

His flesh rotted, transforming into strands that acted as tendrils that hovered around his body.

A mass of writhing black tissue spilled out from his stomach before climbing up his body, reshaping his entire form.

Seeing all of this, Alice couldn't help but take a step back.

This power... this... Evil.

Was like nothing else she had ever seen in her life. It felt uncanny, not in the sense of the hybrids but rather in the way that sent primal fear through her bones.

The manifestation of desire. The need to consume.

Despite laying her eyes on this... thing for the first time today, Alice understood that allowing this beast to roam free would be inviting disaster into their world. To allow it to grow and transform into something beyond them.

If given the chance, this calamity will quickly spiral out of control.

She had to kill this thing no matter what!

Rather than killing Zal-Ka'Rith, she now had to deal with the 'tale about the world eater with a voracious appetite.

Taking a deep breath, Alice clenched her fist and recalled every single blade from her surroundings.

Transforming Void Fang into a bow, Tiamat's wings stabbed into the realm around her as energy floated into her body.

A pulse of blue lights rippling across the spectral wings.

Alice took aim.

A singularity spun to life before shifting into an arrow.

Then she paused, dismissing the arrow.

An attack like this wouldn't succeed. She could feel it instinctively.

Firing this would simply be giving that monster another meal to consume.

Instead, she needed to focus her all into severing something hidden at its core.

The connection this thing held with Zal-Ka'Rith.

Transforming Void Fang into a spear, Alice overlayed it with her personal Artifact.

The ability to guarantee a single hit with her attack.

Using this, she'll focus on the connection between the story and the Outer God who summoned it.

*BANG!!!

Crackles of lightning flicked off Void Fang's body as violet energy rippled across her body.

Golden chains manifested on her wrist as Alyss stepped in.

If Alice was responsible for the casting, she would be responsible for the physical action.

To throw the spear as accurately as possible while making use of her own skills.

Exhaling softly, Alyss tightened her grip around the spear.

The golden chains now wrapping around the handle of the blade, enhancing it with the Anti Eldritch properties that Velouria left behind.

Destruction Point!!!

The world transformed into a muted landscape of black, white and greys.

The only colour that could be seen in this world was the weakness leading to the monster's heart.

The core of its being.

'Ready?' Alyss smirked.

'More than ready.' Alice nodded. Her preparations now done.

Taking a few steps back, Alyss started to run forward as energy flowed through her veins.

Her physical power reinforced to the maximum as she pulled her arm back.

*BANG!!!

Taking that final heavy step, Alyss leaned into the strike as she twisted her hip, generating as much power as possible before throwing.

*BOOM!!!

In an instant, the spear crossed the distance between Alice and Zal-Ka'Rith. It drilled a hole through the beast, tearing apart its body as flesh unravelled, revealing the Outer God hidden within its torso.

A single eye staring at Alice in disbelief, unable to accept the fact that she tore apart his 'story' so easily.

It seems... her growth was far more explosive than he had initially anticipated. Perhaps spurring her on...

Was no different than opening Pandora's box. A path of no return.

To bring forth a being that none could contend against.

A monster in the form of a girl. The consequence of the Zenia family and the betrayer's sins.

Chapter 1038: Allura's Book

With his beastly form destroyed, Zal-Ka'Rith understood that escalating this further would only make cooperation more difficult to achieve.

Once a certain line has been passed, it becomes near impossible for the losing side to accept reason.

And that line was not something Zal-Ka'Rith wanted to cross at this moment.

Not when he still needed to collaborate with Alice.

Just as Alice was about to move, the Outer God quickly raised his hands in surrender.

"I think you've made your point clear. There's no reason for us to fight to the death like this." Zal-Ka'Rith smiled helplessly.

Alice narrowed her eyes but didn't drop her guard.

"If it makes you feel safer, why don't we strap the golden chains to me? This is me taking the step forward and trusting that you won't just kill me on the spot." He offered.

