

Abyssal A 141

Chapter 141 - 141: Alice's Discovery

As expected, with Ria having hidden her power at the Guild trials, she was able to continue winning matches without any issues.

None of the four star Hunters she faced had forced her to take a step away from her current location as her overwhelming firepower made it impossible to approach.

While watching the fights happen, Alice couldn't help but feel as though something was off.

To her, a four star Hunter should be more than capable of making Ria use more of her power. And yet here she was taking them out one by one with ease.

'All of the people we fought against, even the three star's were better than these people. Are they really that weak or are they acting weak to boost Ria's confidence?' Alice thought to herself with a frown.

Even without Cayla, the movement of the four star Hunters seemed rather... dull in comparison to the fights she's had.

All things considered, Alice speculated that she could probably beat them in a fight if she uses only her first Sigil and dagger. However, that was pushing it slightly since she had no way to deal with the difference in physical strength.

'The only ranged attack option I have is my fire and the blood I collected from the Hunter last time. Though it's a last use resort since having the angel scream can cancel out Abyss Powers when merged with my own Sigil.' Alice thought to herself as she glanced into her pouch.

There were only two vials of blood left that didn't include her own, whether it's in powdered form or liquid form.

Shaking her head, Alice glanced at the last fighter and wondered how she would've fought him if she was in Ria's position.

'His resonance was one that allowed him to manipulate this weird black energy. I guess in a way it was similar to Kaden since he was using shadows to attack. Against him... I would probably start by using my dagger then rush him to see how his reactions are.' Alice mused to herself.

Defeating him would be annoying without her second Sigil, but if it was a fight to the death, his death was guaranteed.

"I suppose Allura mentioned that not all four stars are equal. Just like the difference between Ria and her opponents." Alice mumbled while making her way over to the bar to get something to drink.

In the end, she decided to try one of their best sellers which seemed to be a mead made from apple and honey.

Smelling the mead from the cup, Alice was surprised by how sweet the smell was as she had expected something bitter.

"Seems like you're not familiar with alcohol girly." The bartender chuckled as Alice shook her head.

"I don't really drink. It seemed like people are buying this a lot so I figured I'll try it." Alice replied honestly as the bartender chuckled.

"Mead's are usually rather sweet since they're made from honey. The alcohol contents are relatively low." He explained as Alice nodded her head and thanked the bartender.

Making her way back to her seat, she could see that Ria had been paired against one of their more 'powerful' fighters. Just judging from the way he was carrying himself, Alice could tell that he was someone with experience.

It wasn't comparable to Allura or Gin but Alice knew that he was roughly Neal's level or maybe just a bit lower.

'Seems like Ria might have to use more strength in this fight.' Alice thought to herself as she took a sip of the mead.

"!!!" Raising her eyebrows, Alice was surprised by how the drink tasted. It felt like a warm fire flooding her body yet it didn't hurt at all. The sweetness that came before the warmth made her feel cozy as she took another sip.

"Holy crap... This is good..." Alice muttered as she realised what she wanted as her hobby. Or rather, something that she wanted to classify as what she enjoyed and that was tasting more alcohol like this mead.

"Urg... Ria's grandfather had a flask that he kept drinking from. I wonder if I can get something like that too for this drink." Alice sighed while taking another sip.

From sips to gulps, Alice finished her drink quickly and ran back to the counter to get more.

"Seems like I've hooked you on this drink girly hahaha." The bartender chuckled seeing the eagerness in Alice's eyes as she placed the mug on the counter while asking for more. In a sense, it was almost as if a kid was asking for sweets from a stall.

"It's sweet then hot. Kind of spicy then cosy. Very tasty." Alice nodded her head as she wasn't sure how to explain how she felt from drinking the mead yet she knew she enjoyed the drink.

"Are there any others like this one? Or is this one the best one?"

"We got a few others. Though whether or not it's the best one depends on your tastes. Some meads are made from different kinds of honey. Some would be considered poisonous to Hunters with weak constitutions yet those with 5 or more Sigils tend to enjoy such drinks as they help them get drunk." The bartender explained with a chuckle.

Alice was like an eager student right now as she memorised everything he mentioned about the drink and bought some more to sample.

Seeing how she was gulping down the drink like the barbarians from the northern continent, the bartender was surprised to see how resilient she was towards the drinks. Even though the alcohol contents were low, considering her stature, it was a wonder how she was not even red in the face yet.

"Hmm... I think I like the mead made from Cinder Honey the most." Alice muttered after trying out all of the different meads that the bar offered. Despite not being red in the face, the alcohol was slowly taking effect as the tips of her ears were red.

"Do you have a flask that can hold a bunch of the mead in one go? Like er... that whole barrel." Alice asked, pointing at the barrel behind him.

"We don't since they're usually equipment for famous Hunters. But I can have some people deliver the mead to where you're staying if you wish." The bartender offered as Alice nodded her head.

"Then I'll take 10 bottles to g-"

Before she could finish her sentence, Ria had walked up behind Alice and chopped down on her head.

"OW! Hey! What was that for?" Alice frowned as she glanced back and saw Ria behind her.

"Oh! Ria you should try this hehe~" Alice grinned, showing Ria a mug of the Cinder Honey mead.

"You're drunk. And how much of our gold did you spend on alcohol? You do realise that you only have 1 gold piece left right? The rest is my gold?" Ria asked with a twitching smile.

Tilting her head for a moment, Alice placed the mug down before holding up 6 fingers.

"The girly here spent 6 gold on our finest mead and wanted 10 bottles to go which would total to roughly 5 extra gold pieces. So 11 gold in total." The bartender chuckled, causing Ria to blink her eyes in bewilderment. She was in shock at how much Alice had drank in the course of a few short matches and was now even planning on buying 10 bottles to take home with her!

Massaging her eyes, Ria glanced down at Alice and sighed.

She could see the longing in Alice's eyes as she laughed to herself thinking about the drinks that she'll have.

"I suppose you're a happy drunk. Though it's more accurate to say you're tipsy. However... your self control has already waned this much."

Shaking her head, Ria placed 5 gold pieces on the counter.

"Can you send the bottles to this address?"

"Of course. Here's one free on the house as it seems like the girly has fallen in love with the flavour." The bartender chuckled, handing a bottle to Alice who didn't hesitate to hug the bottle while Ria dragged her out of the establishment.

Even she knew when to quit and after winning two more matches, she took her earnings to look for Alice.

Counting the coins in her pouch, Ria sighed as burning through 11 coins just for drinks was not part of her calculations. It was likely that they'll have to revisit the place meaning... Alice will get more drinks.

"I'll be honest, out of everything, I didn't expect you to like drinking so much." Ria sighed while glancing back at Alice who was drinking her bottle happily while letting out strange giggles.

"You should try it Ria. It's tasty!" Alice offered as Ria sighed and nodded.

"50 silver per bottle better be worth it."

Taking the bottle, Ria took a sip and raised her eyebrow.

"Huh... Well I can see why you would like it I suppose. Though I wouldn't go out of my way to spend this much on it." Ria shrugged, giving back the bottle to Alice.

"You're losing out then. More for me." Alice smiled.

However, her smile soon faded as her eyebrows began to furrow.

Pausing her steps, she closed her eyes and sniffed the air.

"Alice?"

"Wait... Something smells weird." Alice frowned.

Despite being tipsy, her awareness was now sharpened as she continued to smell the air.

Following the smell, Alice arrived at the entrance towards the slums as there was a deep frown on her face.

At this point, even Ria could smell the stench as she had to cover her nose.

"What the hell is this smell?"

"Abyss Blood boiling in rotting flesh. The smell is usually very potent and if you're not careful can cause slight side effects just like if you were to drink impure blood." Alice warned, gesturing for Ria to take a step back.

"Though from the smell, it doesn't seem to be a high concentration. You'll definitely get sick if you smell it for too long but it can be treated."

She knew this smell well. After all, she smelled it plenty of times when her body was suffering from side effects in the Zenia prison.

However, the biggest worry was how this smell was caused.

'Someone did this on purpose. Maybe it has something in common with the rumours I heard earlier...'
Alice contemplated for a moment before stepping away.

"Well, I'm sure the guards will deal with it tomorrow. Not like we can do anything here anyways." Alice shrugged.

"If you say so." Ria glanced back at the slums before following Alice back to their Inn.

Chapter 142 - 142: City Lord

Waking up in the morning, Alice felt groggy and had a slight headache while looking at her bed.

She noticed that she had fallen asleep hugging her mead bottle and furrowed her brows before placing it on the table.

Getting dressed, she glanced out the window and saw that the street seemed to be crowded with guards.

'Could it be due to what happened last night?' Alice thought to herself as the issues in the slums were clearly unnatural.

Making her way downstairs, she noticed that Ria hadn't woken up yet and guessed that she must exhausted. Plus, she was always bad in the mornings.

"Can I get a simple breakfast please?" Alice ordered as she sat down by the counter.

"Of course. Also, I believe I have a shipment for you today for 10 bottles of mead. Would you like me to take it to your room later?"

"Take it to my room please." Alice yawned.

Hearing this, the woman nodded her head and called out to the kitchen to prepare the breakfast for Alice.

"So what's going on outside? Aren't there a bit too many guards for this time of day? Or was there a fight?" Alice asked, wondering if the Innkeeper had any news regarding the matter.

"I'm not sure. There are a few rumours and speculations but the guards aren't saying anything. Some of the patrons said that the guards were making sure no one could approach the slums. I'm thinking it must be the halves that caused the issue urg..." The woman groaned while walking away to attend to another customer.

Raising an eyebrow, Alice realised how disgusted everyone in this city seemed to act towards those that were suffering from Abyss Blood side effects.

'My own hair and eyes look affected too yet everyone seems fine with me.' Alice wondered to herself.

However, considering the fact that aside from a colour change, her appearance doesn't vary much from the normal human's. It seemed like she couldn't be considered a 'half' yet.

