

Abyssal A 1041

Chapter 1041: Extalia Royal Family

"Can you tell me everything you know about the Royal Family?" Alice asked as Lab paused for a moment.

She stared at the spot Zal-Ka'Rith was standing in a moment ago before turning to Alice.

"As the gentleman had mentioned earlier, information on the Royal Family is difficult to access."

For the first time, it seemed like Lab truly had no way of confidently reassuring Alice regarding the accessibility of information. She doubted that even if Faust were here, he would be able to tell her everything.

"The Underground doesn't know?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

Lab shook her head.

"It's not that we don't know. It's simply a matter of not knowing enough. The Royal Family of Extalia has always been secretive. Even among the major nobility, very few are permitted to know what lies beneath. I'm sure you are aware of House Varyn and Serathei. The left and right hands of the Royal Family."

Reaching into a pouch, Lab pulled out two emblems that represented the two houses.

"These two are the oldest houses alongside the Royal Family. The reason for their conquest and the shadow that keeps them safe. It was later, with the inclusion of the elven populace, that the houses truly solidified themselves as pillars of the kingdom.

"As you know, the Elves and Royal Family share a rather unusual history.

"Most believe that the Elves were conquered or maybe their relationship was based on an alliance. But with what Miss Renna has told you, you now know the truth. The Elves had to sell themselves into slavery in order to survive.

"Their relationship with the Royal Family is not one built on trust. In fact, the more competent they prove themselves, the more they remain as simply tools for the Royals."

Alice turned towards the horizon and stared at the giant tower piercing the sky.

"You've told me about the connection they hold to the three core families. But you've yet to tell me about the family itself. Why do they hold power? What makes them Royal? What are their foundations and what must I keep in mind if I'm to make an alliance with them?"

Despite the earlier skirmish with Zal-Ka'Rith, the Royal Family didn't make a move. Was it because they lacked manpower? Or was it because of something else?

Or maybe... the power she showed was too lacking for them to even care about.

Lab followed Alice's gaze towards the tower in the distance.

"The Royal Family..." She muttered softly. "Are old. Far older than most realise. But you know what's weirder?"

Alice raised an eyebrow.

"The fact that this tower predates them. No one knows when it appeared. Not the churches, not the historical records. Not even the Inverted World. It was there before the Royal Family.

"It was even there hundreds of years ago. But after a certain point, it was no longer present. Meaning something must've built a tower of this size during that time period. As for its purpose..." Lab smiled bitterly.

"The Royal Family has occupied it since the beginning of the nation. Getting information is near impossible unless we want to offend the family."

Alice folded her arms with a slight frown on her face.

A strange tower, a long history. Unknown connections and the fact that Allura disappeared while approaching them.

Creasing her brows, Alice wanted to avoid fighting another faction while the Zenia family and Nyer were the main dangers, but it might not be avoidable if the Royal Family were enemies of Allura.

"What about the members of the family? Can you tell me about them?"

"The current Royal Family is surprisingly small if you consider the power they wield. Publicly, only four members make themselves known." Lab pulled out four pictures.

"First is the King. Aleric Extalia. The King appears publicly quite often. Military ceremonies, speeches, inspections, gatherings and so on. He plays a rather active role. Yet despite doing so, little is known about his life. Only what he wants to show."

Alice lifted the first picture.

A middle-aged man with a gentle smile yet sharp eyes. The kind that would put anyone on guard despite his friendly appearance. A head of grey hair and a small beard. The most defining feature was his eyes.

Heterochromatic eyes with a halo circling the pupil.

The left was gold in colour while the right was a clear blue.

"Friendly and caring. That's the public perception of the King while those who know him slightly better describe him as strong. He has six known Sigils though most believe him to have reached Lordship." Lab explained before moving onto the second member.

"Next we have the Queen. Vivian Extalia. Married into the family, she was a distinguished lady from the Varyn family. One of their finest and personally selected by the King's mother.

"Unlike the King, the Queen is rarely seen in public. Most interactions involving her occur behind closed doors. Meetings, negotiations and so on. Everything involving the internal stability of the nation and she's there."

Alice raised the second picture.

Even as a woman, Alice had to admit that she was charmed for a moment.

Vivian Extalia possessed a kind of elegance that felt almost unreal. Bright crimson hair flowed from her head, framing her figure against a backdrop of scarlet. Its dazzling colour stood in contrast to her composure and almost emotionless disposition.

Yet despite the beauty of her appearance, none of it managed to draw attention away from her eyes.

Pitch black irises that seemed to swallow the light around them.

Dark jewels reflecting the world itself within their surface. Calm and impossible to read.

The longer Alice stared, the more it felt like her gaze was being pulled inward forcefully.

Such beauty, yet there wasn't the slightest trace of warmth on Vivian's face.

Not a single smile.

It was as though she was a treasure forever out of reach and could only be admired.

One that captivated the audience and made them yearn for her attention. A beautiful painting placed behind layers of glass.

She didn't look like a woman who had given birth before. In fact, it was as though her beauty had been frozen in time.

"She would only show up for the important public meetings. Otherwise, each appearance could be hailed as a stroke of luck for the citizens who live in the capital. As for her personality traits... I've got nothing. Even though she joins in on the meetings, she rarely speaks." Lab sighed helplessly.

"That's fine. Just putting names to faces is good enough. Who's next?" Alice reassured before looking at the third picture.

Compared to the King and Queen, the young man captured in this picture looked... strangely approachable.

Long crimson hair, much like the Queen's, was tied loosely behind his head while several strands framed his face. A casual smile rested on his lips like the kind you'd see on a long-time friend.

And like the King, he had heterochromatic eyes marked with the same halo surrounding the pupil.

Unlike the King however, his gaze lacked the demand for respect and authority. There was a laziness to his eyes with a hint of sharpness that few would notice.

"Damien Extalia. The Prince of the nation. As you can see, he inherited his mother's hair but kept his father's eyes. A lazy prince who... shows up at irregular intervals. Sometimes he'll be present at important events, sometimes he'll be missing. His whereabouts are subject only to his whims.

"Publicly, he's viewed as lazy and unmotivated. However, no one can deny that he's a genius. He's simply one who refuses to put his talents to use."

Alice raised an eyebrow. A genius who didn't want to use his powers?

"He's the type that disappears halfway through training yet masters everything he's seen. Complete domination in sparring matches, even against known knights of the Empire. A monster in disguise." Lab shrugged.

"And his Sigils?" Alice squinted.

"Unknown. He's only ever displayed two abilities. Yet with just those two, he's completely overwhelmed opponents far above his expected level."

Alice rubbed her chin while observing Damien's picture.

It was clear that he was probably someone who possessed incredibly strong fundamentals. Even if he may be perceived as lazy, genius alone wouldn't allow him to achieve such performances. Either the Royal Family didn't care, which she doubted, or this was part of his plan.

To appear lazy in order to make others lower their guard.

Though... it hadn't exactly succeeded if he'd already proven his strength with just two abilities.

As for his abilities... that could wait. Alice wanted to know the identity of the fourth member. Though considering the pattern, she could already guess she was probably the princess.

Those eyes were a dead giveaway.

Like her brother and father, she had heterochromatic eyes with halos. Yet she didn't inherit the crimson hair. Instead, she had pure white hair that flowed past her shoulders. Soft golden undertones could be seen hidden beneath the outer layers.

Even in the picture, Alice could imagine how they would shimmer beneath the light, giving her an almost radiant appearance.

There was a wide grin on her face, the same kind of smile Alice herself wore whenever she wanted to stir trouble.

Bright and carefree. That was the impression Alice had of the girl.

"She's the odd one out." Lab sighed.

"Energetic, reckless and almost impossible to control. Most public appearances involving the Princess usually end with half the guards panicking because she managed to sneak out. And..." She hesitated for a moment.

"In the events where she sat through the whole thing, that's only because she was physically restrained to a chair. Even then, she would be seen rocking from side to side, trying her best to break free."

Alice was speechless.

The other three members of the family seemed refined and dignified, even if Damien looked lazy.

There was still a hint of sharpness that couldn't be hidden.

But the daughter?

Just based on what Lab was saying...

She was an absolute chaos machine!

Chapter 1042: Ruri Extalia

"They say that if you're responsible for looking after the princess, Ruri Extalia, you're cursed to not have a quiet day. No matter the methods you use, she will absolutely find a way to make your life hell so long as you are assigned to look after her." Lab rummaged through a few records.

"Explosion at the city centre, erupting sewers, damaged roads that could've caused death. One time, a nobleman tried to ask her for a dance and in return, she threw him against a pillar, breaking both the pillar and his bones.

"Another tried to hire Hunters to kidnap her and well... one's no longer a man and another can't eat solid foods anymore. As for the one behind the hiring of the Hunters, he err... Well I think it's better for you to have a look yourself." Lab coughed, handing over the record.

Alice wondered what could the princess of Extalia possibly do for them to-

"F*cking hell." Alice recoiled slightly, blinking her eyes in disbelief.

As a result of his transgression, the man was reduced to nothing but a head with the bare minimum attached to him. His heart, lungs stomach and so on. No arms, no legs. Just the head and organs.

Saying that he's alive at that point was... generous.

As Alice read further, she realised the man couldn't kill himself even if he wanted to. He was given the bare minimum of vitality needed to stay alive in this state.

The worst part?

One of the sections caused Alice's eyes to narrow.

She hoped it was just a temporary agreement, between the two families.

After all... one of the devices used to keep him alive was the very same collar the Zenia family locked around her neck.

Folding the report over, Alice let out a deep exhale.

If the Princess has ties to the Zenia family... Alice wouldn't hesitate to take care of her as well. This could be overlooked to some extent considering the fact that it was the others making a move first.

But at the same time, employing the use of the collar was already making her out as an enemy for Alice.

Massaging her eyes, Alice handed the document back.

