

Abyssal A 201

Chapter 201 - 201: The Dragon's Breath

Arriving at a bar known as the Dragon's Breath, Alice couldn't help but admire the building.

It stood tall and imposing with a single signboard showcasing a dragon breathing out a torrent of flames. The entrance was flanked by torches housing a flickering blue flame, casting a spectral glow on the entrance.

As she stepped through the door, it felt as though she was transported to a brand new world.

The interior of the building was bustling yet much to her surprise, all she could hear was murmuring. She couldn't quite make out what they were saying no matter how hard she tried. A thin veil blocked her from making out what they were saying.

In the background, music played yet Alice couldn't find the band that was playing.

Continuing into the bar, the aroma of food, alcohol and scented candles filled the air as the lighting of the interior was rather dim. It was only illuminated by the glowing shelves displaying different bottles of alcohol along with lights above the different tables.

Standing in the middle of all of this, Alice couldn't help but feel as though she was out of place as she didn't expect something of this level. Her initial expectation was a rather standard rowdy bar.

Making her way to the bar where several seats were placed in front of it, Alice sat down and glanced over to the bartender.

Due to the light from the display behind him, his features were completely obscured and even trying to focus on his face didn't help.

"Judging by your body language, you must be a new traveller to this port." The bartender smiled as he walked over while cleaning an empty cup.

"Hm? Oh! Yes, I am. What's with this place?" Alice asked curiously, glancing over to the different tables spread through the building.

"Ah~ You must be confused by the secrecy. It's one of the shining features of our establishment. We are rather confident in our ability to help you keep matters confidential should you decide to hold a meeting here. As the best bar in an international port, it's only natural." He explained with a light laugh.

"You can think of it as a protective measure since it is applied to the staff here as well. Even now, the voice you are hearing is not my real voice and my figure, not my real figure. It gives noble families more confidence in us should they decide to visit rather than hosting private parties. Of course, this means that the meetings conducted here are usually for nefarious matters such as murder."

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but raise an eyebrow as he pulled out a mirror from behind the bar.

Placing it in front of Alice, he took a step back as Alice realised that her own figure was obscured as well.

Blinking her eyes in surprise, she paused in realisation and understood it must've been the blue flames by the entrance.

"Seems like you understand the allure of this place. Now how may I help you?"

"Well... I'm here for some mead." Alice replied honestly. She just didn't expect the bar to be this kind of place when she was simply here to get a drink.

"Ohya? Most interesting. Can I ask what kind of mead you are... Looking for?" The bartender chuckled softly.

"I'm thinking something spicy but sweet. Not too harsh on the body."

"I see... A gentle time. Understood. Any preference on time of service?" He nodded as Alice felt confused by his response but dismissed the feeling for now.

"As soon as possible. I still need to catch an airship so I can't stay for long."

"I will see what I can do. I will give you a list of our catalogue once I check the availability. In the meantime please enjoy this complimentary drink." He bowed before pouring a pink alcohol into a small glass and pushing it before Alice.

"Oh? Thank you."

She didn't think they would give her a free drink on top of what she wanted to order.

Bringing the glass to her nose, she gave the alcohol a smell. A soft floral scent drifted from the liquid with a tinge of sweetness.

Taking a sip, Alice could feel the alcohol going through her body as warmth spread through her body in an instant. Licking her lips, Alice couldn't help but sigh out in satisfaction.

Just as she finished her drink, the bartender came back with a list and pictures next to the time.

But once Alice laid her eyes on the contents, she froze up in a mixture of confusion and stock.

"Erm... I'm pretty sure I ordered mead?" Alice forced a smile while the bartender tilted his head at her response.

"Yes?... Wait... Are you talking about the drink mead or do you mean the... service mead." The bartender asked hesitantly.

"The f*cks a service mead?"

Coughing awkwardly, the bartender hesitated before opening his mouth.