'Since this city seems to be Church of the Sun orientated, maybe it's a matter of religion as well.'

Shrugging her shoulders, she finished her breakfast before making her way upstairs to wake up Ria.

Helping Ria get dressed and get some breakfast, the two made their way out of the Inn and roamed the city.

"So what's the plan for today then?" Alice asked curiously.

"Get a job at the Guild, get some money then gamble some more tonight. I want to get around 60 gold pieces before we hire a carriage to the next place." Ria sighed while stretching her body.

But once they arrived at the Guild, they noticed a crowd of angry Hunters gathered around the reception.

"What do you mean we can't leave the city?!" One of the Hunters shouted in anger.

"I'm sorry sire but the city lord has ordered that everyone stay put within the city for the next 3 days. We're currently investigating issues that have crept up yesterday and no one is allowed to enter or leave the city." The receptionist replied helplessly as this was an order sent down by the city lord.

It was not something they could overrule no matter how influential the Hunter's Guild may be.

In times of trouble, even the Hunter's Guild needed to obey the city lord, especially when the danger could escalate to something beyond their control, hence the sudden lock down.

"Then you can at least tell us what's going on!"

"We can't do that I'm afraid as we're unsure as to the reason ourselves. Please, there are still plenty of jobs within the city that you can do. We're not asking you to stay for long, just three days. The city lord has already deployed guards to watch over the city walls and the city is now under martial law.

Any action against the city lord will be seen as obstruction of duty and you'll be imprisoned." The receptionist sighed.

Unfortunately, she was just a worker and wasn't privy to the information available to the higher ups. She was merely their meat shield against the angry Hunters that could kill her with a single attack if they get annoyed. The best she could do is try to deescalate the situation.

Seeing that the receptionist wasn't able to tell them anything, some of the Hunters decided to see if the branch master had some information yet powerful five star Hunters were barring their way up to the second floor.

"Do you think it has something to do with the stench we smelled yesterday?" Ria asked curiously.

"Very likely." Alice nodded while making her way over to the job board.

With the lockdown suddenly announced, everyone was grabbing the jobs within the city and there were practically no jobs left for them to choose. It was a first come first serve situation after all.

"So we have no jobs and nothing to do until we gamble later tonight then." Ria sighed as the two of them sat down by a table.

"Then I suppose it's a free day for us." Alice smiled but her smile didn't last long as two guards approached their table.

"May I have a word with you? I believe yesterday you came into contact with a half, am I right? We had received a report and wanted to make sure if it was you or not." The guard asked coldly as Alice glanced up and furrowed her brows while Ria was confused.

"Yes, is that an issue? I'm just a traveller and I saw people hitting the guy." Alice replied as the guard looked at one another before nodding.

"I'm sorry but can I ask you to follow us? We need to do some checks due to the situation in the slums. If there are no issues with you, naturally nothing will happen." The guard asked politely however Alice knew that this wasn't a request but rather an order.

"Welp I guess I know what I'm doing today." Alice chuckled as Ria furrowed her brows.

"Can I follow along?" Ria asked since she didn't want Alice to be by herself when there is something strange happening in the city.

"You may."

Following behind the guards out of the Hunter's Guild, Ria leaned over to Alice.

"What happened?"

"While you were doing your four star exam I was shopping and saw a few Hunters beating up a man. Turns out he was suffering from Abyss Blood side effects and what these people call a half." Alice replied honestly since she didn't think she did anything wrong.

"I see... Well I'm sure it's nothing serious." Ria reassured while Alice nodded.

Following the guards, Alice noticed several others being escorted towards the castle as well. Within the group was even the Hunters that were abusing the man from yesterday as it seemed like anyone and everyone who came into contact with the people from the slums have been taken in.

Within these groups, Alice could see that some of the people being brought in were extremely pale.

'Is it an illness? There's too many to be just a coincidence.' Alice thought to herself with a slight frown.

As they were being guided through the castle, they were sent to a large open hall with countless guards protecting what seemed to be doctors, priests and priestesses.

"Line up and wait your turn." The guards ordered before filtering them through the different queues.

The ones that were showing signs of illness were placed on the side while those without visible symptoms were separated from them.

Not only that, it seemed like the city lord was also present in the hall.

He was a tall muscular figure that seemed to be just as tall as Allura. Short black hair and a pair of cold black eyes overlooked the hall. He wore a simple black suit yet the power he radiated passively caused Alice to shiver.

Above him, six daunting Sigils hovered.

"I believe that is everyone that has encountered the half's from yesterday my lord." A retainer reported as the Lord nodded his head.

"Seal the room. Do not let anyone in or out. Maintain silence in the city and ensure that no one can sneak out." He ordered while reading a report passed onto him by a priest.

Narrowing his eyes, he glanced towards the side housing the patients that looked pale.

"Eric Helgo, merchant importing wares. Discovered to be smuggling illegal Abyss Blood through the slums. Verdict, guilty. Take that man away and interrogate him. All methods are allowed." He declared as Eric widened his eyes and prepared to reach into his jacket for a vial of blood.

However, the guards simply stood by as the Lord tapped down with his finger.

*BANG!!!!!!

A large blade struck down from above, severing Eric's arm while also taking a portion of his legs.

Hearing his cries echo through the hall, all of the people present felt a chill down their spine as the Lord was akin to a guillotine hanging above their heads.

One wrong move and he could end their lives with a single action.

Even Ria had a deep frown on her face as she barely reacted to the speed of the blade. Should she be declared 'Guilty' it would take everything just to dodge the attack never mind fighting back.

"That was just his second Sigil." Alice whispered over as Ria widened her eyes and glanced down at Alice who was staring at the Lord.

She could see only two Sigils light up briefly in that moment he chose to attack.

'I can only see up to six Sigils right now. There's a chance that he might be above the threshold...' Alice thought to herself. The chances were low but not impossible.

With the city lord watching over the process, no one dared to make any unnecessary moves to invoke his wrath.

As they waited for their turn, the city lord would occasionally voice a verdict and have the guards escort them away. If they comply, nothing will happen. Yet if they dared to fight back, the lord would personally make a move.

The ones given a 'Guilty' verdict weren't limited to just the side with those suffering from visible symptoms. Even those in the other queue were chosen and soon, it was Alice's turn to be questioned by the priest.

Chapter 143 - 143: Speaking To The City Lord

"Name?" The priest asked as he glanced at the document that was handed to him.

"Alice Agnelia."

"Occupation?"

"Hunter."

"Where are you from and why did you come to Blackrock City?" The priest asked while flipping through the pages.

"I came from Zadash. We got lost for two weeks or so and was told that Blackrock Castle was nearby. Me and my friend came here hoping to get some directions and earn some funds." Alice shrugged.

"Zadash? That's quite far away. Even if you travel for 2 weeks you must be moving rather quickly to get here. Now I must ask, why did you come into contact with the half yesterday? We received reports that you helped them and even came into physical contact." The priest asked while narrowing his eyes at her, his gaze focusing on her right eye and split hair.

"Didn't realise that was the practice in this city. Just felt like I should've helped before I realised he was a half." Alice admitted.

"I see. Then is there any reason why you stopped by the entrance to the slums last night? You approached near the scene of the crime before leaving."

'Seems like this is the final question.' Alice thought to herself as she noticed that the priest was on the last page of the document.

"I smelled something weird. Followed the scent and found myself at the entrance. Didn't want to find out more so I left."

"I see. Though it says here that you recognised that smell and know about the effects. Care to explain?" The priest frowned as the guards slowly surrounded her.

"I came into contact with it in the past so I know the distinctive smell." Alice replied while glancing at the guards that surrounded her before focusing on the lord who was watching over everything.

Depending on what happens, she might have to force her way out using the blood she gained from the five star Hunter.

"Is that so... Please follow the guards for further questioning. If you cooperate, nothing bad will happen." The priest gestured, causing Alice to frown at his threat.

But with the Lord watching, she couldn't do anything even if she disliked his threat.

Sighing out softly, Alice raised her hands in surrender without trying anything strange.

Before Ria could protest that she wanted to come along, the guards blocked her way.

"Shouldn't be anything too bad. I'll be right back." Alice reassured with a smile.

She had the amulet that Allura had given her. If things turn dire, there was still the option of using it though Alice wanted to avoid that if possible since its basically an extra life for her.

Following the guards, she noticed that the Lord was informed and glanced down at her before leaving the area.

She was taken to what seemed to be an office with two sofas, bookshelves, a window overlooking the city and a desk and chair.

Sitting down on the sofa, she was given a cup of tea with some snacks to enjoy while she waited.

'Seems like the City Lord wants a word with me.' Alice mused to herself as she drank the cup of tea and furrowed her brows.

Finishing it in one gulp, she grinned and pulled out her bottle that she had kept in her inner pocket. It hadn't been long so the mead was still rather cold for her to enjoy.

Pouring the mead into the tea cup, Alice enjoyed the smell before taking sips. Naturally, she left the bottle by her feet so it didn't get too warm inside her jacket.

Hearing the door open, Alice glanced over and saw the City Lord enter while keeping the guards outside.

Noticing that Alice had replaced the tea with her mead and even had the bottle next to her, the City Lord raised an eyebrow before sitting down opposite her.

"Now, my subordinates have told me that you know something about the incident that occurred. We're still in the process of figuring out exactly what happened but if you can give us some insight on the matter, you will be rewarded." The City Lord stated while resting his elbows on his knees.

"I mean... I know a little bit but I'm in the dark on what happened." Alice shrugged.

"Yesterday, we received reports that half beasts were acting up in the slums. Not in a violent way but rather many of them became sick and started to mutate faster. We assumed it was Abyss Blood abused yet the scenarios didn't match up.

"Then later at night, some of them started to rot from the inside out and those near the corpses started to do the same. Until we can figure out what happened, whether this be sabotage or just an unfortunate incident, the city is being kept in martial law. The faster we get to the bottom of this the better." The City Lord explained as Alice furrowed her brows.

