

Abyssal A 111

Chapter 111 Sea of Stars

As they were on their way to the entrance leading down to the Howling Depths, Alice couldn't help but ask about the communal point.

"You see, the communal points are just a general term that people have given to the location since each location looks slightly different. Most communal points known throughout the world are occupied by noble families or powerful Hunters while the ones that aren't occupied disappear after a while.

"The one we're going to is rather deep in the Howling Depths so most families haven't found it yet. Despite how big the location is, I think it only has one or two uses of it left." Allura shrugged as Alice thought about the Howling Depths.

Last time she had gone down, they stopped at the boundary as a beast they couldn't deal with showed up, forcing them to retreat.

With Allura as their guard this time, she'll be able to see more of this location that she kept hearing about.

A layer where countless screams of dead Hunters echo out and gets drowned by the howls of beasts.

"We'll be moving faster than normal when we get down since it's rather far from the entrance. If we go too slow, we won't be back by the time Gin is back. As for our destination, we'll be going to a place most would call the Crystal Grove. The communal point is located in the centre." Allura explained.

"You might not know it but just the information that there's a communal point available is pretty expensive. Six star Hunters are especially eager over this information since it means they have an easier time choosing their next target, increasing their odds of becoming an Abyss Lord." Ria added while glancing out of the window with her chin resting on her palm.

"Well, the realm of Abyss Lord only really applies to those with nine Sigils but I suppose seven and eight are still rather close. But yes, this information fetches quite a nice price with six star Hunters. If you want

to make good money then there's nothing more lucrative than having details regarding communal points.

Naturally, there is an inherent risk that comes with having this kind of knowledge." Allura said while opening one of the windows so that she could smoke her cigarette without Alice and Ria being forced to breath in the second hand smoke.

"Can... You explain more about the different power gaps?" Alice asked, voice still hoarse from her earlier outburst but her curiosity demanded that she ask this question.

Knowing that Allura was going off on a journey of her own with Gin once they finished with Ria's hunt, Alice wanted to find out as much as she could.

"Hm? Oh sure. Let's see... Sigils one to three are what we consider beginner. They make you stronger than normal civilians and essentially cannon fodder in a nation's army. Those that can bridge the gap into three to four Sigils are what we call Talented. At four Sigils, you SHOULD be able to take out any three Sigil user.

At five, you can be considered a powerful figure within a community. At six, you can be considered to be the top 1 percentile.

"It is only when trying to get their seventh Sigil do people finally understand the gulf between the two despite being the difference of one ability. A six Sigil user trying to kill a seven Sigil user is essentially the same as you with two Sigils trying to kill a five Sigil user. Very difficult and near impossible.

"However, the competition within the last three Sigils is especially harsh. Everyone that gets to this point at all talented in their own right. And as you know, once you reach this level, depending on your power, the Abyss will grant you the status of Lord.

Most will get this on their ninth Sigil but Gin got it on his eighth Sigil." Allura explained as she tried her best to describe what the power of each Sigil was like.

However, they were all ants compared to her so it was hard to say which ant is stronger between the two when they're both fragile.

"What about after the ninth Sigil?" Ria asked as this was the same question she had posed to Alice. But when she had asked Alice, it was more rhetorical. With Allura however, she expected an answer.

"After the ninth you have the Apostles. As you know, each church is led by their popes but above the Popes are the Apostles. Extensions of their God's will. Each god has two Apostles and they have something that Abyss Lords can never compete against. A symbol of absolute power beneath the level of Gods. It's what I like to call a Divine Aspect.

A fragment of a God's power that they bestow upon the Apostles and it's what gives them their name. Apostle of War, Famine, Preservation and so on. The Apostle of War will have the Divine Aspect of War granted by the God of the Eclipse." Allura chuckled.

"Each God is limited to two Apostles as sharing more would only weaken their grasp over this world. The trio of gods play their own game while we can only watch. And the Apostles are merely chess pieces on this board despite their impressive power."

Hearing this, Ria couldn't help but swallow her saliva while trying to imagine what kind of power they could command.

"But it's far too early for you to think about Apostles. You can't even harm a hair on their body even if they let you." Allura grinned, flicking Ria on the forehead.

"Anyways, is there anything else you would like to hear about?" Allura asked, knowing that Alice wanted to get as many questions as she could answered while she was still around.

"Layers of the Abyss. How many are there in total?"

"Well... If I told you too much it'll be no fun. We are in the Twilight Layer. Above us and serving as the boundary between the surface and the Abyss is the Reflection Layer. Below us is the Howling Depths Layer. As for what lies beneath the Howling Depths... It's a layer dubbed the Sea of Stars." Allura narrowed her eyes.

"Sea of Stars... What's it like?" Alice muttered in wonder. Just the name alone seemed strange yet beautiful. If it has such a name, what would the view be like?

"That's something you'll have to find out for yourself. Everything below the Howling Depths is widely unknown to 99% of the populus. Even the scholars are in the dark about the information beneath the Sea of Stars."

"Anything else you want to know for now?" Allura asked but Alice shook her head.

Knowing what Allura was like, Alice understood that most of her questions would result in Allura asking her to explore for herself and she agreed with that thought. After all, she was free. She wanted to explore this world at her own leisure and experience life for herself.

Hearing about it from Allura was a shortcut she didn't want to take.

The rest of the journey was filled with Ria and Alice asking Allura questions about fighting rather than exploring. Ways they can use their power, how to better get into the mentality that allowed them to improve the fastest and what kind of training methods they could use.

For Ria, Allura's advice was mostly for her to work on her own stamina and durability since her Sigils rely on her constitution while for Alice, it was physical training along with flexibility training.

Knowing that the powers of the Abyss Blood weren't permanent for Alice, she had to take the hard route of training everything manually but it had the added bonus of letting Alice understand the range of motion for her own body. With understanding comes control and with control, she'll be able to demonstrate movements that most could only dream of.

Allura understood that Alice didn't suit a head on collision. Her physique was one that supported flexibility and speed.

'Alice is suited to speed and flexibility. She should fit the role of the controller in a team battle. Ria will be the frontline brawler as she's similar to me in many aspects. We're both hot headed fighters who rely on our bodies.' Allura thought to herself as the two of them will be working with each other quite frequently.

'I want them to work together more often but so far, the only times they worked together they had to restrain themselves to a certain extent like Alice's Sigil hunt. This trip down to the Howling Depths might prove to be a good chance for them to develop some teamwork.

I'll have Alice focus on using her threads and weapon along with blood control to manage the battlefield while Ria fights the beasts head on.' Allura planned in her mind while the two were none the wiser.

Suddenly, Alice could feel a chill down her spine as she looked around in confusion, wondering what had triggered her instincts.

Unable to find a source for her sudden sense of unease, she relaxed herself once more as she closed her eyes and rested her mind for the rest of the journey.

Just seeing the Zenia family emblem earlier today had left her mentally exhausted with foul memories flooding her mind of her past.

Thinking about this, she couldn't help but wonder what her father and brothers' reactions were towards her disappearance. Were they happy that this 'inhuman' thing has finally disappeared from their lives?

Whatever the answer was, she knew that they'll meet in the future. It is not a matter of if, only when. When she decides to revisit her old home, when she's powerful enough to stand her ground. When she's powerful enough to claim vengeance against them.

That was when she was going to return home and bring it to ruins.

Chapter 112 Falling Through The Abyss

Arriving at their destination, Allura had the driver make his way back to the city since there was no point in having him wait around. With just the three of them left at the scene, Allura pulled out a new cigarette before taking a deep breath.

"Right then. Are you ready to jump?" Allura asked while Alice was silent.

After all, the scene in front of them could only be described as absurd.

They stood at the edge of the slash that Gin had unleashed during his fight against the White Death. Even now, an oppressive aura could be felt as a constant phantom pain of a scythe aiming at their throat was present.

"We're... jumping down?" Alice asked as she had expected Allura to take them to the mountains or a cave leading down like the path she had discovered last time.

"Of course. It'll save us some time navigating all of the winding paths to reach the depth we need to go to. All we have to do here is to just jump down and survive." Allura shrugged.

Despite Ria having prior knowledge of where Allura wanted them to go, she was still concerned by the notion of jumping down into the depths of the next layer. Making a bolt of lightning, Ria threw it down and watched as it fizzled out before even reaching the bottom of the ravine.

"How deep did grandfather even slash?" Ria couldn't help but asked as Allura thought about it for a moment before opening her mouth.

"Ehh... I'd say roughly half way through the next layer. Which is perfect for us. Anyways, are you two ready?" Allura asked once more as Ria and Alice looked at one another before nodding their head.

But before they could jump, they felt a hand push them from behind as they were thrown into the middle of the ravine.

Widening their eyes, they looked back and saw Allura jumping after them with a grin on her face.

"AHHHHH!!!!" Ria cried out in a panic as she tried to adjust her posture.

"There might be a few beasts on the way down. Deal with them as you see fit." Allura chuckled, diving past the two before leaning back into a relaxed posture as though she was lying on a beach chair.

Gritting her teeth, Alice adjusted her posture so that she was standing upright before looking warily at the darkness around them.

She could feel hundreds of eyes locking onto them.

"Gah! Dammit!" Ria shouted out as she charged her body full of lightning, lighting up the surroundings and revealing a myriad of creatures that were either crawling on the walls or residing in the cavities in the walls that used to be caves.

"I don't recommend making yourself a target like that." Allura reminded as a centipede like beast shot out of the darkness, aiming to consume Ria while revealing its underside that was full of skulls.

Before the centipede beast could reach Ria, Alice had flicked her wrist and wrapped her thread around Ria, pulling her to safety.

With the help of Cayla, she could see countless names floating in the darkness along with their stars. Despite now seeing their form, she could see their movements with some being faster than the others and the average stars that she could see being 4 to 5.

Cold sweat filled her back as Alice barely caught the sight of an arachnid shooting its webs toward them at blinding speeds.