"Even if the Golden Chains can bind you, I doubt someone like you would die so easily. At most, it'll give you a wound that's more annoying than most." Alice called out his bluff.

Velouria's golden chains can indeed hinder Eldritch energy. That's true. However, trying to prevent them from escaping... especially someone like Zal-Ka'Rith was going to be annoying.

Alice noticed it during her final attack.

That spear... it should've struck the connection between Zal-Ka'Rith and his grimoire. Not just the story he was overlaying himself with in the moment.

And yet... despite trying to cut the connection, all her spear did as destroy the bestial form.

Nothing more.

[It seems like he's got multiple connections between him and the grimoire. Even if one is destroyed, the others act as backup. There's no telling if he has any 'spare' bodies as well.] Cayla analysed.

So far, Alice has met three opponents who couldn't be killed easily. First was Nyer, second was the Doctor. And now, Zal-Ka'Rith.

All three had a method of transferring or having spare bodies prepared. Unless Alice found a method to attack them all...

Killing these three will never be an easy task.

Landing on the ground, Zal-Ka'Rith had a smile on his face as he sat down with his hands raised.

At least for the moment, it truly seemed like he just wanted to talk.

And after deliberating over it for a while, Alice decided to create three layers of protection.

First, the golden chains. Velouria's ability that lets her suppress Eldritch energy.

Second, the copied skill Space Lock. A skill she mimicked from Nyer.

However, simply freezing the space in a barrier around them wouldn't be enough.

By combining the second still with her artifact along with her other Sigils, it now became a barrier that would directly target the soul should the trapped individual leave the designated location.

"My how meticulous." Zal-Ka'Rith smiled, shifting his arm to the right as the barrier sparked against his finger.

A jolt of energy flashed through his body. The only reaction Alice could see was the word flames flickering from his head, stuttering for a mere moment before going back to normal.

At best, the second barrier was only there to slow him down if he wanted to leave.

The true defence was the third barrier that she put into place.

One that'll mark Zal-Ka'Rith's soul and even begin reading his 'history' through her sixth's Sigil.

Preventing his escape might be impossible, but she'll still make the most out of it.

"I have to be meticulous when it's someone like you. Now speak." Alice flicked her finger, creating a metal chair in front of Zal-Ka'Rith and sat down.

"What kind of information do you have on Allura."

Hearing this, Zal-Ka'Rith smirked and leaned back.

"The Apostle of Severance has less than a year of her life. She has made a bargain with the Lord of Life. To use what little energy she has left as her life force.

"Every battle, every use of her energy decreases her lifespan. In fact, the only reason why the Lord of Life is even travelling with her right now is to keep an eye on Allura's condition. To ensure that she can safely live through the year she has left."

". . .What?" Alice blinked her eyes, unable to accept what she's just heard.

She knew Allura was injured but...

Her heart pounded.

Cayla was the same, she couldn't say anything.

"Allura has been... rather busy to say the least. Eliminating hidden threats and even reducing the esteemed Tiamat to a shell of her former glory. But such activities while injured has its consequences." Zal-Ka'Rith shrugged.

"In fact, you should be grateful that the Apostle even has a year of her life left. Had it not been for the Lord of Life, she would've died a while ago."

Alice's pupils trembled as she started to hyperventilate.

A ringing echoed in her ears as her mind couldn't accept this reality.

Allura would've died had it not been for the Lord of Life.

And even then, she has less than a year left to live...

There was still so much she wanted to do, so much she wanted to show Allura.

How can she rebuild Ayr in less than a year? It was... impossible.

That meant that even if she tried her best to reconstruct Ayr, to bring her hometown back to life, Allura wouldn't be there to see it.

Clenching her teeth, Alice stopped herself from simply lashing out.

"Can you tell me more about her condition?" She asked slowly.