This was a little different from what she initially expected, almost as though it was an evolved version of what she had suffered.

"Hmm... I'm guessing you already restrained those who entered the slums?" Alice asked since this wasn't something that can occur naturally.

It required a specific set of actions to cause this reaction within the body and it's a horrible way to die while also taking out those around you.

"We are still in the process of doing so. Now, what can you tell me about this strange mutation?" The City Lord asked, not wanting to waste too much time here.

"My original understanding is that it requires a specific environment to occur. However, if it's happening like you said, it's probably an improved variant of it. It's not... a mutation per say. More of a half alive beast that requires a host." Alice explained while taking a sip of her mead.

"Oh? A beast that requires a host?" The City Lord raised in eyebrows in surprise.

"Mnm. Well... That was the version I know at least. I don't know what this new one is like."

"I see... Alright. As you are a Hunter by trade, I believe your services can be bought with coin, yes? I wish to employ you to assist in dealing with this strange outbreak." The City Lord leaned back.

"Seriously? You do realise that I'm just a two star Hunter right? I don't think I can help much. Plus, my knowledge is outdated." Alice furrowed her brows.

"Even outdated, it's better than charging in blind. Right now you're our only lead on what this thing is and what it can do." The City Lord nodded before pulling out a contract of sorts.

"What kind of reward would you like for your services?" He asked as Alice leaned back and crossed her legs.

'Seems like this thing is more serious than I thought...' Alice mused to herself as she was surprised that he was asking her what she wanted in exchange for her help.

'When I was stuck in the prison, this beast was only in the initial stages of development since they were wanting to see if it was possible to feed it my blood and have it inherit my properties of being resistant to the Abyss. That way they could mass produce an antidote of sorts for the mutation.

In the end, all they accomplished was creating a zombified version of the parasite.' She tapped her chin while trying to recall as much information as she could.

Once zombified, these parasites would feed on the host while also increasing the potency of Abyss Blood. But there was a big trade off. In exchange for potency, the manifestation of the side effects was also sped up. A trade of life for power.

The result of this would be rotting from the inside out and dying due to the influx of side effects.

'However... this was limited to just the initial person who took the parasite within their body. The fact that this one can infect the people around it and kill them as well... Hmm.'

"I can only promise that I'll try my best. But if it becomes too harmful for me, I'll have step away. You know that right? I would rather place my life above those I don't know about, even if I sympathise with their plight." Alice warned as she didn't want the City Lord to think she was someone who would just sacrifice herself for people she didn't know about.

She had enough of this 'self-sacrifice' while she was stuck in the prison. She didn't owe the world anything anymore.

"I know. If you are unsure, you can read the Law of Agreement for yourself." The City Lord nodded as he handed Alice the sheet of paper.

Nodding her head, Alice read through the page and understood that the terms of this agreement was rather loose as all it required from her was to assist in this investigation. It didn't require anything else from her while in return, the City Lord will grant a reward to her that's befitting her assistance.

Failure to comply would incur a penalty, that being returning the reward bestowed by the Lord as well as a small penalty in gold.

"Would it be okay if I consult my friend first?" Alice asked as she felt safer if Ria was here.

"Alright. I believe she's the lady with the eastern clothing yes?"

Nodding her head, Alice watched as the City Lord left the room and notified the guards before coming back in.

Now that there was nothing else to talk about, Alice decided to refill her teacup of mead while thinking about what she wanted.

"Say, have you ever heard of a flask that can store a lot of liquid?" Alice asked with a small smile.

"Hm? Yes I have. Are you... Wanting that as your reward?" The City Lord asked hesitantly seeing Alice pour some mead into her tea cup.

"I'm just asking if you have heard it ya know? I'm not saying I'm 'wanting' it as my reward." Alice shrugged.

". . . Yes I have heard of it. Though it's merely an expensive Hunting commodity for long Hunts in rough conditions. Are you sure you want to trade that as your reward?"

"Oh? So its pretty common then, just expensive. In that case then do you think you have a blacksmith that can fix this glove?" Alice changed her mind as she took off her glove and placed it on the table. However, she made sure to store the threads away before doing so.

Examining the gloves, the City Lord furrowed his brows for a moment before opening his mouth.

"Is this perhaps the work of Lord Lothian?"

Chapter 144 - 144: 'Samples' Of The Outbreak

"Lord Lothian?" Alice furrowed her brows as she didn't know anyone by that name nor had Allura mentioned them.

"You don't know about Lord Lothian? I'm surprised you even got your hands on this kind of equipment then." The City Lord shook his head before placing it down.

"Unfortunately, as this is his work, our blacksmiths... lack the talents needed to repair this. It's not that the material is hard to get. But rather, their understanding of the inner workings of a device, like this one, is lacking compared to Lord Lothian. If they were to try, there's a greater risk that they break the device than repair it." He admitted as Alice nodded her head.

"So I'm guessing I can't have this fixed then."

"Sadly no."

Taking the gloves back, Alice examined the mechanism and sighed out. She was regretting that she had held on so stubbornly and now risked breaking this weapon that Allura had gifted her.

"Is there perhaps anything else I can help you with instead?" The City Lord offered but Alice shook her head.

"I don't have anything on my mind right now." Picking up her teacup, she continued to sip the mead while waiting for Ria to arrive.

Not even 2 minutes later, there was a knock on the door as the City Lord gestured for them to bring Ria into the room.

As she entered, Ria was worried that Alice was in some trouble and yet saw her drinking mead from a tea cup while the City Lord sat opposite her.

"So... the guards didn't tell me what's going on. Did something happen?" Ria asked with a slight frown while sitting next to Alice.

"I want to employ your friend, Alice, to help with the clean up of the slums. There's been an outbreak of something unknown that Alice has some prior knowledge of.

I'm hoping that with this knowledge and her assistance, we can resolve this issue as soon as possible so I can relieve the city of Martial Law." The City Lord summarised as Ria understood that he must've wanted her to sign a Law of Agreement.

"He gave me a Law of Agreement and I wanted you to make sure everything is okay with it first. I'm not too educated on this kind of stuff anyways." Alice shrugged while pouring herself another cup. At this point, she had gone through most of her bottle.

"I see... Alright, let me have a read."

Skimming through the contents of the Agreement, Ria was surprised how lax the conditions were and all it required from Alice was for her to provide information and assistance where she can.

A small price depending on what Alice asked for a reward.

"And have you figured out what kind of reward you want?"

"Nope. I wanted to ask for a flask similar to what your grandfather has but it seems pretty common so I changed my mind. Then apparently my glove was made by someone called Lord Lothian and his blacksmiths don't have the talent to fix it. And now I dunno what I want." Alice explained bluntly.

Widening her eyes, Ria didn't expect Alice to be this blunt regarding the blacksmiths.

Turning to the City Lord, she could see that he was still stone faced. Despite his slightly talkative nature at this moment, his expressions didn't fluctuate whatsoever.

"Well... the conditions seem fine. If you want to do it, you can. It's not like we can get out of this city before the Martial Law is lifted anyways." Ria shrugged as they had two choices right now.

They can help out the City Lord and get a reward out of it. Or, they could reject this and spend the next few days going to the gambling arena and earning some gold.

Tapping her chin, Alice decided to accept the commission and made a small cut on her finger.

Pressing her finger print down on the page, a familiar feeling washed over her as a connection was formed.

"Now that the agreement has been accepted, please let my secretary lead you around for now while I deal with the rest of the people in the hall. I will join you shortly." The City Lord nodded as he stored the Law of Agreement away for safe keeping.

"Ah before you go, what do I call you? Do I call you City Lord, your lordship? Or something else?" Alice asked curiously since she didn't know the City Lord's name.

"You can just call me Kallus." He replied as he stood up and adjusted his suit before stepping out the door.

Entering after him, was a woman with short dark greyish blue hair and a pair of cold eyes. Like Kallus, she wore a suit.

"Pleasure to meet you, I'm Elyn. Please follow me as our first stop will be the autopsy room. Our doctors are still examining some of the samples that we have recovered from the Slums. Please take care when you touch the sample, even if you are wearing the protective clothing that you're given once you arrive." She bowed slightly as Alice nodded her head and finished her cup of mead.

Jumping off the sofa, she grabbed her bottle and started to drink the rest of it.

Raising an eyebrow in slight concern, Elyn decided to not say a word. If the City Lord has not said anything regarding her drinking then it was not her place to do so.

Guiding Alice and Ria through the castle, she made her way down a flight of stairs surrounded by guards.

Every guard here had a minimum of three Sigils while a few had four.

"So how did you know about what happened?" Ria asked curiously as she didn't expect the City Lord to employ Alice's help.

"Just something I ran into in the past. I already told the City Lord that my knowledge is a bit outdated but he said any lead is fine." Alice shrugged.

Before Ria could reply, Elyn pushed open the door and a pungent smell immediately assaulted their senses.

Even Alice, who was prepared for this smell, visibly recoiled back as she covered her nose with her sleeves.

"There will be protective clothing in the changing rooms, please get changed. I will wait outside of the changing room once I have gotten changed myself." Elyn gestured to a set of doors as Alice nodded her head.

Stepping through, she could see several outfits of varying sizes hung up on the walls. Taking the set that seems to be roughly her size, Alice scrutinised the design and sighed softly as it was similar to what the scholars would always wear when operating on her body.

The outfit was a plain white and covered the entire body while paired with a set of gloves, some safety glasses and a mask.

Putting everything on, only Alice's eyes could be seen while everything else was hidden under the outfit.

"When we get in, just stand to the side if you can since I don't know how the new parasites would react. They might blow up, they might not." Alice warned.

"I'm guessing I just punch anything dangerous that pops out?"

"I mean... You could do that but I wouldn't recommend it. If I'm being honest I just don't want to be alone in there." Alice sighed.

Hearing this, Ria had a wide smile on her face as she jogged over and hugged Alice.