"The bedroom service kind. My apologies, since you described mead as not too harsh on the body, I had assumed you read the sign. And understood what you were asking for." He bowed with embarrassment as he pointed to the sign behind him. It was next to the display of alcohol and clearly stated the code words of this establishment.

The code words ranged from poker to different types of food and finally, mead.

[Mead = Massage, Ecstasy and Desires]

"!!!" Widening her eyes in horror, blood rushed to Alice's face as she was so focused on the alcohol on the shelf that she didn't even see the sign next to it.

Hiding her face out of shame, Alice took a deep breath and sighed.

"I... Just want to fill my flask with some me- alcoholic beverages for the journey ahead since it'll take a week." Alice explained, suppressing the desire to crawl into a hole and hide herself.

"Once again I'm sorry for the mix up. It's just... hardly anyone comes here just for the alcohol since it's complimentary with the service we provide. But since this is my mistake, please let me compensate you." He apologised sincerely as he had truly never seen anyone come to this establishment just for alcohol.

'Once you enter this place, it should feel no different to the deep layers of the Howling Depths. Does this person not feel anything? Who would believe someone like this is just here for alcohol? Or is it some other code word I haven't remembered?' He thought to himself.

Those who treated this place as a normal bar would find themselves struggling to move from the malevolent aura emanating from this place. Yet she was sitting here just fine and wanting a simple refill of her flask.

Not wanting to make another mistake, he decided to ignore the abnormalities and refill her flask with the highest grade mead they had.

"Here you go, your flask has been refilled. Once again I apologize for my mistake of misunderstanding your intentions. I hope you can forgive me."

"Ah it's fine. It's my fault too for not reading the sign." Alice waved her hand as she was in the wrong. She should've seen the sign and asked the moment his response felt weird.

Looking back, it truly sounded like she was asking for a bed warmer to spend some time with.

'Urg... I'm going to take this secret with me to my grave. If Ria found out... Yeah no she'll definitely laugh at me.' She sighed inwardly. Thanking the bartender once more, Alice stood up and left the establishment.

Leaving the door, Alice could feel the concealment effect lingering on her so long as she was near the strange blue flames but once she stepped away, it disappeared.

'What a strange thing... I wonder if I could take a sample of it. Nah, I don't want to test my luck.'

Whoever had created this establishment knew what they were doing and she didn't want to annoy someone like that accidentally. She couldn't even sense the abyssal energy flowing through the establishment hence why she didn't realise something was off.

Shaking her head, Alice turned around and left when she noticed a group of three preparing to enter the bar.

Stepping to the side so as to not bump into them, Alice was about to walk away when she noticed a crest embroidered on their jacket.

'Dagger in a heart... Isn't that the crest of the Morrigan family?' Alice paused in surprise as the Morrigan family was one of the families responsible for Abyss Blood production before the Zenia family took over.

After the sudden rise of the Zenia's, they could only survive as a family that supplied the nobles with high-purity blood at their request.

'If I remember correctly, they should be a Blood Harvesting family now...' Alice thought to herself before walking away.

She understood that with how famous the Silverwind Academy was with it being located in the self-destruct site of an Abyss Lord, she shouldn't be surprised if famous noble families were to show up.

Especially if it was the Zenia family.

Placing her hand over her chest, Alice furrowed her brows as she didn't know how she would react.

Would she have another panic attack? Would she lash out in anger? Or could she hold back her fury and simply watch?

Allura wasn't here to protect her right now and she had to be responsible for her own actions.

Thinking to herself, Alice made up her mind. Depending on the rules of the Academy, and if she saw anyone she knew, she'd work within its boundaries to achieve her goals.

'If I want to get dispose of any Zenia's I come across, I'll need to do so quietly. How would I even hide my identity? My split hair isn't exactly common in the Abyss.' Alice thought to herself.

Strolling through the port, her mind was solely focused on how she would get away with a murder should she find a member of the Zenia family.