"Of course. I'm here for a reason after all. You see, she is akin to an hour glass with a crack in it. Rather than the sand piling up at the bottom, it's leaking out slowly. If you try to patch it up, a new crack will form." Zal-Ka'Rith nodded.

"Allura's condition is one where this final year is a result of her burning everything away. The last embers of her life. Once down this path, no healer can help her."

Alice glanced down and bit her lip.

Allura's situation was much worse than what she had originally expected. Which made finding her all the more important.

"How did you find this out? Since you know all of this, you know where Allura is don't you?" Alice narrowed her eyes as a threatening aura started to expand.

However, Zal-Ka'Rith simply clapped his hands together.

"Calm yourself girl. I'm already telling you what I know, trying to force things I don't know out of me wouldn't be a good look now would it? Who knows, maybe you'll need my information in the future. Information that only an Outer God like myself knows. So making a bad impression should be avoided, don't you agree?"

But Alice didn't care.

Snapping her fingers, four silver blades hovered in the air, pointing at Zal-Ka'Rith's neck.

Alice's eyes were cold and unfeeling, the eyes of a hunter looking at prey.

Zal-Ka'Rith chuckled.

"I don't exactly know where she is at the moment. But I was fortunate enough to see her not long ago. During that time, I traced her 'current story' and saw the state her body is in. If you don't believe me, you may take a look at this."

Manifesting a grimoire, he tossed it over to Alice.

It was a thin book with not many pages inside. No thicker than half of Alice's Pinky finger in height.

Flipping through the first few pages, Alice's finger trembled as it detailed the condition Allura's body was in.

The rot that had been spreading inside while she hid it from the people around her.

Lab snuck a glance before turning pale.

How could anyone even walk with these conditions, let alone survive for a year?

Calling her a dead woman walking was being generous.

"Why is this book so thin?" Alice clenched her teeth, looking up at Zal-Ka'Rith.

"It's simply the length of her story. This is everything she'll accomplish in the time she has left. Empty pages that count down to her destined death. Then, as I observe her story, the pages will begin to fill." He explained without holding back.

"It's how I determine whether or not a story is worthy to invest in or consume. For reference, this is your book for the coming year." Zal-Ka'Rith pulled out a second book.

Compared to Allura's book, hers was much thicker.

The contents it could store were incomparable to Allura's, even though they take place across the same timeframe.

"Of course, just because there are pages, doesn't mean all of it can get filled. It's simply a reflection of potential. At least that's how I like to see it. Sometimes, even the shortest stories can give a pleasant taste like no other. Having a bigger book means there are more chances for you to hook my attention." He smirked before flicking his finger.

The books disappeared and a feeling of emptiness appeared in Alice's chest.

"If you die before the time is up, the story will simply be left unfinished. The worst kind of tale, exactly the kind I hate. Which is why I tend to avoid investing in them.

"Now, the reason why I'm telling you all of this is because of one reason and one reason alone." Zal-Ka'Rith narrowed his eye, turning serious.

This was his offer for Alice.

The trump card he had prepared to ensure a good collaboration between the two of them.

"I noticed traces of paper at the end of her book. Signs that pages are being torn out. Meaning..."

"Her fate is being changed..." Alice mumbled.

After her talks with Monika, she was now more familiar with how Cogs work in their world.

The domino effect of events linking up, transforming into fate. However, fate wasn't set in stone so long as the options are left open.

And if Allura's book was showing signs of change...

"Yes. It means that pages can be added or taken away from her book. There is a chance that her life could be extended beyond the time limit of one year."

Chapter 1039 Striking A New Deal

"Yes. It means that pages can be added or taken away from her book. There is a chance that her life could be extended beyond the time limit of one year."

Alice held her breath.

If Allura's fate was slowly being changed... what about the black chains? Who was changing things?

"Tell me more." Alice leaned forward while Zal-Ka'Rith simply shrugged.