"Fufufu~ Of course I'll keep you company in there. Just let me know if there's anything you want me to help out with, okay?"

"Mnm."

Making her way out, she could see Elyn waiting by the side, already suited up with her own protective clothing.

Without saying anything else, she made her way down the hall while Ria and Alice followed behind.

Even though the mask helped with the smell, it was still present and got worse the further they walked.

"Try not to scream once we get in." Elyn reminded as she pushed open the last set of doors, revealing an operating room with several tables placed in the centre of the room.

On the table were corpses of several half beasts with their chests opened up.

Several doctors could be seen surrounding a few of the corpses while trying to examine the aftermath of the strange mutation.

Making her way to a table without any doctors, Elyn grabbed a tray of tools and placed it next to the operating table.

"If you have any questions please let me know and I will answer to the best of my knowledge. If you would like someone else to operate on the sample and you just observe, that can be arranged as well."

"It's fine, I'll handle it." Alice reassured as she didn't need to be delicate on the subject. After all, they're already dead.

The subject she was working on was an old man that was mutated beyond recognition. A strange white rubbery material acted as his skin while his facial features have been completely smoothed out with the exception of the eyeholes.

On his back, several cavities can be seen where he started to rot from the inside out.

Turning him around, Alice narrowed her eyes at the wound and plunged her hand in without hesitation.

Feeling the flesh, it was akin to a chunky mess as the flesh couldn't hold itself together.

'The effects seem to be far worse than what happened to me. He's literally been turned to sludge inside his body.' Alice thought to herself as she grabbed a knife and started to cut away at the body.

Seeing Alice carve away at the corpse so casually without any reaction, Ria couldn't help but applaud in her mind as just the sight of it was enough to make her want to throw up her breakfast.

Prying the body open so that she could get a closer look at the damage done on the inside, Alice noticed strange strands within the body.

Pulling them out, observed in silence as a theory started to form in her mind.

The original goal for these parasites were to 'copy' her ability to resist the Abyss and make a medicine that could be sold to Hunters. From what she was seeing here, it seems like they were now a step closer as the body had become a cocoon that was concocting 'medicine' within the body.

But rather than medicine, it was better to call it a poison as it doubled down on the corrosive reaction.

'What are they planning...' Alice frowned as she noticed something else within the body.

Digging through the flesh, she discovered a strange material that was being cultivated around the heart.

Chapter 145 - 145: Secrets Of The Outbreak

Digging out the heart, Alice narrowed her eyes and held it against the light.

It was barely noticeable but there was a thin transparent veil surrounding the heart. The purpose was unknown but compared to the rest of the body, the heart seemed to be in pristine condition thanks to this material.

"Can I get another sample? I want to compare them." Alice asked as Elyn nodded her head and made her way out before wheeling in another table with a sample placed on top. This time the corpse belonged to a woman with feathers and wings protruding from her body.

Opening up the chest, Alice dug through the flesh before finding the heart.

Just like the first sample, there was a thin veil covering it.

"What do you know about this thin veil?" Alice asked but Elyn only tilted her head in confusion.

"Thin veil?"

"You don't see this?" Placing the heart on the table, Alice separated the bloodied veil from the heart. However, it seemed like Elyn could only see the heart and not the veil.

'Is this something only I can see?' Alice frowned as she didn't remember the parasites having this kind of reaction with the body. Perhaps it was due to her resistance against the blood but this kind of veil was never created around her heart.

Picking up the strange material, Alice was about to take a better look but then it started to break apart and disappeared. Yet she noticed something strange with the residual energy the material left behind.

It felt similar to the Blight Caller Shard that she had consumed yet very different and far more 'corrupt' in nature.

'No way...' Alice widened her eyes as an outlandish theory appeared in her mind.

"Miss Elyn?" Alice called out.

"Yes?"

"Can I ask that everyone leave this room for a moment? No one is allowed to peak while I verify something with the sample. I will let everyone know when they can enter once more. Also, I need a new sample along with their details such as name, age and Sigil Abilities." Alice asked as Elyn furrowed her brows before nodding her head.

The City Lord had instructed her to help Alice however she could while he was away. Should he be here right now, he would allow her request.

Letting all of the doctors know, they left the premises one by one until it was only Ria and Alice left.

With a new sample in front of her, Alice took a deep breath and sighed, preparing herself for what she must do next.

"What's on your mind?" Ria asked, clearly understanding that this had something to do with Alice's secret with her asking everyone to leave.

"Just testing out a theory of mine. If it's proved correct then we'll need to find a way to send a message to Allura." Alice frowned as she gestured for Ria to step back.

Reading through the document, Alice memorised the information of sample 3 before opening the chest and prying out the heart.

Once again, the strange material was present on the heart.

Biting her lips, Alice took off her mask and grabbed the veil with her hand.

Without hesitation, she threw it in her mouth before swallowing and an infernal pain shot through her body.

Black veins appeared around her neck as Alice could feel a foreign power flowing through her body as black ink flowed out of her orifices. From the ink, spikes manifested, proving her theory correct.

Both of these powers belonged to the person in front of her when they were alive but compared to the Blight Caller Shard, this power was rough and unrefined. The potency was low and the duration was short.

A waste of a person's life. Yet the results of this wide-scale experimentation was that they have successfully, albeit in the initial stages, transformed human Sigil Abilities into shards that people can activate.

Gritting her teeth, Alice did not hesitate to activate her Second Sigil as her body flared with a violet flame, burning away the ink around her and cleansing her body of the foul power.

After a short moment, Alice dismissed the flames and sighed. Putting on her mask, Alice placed the heart on the table.

"They're trying to turn people into Shards that can borrow Sigil powers. It's similar to what I can do but crudely as it requires the life of a person. Side effects are rather potent and the moment it is removed from the body, it will disappear quickly." Alice summarised with a frown.

"What the hell?! Is it your old family?" Ria furrowed her brows while glancing back at the tables.

This method, this level of cruelty, reminded her of the Cult of the Eclipse. People who would do anything to attain their goal and worship their god, even if it means killing your own family or lover.

"I don't know. Maybe the scholars started the initial research but this has been modified heavily. If we can find out the person who released these parasites into the city then I might be able to learn more." Alice shook her head.

Pushing open the door, Alice could see the doctors discussing amongst themselves while Elyn waited patiently.

"I've verified what I wanted to know. Can you take me to Lord Kallus? I need to inform him of my discoveries." Alice asked as Elyn nodded her head.

Following behind Elyn, Alice could hear the doctors whispering to one another and doubting her capabilities as she had only arrived for not even an hour and had already discovered something that they hadn't.

However, they didn't voice their doubts directly which saved Alice the trouble of trying to convince them.

She placed the protective clothing into a basket that Elyn had prepared and made her way to the main hall where Kallus could be seen overlooking the entire operation. There were more bloodstains on the ground along with signs of him using his Sigil.

"Seems like you've already made some discoveries." Kallus nodded as he gestured for Elyn to step away for now.

"I have an idea of their end goal. Or at least it's what I'm thinking is their end goal." Alice shrugged as Kallus raised his eyebrows in surprise.

Even after giving the doctors hours to see what's wrong, the most they had discovered was that it was akin to a potent poison that rots the body from the inside out. It was unknown as to whether this was simply a hate crime or a test with larger goals in mind.

But with how Alice was wording it, it seemed to be the latter.

"And their end goal being?"

"It seems like they're trying to make humans into items for consumption. In the past, I have come into contact with something called a Blight Caller Shard. I've noticed that there is a thin layer of energy surrounding the heart that acts in a similar manner to the crystals." Alice explained, excluding the fact that you could gain their powers by 'eating' this energy.

After all, saying so would simply raise questions on how she knows this.

"Is that so? Hmm... That is truly concerning. So if I'm understanding it correctly, should I consume the same parasite, I will have my power turned into a shard for others to use?" Kallus asked with a frown but Alice shook her head.

"It's still in the preliminary stages it seems as this energy dissipates quickly after being removed from the body. Unfit for use."

Thinking in silence, Kallus sighed before opening his mouth.

"Do you have a way to perhaps identify who has come into contact with the parasite or possibly who is in possession of it?" Kallus asked as it was better to go for the source of this outbreak. The half beasts

who have been infected are a lost cause and they're practically dead men walking. He needed to prioritise the living.

"Hard to say. When I first found out about this parasite, its form was simply strands of flesh writhing in liquid. Maybe it's changed in the current iteration." Alice shook her head as this was the limit of her assistance.

Of course, there were some investigations she wanted to make of her own, but she doubted her movements would be overlooked by the City Lord.

"I see... Alright. I will take it from here. When you make up your mind about your reward, bring this to the castle gates and they will allow you to see me." Kallus nodded, handing Alice a silver token with the crest of the sun engraved on the surface.

Nodding her head, Alice made her way out of the castle as she and Ria had been cleared of suspicion.

"Seems like the city will still be in Martial Law until the City Lord gets to the bottom of this." Ria sighed as she wanted to kill whoever released this parasite into the Slums.

But it was not as simple as just appearing and then killing the culprit.

Taking out her bottle of mead, Alice drank the rest of it in one go as there wasn't much left.

'Is it the Zenia's? Are they getting desperate after I disappeared?' Alice thought to herself as that was a possibility.

With her no longer taking the brunt of the experiments, there was a chance that all of this was due to her disappearance.

The Zenia's would need to experiment with more casualties if they wish to continue producing Abyss Blood for the masses and retain their current status.

'Or is it the work of the Scholars? They've always been over-obsessed with Abyss Blood. I was practically a treasure trove for them.'

Taking a deep breath, Alice sighed before scratching her hair.

"Ria, what do you think about doing some investigations around the slums at night?" Alice asked as Ria cracked her knuckles.

"I was getting bored anyway. Plus, I also want to know who caused all of this and send them to the afterlife."

All that was left was to wait till 'nightfall' when most of the Civilians and Hunters stop their daily activities and go back home.