Chapter 202 - 202: Boarding The Airship

". . ."

Looking at the scene in front of her, Alice was speechless.

Massaging her eyes, she wasn't sure how she should react.

"Didn't you say... You were just going to find the gambling arena? How did you even end up in this situation?" She sighed, looking at Ria who was chained and cuffed up in a cell.

"Ahahaha... That's a bit of a long story." Ria smiled awkwardly. She wanted to scratch her cheek but due to her restraints, she was unable to.

Sighing deeply, Alice wondered how she should proceed. After she left the Dragon's Breath, she went to look for Ria. However, following the traces of her blood bead, she found herself in front of the guard house where Ria had been apprehended due to misconduct.

"I'm sorry for what my friend caused. Would it be alright if I take her from here?" Alice asked as she glanced over to the guard next to her.

"That's fine. Just make sure she doesn't cause any more trouble. The first instance is just a warning, if it happens again we'll take no responsibility if you were to miss your airship." The guard explained. Opening the cell, he unlocked her restraints and gestured for her to leave.

"Phew finally. I was wondering how long I'll have to wait for them to let me out." Ria smiled in relief while massaging her wrists.

"So care to explain the whole story now?"

"Sure. So for you see, after I had found the gambling arena, I signed myself up for it as per usual. Looking to earn some coin for my wallet.

"However, after my first match, I had some pompous ass trying to invite me to dinner or some crap. Of course, I rejected him but he didn't understand the word no so I tried to explain that I'm just here to gamble. Nothing more nothing less. Can you even guess what he decided to say next?" Ria huffed while rolling her eyes.

"What did he say next?"

"He asked if I wanted to gamble with him. And to make it more 'spicy' he said why don't we gamble with our body on the line? Honestly after hearing that I decided to hit him in the face. Turns out his guards didn't take kindly to that so I started to fight his guards.

After the first wave another wave came, some people got dragged in and it spiralled into the entire gambling arena fighting one another." Ria shrugged as though it was just an everyday scenario.

Meanwhile, Alice could only blink her eyes in disbelief.

"I get why you would hit him but why the hell did the entire arena start to fight one another? How did it even spiral to that extent???"

"I dunno, don't look at me. I was just focused on punching the pompous ass." Ria shrugged her shoulders before stretching her body.

"So what did you do in the meantime? Did you get the mead you wanted?"

"I did. A full flask hehe~ I have to admit this mead is actually quite nice. One of these days I should learn how to make it myself so I can always keep a supply on me." Alice chuckled while patting the flask on her waist.

"OH? If you're saying it's good then it must be some fine mead." Ria remarked as Alice's taste for mead had only gotten more expensive as time went on.

After leaving the guard house, the two made their way to the docks as they decided to spend the rest of the time making themselves comfortable on the airship.

With Alice not wanting to repeat the misunderstanding in the Dragon's Breath and Ria not wanting to get apprehended again, they registered their arrival and waited for the airship to be open for boarding.

Waiting by the waiting rooms, Alice couldn't help but wonder why they couldn't board yet. Considering the actual airship itself was ready by the docks.

The airship that loomed over the docks was a magnificent sight to behold.

The ship itself was adorned with intricate designs and patterns that spoke of detailed artistry yet the sturdiness of the ship itself could not be underestimated.

Unlike standard ships, there were no masts that would guide its path. Instead, there seemed to be a harness that lacked a wearer at the moment to which Alice could only assume the beast hadn't arrived yet.

'Beasts are usually killed on sight with very few being captured alive for other purposes. I wonder what kind of beast will be carrying this airship.' Alice mused to herself as she could see the crew scurrying about on the deck of the airship, making final preparations for departure.

"This will be your first experience with an airship right?"

"Mnm. Though I assume the novelty will probably wear off after the first hour or so." Alice shrugged. She didn't understand the excitement and enjoyment that came with riding a vehicle like this. To her, it was no different to a ship or a carriage but this time it was through the sky.