Aleric, Vivian, Damien and Ruri Extalia. Four members of the Royal family that she'll have to deal with.

It was unknown whether or not they were Lord level but considering the resources and the respect they demand, it wouldn't be a far fetched idea.

"Since they haven't attacked us yet, Let's keep it that way. Unlike earlier when Renna sensed Lab approaching, let's keep it subtle." Alice finally suggested as she turned to Lab.

Narrowing her eyes, Alice snapped her eyes and a metal bracelet appeared around both Elias and Lab.

A dragon engraving could be seen etched on the surface as their aura was immediately suppressed.

"What the..." Lab blinked her eyes.

Mirror clones couldn't hide their aura. That's what made it difficult to infiltrate using them and Faust only chose this method if he wanted to specifically keep tabs on someone.

And yet...

The Lord Aura she was carrying with her a moment ago disappeared completely.

"I had an idea just now thanks to the barriers around this place. I'm basically putting a camouflage over the top of you. Anything past a certain point will be reflected back into your body." Alice waved dismissively.

"Well... That's not exactly accurate either. Hmm... Think of it as me creating a second set of mirrors for you. Your Lord aura is contained so long as you don't fight.

"As for me and Elias, we just need to make ourselves seem like ordinary civilians. We'll assume this disguise while searching the capital."

Waving her hand, fragments appeared over Alice's body as her appearance started to change.

It had been a while since she last used this power. The power of the mirror jester. One that, when merged with her other Sigil powers, allow her to pull off a very convincing disguise.

As the fragments peeled away, Alice gave her body a lazy stretch.

There was a cigarette in her mouth as she was now a head taller than her usual height.

Short pink hair with a cute bunny hair clip pulling her bangs slightly to the side.

A set of extremely tired eyes with dark circles under her eyes, making it seem like she hadn't had a good night's rest for years.

Her eyes were pink like her hair, completely devoid of enthusiasm and drive to accomplish anything.

A kind of laziness that the prince tried to mimic but failed as there was still a hint of his power hidden behind his gaze.

But Alice? Her disguise was perfect.

As for her outfit, she wore a loose white shirt with the collar unbuttoned slightly. No tie and the bottom of the shirt lazily tucked into her skirt. One side of the shirt slipped out but that was done on purpose.

She wore a large lab coat similar to the one that Suyin had but Alice let this hang off her shoulders. A personal favourite when it comes to large coats, just like the extra large sleeves that hid her hands.

A pair of uneven socks, one reaching her knee while the other was folded down.

And finally, simple shoes with a bunny pin next to the laces.

"Ah~ Ah ah~ Okay... I got the voice and personality down now... What a pain... I think I don't need to remind you not to call me by my name in this form." Alice mumbled, her words slow and drawn out as though just talking was a hassle in itself.

"As for the name... hmm... You can just call me Suna. Yeah... Suna is good." Alice yawned, taking a drag of her cigarette.

Naturally, it was a fake cigarette but her actions seemed experienced. A trait she specifically copied from Allura.

The way she smoked, how she held the cigarette in her mouth. Even the little trick of creating a fire on the tip of her finger.

Alice mimicked it all and overlayed it with the sense of laziness of her current form.

Lab was surprised.

If she hadn't seen it happen in front of her, she would've never believed that 'Suna' was Alice.

The aura was completely different. The way her eyes looked around, the intensity of her aura, her habits. Everything pointed towards her being a completely new person yet Lab knew otherwise.

Hell... even the feeling of her energy was different. Alice's usual energy and aura felt dense and powerful. A hint towards her true power. But now? Soft and slow.

"Okay, I understand that you need a lazy disguise that's completely different to your usual self..." 'Elias' voice echoed out as Lab snapped her gaze to the right.

Immediately, she almost choked on her own saliva and held back a laugh.

He, no. 'She' was currently standing with a frustrated and embarrassed look on her face while clutching at the skirt that Alice had prepared for her.

Much like how Alice's own disguise made her taller, she made sure Elias couldn't be associated with his new look at all. Even if his habits and manner of speaking was the same.

He was now a tall dark haired beauty with sharp features. The kind that made every head turn as they passed her on the street.

Long black hair that flowed down past his lower back, a pair of sharp eyes that would pierce into your soul... If Elias wasn't overwhelmed by embarrassment in this moment.

As for her outfit... That was the part that bothered her the most.

A crop top with no sleeves and an exposed midriff. Black gloves that reached her bicep and shorts that were too short for her pride. If there was a silver lining, it would be the tights underneath that kept her legs hidden.

And to finish the outfit off, a pair of knee high boots.

"Is there a specific name you want?" Suna smirked as Elias held back a string of curses too potent for anyone to hear.

"Just turn me back into a man if anything." She grumbled but Suna shook her head.

"No no, we can't have that. They'll keep an eye on a party of two cute girls and a guy after all. So we make it two girls and a bunny pet."

By this point, both Lab and Elias looked at Alice in confusion.

Bunny pet? Who? It wasn't her nor was it Elias. Which means...

In that moment, Lab's view of the world slowly changed. Everything started to grow larger. Or rather, she was being shrunk down.

Then, when her body was no bigger than Alice's palm, she was picked up and held up into the sky.

"Hehe... How adorable. A small white bunny. Of course, I'll return you to normal once everything is done. You can break out of it forcefully too if needed. But I doubt people would care if a small bunny like this ran around the castle now would they?" She chuckled.

"Let's call you... Snowy. As for dear Elias over here... What kind of name do you think would be suitable for a dark elegant beauty like her?" She asked, placing Lab on her head.

"Nothing. Just turn me back into a guy please. I don't care what kind of disguise you want to give me as long as I remain male." Elias pleaded as Suna raised her eyebrow before grinning.

"Okay~ Don't regret it now..."

With a wave of her finger, Elias began to change once more. As promised, he was turned back into a male form only... the disguise was not what he had originally expected.

He stared at his hands, then his legs.

And to help, Suna even made a mirror for him to observe his new appearance.

". . . Are you f*cking kidding me."

"Make your choice." Suna laughed.

". . ."

Elias held his breath and made a choice.

And soon, two women and one rabbit made their way towards the capital.

Chapter 1043: Elyndor

The journey towards Elyndor was... not quite what Alice had expected. After everything she had heard regarding its current state, she expected to see signs of destruction the closer they were to the Capital.

Destroyed roads, refugees, corpses strewn around and perhaps even irreparable landscape damage.

Yet... the closer they were to Elyndor, the stranger the situation became.

No signs of damage, no death. No fear. There were even patrols giving them greetings as they passed.

It's as though the Nightmare didn't even exist.

But that wasn't the case as Alice could still clearly sense it in the air.

The Nightmare was around them but...

It was being blocked off?

Alice furrowed her brows.

No, that wasn't accurate. If the Nightmare was blocked off, Alice wouldn't even be able to sense it's presence.

Instead... it felt more like they were acknowledging each other and not making a move.

However, that only brought forth the question of why.

Why was the capital untouched? Why are they doing nothing even though they're not being held back?

Or was the people in the capital kept unaware of the chaos happening in their surroundings.

"It's like they're completely blind. Living everyday in ignorant bliss." Elias mumbled with a slight frown.

He wasn't quite used to this voice. In his mind, the moment he spoke, a deep voice should echo out yet it was the exact opposite.

Regardless, now was not the time for him to be bothered about his current appearance when strange things were happening.

"I suppose it's better than living every day in fear. We'll have to be careful with what we say. It's already obvious that we're outsiders so we don't need to make the situation worse than it already is." Alice yawned as the two of them approached the city gates.

Tilting her head back, Alice stared at the tower reaching towards the heavens. It's hard to say where the tower ended. Even with her eyesight, she couldn't see the top from down here.

There was a security check but it was... surprisingly lax. As though they weren't in the middle of a crisis. All the guards required was the reason for coming here along with some ID.

Following what the people in front of her said, they got through without any issues.

By this point, even Lab was concerned.

Something was definitely off.

As they stepped through the gates, the city finally revealed itself in all its glory.

Everything here was built with white marble and gold details. Gardens could be seen lining the upper districts while water ways cut through the streets. Clear blue water reflected the sunlight as even the clouds could be seen.

The people around them walked without care. Alice closed her eyes and tried to sense the Nightmare energy but... it was blocked off from entering the city. In here, there was only holy and Abyssal energy.

[Considering the fact that Extalia is technically a territory of the Moon, it's not surprising that there are barriers created by Lumiria in this place. The question is what purpose do they serve.] Cayla folded her arms.

Alice nodded her head as the group continued through the city.

The closer they got to the tower, the more unnerved Alice felt. It wasn't the kind of feeling she got when it came to danger or hostility. It's not the same kind of uncanny discomfort as the one she felt when seeing the Hybrids.

This was something else. Something new.

She glanced up at the tower once more.

It felt like something that fundamentally should not exist within this world. Within this realm.

Like seeing a splash of colour in an otherwise monochromatic black and white painting, this tower stood out like a sore thumb.

Citizens walked without noticing this strangeness. Perhaps it's because they're used to it. But for Alice? A part of her wanted to leave immediately.

Walking past a building, Alice traced her fingers along the wall and brought it up to her face.

Her brows creased before making her way to the next building.

Neither Lab nor Elias knew what Alice was doing as the two of them simply glanced at one another.

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Sitting on a balcony, a man suddenly lifted his head and closed the book in his hands.

"Ruri, must you climb up the side of the tower?" He chuckled, resting his cheek on his hand while glancing to his left.

A pair of hands grabbed the railing as a young girl could be seen pulling herself up and over.

"How else am I supposed to find you without others knowing?" Ruri Extalia lifted two fingers into a victory sign before throwing herself onto a chair.

Giving her body a good stretch, she started to toss and turn before ending up upside down.

Glancing at her brother, her smile widened.

"You felt it too right?" She asked as he nodded his head.