Unable to defend themselves, Alice bit her arm and threw some blood towards the webs before setting it aflame. Watching the fire burn away at the web, Alice looked down at the darkness before turning to Allura.

"How much longer till we get to the bottom?!" Alice shouted out, wanting to escape this situation as soon as possible. They were practically sitting ducks right now with countless beasts jumping down from above to chase after them.

"You'll know once we get there."

Seeing that Allura was going to be no help at this moment, Alice narrowed her eyes and created a dome of threads around them.

All of the threads were laced with her blood and will burn away at anything that touched them.

However, this is just a temporary measure.

"I'll focus on warding them off! Burn anything that gets past me!" Ria called out as she created two lightning spears and threw them toward the closest beast that was approaching them.

*BANG!!!

Watching the beasts fly back while crying out in pain, Ria sighed in relief before creating more spears.

But soon, the beasts started to throw ranged attacks. At first, it was merely fire, ice and other elemental abilities but little by little, they realised that Alice's flame was limited in effectiveness.

With that understanding, large chunks of bone and debris started to fly towards them with Alice being unable to fully melt them before they reached her.

Had it not been for Ria kicking them away to the side, they might've gotten hit.

"We can't go on like this!" Ria shouted while glancing back at Alice.

Furrowing her brows, Alice adjusted her posture as an idea flooded her mind.

"I'm sorry!" Alice shouted out, confusing Ria.

Flicking her wrist, Alice sent a wave of threads towards Allura and dragged both Ria and herself towards Allura.

"Huh?" Raising her eyebrow, Allura understood that Alice didn't apologise to Ria but rather to her.

Watching Alice and Ria hide themselves behind her, Allura couldn't help but chuckle.

"You know, if you want to use me as a meat shield you're gonna have to try a lot harder. Tell you what, let's have a bet. Ria, if you can figure out a way to create a 10 second window of safety I'll help you two out." Allura laughed as she disappeared with a burst of flames before reappearing a short distance away from them.

Unable to do much else, all Alice could do now was hope Ria was able to create the 10 second window of safety that Allura had suggested.

"10 seconds?! Are you crazy!" Ria shouted out as she didn't know how she was even going to fend off the beasts for 2 seconds much less 10!

Gathering 3 orbs around her, she fired it toward the closest beast and watched as it slammed against the walls of the ravine.

With them not knowing how much further they must fall, all Ria could do now was gamble. Allura wouldn't propose something impossible which means there's something that she missed.

Something crucial that she could do to buy them 5 seconds of time.

"At least give me a hint!!!" Ria shouted in desperation.

"Hmm... fine. I want you to remember back to the lessons I taught you and Alice while we were training for the Blood Widow. Take things slowly, observe and locate the weaknesses in the formation and capitalise on them. You don't need to break it in one go, do it little by little." Allura smiled while pulling out a cigarette.

Gritting her teeth, Ria closed her eyes as memories of the training session flooded her mind.

'Pick out the weaknesses... Break it down one by one. Find the gaps and make a path... How the hell am I supposed to do this with falling beasts?!' Ria asked herself as she looked up.

"Alice, got any ideas? I'll be honest nothing's ringing a bell." Ria forced a smile as she wanted Alice's input to see if she had any ideas.

Furrowing her brows, Alice closed her left eye and focused with her right.

The world slowed down as she started to identify the gaps between the beasts.

'Allura wanted Ria to do this task which means Ria has the means to do so... What has Ria demonstrated thus far... What can she do to create a gap in attack? Hmm...' As the gears in her mind started to turn, Alice reflected on everything that happened and had an idea.

Widening her eyes, she glanced back at Allura before looking to Ria.

"Use your lightning! Make their body contract so they fly to the edges! Earlier your lightning made them change their falling posture and the wind moved them towards the wall!" Alice shouted out as Ria understood the assignment.

Hearing Alice's suggestion, Allura chuckled as that was one of the possible answers.

'Clever girl. Now... How will Ria achieve this effect I wonder.'

Clasping her palms together, Ria gritted her teeth and created a handful of charged orbs while narrowing her eyes at the beasts.

'The orbs don't need to be strong, I just need to make sure the blast changes their posture and cuts off their flight path!'

Sending the orbs out, Ria marked down the closest beasts and had the orbs hover near them.

Creating a bolt of lightning in her hand, she had Alice ward off some ranged attacks with her flames before throwing her spear, hitting the closest orb and causing a chain reaction!

Sparks of lightning jumped from the orb, shocking the beasts as their body curled up from and slammed into the walls. Their muscles tensed up to the point they were unable to adjust their posture and thus could only watch as their prey fell further down into the Abyss.

"Alright! I got more where that came from!" Ria cheered as hope ignited in her heart. Creating more orbs, she continued sent them out before detonating them with her spears.

Meanwhile, Alice warded off the range attack using her fire. She had Ria target those who are preparing attacks that are too big for her to ward off.

And soon, the 10 second window was up.

"Fantastic work girls. As you go on your journey to the mainland, you will be relying on one another. Remember that by working together, you will be able to find a way out no matter how dire things may look." Allura smiled as she had requested 10 seconds so that she could enjoy her cigarette.

With them completing the assignment, Allura flicked the cigarette butt before snapping her fingers.

***BOOM!!!**

An explosion of flames covered the ravine as the fire consumed all of the beasts chasing after them, reducing them to charred corpses.

Grabbing Alice and Ria, Allura wrapped the three of them in a ball of fire before shooting down the ravine like a meteor, blitzing her way down to the bottom.

Chapter 113 Bottom Of The Ravine

"Ah... My child... My poor baby..." A trembling voice echoed out in the darkness. A voice full of mourning and sadness.

Alice didn't know who the voice belonged to but it brought a wave of sadness through her heart. A rush of pain through her chest but the voices did not stop.

"Why... Why must it be like this... Luthor... Please..." The woman's voice called out.

"Please... Why does it have to be her... Kill me if you have to... But why must it be her?"

In this darkness, Alice floated aimlessly as tears started to flood her eyes.

'Am I... Crying? Why...' Alice questioned herself as her mind slowly gained clarity.

The last thing she remembered was Allura wrapping them in her flames before diving down into the bowls of the ravine.

Remembering this, Alice snapped her eyes open and sat up while looking around her.

"Woah there, take it easy. Ria is still napping." Allura's voice brought her back as she looked to her left and saw Allura leaning against a boulder while there was a small campfire in the middle. To her right, Ria was currently sleeping.

"You were crying in your sleep. Was the journey down that bad?" Allura asked as Alice noticed her tears hadn't stopped yet.

"Ah... No. It was... A weird dream." Alice shook her head while wiping her tears away with her sleeves.

Furrowing her brows, Alice held her head while remembering the words of the woman in her dream.

She called out for a man called Luthor. A name familiar to her as it belonged to her father.

'Was... That woman my mother?'

She doesn't remember her mother's voice nor what she looks like. After years in the Zenia prison, all she could remember are her tortures and the faces of her captors. Especially her brothers and her father. Her biggest sources of betrayal.

'What happened that night...' Shaking her head, Alice sighed out as a heavy feeling plagued her chest.

"Where are we right now?" Alice asked, wanting to put her focus elsewhere so she could forget this discomfort.

Looking around her, she could see that they were hidden within a rock formation right now. Despite the fire and smoke giving away their location, nothing was attacking them.

"We're at the bottom of the Ravine. I didn't take us too far, I'd say about... a 5 minute walk from where we landed?" Allura tapped her chin as Alice stood up and climbed over the rock walls.

From where she was sitting, she couldn't see much as all she could see was the darkness that hung over her head.

As she climbed over the rocks to see what was around them, the smell of charred flesh assaulted her nose as she widened her eyes in shock.

Large corpses belonging to a variety of beasts were scattered around them. The weaker ones seemed to have been reduced to ashes while the larger ones had parts of their body still intact.

Regardless of the state of their body, a graveyard of beasts surrounded them.

"Don't mind them. Just a few pests that tried to attack without knowing what's good for them. Honestly, even when I release my aura, some of the beasts still attack out of fear. Some just don't know what's good for them I guess" Allura shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

Hearing that Allura had called them 'pests' Alice couldn't help but glance back in bewilderment. Though considering Allura's power, she was not wrong.

Even so, all of these beasts seemed to be at the level of five to six stars. Just one was enough to kill both her and Ria never mind a whole batch of them like this.

Looking past the corpses, Alice finally caught a glimpse of their surroundings.

Compared to the mystical nature of the areas she's been to so far, this was far darker and ominous.

Black roots ruptured from the rocks and walls, while vines hung from the darkness above. A constant mist layered the ground while the remains of corpses could be spotted, breaching the ground with their claws.

Silhouettes that seemed to look like trees without leaves with flickering shadows between the gaps. It felt as though a beast could jump out the moment she stepped away from the safety of Allura.

"You might want to be careful. The average level around this layer is six Sigils, especially when we are this deep. The closer we get to our destination, the higher the chances are to run into a seven star beast so make sure you don't get too far from me when we leave." Allura reminded as Alice swallowed her saliva in nervousness.

Making sure that Alice took this time to rest up as she had used quite a bit of blood on the way down, Allura kept an eye out for beasts who were unafraid of death.

While waiting for Ria to wake up, Alice's mind finally calmed down from her strange dream as she sat down and drank some healing blood.

"Just out of curiosity, how long does it take for the side effects to disappear? You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I'm just wondering if you know your limits." Allura asked. While she didn't want Alice to recount her traumatic past, her physique was her strongest weapon right now.

The more she understands her own situation, the better her odds of survival are.

"It depends on the strength of the side effect... Sometimes they take minutes to disappear, sometimes they take hours. The longest one took about 3 days I think." Alice replied, trying her best to remember the results of the experiments.

"The ones that take the longest are those that build up and manifest like Vampire Lilies. That one took 2 days to disappear once it manifested the flower on my back. If I'm not being injured with other wounds, the side effects disappear faster."