"Sometimes old pages show signs of potentially being torn out. Changes in the flow of events that result in Allura making a move and using her life as energy. Sometimes new pages show signs of being added in. Someone else out there is compensating for her injuries.

"I don't know if it's the Lord of Life or whoever, but I doubt the Lord of Life has that power. Especially considering she had already expended her abilities to help prolong Allura's life. Trying to get more out of her is asking the impossible.

"Which then leaves us with two possibilities." Zal-Ka'Rith raised his finger.

"Possibility one, her life is being extended by somehow. Either through the nightmare energy replacing the energy she needs to spend or..."

He raised a second finger.

"Someone is using their fate to offset Allura's."

Alice leaned back with a deep frown on her face.

Tampering with fate was... dangerous to say the least. Especially when you're trying to overturn a 'decision' made by the cogs. Doing so would cause black chains to appear on your body and force you down a path you couldn't reject.

So, based on what Zal-Ka'Rith was suggesting, it meant that someone was essentially giving Allura their 'time' in order to extend hers.

And there was only one candidate that Alice could think of.

Kaden.

The prison he was in had traces of Famine. And knowing that he was out looking for Deva, it wouldn't be a far fetched idea to believe that somehow, he found a solution to Allura's problem.

Only... it wasn't a perfect solution. One where he's now heavily injured yet still helping her out in some way.

"Now you've told me all this, what exactly are you expecting me to do about it. Like I mentioned before, I doubt you're someone who'll make an alliance for no reason at all. There is no goodness in your heart. Just your own desire." Alice asked, turning her eyes to the Outer God.

"What does the Writhing Script want from my 'story'."

A wide grin stretched across Zal-Ka'Rith's face as he clapped his hands.

"Now you're understanding me. The greater your achievements, the better it is for me. I want to see you tear this Nightmare realm to shreds. I want to see you achieve the impossible, bring forth the inconceivable. For that reason alone, I have worked behind the scenes so that you may grant me the most sublime meal of all." Zal-Ka'Rith stood up as his enthusiasm was now bordering on insanity.

That look in his eyes was one Alice was very familiar with.

The same look that appeared on people like Asterlya when they talk about their hearts desire.

For Zal-Ka'Rith, that would be to witness her story come to its ultimate epilogue.

"My greed for this story surpasses my loyalty as an Outer God. So let us exchange information freely." He held his hand forward.

Alice stared at the hand before staring at Zal-Ka'Rith.

"I'm sure that even without you doing anything, you can witness my story approach its end, can't you not? Why go so far? Why help me to this extent?"

This was the part that confused her.

If all he wanted was a story, there would be no reason for him to interfere. Simply staying as a spectator would've been good enough.

Yet he wanted to give her information. To help her from behind the scenes.

"Nobody likes a story that comes to a premature end. Don't you agree? Even though fate may be on your side, the way it manifests may be different to what you imagined. How many times do you think you've managed to narrowly avoid a disastrous outcome?" Zal-Ka'Rith laughed, summoning a book out of thin air.

"Just like what I'm doing, there are other... spectators making adjustments to the fate of this world. They're making their own decisions in order to steer this world. Naturally, you stand at its centre. The Outer Gods, the Nightmare. The humans living on the surface, those who dwell in the Abyss. So many hopes and ideals converging into one.

"And depending on what happens, the ending you bring forth may either benefit them or destroy them. Wouldn't it make sense for them to extend their hand in an attempt to avoid their destruction?"

Alice stood up massaged her neck.

"And I'm guessing that's your reason for interfering. You want to guide my story so you get the most out of it?" She exhaled softly as the Outer God nodded his head.

"This is a transaction built on benefits. I will give you the information you require, I will receive a story like no other. Once either of us is of no use to the other, the deal is off."

Folding her arms, Alice thought about it for a moment. Before accepting this deal, there was one concern they must address.