"It's hard not to notice when such a potent source of Abyssal energy starts leaving traces behind." Damien placed his book off to the side. Dragging his hand through his hair, he glanced towards the city.

"Are you going to take care of it? You should remember that mother told you not to cause a scene this time." He asked as Ruri tapped her chin.

She kicked her legs back and forth while still remaining upside down.

"How long does 'this time' even last. I've been on my best behaviour for a week now." Ruri pouted as she started to kick the wall.

"It lasts as long as mother says so. She's let you do whatever you want for quite some time now after all. But now that things have turned serious, you need to learn how to behave as well." Damien chuckled, giving his body a stretch.

"Unless you want to join her for the meeting with those who worship the Moon."

At the mention of the Moon, Ruri pulled a face of disgust and pretended to throw up.

"Blergh, don't wanna. Honestly, how can they even walk around when they're nothing but husks at this point." She pursed her lips, rolling backwards and standing up straight.

"Seriously, why do we still act kind to them?"

She couldn't understand it. The crimes of the Moon were pretty obvious once you look a little deeper. Lumiria wasn't someone to hide her sins so long as her amusement was fulfilled.

Sure, she'll keep up some level of passiveness but it wasn't a very hard veil to look past. Take for example the countless souls she's eaten over the years.

When so many people have gone missing, especially at orphanages, one can't help but question what's going on.

"Because acting kind and pacifying them is the best way to keep them from freaking out. There's already a bunch of issues surrounding the Sun and the Eclipse. Do you seriously want all three to be running amok?" Damien smiled helplessly, walking away from the balcony.

Ruri twirled her hair before shrugging.

She may like to cause trouble but that did sound like it was a little 'too' chaotic. Even for her.

What use was it to play around in the 'garden' when everything is on fire? She wanted to watch fireworks happen not get engulfed by them.

"There are two? No... More than that. One of them has three souls attached to them on a deeper level." Damien mumbled.

"Are they part of the Moon?"

"I doubt it. There's... Holy energy in their body but it's not gentle like the Moon." Damien shook his head.

Lifting his finger, a mote of light appeared on his fingertip as he drew a halo and broke it in half.

After a slight pause, a ripple appeared in the air as a chunk of marble appeared in his hand.

The very same chunk that Alice had touched earlier.

"Geh-, is it safe?" Ruri let out a weird sound as she hadn't expected her brother to be so callous. The new arrival had just touched the marble and he's already removed it from the building.

At this point, she wouldn't be surprised if the other person had already noticed.

"Safe? Who knows. Let's see... Three? No. There's... five? How do they even walk around?" Damien narrowed his eyes.

Snapping his finger, the spot Alice touched started to glow as he tossed it to the other side of the room.

*BANG!!!

Erupting with a myriad of colours, five distinct forms took shape. First was a strange mass of darkness. Within it, Damien could sense countless souls being attached in a manner similar to how the Moon operated. But at the same time, different.

The restraints weren't the same.

The second was one that reflected a cosmic sea. Wonderous and filled with starlight, a Void that stretched on endlessly.

Third was holy. Radiant and awe inspiring. A type of power that forced those with weak wills to kneel in its presence.

Fourth was a disgusting, mutated shadow. Eldritch in nature and disgusting to be around. Yet strangely... it was tame in this moment.

Completely under control.

Then the fifth. Calling it the fifth wasn't quite accurate as it was more so a transformed variant of the Void.

However, it was distinct enough for him to classify it as a fifth kind of energy.

"Woah... that's the most we've seen so far right?" Ruri gasped in shock.

They've seen people with two types of energy in their body before. Especially those who are part of a religion or those who gained powers from the Void.

Rarely would there be people with three sources as doing so made their vessels exceedingly unstable. A kind of action that would doom them to mediocrity or explode in a brilliant burst of energy.

The only recent exception would be the Nightmare energy as it was strangely compatible so long as you follow its rules.

But the person who's entered the city had five sources in their body.

Damien folded his arms.

As for Ruri...

Before Damien could even say anything, Ruri had already thrown herself out of the window, causing him to sigh.

Flicking his fingers, the energy disappeared as he left the room. He had to inform his father and mother of the new arrival.

Chapter 1044: First Taste Of Jealousy

Feris kicked her legs back and forth, her eyes tracing the movements of Noah as he wove through the attacks of the beasts around them. The way he ducked, the way he countered. Even the moments his muscles would peek out from under the armour.

"Sexy~" Rika chuckled, sitting down next to Feris and surprising her.

"Wah! Aren't you supposed to keep the others safe?" Feris quickly looked back, but her worries were soon dispelled when she noticed the beasts were now dead. Only the one Noah was dealing with remained.

"Now come on, don't be shy. Tell me what your favourite muscle is." Rika rested her arm over Feris's shoulder.

"Personally, I like a pair of nice, firm forearms. It gives a sense of safety, right?" she chuckled.

Hearing this, both Yama and Tobi took their bracers off and flexed their forearms.

Naturally, Rika rolled her eyes.

"I don't drool over the flabby forearms of you two dumbasses. Give me some real manly forearms like the captain's over there."

"Maybe you should get in line first. Those forearms are for Feris' eyes only." Yama laughed, sitting down near the two girls.

But Feris only tilted her head.

Looking at Noah's back, she wondered what her favourite muscle would be.

"I think I like the chest or back."

The three members of the party looked at one another before letting out a collective laugh.

"What? Why is mine so funny?" Feris pursed her lips, feeling as though she was being mocked.

"No no, you got it wrong, bestie. We realised it was the obvious choice since you always sleep on Noah's chest or back. What else would be your favourite muscle if not your personal pillows?" Rika clarified.

"What kind of trouble are you three making for Feris now?" Noah walked over after finishing his fight.

The beast was decapitated behind him and slowly bleeding from its neck.

It had been a few weeks since they started their travels. Thus far, they had only found two sites based on the map.

"We're not making trouble, Captain. Just seeing what Feris' preferences are when it comes to your muscles," Tobi reported.

For a moment, Noah almost choked on his saliva as he hadn't expected them to be having that kind of conversation.

"Ahem, stop messing around now. We're deep in dangerous territory. The third site shouldn't be far from here." Noah quickly changed the subject as they packed their things and got ready for the road.

Even though Ciel gave them the resources they needed, they chose to remain as a small group in the end. Trying to cooperate with more people made things more difficult, as he had to handle the logistics of multiple teams rather than just one.

So instead of manpower, they bought a bunch of useful items and relics to help keep them safe.

After doing a quick inventory check, Noah stored everything away before walking over to Feris, who simply raised her arms with a small smile on her face.

Without question, Noah swung her onto his back with practiced familiarity.

During the previous two sites, he had half expected Feris to feel excited by the Crystals.

Even if they were small in size and number, they should've caused a reaction.

Yet strangely...

Feris didn't feel any attachment to them. The void in her heart was still empty.

It's not that she had lost interest in the Crystals either. She was still fully attached to the fragment she stole from the pit.

The party had a few theories, such as purity. It might also have been a case where it wasn't even the same kind of crystal.

But regardless of the truth, the fact that Feris showed no reaction hadn't changed. In fact, it felt like the Void in her chest might've even grown.

"Are you still feeling down?" Noah asked as he noticed Feris's eyes locked onto the crystal necklace.

"I don't know." Feris exhaled softly. She rested her head against Noah's back while holding the crystal between her fingers.

She couldn't pinpoint the issue either. The samples they collected looked and felt the same as the one in her hand. It was simply... missing something.

It felt more like a shell than anything else. The same went for the sites they visited. There were veins of the same crystal, but they lacked a certain... feeling. She couldn't see the other realm, even when she stood at the centre.

"Don't worry. Right now, we're just investigating the crystals on the outer edges. The closer we get to some of these rumours, as well as our old home, the more clues we'll get," Noah reassured her. "I'm sure you'll be able to fill the void in your chest."

Feris' eyelashes trembled for a moment before she nodded her head.

She then thought back to what Rika had said earlier and pressed her palm against Noah's back.

Broad.

That was the first thing she noticed about Noah's back.

Even through the layers of clothing and armour, she could feel the shifting of muscle with each step.

Resting against his back, Feris felt a strange sense of stability. One that anchored her to the world and kept her mind at peace.

Next was the warmth. The presence of another person.

Usually, she would've been against this kind of feeling, often choosing solitude in her youth. She would spend time alone, staring up at the sky.

But now?

She wanted to feel his presence beside her at all times. It was a strange feeling she couldn't understand.

Her fingers curled against Noah's back.

Aside from the warmth, there was also the sense of reliability.

Noah wasn't considered huge compared to some of the warriors they had seen on their journey. In fact, there wasn't even a comparison to be made.

They dwarfed him in size.

Yet none of them could make her feel this way.

Safe.

Her eyes drifted down to the crystal in her hand. Even though the void was still present in her chest, it was only bearable because Noah was beside her.

If he wasn't here...

Feris sighed.

"If you keep sighing, that Void will grow bigger, you know? They say a bit of your happiness escapes with each sigh."

Feris pursed her lips.

"If I lose my happiness, I'm blaming you." She punched his back with her fist.

Though it was a 'punch' in her eyes, to Noah, it was no different from a tap.

"Haha, if you do lose your happiness with your sighs, I'll just give you some of my own. I promised to take responsibility after all."

"But what if I take all of your happiness? What will you have left?" Feris asked, lifting her head and resting it on his shoulder.

"Happiness is not a finite source. I'll give you as much as you need and more. That's a promise."

She stared at Noah's face. Even from this angle, she could see the resolve in his eyes. That confident smile, as though nothing in this world could stop him.

For a moment, Feris found herself lost in the sight.

Her gaze softened, and a strange feeling washed over her as, for a brief moment, she forgot all about the void in her chest.

She felt... satisfied.

Fulfilment from simply being carried on his back. Hearing his voice. Knowing that he was here at this moment.