Hearing this, Allura raised an eyebrow as this was stranger than what she had expected.

'Seems like Alice has some kind of recovery ability. I don't think that's exactly normal even if she is able to recover from side effects. If the time to recover changes based on her wounds, then it might mean her body needs to focus on her wounds before attending to the side effects... Then again... Alice's recovery has been rather fast compared to normal standards.'

Allura remembered the time she was first exposed to Alice's secret. How quickly her body patched her wounds up as she approached death's doorstep. The way her wounds closed up was fresh in her mind.

'This isn't the first anomaly I've seen thus far considering the Blood Cult is messing with dead gods and the Eclipse Cult is messing with sealed Abyss Lords.' Allura scratched her head while pulling out a cigarette.

Just as she lit up the cigarette, she noticed Alice giving it a glance occasionally.

"Curious?" Allura asked with a smile.

"A little. Is it... tasty? You do it a lot."

"Tasty? Hmm... Not quite. It's just routine for me now I suppose. Plus, it's not like it does me any harm." Allura shrugged.

"I don't think you should try it though haha."

Scratching her cheek, Alice nodded her head as she wasn't a fan of the smell.

It didn't take too long for Ria to wake up as the sound of their talking and the beasts that tried to attack only to be burnt to a crisp by Allura was quite loud.

Sitting up, Ria seemed to be half away as her eyes were barely open while she sluggishly looked around her.

"Whaz goin on?" She asked softly while blinking her eyes.

"Wakey wakey. We've stayed still for long enough now. If we keep delaying, we might not make it back in time." Allura clapped her hand as Ria nodded her head slowly before standing up and yawning.

Rubbing her eyes, she stood next to Allura without much input and just followed as though she was sleep walking.

"Seems like she exhausted herself more than I expected. Might take her a bit of time to get back to normal." Allura smiled.

"Anyways, let me do this as a precaution. You can never be too careful out here."

Snapping her fingers, she created two small motes of fire before capturing them in small glass containers.

"Keep them on you and crush it if you get into any danger. If things go south and I can't immediately be there to help you, this'll deal with the threat. Even if it doesn't kill, which I doubt, it'll buy you some time." Allura reassured as she handed one container to Alice while giving the other to Ria who stored it away without another word.

"I think that's everything now. Let's go."

Digging her fingers into the boulder behind her, Allura tossed it aside as though it was garbage and started to make her way through the Abyss.

Hearing the loud thud followed by the screeches of Abyss beasts, Alice didn't hesitate and followed closely behind Allura.

"How did you come across this place? Didn't Gin make this ravine recently?"

"I found it quite a few years ago. Personally, I had never used it, so I left a marker at the location. With the beasts that surround this place, I doubt any of the noble families managed to locate it and even if they did, I would've known. I was keeping this place as a bargaining chip if I needed one.

Just like the blood I used to trade for the sparring session, they come in handy once in a while so it doesn't hurt to collect or mark down a few things here and there." Allura explained with a shrug.

Over the years, she had marked down hundreds to thousands of locations that could be useful for her future endeavours. She just never found a situation for them yet.

"Are they all places like the communal point?"

"Nope. Some are ruins, some have treasures. One place I marked down used to belong to a weird b*stard who kept collecting cursed crap. Things that have malicious abilities embedded into them thanks to certain beasts. Weird pieces of armour that cover strange places and even a spear made of ice that never melted. It was a pretty good storage vault though so I marked it down.

"I'll make note of some places on a map for you in the future since they're not suited for your strength right now. Going there means death for you." Allura smiled.

As Alice is her family now, this could be considered her inheritance to some capacity.

Chapter 114 Pressure Of The Abyss

Making their way through the Howling Depths, Alice had to step over countless skeletal hands that decorated the ground. Whether it was due to history or the effects of Gin's slash, Alice wasn't sure.

All she knew was that this place was giving her the creeps and a sense of unease continued to build up in her heart.

"Urg... when will we change zones? This place is depressing as hell." Ria groaned as she had woken up a bit more after some walking.

"Almost at the next zone." Allura chuckled while jumping over some rocks.

"Can't you just fly us over there? Wouldn't that save us some time?" Ria asked as Allura was escorting them there anyways.

Having her cut the journey short would be beneficial.

"Of course I can. But then you won't get to experience the atmosphere of the Howling Depths. In the Howling Depths, it's easier for you to tire out, easier for you to use more power than expected because of stress and the silent fear the Abyss instills upon you. The unknown variable of whether or not a six star beast will show up.

Those who have experienced this fear and know how to deal with it are those that'll survive this layer." Allura explained.

"If you two can get used to this stress then it'll help with building your foundation as a Hunter."

With this explanation, Ria had nothing else to say as she sucked it up and journeyed onwards without complaints. If this was all to make them better Hunters then she'll do it no matter how difficult it was.

Continuing their exploration forward, an invisible pressure slowly made itself known as both Alice and Ria noticed how their movements were slowing down. At first it was miniscule, but over time, they were only moving at around 70% of their original pace.

It was like sleeping while having more weight being placed on you. At first, you'll feel nothing but soon, your body is fatigued and the weight becomes unbearable.

"Seems like you're feeling it now." Allura grinned.

"Why is this happening?" Alice asked as this was not just normal stress. Normal stress wouldn't do this to them."

"As you descend further into the Abyss, your body must be ready to face the pressure exerted by the Abyss itself. When you are close to the surface, this effect is negligible as it is being balanced out. The deeper you go, the stronger this pressure becomes. I suppose you could say it's the Abyss' way of testing to see if you are worthy to descend to this depth. Regardless, let's keep going.

If you can make it to the next zone while surviving this pressure then I'll give you a little break like what happened back at the rock formation."

While they were resting, Allura made sure the two weren't affected so they could have a proper rest. But that was no longer the case. Now, they were fully exposed to the effects of this layer and the fatigue was catching up.

"Can we start running?" Ria asked but Allura shook her head.

"A tip for you is that this is not a matter of speed but rather endurance. It's to test how well your body can cope with the environment. If you decide to exhaust yourself and blitz through, I can guarantee that you'll be passed out before 2 minutes even passes and die to the beasts. Pace yourself and endure as long as you can.

We'll be doing this repeatedly until we reach the location." Allura grinned as Alice finally understood where her bad feelings stemmed from. It was from what Allura had planned once they got down here.

"But don't we have to get back on time?" Alice asked, knowing that Allura wanted them back by the time Gin returned.

"Oh of course. But the journey back will be done through me unless you want to climb all the way back up?" Allura raised an eyebrow, pointing at the veil of darkness that hung above them where the moonlight could not breach.

Hearing this, Alice understood that Allura never planned for them to have a round trip. This was a one way journey to reach the Crystal Grove while enduring this kind of pressure.

". . .Crap." Ria cursed as she understood their predicament.

She could only be glad that no beasts were involved while they journeyed through this layer as Allura was keeping them at bay.

"Keep up now, don't fall too far behind. Remember, keep your pace and focus on the next step. Don't think of the journey as a whole, just put your mind to taking the next step."

Taking a deep breath, Alice calmed her breathing as she did as she was told. Focus on her next step.

'In one way, it might be similar to living. Don't think of a journey as a whole while I'm taking it but instead, focus on my next destination. The next step and one of many on this long path.' Alice thought to herself, distracting her mind with long winded thoughts and explanations to take her focus away from the exhaustion.

Time passed as the two no longer cared about the corpses and obstacles in their path. Each step was heavy and taken with great difficulty. Should there be a bone in the way they would rather crush the bone under their foot than step to the side.

They had established a rhythm in their mind, one that allowed them to distract themselves from the fatigue and the arduous journey. They had even stopped asking her questions as their mind was solely focused on taking the next step.

'They're doing pretty good. I expected them to take a few pauses here and there, but they've held on. Ria is focusing her mind on body movement. How to best use her body to conserve stamina. How she should reduce her movements to the bare minimum while Alice has gone for a different approach.'

Allura examined as their methods to cope with this pressure reflected their personality and thinking process.

Ria resolved the issue through physical control while Alice pushed forth with pure willpower.

Each movement was sluggish and wasted more stamina than Ria's, but her determination was not to be scoffed at.

Ria was martial discipline while Alice was mental discipline.

With her willpower, Alice was able to keep up despite her poor physical strength.

'They're not fully accustomed to the pressure of the Abyss just yet but it doesn't get much harder. Unless I plan on having them fight, which they're not ready for, it's probably best to focus on this pressure for now.' Allura thought to herself.

Curling her lips into a small smile, the pressure around Alice and Ria started to increase once more as Allura was manually increasing the difficulty.

The change made itself evident as sweat splashed against the rocks with each step they took.

Just as Ria was able to take another step, she heard the sound of Alice collapsing on her knee beside her.

Just as she was about to call out to Alice, she watched as Alice stood back up and use her threads to help her take the next step. How she sent the thread forward before dragging herself up. Her body was tired but her will burned bright.

Seeing this, Ria couldn't help but grin. She couldn't get beaten like this. Massaging her neck briefly, she continued onwards.

From using her threads to activating her first Sigil to boost her physical strength, Alice was slowly exhausting all the tools she had available to keep up while Ria was doing the same. She was slowly charging herself with orbs little by little to keep going, making sure she didn't overburden her body.

With the two finding more ways to keep up, Allura felt proud yet inclined to dial up the difficulty some more. It had reached a point that surpassed the pressure exerted by the current layer yet the two didn't falter.

They could not falter, they would not allow themselves to falter.

This may be a simple test but if they stopped now, how did they expect to face the future challenges?

For Alice, it meant overcoming the wall that was her family.

For Ria, it meant erasing the Eclipse Cult from this world.

It took them minutes to take a single step. They stood still, and gathered their strength before unleashing it for the next step.

Little by little, step by step, they moved forward through the bottom of the Ravine.

'Just a little further... One more step...' Alice urged herself.

*CLAP!