Chapter 146 - 146: Implications Of The Shard Prototype

Waiting in her room, Alice sat by the window and glanced out at the streets while Ria waited in her room.

"Say Alice, why do you think they're trying to turn people into shards?" Ria asked as she hugged her knee while sitting on the bed.

"Don't know. If it's the people from my old family, maybe they're doing it to find a way to make more medicine. In this case, the medicine is an item that can give you the power belonging to other people." Alice shook her head. Even if they were able to succeed in creating this shard that copies the power belonging to another, it doesn't eliminate the fact that there are side effects in doing so.

Even now, she could still remember the sensation of a dark power trying to pry its way into the deepest parts of her body and take her over. The Blight Caller Shard attempted to do so and so did the prototype shards.

The only difference is that the prototype dissipated before it could get far.

"Let's think of it from their perspective then I guess. What would a finalised result of these... Human shards be capable of?"

"The finalised results should be capable of granting you the powers of the Sigils they acquired in life along with any passive benefit within your body. If one was made from an Abyss Lord, eating said crystal should grant you the power of the Abyss Lord. Or do you think they're trying to stack the powers with one another?" Alice furrowed her brows.

"That's what I'm thinking. Remember how Allura mentioned that Apostles are one level above the Abyss Lords? Do you think they're trying to bridge that gap? If this is the word of the Cult, maybe they're trying to give their Apostles the upper hand against the Sun and Moon." Ria speculated.

It was a possibility that had been appearing in her mind ever since Alice mentioned that the Shards could grant the power of Sigils.

Hearing this, Alice paused as she glanced back at Ria.

"If they succeed, would it be possible to duplicate an Apostle's power?"

The notion of such a feat seemed impossible but if it was true, perhaps the religions would no longer be limited to just having two Apostles each and a battle beyond their capabilities and imagination could break out.

"We need to tell Allura and your grandfather."

"I can send grandfather a letter through the Underground but I'm not sure how long it'll take." Ria frowned.

"But the issue is that this information becomes available to the Underground. They are primarily an organisation for information, anything can be bought with the right conditions."

"Do we have no other way to contact them?" Alice sighed but Ria shook her head.

"In that case how about we ask the Underground to inform Allura to contact us as soon as possible? We shouldn't share the details so that only Allura knows." Ria suggested as Alice thought about it for a moment before nodding her head.

After all, Allura mentioned that she had methods to contact them if she needed.

"Alright let's do that. I'm not sure where the Underground is though. Is it like... Literally underground? Or is that the name of their organisation?" Alice asked curiously.

"It's a bit of both. Usually I see them underground and their name is also the Underground. It might be different in this city but we can probably ask the City Lord for some help. Maybe ask if we can get permission to enter the slums too without snooping around.

"Of course, there's a risk that he can just have someone tail us so we might need to be careful with how you display your power." Ria reminded as Alice nodded her head.

She needed to be cautious when dealing with her flames.

"It's also a good time to ask for the reward. What do we need right now?" Alice asked as the only thing she wanted right now was a high quality flask to hold her mead while keeping it cold.

"Well we can ask for a carriage leading to Isilvaria as well as a bit of travelling money. We can also ask for some weapons just in case since some people might covet your weird bracelet." Ria suggested as she still couldn't wrap her head around what Alice's bracelet was made from.

The fact that it could drink so much blood to enhance itself while changing shape was far too strange and eye catching. If she showed it to others, there was no doubt that some greedy Hunter would have plans to steal the weapon.

"Alright, let's do that."

Leaving the Inn, the two made their way back and set up a meeting with the City Lord.

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"I did not expect you to come back so soon. Are you here for the reward or have you gained more leads to the investigation?" Kallus asked curiously while inviting them to sit down in his office.

"A bit of both. For the reward, would it be possible to get a carriage leading to Isilvania? It's a bit far from here. Aside from the carriage, can we also get some weapons and a high quality flask for my drinks?" Alice asked.

Upon mentioning her drinks, she pulled out a fresh bottle of mead that she had taken from her room and had a wide smile on her face.

Seeing how enthusiastic Alice was towards mead, Ria was speechless. She couldn't help but feel as though it was a mistake to bring her to the gambling arena as now not only was there a gambling addict, which is incorrect as she could stop whenever she wanted, but now there was also an alcoholic.

Kallus was speechless at Alice's request but nodded his head as all three were reasonable requests.

After Alice had mentioned that there was a strange energy surrounding the heart, he had the Doctors compare it to Shards that was collected from other beasts. And as expected, there were indeed faint traces that bore similarities between the two.

Had it not been for Alice mentioning it, they wouldn't have discovered the traces of energy. Even for him, if he wasn't looking for it specifically, he wouldn't have discovered it so soon.

"Very well. But I must say, I can only get you the carriage once Martial Law has been lifted. It's not that I'm suspecting you but rather I must be fair with all parties involved. As for the weapon, I will arrange a meeting with the finest Blacksmiths we have and you can make your request to them. As for the flask... I will see what I can do.

Getting a standard flask is simple but a high quality hunter's flask is a little harder." Kallus nodded as Alice didn't mind a little wait for the flask.

After all, it wasn't as though they could leave any time soon with the Martial Law still in place.

"Ah before I forget, can we investigate the Slums? I know you have your guards there but we want to look around on our own for a bit." Alice asked as Kallus raised an eyebrow.

"Are there theories you wish to verify still?"

"Kind of but not really. It's also just getting a better look at the situation so I can inform my... Teacher?" Alice furrowed her brows as she wasn't sure what kind of connection she would call Allura.

She was both her teacher and family member. The part that confused her was the part where they are family.

"Ria, would you say Allura would be my great great great many times grandma? Since she said she was older than your grandfather right?" Alice turned to Ria who was about to answer but paused as she wasn't sure herself.

Allura's age had always been a confusing factor as she looked as though she was in her late 20's to early 30's yet she's been around for entire generations.

"I mean... She's more like your mother right now. But if we're strictly talking about age, she'll be your great great great many times grandmother." Ria shrugged.

Meanwhile, Kallus was completely lost in their conversation.

"So you're investigating things to inform your Teacher?" Kallus asked, deciding to not confuse himself and just associate this 'Allura' person as Alice's teacher.

"Pretty much." Alice nodded.

"Alright, I'll have Elyn inform the guards to leave you be if you wish to enter the slums. If there are any discoveries, please let me know so we can lift the Martial Law. The sooner we find the culprit, the faster life returns to normal for the civilians." Kallus nodded.

"For now though, would you like to talk to our blacksmith so he can start making your weapon immediately? Of course, you can also choose from his existing wares as well." He offered.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice decided it was best to see the blacksmith first. If a fight does break out, having a spare weapon would come in handy.

With Alice's mind made up, Kallus had Elyn notify the Guards while writing a note for Alice.

"Take this to the smithy and they will understand. From there, you can either choose a weapon they already have on display or have them make something for you. If you are not in a rush, I suggest having them make something for you as they will base it on your existing Sigils." Kallus said while handing Alice the note.

With Elyn being busy informing the guards, Kallus had a Guard guide them to the smithy so they didn't get lost within the castle.

As they approached the smithy, the distant sounds of hammers crashing down on the anvil started to ring out as the surrounding temperature increased the closer they got.

The stone walls of the castle was dyed in a faint crimson due to the flames of the smithy while the shadows of hammers and those who wielded the tool reflected on the walls.

Entering the smithy, the guard gestured towards the room in the back.

"That's where the head of the smithy is." The guard explained before giving the two a slight bow and making his way back to his station.

Looking at one another, the two shrugged before walking through the smithy to reach the room.

The one way there, they could see several smiths using their Sigils to help them forge weapons.

'I suppose Sigils aren't only used for hunting. There are uses like this.' Alice mused to herself.

Knocking on the door, a tired voice called them in as the two pushed open the door and entered the room.

Chapter 147 - 147: New Weapons

"What's going on? I'm pretty sure I finished all of my commissions." A tired voice sounded out as Alice and Ria saw the owner of the voice.

They had expected the head of the blacksmiths to be a large muscular old man or woman but instead, it was a young man with a rather slim physique. Even Ria seemed more muscular in comparison.

He had short crimson hair and wore the standard blacksmith's attire consisting of a black shirt, pants and an apron with tools hanging on his belt.

Handing him the letter, the young man skimmed over the contents before furrowing his brows.

"Alright. Let's make it quick then. What kind of weapon do you want?" He asked while tossing the letter on his table.

"Well what weapon do you recommend for lightning users?" Ria asked curiously, wanting to gauge the skills of the young blacksmith.

"Depends on how you fight."

"Close range and with speed. Preferably something that can deal a lot of damage in one go without decreasing my speed." Ria answered while trying to think of other requirements that would be good for her.

"Is it for killing Hunters or fighting beasts?" The blacksmith asked while walking over to his desk and pulling out a catalogue of sorts.

He wanted to see if any of his preexisting weapons matched her requirements and if it did, it would save him time on forging a brand new weapon.

"Bit of both but mostly for beasts."

"Alright. And what about you?" He turned to Alice who was still thinking of how she wanted to fight.

"Do you have any recommendations for a close to medium ranged fighter? My Sigil powers revolve around using blood and setting it on fire." Alice asked curiously. She wanted to see how else she could utilise her Sigils.

"Blood and fire? That's a strange combination. But I do have something available." He nodded as he stood up and made his way to the storage with Ria and Alice following behind.

"However, it might require a bit of adjustment to suit your Sigils. When we get there, can you give me a quick demonstration of your blood control and flames?"

"Ah, sure." Alice nodded while Ria glanced towards her.

She was worried that Alice might reveal too much but seeing that Alice wasn't saying anything, Ria decided to trust the process.

"Same goes for your lightning. Just a quick demonstration will do."

Upon arriving at the storage, Alice could immediately feel the threatening aura some of the weapons were radiating.