Feris closed her eyes and smiled, immersing herself in this strange yet pleasant feeling.

Then she recalled what Rika had said about Noah's forearms, and her brows creased ever so slightly. A faint sourness formed in her chest.

Unable to hold herself back, she leaned forward and nibbled on his ear.

"ARGH!!!" Noah let out a cry of shock as the party members glanced back at the two in surprise.

Yet when they saw the blush on Noah's face while Feris nibbled on his ear, their smiles twitched.

As for Rika, she noticed Feris' fierce gaze directed towards her.

'Ohya?' Her thoughts stirred as she immediately realised this was probably because of what she had said earlier.

Right now, Feris was acting like a small animal marking her territory. Even though she wasn't saying it aloud, her eyes conveyed everything that needed to be said.

Noah was off limits.

Just like the crystal she loved oh so much.

Rika simply raised her hand in surrender. She was never going to go after Noah anyway. She knew his heart had only ever been focused on Feris. That had been the case since they were children, and it was still true even now.

Still, she never expected Feris of all people to have that kind of competitive expression on her face.

It made the girl feel more 'human'.

"Why did you do that?" Noah quickly composed himself, not expecting Feris to bite him.

The warm breath against his neck and ear had been... unexpected.

"I just felt like it." Feris mumbled, unable to quite understand it herself. But seeing the expression on Rika's face made her feel satisfied and calm.

Hearing her voice so close to his ear in a whisper, Noah quickly composed himself.

"I... see."

"Did it hurt?" she asked softly.

But Noah shook his head.

"No, it didn't hurt. I was just surprised."

"Mnm... Rika asked what my favourite muscle was earlier. I like your back and chest. What about you?" Feris moved on from the subject.

"What part of me do you like?"

An innocent question. One that Feris didn't quite understand herself.

But from Noah's perspective, it was different.

What part of her did he like?

All of it.

The good, the bad. The selfishness, the stubbornness. He had to hold himself back from saying the thought that had been present in his mind since they were both children.

'I like all of you, Feris.' Noah thought to himself, but didn't dare say it out loud.

It was a feeling he wanted to keep buried in his chest until Feris fully understood what she wanted for herself.

Chapter 1045: Fourth Site

The fourth crystal site was located far from civilisation, buried deep within the wastelands of the far east. News regarding this place was scarce, and the few rumours that did exist were usually spoken in hushed voices by travellers who had only seen its outskirts from afar.

Most people who arrived here never stayed for long.

The atmosphere alone was enough to drive them away.

The air felt unnaturally heavy with every breath, as though the wasteland itself was pressing down on their lungs. Death lingered in the environment like a curse. There was no flowing water, barely any vegetation, and almost no signs of life beyond the occasional scavenger beast wandering through the desert.

Then there was the issue of the Eclipse.

The eastern wastelands were one of their more active territories, and the group had already crossed paths with several patrols during their journey here. Thankfully, they managed to avoid a direct confrontation for now. But none of them were naïve enough to believe that this luck would persist.

Sooner or later, they would be forced to fight against the cultists.

If it was simply the rumour of the site being here, the group would've left it alone.

But there was one reason for their presence in the east.

The fact that Feris's necklace was reacting.

When they were searching for information in the east, they happened to pass through the wastelands that stretched across the majority of the region. It was here that the crystal around Feris's neck began to react.

The fragment released a subtle pulse of light, almost akin to a slow heartbeat.

Weak at first, but the deeper they travelled, the stronger it became.

"How is it?" Noah asked, letting out a sigh of relief as another Eclipse patrol passed them without a fight breaking out.

Feris tightened her fingers around the fragment hanging from her neck.

"It's... stronger. It's still slow, but each beat feels more powerful now," she mumbled.

Rika knelt next to Feris, her eyes lingering on the fragment. Just as Feris described, it was pulsing like a heart.

Not only that, but there also seemed to be a strange source of energy hidden within the centre of the crystal.

Perhaps it was the very thing that caused Feris to lash out during their escape, along with the reports of others tapping into new forms of energy.

More importantly, ever since the crystal started reacting, Feris had felt better than ever. Energised and ready to take on the world.

Holding the crystal up into the air, Feris closed her eyes for a long moment. The others stayed silent, allowing her to focus.

After all...

With the crystal now reacting, Feris had become their compass.

"It's stronger towards the right," she finally said as Noah nodded.

"Alright, let's head towards... the north." He checked the map. Their right would lead them towards the northern side of Sikha. A little closer to the Eclipse than he preferred, but as long as they remained careful, they should be able to scout the situation out.

Plus, they had bought plenty of equipment for emergencies since they were moving as a small group rather than a large one.

As they adjusted their course and began heading north through the wastelands, Feris noticed something strange.

The first sign appeared roughly two hours into their journey.

She lifted her gaze towards the sky and slowly raised her hand. It felt as though she was trying to grasp something that wasn't there, and Noah recognised the motion immediately.

It was the same thing she used to do whenever she reached for the stars before the crystal appeared.

"Feris?" he asked, somewhat concerned by her reaction.

"The sky..." she mumbled, her eyes shimmering with awe.

Through her eyes, she could see motes of light flickering throughout the air around them. Stars that shimmered in and out of existence. Blinking and ephemeral.

Sometimes they would reappear.

Sometimes they were gone forever.

Feris tried to touch one, but they remained just out of reach. No matter how far she stretched her hand, she couldn't grasp them.

The same suffocating feeling she experienced whenever she stared at the sky returned once more. Seeing her heart's desire, yet never being able to obtain it.

In fact, she wanted to reach them so badly that she nearly slipped from Noah's back, forcing him to quickly adjust his grip so she wouldn't hurt herself.

Noah called out to Feris again, but her mind was focused elsewhere.

Countless distortions rippled across the sky as she noticed a crack forming overhead.

A pathway to a different world.

There, she saw the Void.

An endless sea of stars, crystal pillars, and floating islands. A sense of wonder unlike anything else. She could feel her heart slamming against her chest.

She wanted to reach that paradise.

She wanted to cross the rift.

She wanted it desperately.

But like all her previous attempts, the moment she came close to the opening, it faded away into nothingness.

There she stood, shoulders slumped as her head tilted back.

She stared at the sky, but the smile that had once been on her face could no longer be seen.

A sense of emptiness spread through her heart as Noah approached hesitantly.

He couldn't see what had happened, but he could make assumptions. Feris must've briefly seen the other side of the Void.

Then, with a bitter smile, Feris looked back at Noah.

"Seems like it's still out of reach," she mumbled in disappointment.

Noah paused for a moment before reaching out and pulling her into a hug.

Feris widened her eyes in surprise before slowly immersing herself in the warmth of the embrace. Resting her head against his chest, she listened to the steady beating of his heart.

"It's okay. We'll find a way," he reassured softly.

The fourth site was close. If Feris was already reacting like this now... what would happen once they finally arrived?

"Mnm..." Feris nodded.

Though strangely, the fascination and obsession that had gripped her heart faded quickly after Noah hugged her.

The maniacal infatuation disappeared as though it had never been there to begin with.

Reaching down to hold his hand, Feris brought it up to her face and rested her cheek in his palm.

Her fingers traced the callouses, the size of his fingers, the rough skin. A hand much bigger than hers.

Noah, in his confusion, could only stand there in silence while embarrassment spread through his chest. Though... he couldn't deny that he enjoyed this situation.

Only...

He wished it wasn't happening in front of the other party members.

Rika had a smirk on her lips, and so did Tobi and Yama.

"What are you staring at?" Noah finally snapped as the three shrugged simultaneously, almost as though they had rehearsed it beforehand.

After a moment of silence, Feris finally let go of Noah's palm.

His fingers instinctively reached out towards her cheek, but the distance quickly widened, leaving behind a lingering warmth and sense of regret in his palm.

A sense of longing.

"Sorry, I'm feeling better now." Feris smiled, taking a few steps back as a brighter expression appeared on her face.

"Are you sure? We can stay and rest a little longer if you need to," Noah offered, but Feris shook her head.

"I can feel it. We're getting closer now. I think... the site should only be another hour away." She closed her eyes.

After the brief encounter with the portal, it felt as though her mind had finally awakened completely.

For years, she had lived feeling sluggish and lethargic.

But now?

The entire world felt clearer to her.

She could hear better than ever.

Breathe better than ever.

She could feel the wind brushing against her skin and the tingling energy lingering in the air.

Wrapping her fingers around the fragment hanging from her neck, Feris's eyes shifted ever so slightly as they glowed with a dim purple light.

Something only Noah noticed.

Though the glow only lasted for a brief moment before her eyes returned to normal.

With a grin, she reached out, grabbed Noah by the wrist, and dragged him forward.

"Let's go. No more delaying," she laughed, her cheerfulness and excitement surprising the others.

Not wanting to be left behind, Rika quickly ran after the two while Yama and Tobi smiled helplessly before following behind them.

Noah ran beside Feris, his eyes focused on her smile.

While part of him felt relieved seeing her like this, another part of him felt... lonely.

The closer they got to the crystal sites, the more it felt like Feris would eventually leave him behind.

She would become something beyond him. Reach a realm he could never follow.

And though it might've been selfish, part of him wanted her to remain by his side forever.

But that felt cruel.

To force her to deny her heart for a second time...

He couldn't bring himself to do it.

So Noah swallowed the words trapped in his throat and suppressed the emotions swelling within his chest.

As long as she was happy, he could accept it.

And seeing her smile now was worth far more than the days she spent staring blankly out of windows.

A woman stood before a tall window with her arms folded, gazing out towards the garden below.

A glass of wine rested loosely in her hand. One eye remained closed while the other stayed open.

"Oh?" She raised an eyebrow. Clearly, what she was observing wasn't what she had expected.

"Is the girl just like me? I figured she was merely a candidate, but..." She swirled the wine slowly. "She might be more than that if she's this sensitive to the changes."