"Boo no fun. I'm sure once you see the sights it offers you'll think otherwise." Ria chuckled.

"Perhaps. I don't mind a surprise so long as it's not finding you locked in a cell again."

"Arg... Don't remind me. I should've just left but you don't understand. His face was just so... punchable after he suggested that crap to me." Ria sighed while resting her chin on her hand.

"Bah forget it." Waving her hand in annoyance, Ria closed her eyes and rested her mind while waiting for their turn to board the airship.

After waiting for 30 minutes, the staff called them over as the final preparations were finished.

Stepping onto the ship, Alice couldn't help but wonder what kind of beast was even able to lift up such a mass of materials like this through the sky.

Thinking about how heavy this construct was, it seemed crazy that a beast could even support this kind of weight.

But most importantly...

'What kind of power would its blood give me if I drank it? Would I be able to carry the ship through the sky as well?' Alice mused to herself curiously. However, she would probably run out of power before she could even go anywhere. There was only so much she could do since Abyss Blood effects were only temporary for her.

Shaking her head, she made her way to her room and put away her luggage. She wasn't carrying much considering it was just a few sets of clothing and her sword.

"Have you finished unpacking?" Ria asked as she poked her head out of her room.

"I'm not carrying that much you know? We'll be spending a week on this ship, please tell me we have a bit of entertainment or is the only entertainment the scenery around here?" Alice asked as she strapped her sword to her waist.

"Oh! Let me give you a quick tour then. Most of the airship layouts are pretty similar so I should be able to find my way around this one quite easily. And as much as I would like to say there's a training facility, there is nothing like that on the ship. If an accident was to happen and the ship gets damaged, it would be quite the issue." Ria chuckled as she waited for Alice.

"Then what is the entertainment if not training?"

"Bleh it's always training with you. Some bands will be performing throughout the trip. A few plays and bards coming to tell some stories from faraway lands." Ria explained but Alice seemed uninterested.

Seeing this, Ria tried to think of other activities before sighing and relenting to Alice's gaze.

"Fine okay there are a few training facilities. But they're mostly for building body strength or correcting your posture. Nothing too intense. But are you really going to use this time for more training rather than loosening yourself up with some fun activities?" Ria asked as Alice thought about it for a moment before nodding her head.

"Unless there's a bar with good mead you can count me out. Plus... Now that I think about it, when have you been interested in band performances and bards? Let me guess, there's gambling tables for you to enjoy?" Alice asked as Ria flinched at the mention of gambling.

". . . I f*cking knew it. Will the gambling involve fighting? Or is it just normal gambling?" Alice asked with a sigh.

"Just normal gambling ahaha. They don't allow fighting on board the ship after all. But think about it, since we're here for a week anyways, we may as well earn a bit of coin as enrolment fees." Ria grinned.

Sighing out softly, Alice could only nod her head since she wasn't wrong. Their funds right now weren't exactly plentiful after spending over 200 gold just on travel.

'Ria only won one match before getting into trouble. All things considered, we only have 77 gold and 50 silver right now. I don't know how expensive the enrolment fee is but it's probably more than what we have right now. Hmm...'

"I suppose you're right. Since we're spending a week here we may as well procure some funds and never mind. Let's just focus on getting some funds." Alice smiled. She cut herself off from saying that they should stay out of trouble too. However, trouble follows them everywhere and even mentioning it could jinx things for them.

"That's the spirit hehe~ Let's go check out the main deck first. We'll be taking off soon so you'll be able to see the beast up close and the scenery as we ascend." Ria grinned, leading the way to the deck of the ship while Alice followed closely behind.

Even though she had expressed her disinterest, there was a hint of curiosity in her heart regardless. She had seen the airships in Eldoria but this was clearly a different type of airship.

As her first time on this kind of vehicle, there was bound to be some curiosity. However, as they left the corridor leading to their rooms, Ria paused mid step as they came face to face with another group of people.