Despite being held in their sheathes, it felt as though she was standing in a room full of beasts.

"All of these weapons are made from some of the finest beast materials we can get our hands on. So even though it's not a custom piece, it should be more than enough for what you require." The Blacksmith explained as he reached a box in the back and pulled out a weapon wrapped in bandages.

"Show me your blood control and fire. If the sword reacts to it, then that means you two are compatible."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head as she stepped to a clearing before biting her forearm. She didn't want to expose what her bracelet could do so she resorted to this method.

Controlling the blood that was flowing out of her body, she created a set of needles that floated around her before snapping her finger.

In that moment, the needles erupted with bright violet flames as the faint cry of a dragon could be heard upon ignition.

"!!!" Widening his eyes, the blacksmith immediately felt the blade in his hands begin to vibrate as blood seeped through the gaps of the bandages.

Shredding the bandage apart, the malevolent blade presented itself as its body was crafted from a strange black material that looked similar to the spikes and horns she had seen on the body of beasts. A red gem was inlaid upon the guard of the blade as there was no metal present. It was entirely made from this strange material.

Countless layers could be seen as it overlapped one another to form the single edge blade while red energy pulsed beneath the gaps. As it reacted to the presence of Alice's blood and flames, the blade started to bleed as a layer of red liquid overlapped the surface of the blade before igniting with deep red flames.

It looked as though the flame was trying to contend with the violet fire that Alice had conjured as the temperature of the room started to rise yet the violet flames showed no sign of being surpassed.

"Oh my... To think the flames of this sword are actually losing out... Seems like I'll need to make some adjustments to the base material. Otherwise, it won't be able to handle your fire." The Blacksmith remarked as he gestured for Alice to cease her demonstration.

With the flames now disappearing, the blade returned to normal as he glanced at the bandages and sighed.

"What creature did you even have to kill to get such flames? It's rare for the fire belonging to the Bloodflame Gargoyle to lose out." He asked curiously as the blade in his hands was a piece he liked to call the Bloodflame Blade. It was crafted from the spine of the Bloodflame Gargoyle while being merged with the wings belonging to the Infernal Wyvern.

Both beasts synergised well with one another to forge a weapon that harnesses the benefits in a single weapon. It has unholy sharpness that can cut through the skin belonging to three star beasts with ease, while contending against even some of the most lethal four star beasts.

"Secret. How long will your adjustments take?" Alice asked, not wanting to explain the truth behind her fire.

"Hmm... it should take roughly a day or so. I have the materials on hand, it's just a matter of doing the adjustments." He replied after a short pause.

Turning his attention to Ria, he gestured for her to demonstrate her power as she partially activated her resonance.

In the end, they decided on a set of long gloves that reached past the elbow. It was made from the skin of a Lightning Morph and while it was in its dormant state, it looked like a normal set of gloves.

Upon activation, however, the gloves transform into a thin protective gauntlet that will exhaust her lightning to parry attacks. Not only that, it also boosts the potency and her control over the lightning element.

Unlike Alice's new sword, it required no adjustment as the Lightning Morph is a beast famed for its adaption towards Lightning. It could harness the lightning belonging to those beneath the sixth Sigil.

"Do you want to come back in 2 days to collect your blade? Or should I ask someone to send it to where you are currently residing?" He asked while pulling out a notepad and pen.

"Ah then can you send it to this address? We're staying there until the Martial Law is lifted." Alice replied while giving him a note that Ria had prepared beforehand in case Alice was to buy more mead and needed them to be delivered.

Nodding his head, the blacksmith stored the piece of paper away and made his way to the forge.

"You can see yourselves out. I'll make a start on the adjustments immediately."

Hearing this, both Alice and Ria started to make their way out but glanced back upon hearing the roar of the fire within the forge.

To their surprise, they watched as the blacksmith activate his resonance and his entire body started to bulk up while red armour covered his arms. Scales manifested around his face as a set of horns appeared on his head.

Taking a deep breath, he spewed out a stream of fire on the blade while grabbing his hammer.

Seeing the slender man transform into a hulking half-dragon-like beast with armour, both Alice and Ria glanced at each other in shock while continuing their way out.

"Did you know resonances could be used like that?" Alice asked while Ria shook her head.

"Not really. I only focused on the hunting and fighting side of things. Grandfather never told me much about other stuff."

"The more you know I suppose. Do you think your resonance could be used... in a similar manner?" Alice shrugged while thinking back to Ria's resonance.

With how much lightning she was able to generate and how she could change the weather around her, there was a chance that it could be used to for something other than fighting.

"Maybe. But we'll have to ask Luke when we see him since he's more knowledgeable on this kind of thing."

As they made their way out, they noticed that the streets were rather empty as they had spent quite a bit of time inside the castle. If they wanted to visit the slums, now was the time.

Glancing to Ria, Alice noticed that she was thinking the same as Alice made a quick detour back to her room to store away her mead. Not before taking a quick sip to keep her motivated through the investigation.

"So where do you want to start? The slums can be split into three sections. The rooftops, the ground and then the sewers." Ria asked as they walked towards the entrance of the slums.

"Hmm... We should probably check out the ground first. Go to the centre of the incident and see if there are any clues. Personally, I think we should leave the sewers last. I don't want to ruin this outfit that I only just bought yesterday." Alice sighed.

"Fair point. We'll investigate the ground, the rooftops then the... Sewers." Ria groaned as she too wasn't excited about the idea of investigating the sewers.

However, as many would say, leave no stone unturned. If they want to get as much information as they can, they can't avoid investigating the sewer region.

Approaching the slums, the guards gave them a nod and allowed them to pass as they had been informed by Elyn regarding their entry.

Seeing that they weren't held back or questioned, the two shrugged at one another before making their way into the heart of the slums.

As they entered, countless eyes glanced at them through the gaps of their windows and walls, curious as to who they were and why they've come.

Soon, they reached the heart of the slums where a mountain of corpses and flesh greeted them. A spire of flames crackled as black smoke billowed to the top.

Chapter 148 - 148: Investigating The Slums

Looking at the mountain of corpses, Alice could feel a dark power similar to the feeling the heart gave her. Only this time it was far more condensed.

'What is this feeling...' Alice furrowed her brows.

Seeing how the cluster was gathered, she could feel her emotions started to shift. At first, it was simply annoyance towards this sight but then transformed into anger.

And finally, blood lust towards those that caused this.

Glancing over to Ria, Alice noticed that Ria seemed to feel the same as a myriad of emotions washed over her face before settling on anger and bloodlust.

'Not good, we need to step away now!' Grabbing Ria by the arm, Alice jumped back before making a cut on her arm.

She wasn't sure if this was going to work but if it was part of the Abyss, her power should come in handy.

Activating her second Sigil, a violet flame manifested on her arm as her blood started to evaporate, turning into fumes as it calmed their mind.

"What the hell..." Ria groaned while clutching her head.

"I don't know. But this is no longer the parasites I know of. There's... something else mixed in." Alice frowned as she wanted to steer clear of the corpse pile. Just a brief exposure was able to invoke such feelings.

There was no telling what prolonged exposure could cause.

'Could that be why they're burning the corpses? To get rid of them so it doesn't affect the residents.' Alice thought to herself as she parkoured up the metal steps to reach the rooftops.

Now that she was further away from the corpse pile, her mind regained its calm as she glanced down at the slums. Now that she was watching from above, she could see how gruesome some of the deaths were as their bodies had been turned inside out. Countless scratches and tears made by their bare hands scarred their skin while bones erupted from the inside out.

Within this pile, small yet noticeable strands of energy similar to the shard could be observed thanks to Cayla's power.

'The parasites are now trying to turn people into shards. They can infect other hosts if they start to transform near another. Being near the corpses invokes bloodlust and anger from within...' Alice noted down in her mind as she tried to find the connection and purpose of such a parasite.

Right now, the only purpose she could think of for these parasites was to give people an extra boost in power once it is perfected.

But that was shallow. There could be a deeper reason, one big enough for them to experiment so openly in a city.

Just as she was about to jump down one more, she noticed Ria staring off into the alleys of the slums with a frown.

"Something wrong?" Alice called down as Ria glanced up then shook her head.

"No nothing. Probably just someone being curious about what's happening." Ria shrugged.

She had felt as though someone was staring at her and nothing else. A gaze that scanned her from head to toe and gave her goosebumps.

'Maybe I'm just too pretty.' Ria dismissed in her mind as a joke yet she couldn't get rid of the goosebumps on her arms. Not wanting to stand alone, she jumped up to meet up with Alice as their next destination was the sewers.

###

"Her senses are quite sharp." A shadowy figure chuckled softly as he glanced at the two from the darkness surrounding the slums.

He recognised Ria or rather, the power she was exuding. It wasn't the power of the Sigil but rather the Ritual of Starvation.

There were only a handful of these rituals done and few had survivors. Those that survived were usually integrated into the cult and yet, there was a survivor standing near him who wasn't taken by the cult.

Thinking to himself, the man had a scheming smile on his face as he played around with a small white worm the size of a thin needle.

With a survivor of the Ritual of Starvation and a strange woman with split hair now joining the fry, he had to adjust his plans to accommodate for all variables.

As he was thinking about this, an idea manifested in his mind as he curled his lips into a cruel smile.

"I may as well use my old ties to the Cult of the Eclipse. That'll make everything else much easier for me."

Sinking back into the darkness, the man disappeared from the location.

###

Standing by the window overlooking the city, Kallus watched with a serious expression. With his power, he could sense several movements within the city yet a few still elude him.

He could sense the movement of Alice and Ria as they approached the centre of the slums.

'Seems like they're rather shocked by the sight. That's to be expected.' Kallus thought to himself as his demeanour had completely changed.

While meeting with Alice and Ria, he put on an accommodating 'mask' to put them at least. He needed Alice's cooperation to realise what was truly going on within this realm. But now, he had returned to his usual stone faced demeanour where it seemed as though he was an unsheathed blade, waiting to descend.