Ever since sending Noah and the others out on this journey, Ciel had been monitoring their every move.

And now, her attention was fully focused on Feris...

Chapter 1046: A Sense Of Malice

There comes a time in your life when you see something that your entire existence rejects. Perhaps it's fear, perhaps caution.

But the undeniable primal instincts buried deep in your consciousness screams at you to turn around and leave.

To not look back.

To keep running as far as you can.

That's what Tobi felt in this moment.

The instant the fourth crystal site came into view, every fibre of his being rejected the notion of approaching it.

"No, no, no, no! Hell no! Please don't tell me we are approaching THAT." Tobi immediately shook his head, making his discomfort known to the rest of the party.

Rika had the same look on her face. Her fingers tightened around her arm as she held back the urge to turn around and run.

Yama faired a little better but his trembling finger gave his thoughts away.

None of the members of the party was comfortable with the fourth site.

Before them stretched a large crater. A cavity carved into the wastelands as though an invisible hand from the heavens reached down and scooped out a chunk of the land.

Layer upon layers of broken stone spiralled outwards while vein like fractures spread across the land. Within the cracks, a strange energy pulsed in a similar manner to Feris's fragment.

A beating of the heart.

And within the centre of this crater rose a black sphere. It hovered motionless above a pool of purple and silver liquid that rolled down its surface before dripping from the bottom. A sphere unaffected by gravity.

No chains or supports to keep it suspended in the air.

As for Noah, he paused for a moment before turning to Feris.

At this point, Tobi realised that Noah was still considering it if Feris wanted to go.

"Boss man, my captain, my saviour, if there is a time to listen to me, it is now. Do you now feel the absolute MALICE that thing is radiating? I have NEVER felt anything like that. There is just so much... Malice! I don't know how else to explain it!" Tobi grabbed Noah.

However, Noah smiled apologetically.

Right now, Feris was standing on the cliff edge with her fingers clenched around the fragment. She could feel the beating of its heart, the pulse of energy. The sense of... familiarity she felt with the crystal and whatever was hidden within the site.

*Badum...

She felt her own heart resonate.

Ah~... she wanted to find out what was inside. A piece of herself that she never knew.

Every pulse of energy, every second she spent looking at the crater, she felt as though something was calling for her. She wanted to descend into the crater, she wanted to touch, to understand.

She wanted to-

Feris turned around. The excitement in her eyes halted as she saw the expression on her friends faces. The words she wanted to say lingered in her throat.

Tobi looked like he was moments away from arguing with Noah if he suggests they should venture deeper. Rika's teasing smile was gone. Her eyes fearful as her body was tensed, ready to flee at the first sign of danger.

Even Yama looked like he was on the verge of panic.

Feris blinked.

Slowly.

Then, she glanced down at the fragment around her neck.

The excitement and longing in her chest was slowly cooled as she turned her eyes towards Noah.

Depending on what she chose, he would follow. But if the location was as dangerous as everyone was fearing it to be... could she have the heart to ask him to go?

A bitter smile appeared on her face briefly before she took a deep breath.

*SLAP!!!

Hitting her cheeks to snap out of it, her actions caused the party to blink in surprise.

"Feris?"

"Argh! Oh well. We should leave." She smiled, resting her hands on her hips.

The others froze.

"We already confirmed the location of the site and... well, Ciel never asked us to actually venture inside, right?" She shrugged. "We can just report back and come again later if there are no leads anywhere else."

The moment those words left her mouth, the others visibly relaxed.

"THANK F*CK!" Tobi nearly collapsed as he clutched his chest dramatically. Though the beating of his heart said otherwise.

He was truly terrified a moment ago.

"Feris, I swear this is the smartest thing you have ever said in your entire life. When we get back, I'm treating you to a meal."

Rika visibly relaxed while Yama let out a long breath he didn't realise he'd been holding.

Even Noah's shoulders loosened slightly.

Seeing these exaggerated reactions, Feris stared blankly for a moment before pursing her lips.

"How rude. Did you all think I was selfish enough to force everyone into that kind of danger?"

"Yes."

"Absolutely."

"Without question."

The group answered in unison as Feris's smile twitched.

A pout quickly formed on her face.

"Tsk, well screw you guys too." She mumbled, folding her arms.

"You can't blame us for that. You literally tried to jump into a rift that only you saw earlier." Rika smiled helplessly.

Feris almost choked on her own saliva as... she wasn't wrong.

"That was different okay?" She looked at Noah for help.

Seeing those puppy eyes, Noah was going to say something when Tobi nudged him with his elbow.

Coughing awkwardly, Noah was about to say something when the sphere showed signs of change.

*RUMBLE!!!

A pulse so strong that it shook the earth. Feris was knocked off balance as she stumbled back, about to fall when Noah quickly grabbed her and swung her over his shoulder.

"What the hell is going on now?!" He frowned, scanning the location around them.

It was there when he noticed the sphere starting to change as a bad feeling overwhelmed his heart.

He wasn't going to stay around to see what was wrong!

"Yama! Grab Rika. Tobi run as fast as you can. Rika, give us a barrier!" He shouted as the others didn't hesitate to run.

Behind them, cracks spread across the sphere as the air distorted around it. Space itself twisted unnaturally, bending light into warped fragments.

A layer of dust was shook off the sphere as it began to shift.

Its surface split apart, peeling back layer after layer like flower petals. Thin arcs of purple light spilled through the gaps as crystalline growths appeared across its surface.

Parts of the sphere expanded outwards while others collapsed inwards. It's as though a black hole had opened within the body as chunks of the sphere started to disappear, its body no longer making sense.

The movement slowed while the party kept running. The only one still watching at this point was Feris.

Her eyes were glued to the structure.

Beneath the sphere, its 'blood' started to flow upwards, defying gravity and formed rings around the structure.

Inverted rain.

With a flash of light, the sphere opened up. Hidden within the centre of this strange mass of material, hidden beneath the layers of shifting crystals and stone, a single eye swivelled to meet Feris's gaze.

A chill shot down her spine but she couldn't tear her eyes away from the strange sphere.

Even though the group was running as fast as possible, Feris understood it instinctively.

They couldn't get away.

With its flesh now transforming into wings, it shot through the air with its gaze locked onto the party.

A pressure beyond their comprehension crashed down as the group was forced onto their knees. Blood trickled from Rika's nose as the barrier was shattered in an instant.

As the eye drew closer, the fragment hung around Feris's neck exploded with the same purple light that coronated the sphere's birth.

*BANG!!!

The earth collapsed beneath them.

The entire cliffside shattered apart as the group was swallowed by darkness.

Feris reached for Noah instinctively while gravity twisted around them violently.

Up became down.

Left became right.

Countless colours exploded across their vision as space folded in ways they've never seen before. Purple crystal formations duplicating, stretching and reflected across countless mirror like surfaces.

"Noah!" Feris cried out for help.

Clenching his teeth, Noah reached out, barely managing to grab Feris before pulling her into his embrace, using his own body as a shield.

*SHATTER!!!

Breaking through the mirror like surface, a suffocating miasma overwhelmed their senses as they immediately realised they were thrown deep into the Abyss.

Beasts could be seen flying through the sky as they swooped towards the party.

Yet an invisible force continued to push them through the realm. It wasn't satisfied with just dragging them into the Abyss. No, it wanted to take them further.

As the flying beasts drew closer, space shifted as a line stretched across the air.

In that instant, the beasts were cut in half.

Confusion spread across Noah's face as he looked for a place to land.

"Hold on tight!" He shouted. Feris squeezed her eyes shut and entrusted her safety to Noah.

*BANG!!!

With a thunderous crash, the group slammed into a strange island.

The sense of falling disappeared, as did the pressure that prevented them from escaping.

Only when Noah was sure the surroundings were free of danger did he finally let go of Feris.

"What the hell..." Tobi mumbled. His voice reflected his confusion while the rest of the party was silent.

Slowly, Feris opened her eyes and the world was reflected in her gaze.

A strange world broken into fragments. Countless floating islands stretching as far as the eye could see. Stars reflected above and below. Water floating between islands, strange beasts looking at them from afar.

Even without anyone telling her, Feris felt as though she knew where this place was. The air that felt different to the Abyss and the Surface. A realm that captured her heart.

The stellar sea reflected through the crystals.

Right now, the group had been tossed into the Void.

Chapter 1047: Reawakening Of Power

Noah slowly stood up while helping Feris to her feet. There was a frown on his face as he glanced at the floor beneath them. This floating island was made from a strange fusion of both stone and this black material that was cold to the touch.

It resonated with the fragment hung around Feris's neck. The pulsing of light as though a heartbeat was linked to it.

The island itself felt like it was slowly breathing with the pulses of light.

Was this island alive? He wasn't sure.

Not only that... but the atmosphere in this place felt off. It wasn't quite oppressive like the Abyss nor was it clear like the surface. It felt... off.

Noah couldn't quite put his finger on the feeling but he didn't want to find out more.

Tobi tried to use his Sigil abilities but paused when he noticed the difficulty he wasn't having in bringing out his power. It wasn't to the point of suppression but more so a feeling of sluggishness.

Rika did the same but her barriers were weaker than usual.

"Captain, come here and take a look at this." Yama called out.

Noah made his way over while giving Feris a brief glance. She seemed to be burning this view into her mind.

"This black material next to the purple crystal. It seems stupidly hard and conducts energy well." Bringing out a knife, Yama stabbed the material a few times as Noah furrowed his brows.

As mentioned, it was durable just like the purple crystal. There was not a single scratch even after stabbing it with the knife reinforced by Abyssal energy.

Folding his arms, Noah was silent for a moment before looking around them.

"Doesn't seem like we can get out the way we came in." He mumbled, looking up at the strange Void sky.

"Sh*t f*ck, do we have to go deeper?" Tobi clenched his teeth before letting out a sigh.