The sound of Allura clapping her hand snapped them out of their self-imposed hypnosis-like state as the pressure disappeared in an instant, causing the two to accidentally trip over as they were expecting to take the step at great difficulties.

"Congratulations. We'll take our break here since we've reached the next zone. I'll allow some extra time to rest as you two have done very well." Allura smiled, knowing that Alice had unknowingly pushed Ria past her limit.

If Alice didn't stop, then Ria would push on no matter the difficulty.

With no more strength left in her body, Alice crawled up the ground and peaked over the rocks to see the entrance to the next zone. A myriad of colours reflected in her eyes.

The next zone was akin to a desert yet mixed with a snow-covered mountain. Despite all of the sand, the temperature was cool. Tall mountain like structures looked over the distance with white sand covering the peaks. A strange river flowed freely through the zone and an array of lights from golden yellow to luminescent blues decorated the edges.

It looked as though a star lit path had been prepared for them, showing their path through this land.

Despite the lack of a sun and moon, white crystals could be seen hanging from above, coating this realm in a soft white hue.

"The pressure in this place will be a little easier to deal with now that you've acclimated to the pressure to a certain extent. Take this time to rest up since the next part will be just as difficult."

Hearing this, Ria immediately took the initiative and fell asleep without wasting a single moment.

". . . I haven't even prepared the resting area yet." Allura muttered, shocked at how quickly Ria was able to fall asleep.

Shaking her head, Allura chuckled and carried both Alice and Ria off to the side before setting up camp.

Chapter 115 Ashen Bone Stalker

"Come on~ The pressure here should be far weaker than in the ravine. Enjoy the scenery, run with those legs of yours. Why are you moving so slow?" Allura's voice rang out across the white desert as she glanced back with a grin.

She was currently 'walking' and despite her motions, her speed was must faster than both Ria and Alice.

As much as the two would like to retort to her taunts, they didn't have any energy to spare!

Alice was furiously running with the help of her first Sigil while Ria was doing the same and occasionally giving Alice the extra push should the need arise.

After all, the two were running away from a beast beneath the sands!

[Ashen Bone Stalker - ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆]

The Ashen Bone Stalker was a beast that looked like a mix between a large worm and a shark with large fins across its body to help it swim through the sands. Its body was split into several sections with a multi-layered head with rows upon rows of teeth.

Large pincers and reverse bone armour wrapped around its head as it would occasionally let out a loud screech mixed with a myriad of clicking sounds.

Had it not been for Allura slowing down the beast with her own pressure, Alice and Ria would've been dragged into the depths of the sands by now.

However, just because Allura was slowing it down, it didn't mean there wasn't a chance for it to catch up.

Alice and Ria had to run as fast as they could before diving out of the way so the beast didn't rip them to shreds.

"The river!" Ria shouted out, wanting to use the river to buy them a bit of time. She wasn't sure if it'll work but she had to try something. Allura was serving as their guide right now and so long as they keep running in the general direction, they'll reach the next zone.

Jumping over a small sand hill, the two ducked down as the Bone Stalker erupted from the sand and flew over their head.

"The river?! Okay!" Alice replied as she felt as though her lungs were about to explode from her chest.

She could hear the sound of her heart pounding in her ear while her muscles screamed out in pain.

Running towards the river, Alice wrapped her thread around Ria while she jumped, dragging the two of them over the river before continuing their run.

"What now?!"

"I don't know!? I don't got a plan!" Ria cried out as the Bone Stalker was not slowed down at all. All it did was jump over the river without being slowed down at all.

"Ha?!" Widening her eyes, Alice gritted her teeth and turned around for a moment.

Gritting her teeth, she activated her second Sigil as violet flames erupted out of her body.

Raising an eyebrow, Allura decided to not say anything for now and see how the flames would match up against a five star beast. If it could get stronger by consuming the powers of the Abyss and become independent from Alice based on what she had seen, Allura wanted to see if it will allow Alice to transcend the gap of three stars and removed the pressure slowing down the beast.

"Go wild!" Alice shouted out, knowing that the flames seemed to have a mind of its own.

Focusing all of her power on unleashing the flames, Alice watched as a cloak manifested around her. The material of the cloak was black while the underside looked as though it was created from a layer of moving flames.

Violet flames erupted from her hands as she jumped up and used the flames to catapult herself higher in a way similar to how Allura used her own flames.

Punching her hand down, a wave of fire rushed towards the beast from above. The dragon she had seen manifest from her flames during her fight appeared once more as it reared its head back and let out a roar before diving down. Slamming into the beast, the flames charred its shell but the damage was minimal.

Feeling the strength being sapped from her body, Alice immediately turned off her Sigil as keeping it on would exhaust her even faster.

Landing on the sand, the cloak around her body disappeared into countless flickers of fire that extinguished themselves.

"Don't look back! Keep running!" Alice shouted up, running as fast as she could while her flames wrestled with the beast.

Nodding her head, Ria didn't dawdle and ran with Alice while Allura kept her eyes on the fight.

She wanted to see how the fire would hold up against the beast as it reminded her of seeing two beasts fight each other in a territorial dispute rather than one being the result of a Sigil power.

Raising its head out of the sands, the Bone Stalker opened its jaw as another mouth, erupted out from the inside. While it lacked the bone like armour of its outer shell, large teeth decorated its flesh.

From the second mouth, a third mouth erupted out followed by a fourth as it bit down on the flames, only to get burnt. Before the fire could travel up the mouth and into the body, the third mouth snapped shut, cutting the flesh off before retreating back into the body.

Diving down into the sands, the ground started to shake as the beast tried to extinguish the fire but it was tenacious.

'Seems like the fire is struggling. Unless it can latch onto something that it can burn for fuel, the attack power seems to be rather weak. It's having a hard time breaking through the Bones Stalker's shell.'
Allura thought to herself as she could see the violet flames trying to find its way through the shell but the Bone Stalker was determined.

Once it realised the flame couldn't hurt it through its shell, it made sure to stop the flames advances.

After a short period of time, the Bone Stalker slowly raised itself out of the sand as countless burn marks could be seen on its shell but it was not harmed.

Rearing its head back, it let out a loud screech of triumph before diving back now, seeking revenge on Alice who had unleashed said flames upon it.

"That's enough. Go back to the desert." Allura commanded as she narrowed her eyes at the beast. A wall of fire erupted from the sand, trapping it in a cage that prevented it from going after Alice.

Turning towards Allura for a moment, the beast let out a disgruntled cry before diving down and away from Alice and Ria's direction.

Just a single glance upon Allura told it everything it needed to know. Trying to fight that woman meant death! It was not a possibility but rather a guarantee!

Seeing the beast had given up on its pursuit, Allura flicked her finger and the cage disappeared, allowing it to run away while she made her way back to Alice and Ria.

'Unless Alice can help breach the defences, the violet flames will have a hard time killing its opponent... Since the flames are manifested from Alice's strange physique rather than a Sigil power from a beast, getting more flame Sigils won't necessarily help with her growth.

Since the source of the fire is different... Seems like she'll have to keep getting Sigils that'll bolster her control over blood.' Allura thought to herself as Alice's second Sigil had prepared a strong foundation for future blood powers.

Arriving back at Ria and Alice's side, Allura could see the two of them sitting on the sand in exhaustion as they were glad to see the beast had given up on its pursuit.

"P-please... Just... give us... A moment. *gasp* To catch our breath." Ria begged as Allura tapped her chin.

"I mean~ I already saved you a bunch of trouble by scaring off the beast you know. If I didn't do that you'll still be running." Allura smiled.

"Just look at Alice... She can... She can barely go on." Ria pointed to the side, turning Allura's attention to Alice who was lying face down unmoving. The exhaustion had caught up to her and the moment she had taken a break, her body refused to get back up.

"Help..." Alice called out weakly as she didn't have any strength to move.

"*Sigh* What will I do with the two of you? Fine, let's have a break. I'll take you to our next location since it doesn't require any running." Allura shrugged. With Alice using her second Sigil and unleashing that much fire, she had essentially exhausted the rest of her stamina.

What she was moving on was what remained of her adrenaline that pumped through her body.

Throwing the two over her shoulder, Allura made her way through the white desert.

"Blerg... I feel like my insides are about to come out my mouth." Alice groaned.

"Oh stop being a baby, I'm sure you're fine. Need some water?" Allura asked as the two had been running for quite a while.

"Yes please... But preferably when you're not carrying us like two sacks of potatoes." Ria nodded as drinking in this posture was practically asking the water to go back up the way it came.

"Well hold on tight then. I'll be going a little faster than normal to make up for some lost time."

Hearing this, both girls instinctively latched onto Allura as tight as they could, locking their legs while grabbing their wrists to make sure they didn't fall off.

If Allura was saying she's going 'a little faster than normal' then it meant full speed ahead for the usual hunter.

As expected, the moment they secured their grip, Allura shot forward like a speeding comet, crossing the desert at blinding speeds.

Feeling her grip slowly slipping, Alice gritted her teeth and tensed up her body to the point veins could be seen on her neck.

Naturally, Ria was doing the same.

With Allura's speed, the journey was short as they reached their next destination. Dropping the two of them on the sand, Allura looked up at the cliff before her and nodded her head with a smile.

"Your next goal is to scale this mountain." Allura chuckled.

Looking up at the mountain that towered over them, Alice could feel her heart drop.

"What if we fall?" Ria asked.

"If you fall and don't recover in time, I'll catch you and make you start from the bottom again since you 'died'." Allura smiled. This was going to be the hardest part of their journey.

Chapter 116 Climbing The Mountain

Panting heavily, Alice could feel the heavy gusts of wind pushing against her body, trying to make her fall as she reached up and grabbed hold of a piece of rock that was sticking out.

Making sure she has a good foothold, she grabbed her dagger and jammed it into the gaps before changing its shape.

It was to prevent her from falling too far as well as a safety precaution.

"Fu...." Letting out a deep breath, Alice glanced down and saw how high up she was and turned her attention back to the peak.