"What about the other Outer Gods? What are they doing about this? I doubt they're content with just watching Nyer turn this place into a different realm entirely. Once Velouria is brought back, you'll be expelled from the Realm."

Turning around, Zal-Ka'Rith snapped his finger, creating a book that opened itself up. From the centre of the pages, a waterfall of words blurred into a stream of darkness that soon revealed an army gathering outside of their realm.

"The entrance to this world cannot accommodate so many units. Hence why the few of us that managed to sneak in will begin making preparations. One that Nyer has accounted for of course.

"They desire the invasion of this realm while Nyer desires sacrifice like no other. It's simply a race to see who will achieve their goal first. And Nyer naturally believes that he can out manoeuvre the army the Great Ones have gathered."

Flicking his wrist, the page shut as he turned around once more.

"He cares not for the destruction that will follow once the army has invaded. But I don't think you are of the same mind. You're someone who wishes to avoid such conflicts are you not?"

Alice scrunched her face but ultimately nodded her head.

It's as he said. This destruction... She'd rather avoid it if possible. Eldritch energy is annoying to deal with, especially once it takes root. Even with Suyin's help, resolving something like this, at this large of a scale, would take decades, maybe even centuries of relentless effort.

And that's not even considering the damage already done to their realm due to the Will of the Abyss and Nyer's plans.

An example being the North. With its destruction, even Verona had lost hope in its restoration.

Too many people have died. They can only take small steps at this moment and hope things work out.

"Fine. Say you are correct, aren't you still betraying your kind? It's something we've discussed in the past but I find it hard to accept that you're willing to betray them all after you're so close to 'winning' per say."

"Tsk tsk tsk, how wrong you are. We Outer Gods are slaves to our titles. It represents desires that we cannot fundamentally change after all. Unless you're a Great One of course but it's blasphemous to think someone like me can achieve such honour.

"Outer Gods like myself cannot go against our calling. For me, it will always be the pursuit for great stories. And the Story of Outer Gods are simply... a bore to me." He let out a sigh.

"What can I expect from the story of let's say the Silence Beyond Death? Nothingness. The core of his story is evident in his name. A spoiler, the worst kind of enemy for a scholar like myself.

"So naturally I'll betray my own kind as they represent my most fervent hatred." He let out a careless laugh.

An Outer God who will do anything and everything so long as it matches his desires. He may be an ally in one moment and an enemy in another. He's not someone you could put your full trust into as the moment a better offer appears, he'll defect.

That's exactly what happened in the past.

However...

[Leaving the Outer Gods to do whatever they want is dangerous as well. As... annoying as it may be, Zal-Ka'Rith is probably our best chance at keeping tabs on them as well as seeing Allura's fate at this moment.] Cayla reluctantly admitted.

Alice nodded her head.

Zal-Ka'Rith's books were a safe way to determine the potential of their fate. If pages start disappearing, it'll become a warning of what they may have chosen.

"Fine then. But this won't be a verbal agreement. This contract between us will only last until Allura is saved. Anything beyond that can be discussed at a later date. Is that fair?" Alice exhaled softly as she stomped her foot down.

A large array expanded beneath her. A Law of Agreement enforced with the power of her Sigils that interact with the soul.

Compared to a normal agreement, the damage this'll cause is on a whole another level. One that most would be dissuaded from accepting.

Yet Zal-Ka'Rith showed no such reaction.

Instead, his found amusement in her preparation.

"Of course, I wouldn't have it any other way. It feels good to be back by your side." He took a slight bow while Alice had a face of displeasure.

Zal-Ka'Rith, the Writhing Script has rejoined the party.

Chapter 1040: Zal-Ka'Rith's Message For Isolde

Alice couldn't help but groan inwardly at the presence of the contract between her and Zal-Ka'Rith. Even though they may be allies for now, there was no guarantee that Zal-Ka'Rith wouldn't have a method of escaping said contract.