"Does it look like we have a choice?" Rika pursed her lips, sitting down on a piece of debris as she rested her chin on her palm.

None of them could fly and the only path available to them was to go deeper into this realm. By this point, it was either that or sit here and starve.

Rather than waiting for their deaths, she would rather trying something. Anything.

Her gaze flicked to Feris.

Now that they were in the strange realm, the aura around Feris seemed to have changed. She felt... calm? It was hard to say. There was something different about her that Rika couldn't explain. Her breathing was steady, her posture was straight without signs of fatigue.

The lethargy she carried is completely gone and there was a spark of life in her eyes.

Feris felt 'alive'.

Yet before she could call it into question, Rika felt a chill down her spine.

The fear that dominated the mind when something stares at them from an unknown location.

Noah slowly drew his blade, making sure not to make any rapid movements that might startle whatever was circling them.

"Yama, Tobi, cover each other's back and protect Rika. There's an island to my left, we'll jump down on my signal. Just run like hell." Noah ordered. Even if the new arrival was harmless, he wasn't going to take the chance.

Exhaling softly, he pulled Feris to his side.

She didn't react, her focus was somewhere else entirely.

But at least she wasn't fighting against him.

Then, from behind the silhouette of a floating island, a dark silhouette slightly appeared.

The creature, if he could even call it that, didn't resemble anything organic.

It hovered in the air with its body being composed of jagged black shards orbiting a strange triangular core. Fragments drifted like broken pieces of a shattered star and housed in the centre of the triangle was its 'heart'. A black singularity spinning while bands of red arched around it like ribbons.

Strange tendril like appendages extended from beneath its body, its movements slow like that of a jelly fish hovering in the water.

Light seemed to distort around the creature as rocks would bend in unnatural ways.

"What the hell is that?" Tobi whispered, unwilling to even entertain the idea of fighting back.

The creature had no eyes yet the party felt as though it was staring at them. It tilted slightly, rotating to face the group.

Its 'heart' shifted like a strange pupil, constricting and expanding once it saw Feris.

And within that 'heart' a pulse of energy rippled out.

"Eh?" Feris snapped her head towards the creature.

The fragment around her neck pulsed violently in response to its 'call'.

*Badum...

*BADUM...

*BADUM!!!

Each beat would get stronger as it was now undeniable. That was the sound of a heartbeat.

Whatever Feris had stolen from the site years ago, it was a fragment of a heart.

Sensing the resonance, the creature started to shift as the shards around it trembled. Beneath it, the tendrils started to tremble before unfurling outwards.

"RUN!" Noah shouted, turning around and sprinting while the others did the same.

*BANG!!!

Behind them, streaks of energy slammed into the island, destroying the spot they were in mere moments ago.

Jumping through the Void, Noah noticed the gravity being slightly different as they fell towards the next island.

Behind them, the beast followed slowly. It didn't run, it didn't rush. It simply hovered while keeping its eye on the group.

While Noah was fleeing with Feris on her back, her eyes were also locked onto the strange beast.

The two were stuck in a staring contest as she saw a tear appear before the beast.

Space ripped apart to accommodate its body.

Then, as it floated through the portal...

"ARGH!!!"

A cry echoed out from the front as Yama had thrown Tobi away from the danger.

Yama's left arm was disfigured from the strange tendrils weaving through his flesh and from the portal, the beast appeared in front of the party.

Without hesitation, he cut off his left arm and activated his Sigils.

Lightning crackled before transforming into blades that lunged after the beast.

Yet strange metal shields appeared around it, blocking the strikes.

"Yama!" Tobi shouted, his shock quickly turning into rage. But before he could strike, Rika acted first. Her barrier appeared around Yama's arm as bone and flesh started to regrow. Blood trickled down her nose and Tobi understood his role right now was not to attack.

But rather to protect Rika so that Yama could recover from the damage.

Noah quickly jumped into the air while still carrying Feris and summoned a greatsword.

*BANG!!!

Slamming into the beast's shield, the creature was flung away as he winced from the strike.

The feedback of his sword clashing against the shield sent vibrations through his arm, almost making him drop his weapon.

Without saying anything, the group turned and prepared to run once more but the sound of their clash seemed to have attracted beasts from afar.

They could see silhouettes flickering through the Void, rushing towards their position.

"We can't fight them all." Noah exhaled softly. Just from that strike alone told him that killing one would be an issue never mind the several that were rushing towards their location.

Distorted shapes that seemed to be of the same species as the one they fought just now.

Creasing his brows, Noah led the way as he quickly looked for a path of escape.

There were plenty of islands and crystalline structures for them to run on but nothing that could serve as cover or a way out.

And running forever wasn't an option either...

Clenching his teeth, Noah understood that their best hope was to find a spot to defend. A location that'll let him fight them all one by one rather than all at once.

But with their strange powers of space, it was hard to find a battlefield that could use the terrain as defence.

'What if they can break the crystals? They seem to be made from the same thing.' He worried.

Behind him, Tobi supported Yama as his arm was still being regrown. Rika was struggling, finding it hard to focus while being on the run.

"Sorry, I'll need to drop you for a bit." Noah quickly apologised as he let go of Feris, allowing Tobi to catch her in a panic.

Holding his breath, flames erupted from Noah's blade as he twisted his upper body, unleashing a devastating slash in the air in front of him.

*CLANG!!!

His blade was stopped as he struck a beast just as it was about to appear in the air before them.

His weapon wrapped in its tendrils that refused to budge.

Letting go of his weapon, Noah pressed his palm against the beast's chest and activated his Sigil.

*BANG!!!

Energy slammed into its chest as a deep palm print could be seen with the creature now falling towards the depths of the Void.

While Noah and the others were fighting off the approaching horde, Feris's eyes tracked the beast that was falling.

Strangely... it felt like she could hear it speak.

Directly into her mind.

Claim the Void relic.

Retrieve the heart.

These commands echoed repeatedly as Feris clenched her fist. They were trying to take the fragment away from her.

And not only that... But this fragment was indeed the heart and an important aspect of this realm.

If so, then would she find the thing she was missing here? The emptiness in her chest.

Her fingers tightened around the crystal.

Her gaze drifted to Noah and the others.

Their struggle as the beasts refused to let them flee.

How many times has she sat back and watched as the others do everything now? She could still remember it.

The night of their escape.

That sensation of energy coursing through her body as she killed the guard blocking their way.

Right now... That familiar sensation was making itself known.

Feris could feel herself resonating with the fragment, with this realm.

The strange purple energy seeping into her body from the air around them.

And captured in her eyes...

Was the method these beasts used to manipulate the Void.

Chapter 1048: Void Born

Ever since escaping from the site as a child alongside Noah and the others, Feris had desperately searched for a way to become useful to the group.

A way to stand beside them instead of constantly being protected.

So she chased after Sigils.

She sought out shamans to grant her bounties. People who understood the Abyss and could act as an emissary.

Yet every attempt ended in failure.

No matter who examined her, the result was always the same.

The Abyss refused to answer to her.

No bounty would open itself to her. Not even when she dunked herself into communion sites. It was as though the Abyss itself refused to acknowledge Feris's existence.

Or perhaps...

It was rejection.

A realm that rejected her desire.

Maybe it was a lack of talent. Maybe it was a lack of drive. But as time passed, the situation only became stranger.

Out of desperation, Feris had even attempted to strengthen herself through Abyss Blood. Just like the countless others seeking a boost in power. She drank Blood Vials in hopes of awakening some modicum of power within this vessel of hers. To establish a link between her and the realm.

And yet...

The moment the blood entered her body, a violent rejection followed. Her stomach twisted painfully and her throat tightened. No matter how hard she forced herself to swallow the blood, her body would immediately reject it and regurgitate everything back out.

Again and again.

Over and over.

Not once did she gain any benefits from it. No increase in strength, no bestial abilities. Nothing.

Even healing vials produced the same results.

It was as though her body fundamentally refused to accept the Abyss into itself. As though something was already occupying the space the Abyss would've taken inside her body.

However, the same couldn't be said for Void energy.

The reason was unknown to Feris but the moment she laid her eyes on it, the world was suddenly open to her.

The way she should move, the way it should be manipulated.

Like a fish in water, Feris found herself understanding Void energy like it was an extension of her own limb.

Her eyes darted across the different creatures.

"Ah... How inefficient." She mumbled.

She could see the delay. The wasted energy. The time taken that could've been reduced to near zero.

The world spoke to her and her mind was open to its words.

And right now, she understood the Void's secrets.

Lifting her hand, purple veins appeared across Feris's arm as energy coursed through her body!

*BANG!!!

From the group, a giant source of energy erupted as everyone froze and turned towards Feris.

They saw her eyes shift, the markings across her body that looked like Sigils yet different.

The aura around her... It felt no different from these monsters in the Void!

'If I touch this ripple...' Feris took a step forward as her body disappeared.

Appearing behind one of the monsters, she had its head in her hands. In the brief moment she passed the beast, she twisted and tore off its head and killed it in one go!

"!!!"

Every single one of these geometric monsters snapped their gaze towards Feris.

Unsure as to how this human was able to use Void energy to such efficiency.

There was no delay in her movements, fluctuation of energy that let them understand what she wanted to do.

One moment she was there, the next she was behind them.

"Ah... I see..." Feris slowly smiled as she glanced back.

Her eyes staring at the monsters, a small laugh escaping her lips.

She was never compatible with the Abyss because her soul was already linked to this Void.

She wasn't sure when, but a contract must've been made already. She could not accept the Abyss into her body for the Void was already occupying her vessel!

It was also in this moment, that all of the beasts in their vicinity understood the danger of Feris.

There was only one order spoke amongst them, one that Feris caught wind of.

[Kill the Void Born.]

"Try it." Feris narrowed her eyes.

Spreading out her arms, she fell backwards before twisting her body.