The mountain was 80% sheer cliffs while the rest was steep slopes.

Compared to her, Ria was having an easier time since her body strength was far better.

"Wrap the thread around me. Take a break. I can carry you up while I climb." Ria suggested, knowing that Alice was tired. After the initial walk under pressure followed by the sprint away from the Bone Stalker, she was positive that Alice's body was crying out in pain even after their rest.

"No it's fine." Alice shook her head. She wanted to climb as far as she could as per Allura's instructions.

'Still... I don't see how this is harder than the previous tests...' Alice thought to herself. She didn't dare to verbalise her thoughts as doing so was simply inviting trouble!

At that moment when her mind focused elsewhere, her grip had almost slipped as she hastily adjusted herself on the cliff and sighed out in relief before continuing the climb.

They could no longer see where Allura was but the two of them knew that she was watching.

Soon, they approached what seemed to be a resting stop as there was enough flat ground for them to lie down on.

Helping Alice up, the two of them leaned against the wall and took a moment to catch their breath.

"Hey... This isn't too bad huh? I thought it was going to be super difficult with how Allura was describing it but maybe I was just thinking too much." Ria smiled as Alice paused and slowly looked at Ria.

"Hm? What?" Ria blinked her eyes in confusion as Alice sighed.

"You know... Whenever Allura hears that it's easy for us she turns up the difficulty, right?" Alice sighed as she immediately stood up and resumed the climb.

Hearing this, Ria covered her mouth with her hand and smacked her own head as she too resumed the climb.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like anything bad was happening but neither Alice nor Ria dared to utter a single word in fear of changing the situation.

They didn't know how much time had passed but as they climbed up, their mind was solely focused on reaching the tallest peak of the mountain.

Meanwhile, Allura was watching the situation from the top with a smile on her face.

Naturally, she had heard what Ria said but didn't plan to change anything. After all, the climb was simply the calm before the storm. A moment of respite before they're thrown into the hurricane.

Glancing behind her, she had a smile on her face as a beast kneeled in front of her as a sign of submission and respect.

"You're not allowed to kill the two that will appear up here. All you have to do is to stop them from reaching the peak. You can knock them off if needed." Allura smiled as the beast nodded his head.

He was a humanoid Abyss Beast with a tall muscular stature. Its skin was dark like obsidian with glowing embers through the cracks. A rhythmic pulse of golden orange energy could be seen through his body. Four large horns protruded from his head while two flaming orbs and a split revealing the flames within his body represented his facial features.

"They're only weak Hunters so make sure you don't go overboard." Allura reminded as the beast nodded his head.

"Let's see... They might not know where to go so let me make a gate for them." Allura muttered.

Walking past the beast, Allura stomped her foot down and two pillars of fire manifested along with a flaming path leading up to the peak.

"This should be obvious enough. If they miss this then we'll need something else other than strength training.

"Remember, you're not allowed to kill them. Just make sure they don't get past you okay? Do that and I'll reward you as promised. That and allow them to first step on this ground before you make a move." Allura reminded since this was a strong beast after all. Accidents could always happen, so she had to make sure he understood his assignment.

Nodding his head, the beast walked over to the center of the platform and sat down before crossing his arms. Against a fledglings with only two Sigils and three Sigils, there was no need for him to use his arms. In fact, he didn't even need to move. This was his pride.

"Seems like you got it sorted. In that case, then I'll watch from the side. I need to catch the two if they fall after all."

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Reaching another 'checkpoint' of sorts, Ria and Alice sat down as Alice pulled out two bottles of water from her pouch.

It was originally meant to hold blood vials but Allura had deemed it necessary to give them two bottles of water instead for this climb as the temperature was increasing the closer they got to the top.

Of course, Alice had some blood vials to spare but only the bare minimum. Berserk blood and three vials of healing blood.

There wasn't much need for her to carry her own blood right now as she was able to control it and make sure none of it was wasted.

"How far from the top are we now?" Alice asked while wiping her mouth.

"Hmm... I'd say about... halfway up? Maybe a bit more. The cliff seems to end soon."

"Then maybe the last bit is a sprint to the top. Knowing Allura, we'll probably have to run from a beast or something." Alice sighed.

"Maybe... But if it's the hardest part of this journey then I doubt it's just running away from a beast." Forcing a smile, Ria had a thought in mind but didn't want to say it out loud in case she jinxed it and Alice knew that was the case.

"Let's keep climbing. We're near the top now."

Shaking her head, Alice stored the water bottles away before resuming the climb.

As they slowly approached the peak, they could feel a chill down their spine. Despite the surrounding temperatures, the two didn't dare to move a single muscle. Holding onto the cliff edge, cold sweat coated their back.

Right now, they could feel a hostile aura from above, one that put the Bone Stalker to shame. A beast of fury, malice and raw destruction awaited their presence.

Even without using Cayla to peak at her opponent's strength, Alice knew this beast was not something they were equipped to fight!

Swallowing her saliva, Ria took a deep breath and pulled herself up and reached for another rock, resuming the climb.

"Allura isn't oblivious to the dangers. If that thing is around, it means she's let it be." Ria frowned.

Nodding her head, Alice followed behind Ria and pulled herself up.

The closer they got to the top the more dangerous the aura felt. Each movement felt like it was done with a knife against their throat as a single move meant death!

Gritting their teeth, the two of them pulled themselves over the edge and came face to face with the beast releasing this aura!

'!!!' Widening her eyes, Alice could see clearly their opponent and the tag above its head.

[Champion of Flames - ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆]

A six star beast!

An aura of domination and wrath exploded out, enveloping the two of them in the aura as they were unable to move.

Without giving the two a chance to react, the Champion took a deep breath before breathing out. A heavy gust of wind exploded forth as the two were blown back and over the edge.

Knowing that if she didn't react, they would 'die', Alice grabbed Ria and threw her bracelet at the wall, turning it into a hook.

Grabbing tight on the threads, she was unable to stop herself in time and slammed against the cliff face, forcing the air out of her lungs, almost dropping Ria as a result.

"What the f*ck was that?!" Ria whispered in shock as she quickly grabbed the cliff face to reduce the weight placed upon Alice.

Just the act of breathing felt like a punch in the face! How was they supposed to get past such a beast?!

"Champion of Flames. A six star beast, do you know anything about it?" Alice asked as she tried her best to calm her beating heart.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like the beast was aiming for their lives as a simple gesture would be enough for it to kill them. Even now, she knew that they were within its range of attack as the threatening aura never disappeared. In fact, it only concentrated harder around them, making it hard for them to make a move.

"No clue. I never read up on six star beasts since I didn't think I'd run into them." Ria shook her head as glanced up with a frown.

Noticing something falling over the edge, Ria furrowed her brows and caught the falling object. Turns out it was a sheet of paper as words were written on it.

[Your next task is to get past this beast and reach the gate that I have prepared. Naturally, with this being too easy for you, I made sure the beast is feeling motivated with a little reward. Good luck~

Allura.]

Reading this letter, Ria couldn't help but want to cry.

'Me and my damn mouth. I should've stayed quiet.' She mourned on the inside as she showed the letter to Alice.

"Any ideas on how to get past the beast? Or brute force it for now until we get a hint?" Ria asked as Alice was silent before sighing.

"Brute force it for now. I'll catch us before we can fall so we don't have to start from the bottom again."

Glancing over the edge, Alice didn't want to climb all the way back up for another attempt.

Chapter 117 Contending Against A Six Star Beast

The two continued to climb up only for the Champion to knock them back with a single breath. But with their goal being behind the beast, they had no choice but to keep going.

"Gah! Dammit! How the hell does Allura expect us to get past this b*stard! All he needs to do is breathe and we'll get knocked back! So damn humiliating." Ria slammed her hand against the ground in frustration as this was the first time she felt the gap in strength was simply insurmountable.

The difference between this Champion and Allura was that Allura held back so much she actually gave them a chance. The wall was so high that she knew it was impossible from the start.

But the fact that Allura has allowed this beast to stay here means there was a chance they could get past yet they haven't even forced it to uncross its arms.

Alice has the same thought as she too was confused about what they're supposed to do in this situation.

'Does Allura want me to use my second Sigil? I thought she wanted me to avoid using it for now until I've fully grasped how it worked. But I don't see any other way to get past that beast...' Alice thought to herself as she had relied on the violet flames far too much despite not knowing a single thing about it.

All she knows is that it's a manifestation of her own potential. A reflection of her blood and body. Yet she has no clues on how to control it other than the fact that it has a negative opinion towards creatures of powers belonging to the Abyss.

And if she was not careful, the flame could easily go wild with her being unable to wrangle it back under her control.

'All Allura said was that the task is to get past the beast and reach the gate... Not how we're supposed to go about the task... Though it seems like the beast has its senses locked onto us.'

Crossing her arms, Alice closed her eyes and contemplated her options.

"Ria." Alice called out.

"Hm? What's up?"

"What do you think Allura wants us to do? She never asked for a specific method which means we can probably think of something outside the box." Alice asked as Ria tapped her chin.

"Well... I can say for sure that I can't just run past the beast. Even at my fastest, he can track me easily. Then there's your flames but Allura has told you not to use them too much so unless she wants you to ignore her, I don't know what else we can do." Ria shrugged.

Staying silent for a bit, Alice opened her mouth.

"Do you think she wants us to dig a tunnel under the beast?"

". . . The f*ck?" Ria raised an eyebrow, surprised at how strange the idea was.

"I guess it wouldn't work. Not with the beast keeping an eye on us." Alice sighed.

With no ideas left, she was suggesting the first thing that came to mind.

Leaning against the wall, Ria sighed as she also tried to think of some ideas that they could use. There was no point in continuously running up only to get blown off expecting something different.

"What if we tried to go in two separate directions? I'll start off slow then the moment he turns to you, I'll go at full speed and see if I can get to the gate." Ria asked but Alice shook her head.