Hell, maybe he wouldn't even care about the soul damage he received. Perhaps the soul of an Outer God worked differently. She couldn't say for sure.

"Now that we're allies, we need a method of communication. And I'll be honest, I'd rather not have you follow me around while looking like that." Alice sighed, resting her hand on her hip.

"Of course. While I would love to journey with you, a prolonged absence would not work in my favour. I will need to make myself known to the other Outer Gods more often lest they become too wary of me." Zal-Ka'Rith nodded before summoning a grimoire.

"You know we don't need anything fancy like that, right? Just use this. It's something Suyin made." Alice rolled her eyes.

Not everything needed a story. If it was just communication, she didn't see the need.

Tossing over a small glass bead, Alice brought out her own before injecting it with Abyss energy.

In that moment, the bead lit up and a link was established between them.

"I see... Though I don't think this'll work once I leave this place." Zal-Ka'Rith held it against the sky.

"A tale about a man who connected the world."

Wrapping his hand around the orb, Eldritch energy enveloped the bead as it began to mutate.

Then, after a brief pause, it transformed into a diamond-shaped crystal.

"This should be better. It'll allow communication across realms." He smirked, gesturing for Alice to throw her bead over.

"I'll pass. I still need this one." She wasn't sure if modifying the bead would erase the links she'd made thus far.

"Are you sure?"

"You have other ways of finding out whether or not I need your help, right? Just call me when I need you." Alice waved her hand dismissively before stretching her body.

"Anyways, let's get back to the task at hand. First, I want to know everything you know about Allura. Where did you last see her, who's around her, and so on. In more detail this time since we're allies."

Zal-Ka'Rith shrugged his shoulders before pulling out a page from his grimoire. Transforming it into a map, he marked their current location before drawing a cross where he last saw Allura.

"Last I saw her, she was approaching the main castle in the capital. At least, that seemed to be their plan. But my observations were... quickly spotted and cut off. Anything beyond this point, I'm in the dark about."

"First, as you know, she is travelling with the Lord of Death, Gin. There don't seem to be any major injuries present on his body, but his output has decreased compared to before. I'm assuming he must've helped compensate for Allura's dwindling life force.

"Second, the Lord of Life. The key reason why Allura can even survive to this stage. Karya. She has abilities that focus on the conservation of life force and her attack output is surprisingly high. The stronger your defences, the stronger her attacks."

Folding her arms, Alice memorised Karya's appearance so that if she spotted her in the future, she'd know that Allura was nearby.

"Allura has been studying Nightmare energy it seems. An alternative to her current reserves, as tapping into her current reservoir is no different from using her life as fuel. Thus, she's looking for something new in order to help her fight."

"Do you think she's getting help from the Royal Family?" Alice asked, glancing up at the Outer God, who shrugged.

"The Royal Family of Extalia is a faction I have little information about outside of what's already publicly known. They keep a tight seal around everything and have made plentiful preparations to avoid being spied on. If you want me to gather information, I can. But doing so may risk becoming their enemy and make first impressions rather difficult to establish."

Hearing this, Alice decided to put it on hold for now. She could decide whether or not she wanted to find out more once she met them.

It was clear that the Extalia royal family was fighting against the Zenia family right now. It was best to establish an alliance before making any moves that would give the wrong impression.

Tapping her finger, Alice closed her eyes for a moment. She organised her thoughts and how best to approach the current situation.

'Let's see... We have Nyer and the Nightmare, the World Tree and the Void. There's also Allura, Kaden, and the issue of Famine. The Zenia family and the Royal Family. Miki is dealing with gathering forces

under her and helping civilians survive the Nightmare, along with Verona being the connection between the Nightmare and Terminus.'

[I think it's safe to assume that soon, a gateway should open up and our friends stuck in Terminus will break out. There's also Gwen with the Sun Church and Tristan with the Moon Church. Though our information on the Moon is severely limited since Lumiria has mostly kept herself as a spectator.] Cayla added.