"Have the guards surround the slums. There are movements beneath the surface. I want you to send people to all of our exits so you can block their escape path." Kallus ordered as Elyn obeyed.

Taking a deep breath, he sighed softly while glancing at the report in his hands.

He had compiled everything he knew thus far into a document as Alice's conjectures made up 20% of the document.

Flipping through everything once more, he shut the book with a resounding thud and placed it back on the shelf before making his way out.

Adjusting the gloves on his hands, it was time for him to let those who dared mess with his city find out who exactly rules this domain.

'They must be looking down on me if they think I can't find them.' He thought with a small smirk. When fishing, one must be patient.

Alice and Ria were the bait and now it was time to wait for the fish to swim up thinking everything was under their control.

It was also the reason why he was not against granting Alice a good reward as she deserved this as the bare minimum once everything was over.

###

Jumping down the sewers, both Alice and Ria retched at the smell as they tried their best not to throw up.

"Urg... Do we have to go this far down?" Ria asked but Alice nodded her head.

She wanted to find out the truth about the parasites, if her family was truly involved and how deep they were in trying to manufacture such an item.

She wanted to know what the Scholars planned to do now that she was not around for them to experiment on.

For all of that to happen, she needed to investigate every clue she has.

"So what do you think is down here?" Ria asked, curious as to why Alice had chosen to investigate the sewers.

"I want to see if it's connected to some people I know or not. If they are connected, they probably have a room set up somewhere and use it to dispense the parasites. If not then at least we've crossed out the possibility." Alice shrugged as Ria scratched her hair before sighing and nodding her head.

"Alright then let's make this quick. I don't want to stay here longer than I have to."

Navigating the sewers, they came across a few small beasts that Ria was able to take out with ease while Alice focused on memorising the way back along with trying to see if there was any residual energy that she was familiar with.

It was going to be difficult as the moment the prototype shards left the body, they began to disintegrate.

However, as they were navigating the tunnels, they heard a distant thumping sound as it sounded as though something extremely heavy was stomping around the sewage.

Both Alice and Ria stopped talking as they made sure to make as little noise as possible while turning the corners and soon, they laid eyes on the source of the sound.

Similar to the corpse she had opened up in the castle, the beast had pale white skin and a large cut in its chest, exposing its beating organs to the world while the ribs had been turned inside out.

Its skin was practically glued together to his skin as he had a set of sunken eyes and cheeks while a bone like crown sat upon its head.

Strange tendrils with bubbles hung off the crown while.

Despite the sunken facial features, its body was highly muscular as layers upon layers of muscle fibres wrapped around his arms and legs. Just a single glance caused one to shiver at the thought of being hit by its physical attacks as the beast took another step, seemingly patrolling the area.

Above his head, there was another anomaly that Alice couldn't quite describe.

Usually, when she glanced upon beasts, she'd be able to see their name and difficulty level. Yet, upon seeing this beast, the difficulty had constantly been adjusting between two star and four star difficulty.

Not only that, the name changed with each passing glance as though she was looking at another beast but the body stayed the same.

'is it an experiment?' Alice asked herself as it could be another prototype similar to the shard.

'With her knowledge of the scholars and an estimate on what the shards could do, Alice had guessed that this was the lead prototype of some kind of mass produced beast.

'If this thing is patrolling nearby them perhaps there's indeed a room near here.' Alice thought to herself as she gestured for Ria to follow closely behind her.

But Ria didn't respond.

Glancing back, Alice could see that Ria was in shock as she took rapid deep breaths in futile attempts to calm herself down. Her eyes were unable to be removed from the beast's back as countless faint scars could be seen. One that had been etched upon her own body and a nightmare she could never forget.

This beast is also a participant in the Ritual of Starvation.

Chapter 149 - 149: Tasia

"Ria?" Alice called out hesitantly as Ria closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

Clenching her fist, she stood in silence before opening her eyes with a new calm.

"I'm feeling better. Seems like this place has connections to the Cult of the Eclipse. But I thought your family only dealt with the Church of the Moon? Are they currying a favour with the Cult as well?" Ria asked curiously but Alice shook her head.

"The Zenia's dealt with the Church due to the medicine they produced and the resources they could gain as a result. I doubt they would make themselves an enemy of the public by siding with the Cult. Unless it's the Scholars that are involved with the Cult rather than the family itself." Alice replied with a frown.

Despite all the dirt beneath the surface, the Zenia family seemed benevolent to the public eye and they intend to keep it that way. Doing something like this would only harm everything they've worked for thus far, an entire generation's worth of effort wasted by siding with the Cult.

"The Scholars?" Ria raised an eyebrow as this was the first time that she had heard Alice mention them.

"Mnm. They're the ones responsible for the... Testing and production of medicine and Abyss Blood that they sell to the public. While the Zenia's are powerful and influential, the Scholars hold all of the key information to their research.

There are restrictions to what the Scholars can do but if they found a way around that, then there might be a chance that they're working with the Cult to further their ambitions on discovering the secrets of the Abyss." Alice explained while recalling the people who experimented on her body.

Their fervour for knowledge far exceeded the average person and they were willing to do anything and everything to attain the knowledge they desired. Perhaps that was the key to how they were able to produce so much usable Abyss Blood for the public.

While Alice played a large role in that, an average person could never achieve what the Scholars have done and repurpose it for the public.

'There's no one that comes to mind that would side with the Cult. They're too loyal to the Zenia family. Perhaps there's someone else that learned of the Zenia's research.' Alice mused to herself as she slowly approached the beast that was patrolling these tunnels. If they wished to venture further, they had to deal with this beast quickly and quietly.

"Want me to deal with it?" Ria asked but Alice shook her head.

With Ria's power over lightning, an attack that would kill the beast was far too loud and might alert anyone that's waiting further in.

The best person for this job was Alice.

'It remains most of its humanoid body so I can assume it has a brain and a heart. The best way to kill it would be to use my fire from the inside out but it might scream and alert the others. I need to be fast with my fire.' Alice thought to herself as she narrowed her eyes at the beast.

But there was another way she could do this. And that was to simply remove its ability to harness the Abyss momentarily and assassinate it!

Activating both of her Sigils, Alice could feel the power surging through her body, building up before reaching a limit. With her physical strength now enhanced to the limit, she made a small cut on her arm and allowed the blood to climb up the walls and make its way above the beast.

Small sparks of fire appeared above it as Alice had made sure the blood was thin enough to not create a large flame but instead, evaporate instantly.

With fumes now covering the beast, Alice jumped out and turned her bracelet into a dagger.

Turning its head towards her, the beast was shocked at Alice's appearance before regaining composure and aimed its palm at her. Yet nothing happened.

Before it could figure out what was happening, Alice stabbed the knife into the beast's mouth, transforming it into a spear that pierced the back of their head.

Kicking the body of the spear, she transformed the shaft into a blade that sliced the beast's head off while rotating and separated the head from the shoulders.

Taking this chance, Alice poured some of her blood into the body and set it aflame. Using her weapon to 'catch' the body, she allowed it to fall slowly, making sure it didn't make too much noise.

"Damn... I'm jealous. The fact that your fire makes Abyss powers obsolete, even just for a moment is scary." Ria whispered with a slight shiver. She could already imagine how dangerous Alice could be in the future if she decided to walk the path of an assassin.

The simple fact that she could merge her blood with any liquid and set it flame to cancel out Sigils means even those in power were vulnerable to her.

"Don't be." Alice replied while making her way to the next section of the sewers, confusing Ria as many would die for this kind of ability.

But what she didn't know was the price of this ability meant losing everything Alice held dear. Had it not been for Kaden, her torture would've continued indefinitely.

'With or without this power, I would've still been jabbed by a needle at my birthday and turned into a monster.' Alice thought to herself as having this power simply meant she would survive that day only to be greeted by torture.

She had thought about the possibility of not having her resistance to the Abyss many times while rotting away in the Zenia prison. Many times she had wondered if it would've been better had she just died. Many times has she tried to make that a reality yet it never succeeded.

Now that she has her freedom, she wasn't going to give up like she did in prison. The only path she now desired was the destruction of the Zenia family and it had to be done by her own hands. Only then, will her anger be quelled.

Making their way through the sewers, there were a few more beasts similar to the first one they saw patrolling these tunnels. Taking them out in the same matter, they progressed without much issue and soon, they came across a large opening that led down to a giant open space full of broken pillars.

"What the..." Ria muttered, seeing that the path down led to a large cavity in the ground with countless bridges crossing the gap.

It reminded Alice of the tunnels down that hosted a sealed Abyss Lord in the Slaughter Docks yet different.

'Is it a similar containment? Though I doubt they would build a sewer above it.' Alice thought with a frown.

"Do we keep going or back off?" Ria asked curiously as this was far bigger than what they had originally predicted.

"Keep going."

###

In the furthest reaches of the sewer, a woman could be seen sitting on a chair while a group of people were discussing with one another regarding the situation in the slums.

She had long side braided grey hair and a pair of cold blue eyes. She wore a black dress adorned with blue jewellery, white plated boots and a large white jacket with a large fur collar.

"It seems like the material has manifested itself to a small degree. Though the side effects are far too strong for us to make use of it." One of the men frowned as a female researcher chimed in.

"But it's a proof of concept is it not? The fact that we can indeed turn people into shards should be a cause for celebration. Perhaps it's because the subjects are half beasts that it was a failure. Next time we should aim for real humans."

"Their body may have interfered with the transformation process. We should release a second wave but into the market space to test the effectiveness." Another brought up.

"It's too risky though. The City Lord is already investigating the situation. If we're not careful everything we've worked for could be destroyed before we even report back to the Cult."

Upon mentioning the City Lord, they started to murmur to one another as the City Lord was their main concern. He was not someone they wanted to face directly as that would mean death.

"Settle down." The woman sitting in the chair called out as everyone in the room turned silent.