"If you get pushed off the edge I won't be able to catch you and you'll have to start from the bottom. Remember what Allura said?"

"Right..." Ria nodded, understanding that they couldn't really afford to climb up from the bottom.

"But we if we try a one vs one? I can see if I can get his full attention even for a single moment. And that moment will be your queue to climb up and run."

Hearing this, Ria furrowed her brows but knowing Alice, she wouldn't suggest this if she didn't think she could pull it off.

"No harm in trying."

With them settling on a plan of attack, Alice took a deep breath and climbed up.

Since Allura never said what method was allowed, Alice assumed that everything was allowed. No matter what she did, so long as she could buy Ria some time, they could pass this part of the test.

'When I travel alone with Ria, I won't have Allura looking out for me. Which means it's up to the two of us to survive any hard encounters we come across. Allura probably wants to see how I plan to deal with a beast with my flames. Even though they're hard to control, it's a strong asset and something that'll allow me to contend with a six star beast.

Even if it's just momentarily.' Alice thought to herself.

As she reached the edge of the cliff, she narrowed her eyes and swung herself up before throwing her hook against the ground and holding on as tight as she could.

*BANG!!!

As a gust of wind slammed into her body, she was almost flung over the edge but managed to hold on.

She could hear the mechanisms on her glove creaking as it was pushed to its limit but she continued to hold on.

Trying as hard as she could to pull herself closer to the ground, she was unable to as it seemed as though the Champion had an endless supply of air in his lungs.

Biting her arm, she tried to control a sliver of blood to fly towards the beast but it was blown back without being able to get any closer.

'Think... Think! What can I do? I doubt the flames can reach him right now...'

Unable to keep holding on, Alice reached down and grabbed the edge before sheltering herself from the wind.

Taking deep breaths to calm herself down, she could sense Ria's doubtful gaze.

"Keep to the plan. Let me think of something."

Narrowing her eyes, Alice peaked her head over the edge.

'He seems relaxed... I suppose Allura might've imposed a time limit that's why he's not in a rush. He doesn't seem to care that I'm holding onto the edge so long as I'm not trying to get to the gate.'

An idea surfaced in her mind but she wasn't sure if she should go through with it. After all, Allura had reminded her not to harm herself if she could help it.

'F*ck it, it's not like I have any other ideas.' Alice frowned.

Grabbing her dagger with her left hand, she transformed it into a stake before adjusting her grip on the edge with her right and stabbed down.

"ALICE!" Ria shouted out in shock as she didn't expect Alice to stab the stake through her own hand!

Ignoring Ria for now, Alice turned the stake into a hook and pinned her right hand to the ground. Blood flowed out of her body as even the Champion was confused by her own gesture.

However, it was all a part of her plan.

Lifting herself up, she could feel a gust of wind slamming into her body once more but she was able to hold on without being blown back immediately.

The wound in her hand started to tear as blood poured out of her hand.

Gritting her teeth, Alice tried to hold on as long as possible before taking shelter once more.

"Alice stop! We can try something else. You're only hurting yourself at this point!" Ria frowned but Alice shook her head.

"Do you trust me?" Alice asked with a smile.

Seeing this, Ria could only scratch her hair before sighing.

"Fine. What do you want me to do then?"

"Stick to the plan. The moment I have his full focus I want you to run." Alice grinned before pulling herself up once more.

Repeating this process, even Allura was confused by what Alice was planning as she was simply making the wounds on her hand worse with each attempt.

'What is that girl planning...' Allura tapped her chin while watching the scene unfold. She was watching from one of the mountain peaks with her legs crossed.

She could tell that Alice was buying time, but she didn't know what the end goal was. It wasn't like the Champion would exhaust himself by breathing repeatedly.

'Ria is waiting by the side. She doesn't seem to know what's going on either.'

Shaking her head, Allura continued to watch silently to see how Alice was going to resolve this issue.

Pulling herself up one last time, there was a grin on Alice's face as she narrowed her eyes at the Champion and laughed.

"You know... With enough monotony and futile attempts, even a six Star beast will overlook certain actions." Alice smiled as her second Sigil manifested around her eye.

With each attempt of trying to climb over the edge, she had the pool of blood under her right hand slowly make its way to the Champion! This was the only way she could imagine herself taking the Champion by surprise.

In that moment, an array of purple flames erupted forth from the ground, surrounding the Champion in an instant before caving down in an attempt to consume the beast.

*BANG!!!!

Slamming his four arms down, the Champion created a wall of flames but was surprised by how tenacious the violet fire was. The moment it came in contact with his flames, it would assimilate a portion of the fire into its own body, fuelling itself.

*URAHHHH!!!!

The violet flames fought back in anger as it lashed out at the beast.

Taking this chance to pull herself up, Alice grabbed her dagger and drank a vial of healing blood to heal her hand.

Focusing with Cayla, she made sure to dodge the moment a gust of wind was shot her way to avoid getting knocked off.

'I have to fight him here and now!'

Throwing her dagger towards the Champion, she watched as the beast regained his composure and dark crimson energy erupted from his body. A shockwave exploded forth, extinguishing Alice's flames in an instant as it was destroyed through pure brute force!

Not letting up this chance that she managed to get, Alice charged towards the beast while making a cut along her arm. Swiping horizontally, another wave of flames rushed out.

However, this was just a diversion as Alice charged in behind the flames.

At the same instance, Ria rushed out, noticing the pressure around her had decreased with the beast focusing on Alice.

Chapter 118 Mountain Peak

With Alice charging at him with a wave of flames and Ria dashing out of cover, the Champion was left in a slight dilemma.

It wasn't afraid of being unable to stop the two. In fact, he was worried about how much strength he must use. To him, they were nothing but younglings who couldn't even be considered proper Hunters.

Had he met them in the wild he would've scoffed at them before turning away, not wanting to waste his strength on killing something so weak. If he wanted to, he could extinguish their life with a snap of his finger.

But that wasn't what he wanted. His pride as a beast on the verge of attaining greatness stood in the way.

It was a challenge in his own mind. If these two forced him to uncross his arms and use more power than needed, then it was an insult to his status. Yet if he takes his focus off Alice right now, the strange flames would attack him.

He didn't know what they were, but the moment he laid his eyes on them, something deep within his mind told him to not let the flames touch his body. It was a primal instinct that warned him of the dangers.

Furrowing his brows, the Champion frowned as he sighed and stomped down with his foot.

*BANG!!!!

"GAH!!!" Letting out a cry, Alice was blown back as a large wall of force slammed into her, extinguishing her flames at the same time.

Meanwhile, Ria was grabbed by the back of her neck and tossed back towards the cliff.

Flipping in midair, she barely managed to land on the ground without falling over the edge. Just as she was about to attack again, she saw the beast sit down with a frown and didn't attempt to push them off.

'Huh? What's going on.' Ria thought to herself in confusion as Alice prepared to attack.

However, before she could, Allura appeared with a burst of fire.

"Alright. That's about enough. I must say, I'm surprised you decided to give up." Allura chuckled while looking at the Champion, but she could more or less guess why he chose this result.

After all, a two Sigil user and a three Sigil user managed to make him use more power than what he deemed necessary. For someone with a lot of pride like him, Allura knew he wouldn't be happy if he didn't count it as a loss.

"Shameful display." The Champion grunted in annoyance, surprising Alice and Ria who didn't expect him to talk.

"Well, they're my students so~ It's to be expected. Here, can't have you work for nothing." Allura smiled, throwing a vial of blood toward him.

Catching it with ease, the Champion furrowed his brows at Allura.

"I'm not insulting your choice. I'm just happy you pushed my students to the limit and forced them to think out of the box." Allura explained.

Sighing out, the beast nodded his head before turning around.

"When I become Lord, I will challenge." The beast promised as Allura shrugged.

"I mean... Sure why not. If we meet again I'll spare some time for you."

Hearing this, the beast walked a small distance away before squatting down and jumping as hard as he could.

***BANG!!!!**

Shooting off into the distance like a speeding train, he disappeared from the area.

"Well then. I must say I was thinking you would've taken longer or fought until the time ran out." Allura smiled as she turned to Alice and Ria.

"But good job. You actually made a six star beast move more than needed."

Walking over to the two girls, Allura patted their heads and patched them up with some healing blood.

"I thought you wanted us to reach the gate?" Alice frowned.

"I did. But it was an impossible task. You were never going to out-speed him nor were you going to beat him in a contest of strength. I just wanted to see what kind of ideas you would come up with. After all, if

I said it's possible, you would think of ways to match my expectations." Allura grinned, using their prior understanding of her to spur them on.

So far, she had given them tasks that she believed were possible for them with a bit of luck on their side. This one, however, was impossible. No matter how hard Alice or Ria may try, a six star beast was simply out of their league right now.

If anything, the most surprising thing for her was how much self-restraint the beast had. Far stronger than some of the other six star beasts she had ran into in the past.

'Seems like my initial worries were unfounded.' Allura thought to herself as she had warned him not to kill the two multiple times.

"Urg... So it was impossible from the start. Could you have done it then?" Ria asked with a sigh.

"Hah? Of course not. I'm strong but I'm not invincible you know? At the start, I was just as weak as you two." Allura rolled her eyes. With a strong foundation, one can bridge the gap between Sigils easily. But neither Alice nor Ria was ready yet.

Their powers are still on the weak side, and it isn't until they ascend to the second stage of power will that foundation be completed. The moment they attain a resonance.

For Ria, she needed to learn proper techniques to best understand how to utilize her strength along with overall physical improvement while for Alice, it's diversifying how she could use her blood.

Ria was the front line while Alice was the backline. But just them two wasn't enough, they needed a third to act as support for both. Someone who can compensate for both of their weaknesses.

Allura had a person in mind and it was someone that Ria was familiar with.

'They're probably going to meet up later anyways so I'll refrain from saying anything for now. These two are still figuring out ways they can work together.'