"Feris!" Noah shouted but his concerns were misplaced as Feris landed on top of one of the creatures.

Without even touching its head, Feris spread her fingers and activated Void energy. A link formed between her palms, erasing the space occupied but the creature's neck.

With a twitch of its body, it fell towards the endless Void while Feris moved onto her next victim.

Using Void energy was akin to playing a piano for her.

The flow she needed to follow, the weight of each movement. The timing of each attack.

There was a sequence that must be followed, adjustments that must be made. All of it came naturally to her as though she was destined to govern this realm.

Adjustments that would've taken years to understand was performed instinctively.

Twisting her body, she dodged a trap placed in the air by one of the beasts. She could feel that if she touched this empty space, it would erupt and shred her to pieces.

However!

A grin appeared on her face.

Who the hell did they think she was?

Brushing past the trap, a net of Void energy appeared from her fingertips as she 'grabbed' the space and glanced at the beasts.

Their coordinates were secured and her body disappeared.

Stepping on the folds of space, her body was propelled forward in the blink of an eye. Faster than they could react.

With Feris appearing behind them, the trap collided with their body and shredded their forms apart as countless shards rained down from above.

Feris took a deep breath and exhaled with a wide smile.

She felt alive. Felt content. Fulfilled.

Whatever they were calling her, Void Born or whatever, all Feris knew was that she belonged to this place.

In other words, this was her home.

Clapping her hands together, a blackhole spun to life between her palms.

An absurd idea that took shape in her mind was now being brought forth to reality. The desire to eliminate the beasts to keep her party safe.

In this moment, Feris didn't think about the risks nor the consequences. To her, the notion that she might fail didn't even exist.

Her confidence in success was one hundred percent without a shred of doubt!

*RUMBLE!!!

Lifting her hand, the black hole expanded in an instant. Space warped, overlapped and folded in on itself as everyone felt as though their perception had just been dragged out of their body.

They could see a reflection of themselves twisted in all directions. Sometimes up, sometimes down.

And holding this marble of space between her fingers was Feris.

Her eyes locked onto the beasts that attacked them.

*Crack...

A fracture appeared across reality as the beasts started to panic.

Many of them broke apart and combined with their neighbours to form something bigger. Stronger.

But it was already futile.

Feris has established absolute control over this portion of space.

Here, she was no different from God.

*BANG!!!

Crushing the orb, space was shattered as Noah and the others quickly panicked, glancing down to make sure their body was okay.

Around them, the monsters had been reduced to ash as Feris landed near Noah.

To eliminate the threats, she hadn't even broken a sweat.

"Hehe~ Praise me." Feris held her hand behind her back with a cheerful smile. Leaning forward slightly so that Noah could pat her head.

His concerns quickly disappeared seeing this as a helpless smile appeared on his face.

Reaching out, he patted her on the head as Feris let out a small laugh before swinging herself onto his back, taking her rightful spot.

With the battle now over, the purple veins across Feris's body started to fade away with one exception.

The fragment she hung around her neck.

During the battle, she hadn't noticed when it happened but the crystal seemed to have melted into a strange liquid that fused with her body.

Looking down, Feris could see a portion of the crystal embedded into her chest. It pulsed in sync with her own heartbeat.

Not only that, but a Sigil like pattern was spreading out from the crystal, marking her body.

A small portion of it was glowing, as though it was a container being partially filled.

The weird part was that it felt no different from usual. Even with the fragment poking out from her chest, Feris couldn't feel it.

It truly felt like it had become an extension of her own body.

Unbeknownst to Feris, word in the Void travelled fast.

Void Born.

These two words echoed across this infinite expanse as unknown beasts had now turned their attention towards her. A human with a compatibility to the Void like no other.

One who found a piece of her heart in this realm, one who's waiting for fulfilment.

Unknowingly, she had just taken her first steps towards sovereignty.

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"My lady, it's as you thought. It seems that she was indeed a Void Born." A butler reported with a slight bow.

Ciel wasn't surprised. She had her hunch and it was rarely wrong.

The only change now was that Feris had awakened. Her ties to the Void couldn't be denied and as more of these sites 'wake up', she'll be drawn to their presence without even knowing.

And Ciel, despite all her power, could no longer track Feris's whereabouts anymore.

An unknown variable upon this chessboard.

"No matter. We still have Noah and the others to track now that young Feris is out of my sight." Ciel smiled.

It didn't matter if Feris was a Void Born or not. At the end of the day... this realm will belong to her.

Chapter 1049: The First 'Anomaly'

"Nyerrrr!" A girl tugged at Nyer's sleeves while he was reading a book.

"Nyer!" She cried out for a second time, frustration appearing on her face as he finally put the book down and glanced up at the girl.

"What is it?"

"What's a Void Born? I was watching Feris's memories and they said she was a Void Born." The girl explained, pointing towards the sleeping Lady of the Void. In her current state, it wasn't hard to take a peek into her memories and what she was thinking at this moment.

Despite being a Realm Ruler, she was completely defenceless. In fact, even a one Sigil Hunter could break into her mind right now with the right ability. That's how open Feris was.

And with the girl and Nyer waiting for the mutation of the realm to finalise, she decided to pass her time by looking into Feris's past.

"Void Born huh... That's a term not many would know of anymore." Nyer crossed his legs.

Tapping the spot next to him, he invited the girl to sit down while giving Feris a brief glance.

While this wasn't something the girl needed to know, considering her eventual fate, it was still good to pass the time.

"When the Abyss refuses to grant a bounty, why do you think that is so?" He asked as the girl tapped her chin.

"Because the Will doesn't like them?"

"Partially. While the Will can indeed hinder the Bounty system to some degree, he cannot outright reject someone from being given one. A consequence of the past I suppose." Nyer smirked. Though he knows the reason behind it was actually because of Velouria.

"When the Abyss cannot grant a bounty, there are usually two situations in which this occurs. First, their soul is 'full'." Nyer held up a finger.

"Full?" The girl tilted her head as he nodded.

"Full. There is a reason why you and your sister are very unique and special compared to the rest of the world. For the normal person, being able to use two different kinds of energy could already be classified as talent.

"Abyssal and Holy, Abyssal and Void Or Abyssal and Eldritch. Accepting a second means you're splitting your soul in half in order to tap into the power.

"Say your soul is made up of four sections, a minimum of two are required for any source. And even then, it's pushing your capacity to the limit. The burden of an extra source of power has caused many to explode in the past because they couldn't contain it." Nyer smiled.

This was especially the case when it came to Holy energy.

Holy energy could largely be explained as a blessing from the Three Gods. A system similar to the Abyssal bounties yet also somewhat different.

It was entirely dependant on the 'source' of Holy energy. For most, this would be their faith towards the God and their acknowledgement.

If they're not careful, the sudden influx of Holy energy could rupture every blood vessel in their body and give them a gruesome death.

Alternatively, for people like Alice who had their own 'source' of divinity, they needed to regulate how much they're willing to tap into it.

It was a delicate balance of trying to ensure the vessel wasn't flooded while also keeping the sources of energy in check.

But if you add another source...

What would be a simple balancing act suddenly becomes a juggling act and one mistake would cause your death.

"Now, when I say that her soul is full, what I mean is that all four sections are already occupied and refuses to budge. For Feris, her entire being was marked by the Void. It left no room for the Abyss to intervene. Not even through vials of blood. But such a state is extremely hard to achieve." Nyer chuckled.

During her era, Feris was one of the few who were called Void Born. In other words, she was a candidate to become a Realm Ruler due to her constitution.

"If the first situation is being 'full', what's the second?" The girl asked curiously. She could understand why the Abyss wouldn't be able to give bounties due to the first situation.

But what could the second one be for the Abyss to 'reject' them?

"The second situation occurs due to certain factors with the main one being the Cogs." Nyer chuckled.

Through his dealings with Yrael in the past, he understood that the Cogs, while declaring themselves as neutral, actively intervene in order to reach the future they desire.

The black chains were an example of such. Interventions they make to reach their goal.

"So when there is an individual who shows great promise in a certain aspect, one that might upheave the scales of balance, the Cogs will step in and influence fate to prevent them from reaching that moment.

"I've seen a few cases of such in the past. A blacksmith who could've created weapons and armour that rejected the natural order. A diviner who could peer deeper into fate than even Yvael should she be allowed to gain power. A genius who could wrap the world in metal, creating giant monstrosities of machine. All of them had their paths denied as the Abyss refused to grant them a single bounty.

"All because the Cogs deemed it too dangerous." Nyer smiled.

When it came to his experiments, the Cogs were one of his greatest barriers that he must surpass or else his experiments would never reach fruition. It's why the previous prototypes of 'Alice' had their vessels shattered after a certain moment.

It's as though their fate was doomed the moment he was too deeply involved.

However, by keeping himself away, by pushing variables towards that singular experiment, a miracle like Alice could be born.

An anomaly with a fate that the Cogs had no choice but to accept.

Even though the Cogs recognised the danger, they couldn't do anything about it. Messing with her fate would only cause a domino effect that would've upset the balance of the world.

It was too late for the Cogs to stop any of this. Just like how they didn't place black chains upon his actions.

The variables that Nyer had introduced to the system has already pushed his own fate towards the direction he wanted.

In other words.

'Checkmate.' Nyer narrowed his eyes. So many times he's felt the Cogs attempting to stop his actions yet failing to do so.

For he has already wrapped himself in the protection of countless fates entwined into one being.

Much like how they couldn't stop Alice, stopping him would also cause a domino effect of untold destruction. To which they could now only sit back and watch as the two convergence of fates spiral towards the singular climatic moment where the world is forever changed.

Whether or not Velouria is resurrected in full.

Whether or not his plans to destroy the laws binding this world would succeed.

"I see..." The girl mumbled, walking back to Feris's side. Nyer was silent.