Chapter 203 - 203: A Beast To Carry The Airship

Accidentally bumping into Ria, Alice furrowed her brows and peaked over her shoulders to see what was going on. In front of them was a group of three who were also staring back in a mixture of surprise and shock.

In the middle was a young man who stood tall, his demeanour exuding an air of importance and arrogance.

He wore a distinctive attire of a Hunter except it was mixed with accessories befitting a noble. Rather than a proper Hunter gear, it felt more like an imitation than the real deal. Intricate designs are embroidered onto the soft fabric along with a crest depicting his family.

Flanking on either side were what seemed to be his two bodyguards, both radiating a threatening aura as though onlookers shouldn't even think about approaching their young master.

One was a woman who wielded a gleaming sword with barbs extending from the guard. Her stance is poised and ready for action and her eyes reveal her hostility towards Ria.

The other was a man who wore metallic gloves that reminded Alice of her own. He wore a shirt with a sleeveless tunic and a pair of suit pants and shoes. He stood in front of the young man while preparing to fight.

"How the hell are you on this airship!?" The young man questioned as his face twisted with disgust.

"It's got nothing to do with you. Why don't you f*ck off with your shitty guards or do you want to fight round two? I let you off easily last time. How about I break a few bones this time?" Ria retorted as lightning crackled from her body.

Seeing this, Alice understood that a fight could break out at a moment's notice and doing so before the airship departed could mean trouble.

If Ria were to get apprehended once more, they wouldn't be able to make their trip to Silverwind Valley.

Thinking about this, Alice decided to take matters into her own hands.

"Let's just take it easy, okay? The ship's about to depart. We're going to be staying here for a week, why don't we just ignore one another?" Alice smiled as she remembered how some of the staff acted in order to dispel tension between people.

Sometimes it felt easier to act as other people than it was to react as herself.

After all, the easiest course of action would be to kill them but that would cause a myriad of other issues.

"Shut the f*ck up you split-haired freak of nature. Who the hell do you think you are to interrupt my conversation?" He sneered.

*PUCHI!

Feeling as though a vein was about to pop, Alice narrowed her eyes as her smile slowly faded away.

'How should I kill him? I'll need to hide the body and make it fast if I don't want to alert anyone else on the ship. If I use strong attacks, they'll feel it. However... I can probably turn my bracelet into a hook and dig out their brain by the time they can react. I'll be able to take care of two but the third is an issue if I don't want to alert anyone.'

Thoughts flashed past her mind but Alice managed to reign in her thirst for blood and simply reached into her pouch.

"You know, it's not exactly pleasing to be called a freak of nature in our first meeting. Shouldn't you be more cordial with people you first meet?" Alice sighed, causing the young man to glance at her with disdain.

But before he could say anything, Alice flicked a bead towards them before snapping her fingers.

After doing so, she simply walked past them while Ria wanted to stop her.

"Wait!... Huh?" Noticing that the three weren't doing anything, Ria tilted her head in confusion.

"Just some hallucinations. Hold your breath when you walk past them and it should be fine." Alice explained nonchalantly. If they wanted to avoid any conflict and without bloodshed, her first Sigil would do the trick.

"I see... Well, I guess that avoids things for now." Ria shrugged, following behind Alice.

Glancing back, she couldn't help but think about how easy it would be for Alice to kill them right now.

"We'll keep things civil. They won't be able to do much once the airship's taken off but if we were to cause trouble and delay the take-off then they could still arrest us." Alice shrugged as Ria understood why she didn't do anything.

Even after he called her a freak of nature.

"I'm surprised you didn't kill them." Ria sighed, glancing back at the motionless trio who were trapped in a hallucination.

"Like I said, I don't want to cause trouble before we take off. But the little sh*t called me a freak of nature so I let him have a taste of what I had to go through. I'd imagine he's probably in the middle of having his organs removed and replaced with different contraptions to pump him with Abyss Blood." Alice smiled devilishly as Ria felt a chill down her spine.