"Setting that matter aside, we've spent quite a bit of time on this stage considering the fact that you two spent hours climbing before you started to fight. Let's go to the next area." Allura smiled.

"Wait, there's more?" Ria groaned.

"Only one more stop. It's the last stop. I'm being honest when I said this part would've been the hardest for you since it was meant to take the longest. Unfortunately, I didn't account for the beast giving up since he felt insulted by his own conduct but so be it." Allura shrugged. Plans always change and it was one of those moments.

"I mean... It doesn't really feel like a victory." Alice sighed.

"Making a six star beast go against his initial expectation of you counts as a loss? Damn, your expectations are higher than mine." Allura joked while giving Alice another pat on the head.

"You should be proud of what you did. Your little trick with the blood fooled even me you know? I was distracted by you stabbing your own hand and using it to hold on. I didn't think you would slowly have your blood flow towards him. It looked like normal blood flow for a period of time." Allura smiled as Alice reluctantly nodded her head.

"Of course, if you're not happy with the results I can always act as the gatekeeper if you want."

Hearing this, both Alice and Ria shook their heads as they couldn't stand more for today. In this short journey down to the Howling Depths layer, the amount of torment they had to go through far exceeded their limit. Adding Allura on top of all that would break them.

"Well if you don't want that then follow me. The Crystal Grove is just under this place." Allura smiled, leading them up the flaming path that she had created.

As they continued to the peak of the mountain, they could feel the heat rising as the two started to sweat profusely from the heat.

Unfortunately, Allura couldn't do much about the heat, but she could protect them from the fire and lava.

Upon reaching the top, they could see a large crater with thick layer of lava. The air above the pit warped from the heat as the two couldn't stand the heat. It was far hotter than it should be to the point they felt like they were directly placed into a furnace.

"Hold on tight. We're jumping in." Allura smiled as she grabbed the two by the hips before jumping down.

""HUH?!"

Hearing that they were jumping in, Alice and Ria both widened their eyes in panic and grabbed onto Allura as tightly as they could.

*BANG!!!

Crashing through the layer of lava, Allura wrapped them in a barrier of flames and started to dive down at breakneck speeds.

With no way of telling how far they were going, Alice could only maintain her grip on Allura and hope the journey would be over soon.

But after a short period of time, a familiar feeling washed over her.

A feeling that had appeared then they were at the ruins.

Something deep within this lake of lava was calling out to her, urging her to approach.

Alice didn't know how to describe it, but it was akin to returning to her own room after a long day of hunting. A place of familiarity and safety.

'No... These aren't my feelings... Do they belong to Cayla?' Alice thought to herself but Cayla was silent.

Even after entering the strange realm within her mind, Alice noticed that the Eye was closed, signifying Cayla's slumber.

Time passed and the feeling continued to grow stronger when she noticed Allura smile and open her mouth.

"We're here."

Adjusting her posture, Allura dismissed the flaming barrier around them and a hidden world of luminescence greeted their eyes.

Tall trees created from crystal could be seen with large pillars of multi-coloured crystals supporting the ceiling. A lake of strange liquid that reflected the myriad of lights from its surroundings.

But most importantly of all, a single large tree dwarfed the rest of the forest as its leaves melded with the ceiling. The underside of the leaves glowed with a neon blue while the tree itself seemed to be hollowed out.

A pool of darkness with multicoloured stars could be seen oozing from the centre of the tree.

"That pool is the Communal Point. And that is where Ria will choose her bounty target."

Chapter 119 'Alice'

Landing on the ground, Allura noticed that Alice was spacing out more than normal but chalked it up to Alice being enamored by the view.

"All you have to do is take a little soak in the water and the rest will sort itself out. Remember, you have to keep a clear mental image of the beast you want to hunt. In this case, you just have to keep reciting its name in your head and it'll be fine." Allura explained as Ria nodded her head.

Guiding the two to the base of the tree, Allura found a rock to sit on and pulled out a cigarette.

Meanwhile, Ria looked at the dark liquid with a frown on her face.

"Am I supposed to just... walk into the center?"

"Yep. It'll feel weird at first but you'll get used to it." Allura nodded her head.

"Urg... If you say so." Ria sighed.

Furrowing her brows, she took off her shoes and socks before placing them on the side.

"You know you don't have to take your shoes off you know. It looks like water but it's not exactly wet."

"It's just weird okay?!" Ria huffed before stepping into the water.

Upon stepping into the water, she could feel a jolt go through her body akin to being doused with cold water. However, this was different. It left a warm sensation in her chest and filled her with power.

Walking towards the core of the tree, the strange liquid eventually submerged her body except for her head. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and stepped into the core.

"And there she goes. Now then..." Allura muttered as she turned to Alice who was spacing out while looking up at the tree.

"Alice!" Allura called out but Alice didn't respond.

"Are you feeling okay?" Allura asked once more but Alice didn't reply.

Just as Allura was about to walk over, she noticed that Alice was crying from her right eye.

Little by little, dark energy seemed to emanate from her body as Allura froze up in shock, dropping her cigarette.

Standing up in disbelief, she watched as a dark halo manifested itself around Alice's head as her hair tie came undone.

Watching Alice's hair unfurl behind her while dark energy surrounded her body, Allura was overwhelmed by the rush of emotions as she was unable to speak.

There were so many words stuck in her throat, but she didn't know what to say.

Meanwhile, 'Alice' didn't seem to take notice of Allura's reaction as she walked up to the tree and placed her hand against the trunk.

In an instant, the tree withered up as 'Alice' pulled out a small crystal the size of her palm.

"W-Wait!" Allura shouted out as she bit her lip. Clutching her chest, this was the first time in hundreds of years that she felt flustered. This emotion, this longing, this pain.

"Master! Please... Tell me if it's still you?" Allura asked as Alice turned her head back slightly.

The white in her hair had become more prevalent as it dominated more than half of her hair while both eyes had turned black and purple.

There was a different kind of aura to her, an aura that belonged to someone who was above the masses.

"Sorry Lua." 'Alice' apologised as Allura kneeled down in sadness.

She knew this wasn't her master. This was just the residual spirit left behind, taking over momentarily.

"Why the long face... If Kaden saw you like this, he would think I bullied you." 'Alice' chuckled softly.

###

Meanwhile, Alice found herself walking in a strange void that shimmered with the light of countless stars. A realm that was similar to the black liquid she had seen flowing out of the tree.

'What's going on...' Alice thought to herself with a frown.

She didn't know what had happened but the moment she laid her eyes on that tree, she felt something taking over. Once her hand had touched the tree, her consciousness was dragged elsewhere.

"Greetings." A voice rang out as Alice instantly turned out.

There was a mirror reflection behind her. A woman who looked identical except for full white hair and a pair of black and purple eyes.

". . . You're the old master of Cayla aren't you?" Alice asked after a short pause. She had seen this person before in her dreams. Though they were mostly one sided interactions.

"Indeed I am. Though I'm nothing but a fragment of my residual spirit." 'Alice' smiled as she stepped out of the reflection.

"I didn't think I would 'wake' up like this. Well... Wake up is the wrong term as I won't be staying for long. Even if you meet another me, it would be different to the me here and now." 'Alice' shook her head.

Waving her hand, violet flames appeared in her palm.

"You have quite a strange body I must admit. I didn't think there existed a being that could resist the power of the Abyss. Even more so when this power takes several forms... I have taken the liberty to

control your body momentarily. I've harvested a portion of my power that I've left behind. Unfortunately, it won't help you much right now.

It's something that'll come in handy much later." 'Alice' explained as the flames disappeared.

"But it was nice to see my successor. Look after Lua and Kaden for me okay? They're very dear to me and my unfortunate departure must've been quite the shock to them."

"I mean... It's more like they're looking after me..." Alice furrowed her brows in confusion.

"I see. . . Time changes people I suppose. Seems like the infusion process has been completed. Our meeting will end here." 'Alice' muttered as she glanced up at the darkness.

"Before you go... Can you tell me what I'm supposed to do? What does having Cayla mean? What does Kaden want me to do in the Abyss?" Alice asked as these were the questions that lingered in her mind.

"I'm unsure. My knowledge as a fragment is limited. However, being the new host for Cayla means partial dominion over the Abyss's influence. Use it well. If Kaden has entrusted you with Cayla then I will trust his judgement." 'Alice' shrugged as she started to fade away with this realm cracking apart.

"One last thing! Your name? Can you tell me your name?" Alice shouted out. She wanted to learn about Allura's master and her predecessor. The best starting point would be learning her name.

"Hmm... I don't believe there is a translation of my name in the new tongue. Perhaps the outlanders have given me a new name. Perhaps they have forgotten about me. But if you are curious, I believe Lua should be more than happy to tell you if she wants to. Farewell young one." 'Alice' waved her hand as darkness enveloped Alice's vision.

###

Sitting up in shock, Alice looked around her in confusion and noticed that she was sitting under what would've been the crystal tree. However, looking up, all she saw was withered wood and crystals falling down in the distance.

Looking to her left, she could see Allura sitting on a boulder with a cigarette in her mouth.

There was no smile, no boisterous attitude. Only sadness and longing.

Her slumped shoulders and silhouette had never looked so defeated.

Alice could see a hint of red around Allura's eyes and understood that she must've cried.

'Did Allura meet her master? Considering she took over my body for a moment... It seems likely.' Alice thought to herself as Allura noticed that Alice was awake.

The vulnerability disappeared as she recovered her energetic self and smiled.

"Seems like you're awake. Does your body hurt? Anything feel off?" Allura asked, walking over to Alice before sitting down.

"No, I feel just fine." Alice shook her head.

She wanted to ask about Allura's master but wasn't sure if she should.

"You know, I can practically tell what you're thinking from the way you look at me. Your thoughts are written on your face. We're family now, if you want to ask feel free to ask anything." Allura sighed and patted Alice's head.

"Mnm. When I was... passed out. I met someone who looked just like me but with only white hair. I'm guessing she was your master. Can you... Tell me more about her?" Alice asked as Allura thought to herself for a moment before nodding.