Even though Feris technically belonged to the first category of having her soul 'full', she was also sabotaged by the Cogs.

To have one soul to be so dependant on the feeling of 'fulfilment'. To be willing to give up everything for either the Void or the one who occupies her mind.

Back then, the methods the Cogs employed for these Anomalies were... soft in some aspects.

Gentle even.

But Feris's choices, the war she caused. The destruction she brought forth. The wrath that could not be extinguished no matter what. A rampage that continued even as the world continue to burn.

All of this caused the Cogs to take a more proactive approach when it comes to holding back anomalies they detect.

One could even say Feris was the first to cause the Cogs to worry. The first anomaly that almost ended the world.

And now, she lay here. Tears in her eyes as she was forced to relive her past. The realm mutating, her mind collapsing.

That lonely soul longing to find her other half only to bitterly fail time and time again.

'A pity...' Nyer exhaled softly.

It was sympathy from one who had also lost so much. He understood Feris's pain. Understood her longing, her loneliness. Her hatred towards the world and most importantly...

The sadness in her heart and the gaping Void that refused to be filled.

She thought she would be fulfilled by the Void only for the sacrifices to leave an even bigger hole.

Tilting his head back, Nyer looked towards the Void sky.

Even though he didn't want to do this to her, especially due to their similar experiences, it was a step of the plan that couldn't be skipped.

Like it or not, he had to force her to suffer.

Just like how she would make him suffer if it meant bringing back her love, he was doing the same to her.

And though they may be strangers, in another life, they might've been able to rant about their sadness towards each other. As two people who went through a similar suffering and understood each other's pain well.

In this, he could only apologise to her.

However, once the world is reshaped under Velouria's guidance, he will ensure that her soul is reunited with the one she lost. Even if it's the last thing he does.

Taking a deep breath, Nyer glanced down at the book in his hands once more.

Meanwhile, the girl had seen the tiny shifts of Nyer's expression. The pain he was hiding deep inside.

Though she didn't know why, a part her soul felt pained by his expression. Pain that came from familiarity, one that she wasn't aware of.

Somewhere deep down, something was waking up.

Chapter 1050: Game Of Cat And Mouse

Ruri was a force of chaos. She knew this well herself. She enjoyed seeing the faces of those whom she pranks. The sighs of her father and mother when they found out what she did in the morning.

The panic of people as she ran towards them.

But being a force of chaos meant always having a way to run.

To escape.

One needed to be slippery like an eel, treasures at their disposal and escape paths lined up at every turn.

It's how they evade capture when sh*t hits the fan.

And it's what Ruri prided herself in.

Stealth.

Absolute stealth.

When Ruri was five, she already knew what she wanted to be in the future.

She didn't want to become a knight or a ruler. Nor did she want to devote herself to the Moon or any religion for that matter.

She wanted to become an assassin.

As a child, she had spent countless nights reading stories about killers hiding in plain sight. Assassins who could walk through guarded fortresses unnoticed. Thieves who could stand directly beside their targets without ever being perceived.

The slight of hand.

The manipulation of perception.

The understanding of habit and awareness.

To Ruri, there was something beautiful about existing right in front of someone while remaining completely unseen.

And her first Sigil embodied that obsession perfectly.

It helped her visualise her opponent's line of sight and increases her speed drastically so long as she ran towards those points. Not only that, but attacking from the blind spot granted her increased damage.

Just with one Sigil, she couldn't be caught by the guards in the city anymore.

At least...

So long as she is careful not to be spotted in the first place. With their physical capabilities, trying to evade capture after being spotted was too late.

Thus came her second Sigil.

If her first Sigil helped her visualise line of sight, the second helped her notice the awareness of those around her. Whether or not they were on guard, aggressive or passive. Even if they're in her blind spot, so long as she closes her eyes and focuses her mind, she'll be able to sense targeted aggression and 'zones' where guards were most focused.

Finding gaps in defensive lines and moments of hesitation became easy.

With just these two Sigils, she was able to evade capture for a whole week before being spotted due to hunger issues.

Then it was time for the third.

She could see lines of sight. She could sense awareness.

What else did she need in order to become the perfect assassin? One who embodies the very definition of stealth?

Presence. Or rather, the lack of it.

In order to become the perfect assassin, Ruri needed to be able to eliminate her own presence.

Avoiding the eyes and awareness are one thing. But those with a sixth sense beyond normal comprehension will still be able to find her.

Traces left behind. Footsteps, killing intent, changes in the air.

Humans were creatures of instinct. Even if they didn't consciously notice something, their bodies often reacted before the mind could catch up.

A chill down the spine. The urge to look behind, to look up.

A sense of danger.

Thus the third Sigil was one focused on erasing her presence.

It wasn't the perfect solution but it was the foundation of her ideals.

To make others subconsciously ignore you when she wanted to be hidden.

Even if her tracks were left behind, they'll still look away from her as though it was perfectly normal for her to be there.

Fourth was the ability to erase and hide her own tracks. The art of walking without leaving footsteps, to swim without ripples, to tread in snow without leaving marks.

To become the perfect hunter.

Her Fifth Sigil was one that almost guaranteed her escape in all scenarios. A 'toolbox' of sorts that allowed her to make clones or leave marks behind to teleport away.

With these five Sigils, Ruri believed herself to be untouchable.

Once she was confident, she could cause all the trouble in the world and run away.

At least that's how she believed it to be the case.

Until now.

In this moment, Ruri felt fear.

She felt a sense of dread like no other.

The understanding that no matter what she did, she wouldn't be able to escape. No matter how far she ran, no matter what kind of tricks she'll pull, she'll be caught.

Don't breathe. Don't make a sound.

She told herself over and over, hiding behind a building while the new arrivals talked by the café.

The one who was the source of this fear was a pink haired girl with a set of lazy eyes.

Yet despite doing so, Ruri's instincts told her not to underestimate the girl.

One wrong move and death would be swift.

An absolute being she could not offend.

If she ran... she'll make herself known.

But if she didn't run, it'll only be a matter of time before her presence is revealed.

The worst part? Ruri was confident that the girl's sixth sense had already picked her up.

To notice a pair of eyes staring at her.

It wasn't a Sigil ability either. There was no fluctuation of Abyssal energy.

This was simply the girl's natural detection.

What was a calm lake's surface was now filled with danger.

'I shouldn't have stepped so close...' Ruri wanted to cry.

The moment she made a mistake, it was as though the entire lake turned red. Her Sigil went haywire and it was here she understood that the girl's awareness was not normal.

Trying to leave would no doubt lead to her detection. Even with all of her Sigils.

However... By hiding herself here and trying her best to remain undetected, Ruri became privy to information she hadn't expected to hear.

"What? What do you mean this entire city is being monitored?" A tall dark haired beauty asked with her legs crossed.

There was a slight tinge of red on her face as though she was embarrassed about something.

The girl she was talking to, the one with a set of lazy eyes casually petted the rabbit on the table.

"There seems to be a constant stream of energy being directed towards the tower in the middle.

"Everything within its vicinity is being monitored carefully. The moment anyone makes a large move, 'someone' will know. It's probably the prince considering his laziness is probably an act. A chunk of the wall I marked earlier is gone." The pink haired girl smiled while smoking a cigarette.

"So they know we're here. What now?"

"What else? We try to get an audience. The sooner we figure out where Allura has gone, the better it is for me." The girl yawned while Ruri creased her brows.

Allura Agnelia.

A woman who visited the royals not long ago. Her presence was unlike anything she had seen before yet her vitality felt weak. If anything, she should've been more bothered about the two Lords next to her yet her father was clearly more on guard against Allura than the other two.

If they were here for her...

Ruri swallowed her saliva nervously.

This could be bad.

She wanted to leave but she had to find out more.

As long as she didn't make a mistake, it should be easy to figure out their goals.

"Do you think they'll be kind enough to accept an audience? Or even hear you out?"

"Who knows. But I think we should have some insurance in case things go wrong." Suna chuckled, finishing her cigarette with a small wicked smile.

"Insurance? What do you mean?" The tall girl was confused as the Suna let go of the rabbit.

And for a split moment, her eyes snapped towards Ruri's exact hiding spot.

"!!!"

Her eyes widened, panic filled her chest and Ruri didn't hesitate to activate her fifth Sigil.

A trap door opened underneath her as she clicked her tongue.

"Tch! Bad roll!" She grumbled.

Falling through a strange winding space, she landed on the roof of a watchtower and quickly turned around.

There she saw Suna yawning with her back against the wall.

"Hey~ Are you going somewhere? I didn't think a Princess like yourself would be so proficient in hiding." She chuckled as Ruri didn't hesitate.

Reaching into her bag, she threw two needles and dove towards Suna's 'blind spot'.

Her speed made her body turn into a blur but-

"Not happening." Suna closed her eyes.

Her perception was not limited to vision after all.

Even if Ruri eliminated her presence and made Suna ignore her existence, Triggered casts didn't care.

As long as the condition was met, it would automatically activate without Suna needing to do anything!

*BANG!!!

Ruri was thrown back as she triggered several invisible threads of energy that Suna had set down beforehand.

Falling backwards, Ruri activated her fifth Sigil for a second time as her body split into three. Two clones and one real.

Clicking her tongue again, she activated her first resonance!

Slipping into the shadows, three figures dashed away from Suna as she gave a slight yawn.

It was rather interesting to see a similar power as a certain time manipulator but now wasn't the time to admire the creativity of a princess.

Since they already knew the group had entered the city, there was no point hiding their power.

With a snap of her finger, Suna or rather, Alice, slammed her palm down.

Threads shot out in all directions, creating a network of trigger casts across the city.

And as Ruri snapped one of the threads, her eyes snapped towards the east and her body disappeared.

In this game of cat and mouse, Ruri was never going to escape her grasp!

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Within the tower that lie in the centre of the city, a woman suddenly lifted her head as her eyes turned towards the window.