"Sh*t forget I even said anything then. How long do you think it'll take for them to break out of it?"

"If they're strong and have a strong will to match, they should be out of it around now." Alice muttered while glancing back.

Collapsing on his knee, the male guard panted heavily as his face was pale and sweat covered his body.

His pupils trembled from what he had just witnessed as he repeatedly patted his body to make sure it was just a hallucination and nothing more.

"Seems like one of them managed to get out. The other two might take a while." Alice smiled.

Just as they were about to leave, the two sensed a wave of danger behind them as they instantly turned around and saw several threads shooting towards their heads.

Twisting her body to dodge the threads, Alice narrowed her eyes and glanced behind her. The threads weaved with one another to block their path and she could only sigh.

"Must you really go this far? Don't you have your master to protect? Your colleague hasn't even broken out of the hallucination yet, dog. You're barking up the wrong tree." Alice asked as she didn't know what was going on in his head for him to attack them again. Two of them were incapacitated too.

Hearing no response, Alice scratched her hair and turned to Ria.

"Want to deal with him or should I?"

"I'm pretty sure if I dealt with him he's either gonna get fried or die, depending on his durability. I'm sure the staff here wouldn't appreciate that very much." Ria chuckled since her power was far too destructive to just simply incapacitate someone.

It was simply a sign of her own lack of control which she needed more training for.

"Alright." Nodding her head, Alice turned to the guard before stomping down and dashing forward without hesitation.

Seeing this, the guard reacted by slamming his hand down and creating a wave of threads to slow her approach.

Formulating several plans in his mind, he created a large array of defensive traps and web spears before shooting it at Alice who could only furrow her brows and parry the attacks before being forced back.

"Aside from your hallucinations you're just all talk!" He called out with a grin as he noticed his co-worker waking up from her own hallucination.

With the two of them combined, dealing with a bunch of young brats should be easy.

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"Poor b*stard." Ria sighed seeing the man twitching on the floor with a forced grin.

"Meh, he's the one who wanted to fight again." Alice shrugged.

The moment she charged towards him, she detonated another bead and threw him into a hallucination before slamming his head into the ground.

"Anyways, I didn't kill him so it should be fine? Plus he's the one who attacked us so self-defence. . . I think."

"But aren't you the one who used the hallucination on them first?" Ria raised an eyebrow.

". . . We don't talk about that. Let's leave quickly." Alice laughed awkwardly as the two scuttled away from the crime scene and made their way to the deck of the airship.

Finding an empty spot along the railings, Alice leaned forward and noticed a faint shadow approaching from the skies.

The clouds were blocking the beast's figure as all she could see was a blurred silhouette.

However, once it broke out of the clouds, she was able to see its full figure.

A colossal whale on the scale of the Abyss Lords, perhaps even bigger floated its way towards them as four large fins acted as its wings. Its body was divided into two distinct halves, each portraying a different landscape that contracted one another yet held a sense of harmony.

The underside of the whale resembled the vast expanse of an astral sea. A tapestry of colours and stars that danced across its body and shimmered with bands of light that looked like silk. Waves of iridescent blues, purples and greens coalesced into an otherworldly spectacle that seemed to stretch on infinitely.

In stark contrast, the top half resembled a series of lush islands floating amidst this astral sea. Clusters of verdant forests, mountains and waterfalls adorned its back, creating a painting of a different world atop this beast's back.

Together, the two halves of the whale created a breathtaking sight. To the extent of which that even Alice was mesmerised by this sight and didn't have any words she could offer in awe of this beast.

[Starborne Wanderer - ♦♦♦♦♦]

As the two watched in silence, the Starborne Wanderer hovered above the airship as riders atop the whale jumped down and began to attach the harnesses.

Once everything was attached, the beast began to fly into the abyssal sky with the airship in tow.