"I suppose it's only natural that you met a fragment of her. Now that Cayla is in the process of being linked to you properly, you'll become more sensitive to the Abyss and be drawn towards spots like this where my master's influence is the strongest." Allura nodded before tapping her chin.

"Now then... Where should I start? I'll only tell you a little about her since the more you know the more troublesome it might become. The knowledge you could learn is far too dangerous for you so I need to be careful. If you're unlucky you might run into people who have interrogation focused Sigils that can rip secrets right out of your mind." Allura warned as Alice swallowed her saliva in worry.

"M-maybe I shouldn't know then." Alice shook her head but Allura laughed.

"What I'm going to tell you is fine. I'm omitting the more important information for now. These are what you can find if you dig a little deeper into history. Anyways... Where should I start... My master was the founder of a kingdom.

"A magnificent utopia that didn't care about your background. A home for people seeing a second chance in life. And she was its ruler..." Allura smiled softly as she recounted the tales of this kingdom.

It was a bastion of safety for those who fell into the Abyss, the last wall of protection in an era filled with war and destruction. An era where monsters roamed the lands in swarms, killing anything and everything.

To the citizens of the city, her master was the fire in winter. The sip of water in the desert. A source of hope and protection.

"Unfortunately, a war none could imagine broke out. It fractured the lands and the era was erased from history. My master... She died in this war and the kingdom fell." Allura shook her head and finished her cigarette.

"Anyways. That's about enough. Seems like Ria is about finished as well." Allura said as she stood up and walked over to the black water that was slowly drying up.

"What was the name of the kingdom?" Alice asked after a short pause.

"Ayr. That was its name. The name of my home."

Chapter 120 Ayr

"Ayr... Do you miss your home?" Alice asked, curious as to how Allura felt. To her, she never really had a home so she didn't understand this kind of longing.

"Of course. There isn't a day that goes by without me hoping everything was just a bad dream. How I could go back to the peaceful times with everyone I know. Unfortunately, reality is rather disappointing, and the past is in the past." Allura shrugged, putting on a brave front.

She was Alice's guardian, someone who will be her pillar of support. She needed to stand tall, unfaltering and be a role model for Alice.

Walking over to the river of black water, Allura kneeled down and plunging her hands in before pulling out Ria.

"GAH!!! Gods! I can breathe again!" Ria shouted out as she couldn't breathe near the end of that.

"How was it? Did you get the bounty you wanted?" Allura asked as Ria nodded her head.

"Yep! The tree gave me three choices. One of them was the Storm Leviathan but the others were rather dull so the choice was obvious."

"Fufu, well we're on the path of no retreat now. No pressure but if you mess this up it'll be quite hard to find another chance like this. Remember, you have to kill it before it evolves if you can. Once it reaches the next stage, it'll be VERY hard for you to kill it and me and Gin will be forced to step up." Allura reminded as Ria nodded her head.

"Don't worry I know. Plus, I don't plan on failing this hunt. Now can I get out or are you just going to let me soak in this weird sh*t?" Ria asked, raising her sleeve that was soaked by the liquid.

"Fair."

Standing up, Allura pulled Ria out before making a campfire so she could dry herself off.

"We got a bit of time before this place collapses. Let me know when you're ready to go and I'll take us out of this place." Allura smiled as she sat down on a boulder and closed her eyes.

Sitting down next to Alice, Ria laid back and took a deep breath before sighing.

"Ready for another hard fight? This time you'll be playing the support rather than me." Ria chuckled.

"Well, it should be fine. I just have to parry its abilities with my fire, right? If I don't hurt it, it should keep my contributions relatively low." Alice nodded as her fire was the best support that she could give Ria.

Her first Sigil was still mainly a Anti Hunter Sigil. Even when combined with her second Sigil, she was unsure of how strong the effects of the fumes would be. Not to mention the fact that she didn't know if she had enough blood to affect a beast of that magnitude.

Just remembering the size of the Storm Leviathan sent a shiver down her spine.

"That's true. We'll also be fighting above the Abyss Waters. We'll need to be careful, or things will be bad." Ria sighed.

Nodding her head, Alice understood the risks of this Hunt.

To her, the Abyss Waters may be close to harmless as the effects will disappear in due time. But to others, just coming into contact with the liquid risked them mutating under its influence.

Remembering how she was dropping into the Abyss Waters when she first came into the Abyss, Alice couldn't help but feel grateful towards her physique. Had it not been for her body, she would've mutated and died right there.

"Also leaving your hair like this is quite a good look no?" Ria pointed out as she noticed that Alice's hair was untied.

"Can't they grab it though?" Alice shrugged. She will admit that she did enjoy leaving her hair tied up. Naturally, she had the choice of cutting it short but she didn't want to go down that route. After all, she liked having her hair being similar length to Allura's.

"That's fair. Though most wouldn't use dirty fighting tactics once you get past three Sigils. Or at least I haven't seen any." Ria shrugged.

"That's because they don't want to stoop to that level. People who have reached past normal standards want to take pride in their accomplishments, so they usually ignore such weaknesses unless their life is threatened." Allura interjected. She had seen her fair share of fighting styles.

Some strange, some efficient and some are borderline mental torture with the strange places that they target.

Examples being woman with large chests or the natural weak points in a male's anatomy.

But those are usually done by mercenaries that don't care about honor.

"True... Though honestly I don't get why they wait for the last moment. If it's a fight to the death just fight dirty from the start." Ria shrugged as that's exactly what she had done when fighting against the four Sigil cultist.

If he was shameless, things would've gone much worse for the two of them.

Talking amongst themselves, they waited for Ria's clothes to dry before preparing to depart from the Crystal Grove.

With the cracks forming across the ceiling and walls, this place would've collapsed much sooner had it not been for Allura holding everything back.

Making sure the two grabbed onto her properly, Allura wrapped them in a wall of flames before shooting up and out of the mountain, leaving the grove to collapse in on itself.

*BANG!!!

Piercing the ceiling of the mountain, Alice looked down and could see the mountain collapsing in on itself with a layer of lava pooling out from the crevices.

Without stopping for a moment, Allura continued to fly through the abyss as every beast cowerd in her presence. They dare not raise their head too high, they dare not show themselves.

They dare not offend the being that was charging through the Abyss right now.

'Is this what it means to be an Abyss Lord... All of these beasts who can kill me and Ria easily are submitting to Allura.' Alice thought to herself as she glanced up at Allura who was focused on taking them out of the Howling Depths.

This was the kind of Hunter she aspired to be, an unstoppable force.

In Allura's presence, Alice felt safe.

'Allura misses her home. Having Cayla means I'm her master's successor. Perhaps that's what Kaden wanted me to do, rebuilt Ayr.'

Thinking up to this point, Alice had a goal to work towards more than just pure revenge against the Zenia family.

In the past, when she thought about her future, she didn't know what else to do other than taking revenge against her torturers.

But now, she desired to rebuild Ayr to repay the kindness that Allura and Kaden had shown her. The new life that was bestowed upon her by Kaden and the family that Allura welcomed her into.

Making their way back to the surface, all of the mental fatigue accumulated on this journey exhausted the two as they couldn't wait to sleep in their bed again instead of out in the wilds.

Not only that, their body felt much lighter without the pressure of the Abyss weighing them down.

Noticing this, Allura made sure the journey back was fast.

What took them more than a day to arrive only took a minute or so to return from as Allura landed in front of the gates of Zadash.

Naturally, the guards were shocked but Neal rushed to the scene and cleared up the situation, allowing Alice and Ria to return to their inn rooms without any issue.

Once Alice and Ria fell asleep, Allura stood guard by the inn.

She was currently sitting on the roof of the building and reflecting on the meeting with her master. The final words that she left her with...

###

"I must say though... Lua, what do you make of my successor's powers?" 'Alice' asked as she walked past Allura and looked over the Crystal Grove.

"Alice's powers?" Allura tilted her head in confusion.

"Indeed. They're strange, very unlike what the Abyss offers yet the ties it has to this realm is undeniable." 'Alice' smiled as she raised her right hand and conjured a large ball of violet flames that transformed into the dragon.

Sensing the smell of Abyssal power, the dragon narrowed its eyes as 'Alice' snapped her finger and black chains ripped through space and chained the dragon against the ground.

It wanted to fight back but its instincts were warning it otherwise. There was something wrong with this 'Alice'.

The dragon felt like it was staring into the Abyss itself and the Abyss smiled back. That empty coldness which threatened to swallow all, even itself who could deny the Abyss's powers.

"Flames are not its true form. It is merely the form it has taken due to my successor's impression of you, Lua." 'Alice' glanced back with a smile.

"Unlike the rewards that the Abyss usually gives out, this second Sigil does not stem from any beast. However, if that was the case, it would never have offered such a Sigil in the first place, one that brings out her 'potential'. No matter how strange her body may have been, this is simply an impossible scenario yet here we are. I can only assume that humanity is going down an ugly path.

Even for you Allura, I'll take caution when dealing with this power. It will not harm my successor but the same does not apply to others." 'Alice' warned as she flicked her finger and the chains disappear, setting the flames free.

"If she cannot understand her own strength, perhaps her future will be a world of flames with her in the center, unable to quell the destruction she has brought forth."

###

'If master is correct... Alice needs to master the flames. It will not harm her but brings danger to those around her. The sooner we get it under control the better. When she gets more Sigils, it is inevitable that these flames will evolve and change along with her.' Allura thought to herself.

Right now, Alice's violet flames are a ticking time bomb and the only way for it to be defused is for Alice to take the reigns herself. Steal the control over the flames from the dragon that manifests itself and become the controller.

Taking a deep breath of her cigarette, Allura sighed out and looked up at the sky.

'I wonder how Kaden would've reacted if he saw master today... Would he go back to the way he was before?' Allura asked but no one answered.

In the Abyss where there is only the grace of moonlight, Allura sat by herself on the rooftops.