"I have already sent the results of the research back to the Cult. Your work will not be forgotten. But I suggest you prepare an escape route that does not involve going back into the city." She called out as a shadowy figure emerged next to her.

"There are two rats that have entered the sewers. One is a survivor of the Ritual of Starvation. Surprisingly, she has kept her human appearance despite the ritual taking an effect on her body. Maybe it was interrupted half way. The second rat seems to hold a strange power but much is unknown. She seems to be under the effects of Abyss Blood side effects since one of her eyes is affected.

It seems like the City Lord has employed them to figure out what happened." The figure smiled.

"Honestly, if you get the girl that survived the Ritual you might find out what you need to cultivate these worms further without distorting the base body." He shrugged.

"And news about the City Lord?" The woman asked without looking at him.

"He has his guards surrounding the entrances. But he can't cover everything properly. I'm sure you know what that means, Bishop Tasia." He grinned.

Tasia was silent. Tapping her finger against the armrest, she sighed and stood up.

"I'll deal with the City Lord and his two rats. I know your allegiance does not lie with the Cult hence you can scurry off and do whatever you want. You wouldn't want to break your side of the Agreement." Tasia narrowed her eyes as the figure chuckled and nodded his head.

"Of course. I will take your scholars out of the city once you engage in combat. I promise on my honour." He bowed yet Tasia only scoffed in disdain.

"Don't promise me what you don't have. I only trust in the Law of Agreement when dealing with men like you. Adhere to your side of the Agreement and I shall do my part."

Stepping out of the room, Tasia adjusted her gloves and prepared to face the City Lord. He who is judge, jury and executioner of Blackrock Castle.

Chapter 150 - 150: Strange Blood In The Sewers

Making their way through the sewers, Alice tried her best to keep quiet. There was no telling what could be waiting in the shadows, but so far, she couldn't see any beasts. Taking a deep breath to calm her

nerves, Alice glanced back at Ria and gestured for her to follow along quickly as they were now reaching the end of the room.

'There are lots of paths, but most of them are blocked.' Alice thought to herself as they had explored some of the paths on the way down but yielded no result.

"How much further do we need to go? I'm not sure if we'll even find anything down here," Ria asked while scratching her hair. They had already spent more than two hours down here, and they have nothing to show for it except for the strange beasts they encountered on the way here. Products of the Ritual of Starvation.

"Just a bit more." Jumping down, Alice landed on the stone paving and prepared to venture forward when she noticed something strange in the air. Sniffing the air, she furrowed her brows, as this was not the standard sewage smell that they were used to smelling while being down here. It was something else entirely. It was faint, but warning bells were ringing in Alice's mind.

"Ria, stay up there." Alice called out, warning Ria not to jump down as doing so might be dangerous for her.

Walking up to the walls, Alice noticed faint marks between the rocks and glided her finger across the surface.

'Half-dried blood. Not quite powdered form... The consistency is quite thin too... But this is definitely Abyss Blood.' Alice thought with a frown as she held the blood to her nose and smelled the scent.

It was faint, and the sewage smell covered the scent, but she was familiar with the feeling she felt from this blood.

"Is something wrong?" Ria called out while Alice was trying to figure out the composition of the blood. She had definitely smelled this scent and combination of blood before, back in the Zenia prison.

"There's Abyss Blood down here. Vapor Spider Blood mixed with Nightmare Jackle and Phantom Pod. Effects are most prominent while being inhaled, causes hallucinations and agitation.

It also dulls your reaction speed and makes it so that you become hard-focused on what you're trying to accomplish that you ignore everything around you." Alice recited, as this was a byproduct of the scholars making her ingest the combination of blood.

With them inhaling the fumes, they had lost track of themselves and began to experiment without care for her survival and had almost killed her on the operating table. The madness in their eyes was especially clear that day.

"What the... How do you know?" Ria asked, blinking her eyes in surprise as all she saw was Alice walk up to a wall and smell the dust between the gaps. Yet that was enough for her to recognize the combination and Abyss Blood types.

"Just experience." Alice shrugged, as 10 years of having everything burned to memory through pain allowed her to recognize the blood that had been used on her. Climbing up using her dagger and threads, Alice sat down on the platform and frowned.

"It seemed to be recently applied so it's a sign that we're getting close. But going further might be dangerous for you." Alice glanced at Ria, as there was no telling what other blood might be down there.

"Shall we report back to the City Lord then? They can check out the rest of it since we've already found a clue about where they are." Ria suggested.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice nodded her head as this was far too dangerous for Ria.

'I don't have any issues with this, but the same can't be said for Ria. If we enter the more dangerous parts and inhale blood that takes effect immediately, Ria will die before I can make a move. Even with my flames.'

Turning around, they prepared to make their way back when Ria stopped for a moment and activated all of her Sigils at once. Entering her resonance, she gathered a spear of lightning and stabbed behind Alice.

*BANG!!!!

Widening her eyes in surprise, Alice jumped out of the way and glanced back. She saw a woman who was about to stab her with a blade of ice.

"Hou~ I didn't think your senses would be so sharp." Tasia raised an eyebrow as her original plan was for them to approach the tunnels yet Alice backed off after noticing something was wrong. She had decided to eliminate the split-haired girl first as her knowledge of Abyss Blood seemed concerning yet the other girl had actually managed to block her attack.

'Her lightning is stronger than average. She seems to be using four Sigils... I can finish this quickly.' Tasia thought to herself while kicking Ria's wrist and threw an ice dagger at Alice who parried with her own weapon. The force of the collision sent Alice rolling back as she could feel her wrists becoming numb just from blocking!

"Ria! She has six Sigils!" Alice shouted out as she never expected to be ambushed by someone with six Sigils. The fact that Ria was actually able to block just even one strike was enough to prove how powerful she was despite only having four Sigils!

Squinting her eyes, Tasia was surprised that Alice had figured out that she has six Sigils. She had made sure to only use 3 during that assassination attempt. 'How did that girl know? Regardless, I should make this quick. The City would've definitely noticed the fluctuation of power right now.'

Adjusting her posture, she was about to attack Ria, expecting her to be on the defensive. However, to her disbelief, Ria did not hesitate to strike out towards her despite the gap in power!

Ria understood that she needed the physical powers to match against this woman if she wanted a chance at survival! Charging into close range, Ria slammed her elbow towards the woman's chest as she blocked with her palm. Following up with a kick towards the knee, Ria activated her resonance ability and enhanced her physical capabilities to its limit!

Several motes of lightning manifested around her and coated her body with a protective layer.

Letting out a shout, Ria punched down on the platform with countless bolts of lightning crashing down around her, forcing Tasia to jump back as she didn't expect this kind of firepower from her. Just as she landed on her feet, Alice's dagger swung around a pillar and pierced towards her with a violet flame dancing on the blade.

Seeing this, Tasia flicked her fingers, preparing to ward off the blade with her ice as the fire was invoking a sense of unease in her heart. "!!!" Widening her eyes, Tasia noticed that her ice wasn't forming and had to bend her body back to avoid the flames.

'Gotcha!' Alice shouted in her mind as she pulled her thread, causing the dagger to be pulled back and swung towards her head!

*BANG!!!!

A blade of ice pierced up from the ground and knocked the dagger aside as Tasia regained control of her Sigils. 'What the hell was that?!' She thought to herself with caution as she didn't expect her abilities to malfunction. Even if it was just for a split moment.

Re-evaluating how dangerous Alice was, Tasia crouched down before disappearing from her spot. Even with the capabilities of Cayla, Alice couldn't react in time as Tasia was about to stab her in her throat using her daggers. Ria had reacted instantly but she was still a step too slow!

Before the dagger could reach Alice, a black blade slammed down from above.

"Attempted murder of a Hunter I commissioned personally, crimes of being a member of the Cult of the Eclipse while inside the city blessed by the Sun, ties with the outbreak in the slums. Your crimes are heavy, and nothing short of a death sentence shall cleanse your sins." Kallus' voice rang out as Alice glanced up and saw that Kallus was now wearing armour.

"My my, what an honour. To be visited by the City Lord himself despite your busy schedule." Tasia smiled. Flicking her wrist, a blade of ice appeared behind Alice and Ria and stabbed towards their hearts. Yet before they could find their target, a shield appeared and blocked the attack.

Seeing this, Alice and Ria understood that this was their cue to leave as staying behind would only risk death!

Without hesitation, the two dashed towards the exit while Kallus was grateful that they were quick on the uptake.

'Bishop Tasia. Sighted near Blackrock City. She is a step away from attaining the role of Archbishop within the Cult.' Kallus thought to himself as black mist started to wrap around his body. Activating his resonance, he decided to spare no effort in eliminating a future Archbishop!

Running to the original tunnels, Alice and Ria could sense the eruption of power behind them as they dashed towards the exit.

"She seems to be covering for the true culprits for the outbreak." Alice frowned.

"How do you know?"

"There's no smell of Abyss Blood on her body. The blood on the walls was recently applied and it's not a smell that can easily be erased. She's not the one who put them there meaning she's more like a guard." Alice explained.

"What do we do then?"

"Let's find the other exits and let Elyn and the guards know about what's happening. We need to catch the ones responsible for the parasites." Alice narrowed her eyes. But that wasn't the only reason. The secondary reason was so that she could figure out the connection between the Zenia's and the Cult!

Making their way out of the sewer tunnels, they could hear the cries of distant screams and the clashing of weapons. The voices of those in command shouting out instructions to the guard while helping with the evacuations.

Widening her eye, Alice used her dagger to climb onto the rooftops and saw the chaos that was occurring within the city square. Countless half-beasts mutated beyond recognition ran across the streets, slamming into houses and grabbing whoever was closest to them and infecting them with the same parasite.

The effects were less pronounced than the samples she saw in the castle and the slums but this was no doubt the same parasite albeit a different variant! They had to contain this outbreak or else the damage would go beyond repair!