'There's also Rosalyn's brother in the East. Even though his movements may be hindered by the black chains, there are probably still things he can do. A role he must fulfil. Once the time comes, he'll be forced to move no matter what.' Alyss reminded her.

'Speaking of the black chains, there's Monika and Plume. Even though Monika seems to be acting as a spectator for now, I doubt she's willing to just do nothing. I already noticed Plume's energy being slightly different than usual. Monika must've done something, planned something. I doubt a fragment of Yvael would do nothing in this situation.' Alice mumbled, biting her nail.

So many things converging all at once. The closer Nyer's plans came to fruition, the more chaotic the storm became.

And worst of all... the one who was supposed to be revelling in this chaos was not following her natural instinct. Enris was another variable Alice needed to be careful of, even if they were 'allies' right now.

None of these partnerships would've occurred had it not been for Nyer turning himself into the major threat he was.

[If we're not careful, the Outer Gods will invade and swallow the land as well.]

Alice scratched her hair in frustration. It was in times like this that she felt the pressure of everything weighing down on her shoulders. She wanted guidance, but who was there to give her the guidance she needed?

'Was this what Velouria felt all the time? The weight of everything pushing down on her shoulders?' Alice smiled bitterly.

[Just about. Though it was probably more considering the fact that she wanted to protect everyone living in Ayr as well.] Cayla nodded with her arms folded.

She closed her eyes and reminisced about the days she spent with Velouria.

'This is why I say I'm not fit for the job.' Alice sighed.

She was already being overwhelmed with this kind of pressure. If she were put into the same situation as Velouria... she didn't even want to imagine it.

Opening her eyes, Alice stared at Zal-Ka'Rith.

"Can you keep me updated on any major movements the Outer Gods make? Planned ambushes and so on. Anything that would cause a stir. Keep an eye on Allura's fate as well. Any major shifts, let me know immediately. And... see if you can find Kaden for me. There are traces of him in the Void, but I'm not sure where he's gone exactly." Alice requested as Zal-Ka'Rith nodded his head with a slight bow.

"Very well. I will do as you say. Ah, since we are allies right now, I'm sure you can do me a favour as well, right?" He smiled.

Alice nodded her head.

It was only fair.

"But don't cross the line. I'm not going to do a stupid favour just because we're allies." She warned.

"I wouldn't dare think of it. When you regroup with everyone else, specifically Isolde, I want you to pass on a message for me." Zal-Ka'Rith narrowed his eyes with a smirk.

Alice creased her brows.

"Tell her, I have found a way for her to kill Lumiria."

"!!!"

Alice widened her eyes. Just as she was about to ask more, she watched as Zal-Ka'Rith's body crumbled into a stack of words before fading away.

She tried to contact him through the bead while tracking down the tether between them, yet there was nothing.

"F*ck." Alice mumbled. It was as she had suspected. The barrier couldn't hold him at all. He was just playing along. What was to say he would even follow the Law of Agreement between them?

But regardless of what had just happened, the key point was what he said a moment ago.

He found a way for Isolde to kill Lumiria.

Alice exhaled slowly.

Isolde's goal was always to kill Lumiria and her contract with Zal-Ka'Rith would've granted exactly that. So with him finding this information, it seemed like he had no plans of betraying their previous agreement.

But killing Lumiria had its own risks.

Namely Tristan and Griselda. She wasn't sure what kinds of dangers would come from trying to kill the Goddess, but ideally, it wouldn't drag those two into it. A hard ask considering Griselda was an Apostle.

'That's something for you to worry about later, right?' Alyss folded her arms as Alice nodded her head.

She turned to Lab, who had been waiting patiently by the side. The way she looked at Alice had changed. While there had been respect in her gaze before, it was a product of the agreement between her and Faust.

Now? It came from the understanding that Alice had killed Kazira.

"Can you tell me everything you know about the Royal Family?"