Their destination, Silverwind Valley.

Chapter 204 - 204: Training Facility Within The Airship

As the Starborne Wanderer soared above the skies, its colossal form casting a shadow upon the lands below. The people living in the port looked up and waved their hands as the giant beast departed their city.

Enjoying the view of their surroundings as they ascended past the clouds, Alice took a deep breath and smiled.

Perhaps this was what freedom felt like. The ability to enjoy a simple scenery without worry.

This thought only reaffirmed her desire to get stronger so she could dispatch the Zenia family.

"Shall we head back now? The scenic show is over." Alice asked as Ria nodded her head.

"Sure. We have around a week to enjoy everything this airship has to offer." Ria rubbed her hands expectantly while Alice could only sigh.

"How experienced are you with normal gambling in the first place? You said this place doesn't allow fighting right? So what will you do if the host decides to cheat?" Alice asked curiously since she doubted they were going to let Ria leave with all the money she could potentially win.

Hearing this, Ria's smile faltered as she hadn't thought this far.

She knew that gambling places were rather biased and unless she could prove herself, she wouldn't be able to walk away with her earnings.

So far, she's been earning coin through gambling arenas where she knows she can walk away safely.

But for this airship that's guarded by five star Hunters, a giant beast and guards of nobles all heading to Silverwind Valley? Unlikely.

"Urg... But what else am I supposed to do for a week?" Ria lamented while clutching her chest in sadness.

"Well for starters, you can enjoy a drink with me. That and a bit of training. You said they had training facilities right?" Alice smiled, shaking her flask.

"I mean calling them training facilities is a bit of a stretch. It's more like a place for Nobles to show off their status as well as their bodyguards. Few would actually take the training seriously." Ria sighed.

"Huh? Why?"

"Because why would you want to show off your full strength against your enemies? You have to think of it like this. They're children of powerful nobles. Anything they do may implicate their family and the view people have towards them.

If they were to expose their strength and others realise the future hope of the family is weak, what do you think they would think?" Ria explained as Alice paused in realisation.

Should the future of the family be found lacking the strength to carry the burden, it is only natural that their enemies would plan for their destruction and to absorb their assets for themselves.

"What a shame. Is that the same for the Academy then? If it is I might pass on the enrolment after all. Sounds boring if everyone is hiding their strength and no one takes it seriously." Alice sighed in disappointment.

"Oh don't get me wrong, the Academy is a different thing entirely. They hide their strength outside but inside the Academy, every little helps.

"You see, the Academy is sponsored by the several Great Families of the Abyss and with it being located in the middle of an Abyss Lord's self-destruction, it serves as a prime location of study. No one in their right mind would give up such a precious opportunity so everyone who goes to the Academy, unless they have ulterior motives, would showcase everything or close to everything they've got.

That way, they can prove that they're most deserving of the resources provided by the Academy."

Nodding her head in understanding, Alice sighed in relief. While her main goal may be to bargain for as much high quality mead as possible, she's not against actually studying should it help her grow in strength.

The studies may yet open more doors towards her ability much like her discovery of how to control the hallucination of her first Sigil. After gaining her third Sigil, her senses were improved to the point of being able to perceive the flow of energy within the body and inanimate objects.

Using this as a basis, Alice discovered that certain abilities are activated with a unique passage of power through the body. The manner of which is reminiscent of creating a ritual to commune with the Abyss itself.

Considering that the Sigils are a byproduct of a contract to begin with, it was only natural that the source of this power would originate from an act of exchange.

The first step in understanding this discovery was changing the effects of her first Sigil. Originally, her first Sigil would cause the target to hallucinate a scene of their desire.

In the middle of a fight, this meant that they would perceive their victory.

By changing the conditions of the ritual being performed subconsciously, she was able to change this scene of desire into a scene of anything Alice wished for. But in doing so, the drain of using this kind of hallucination caused her to become exhausted much faster with the target building resistance towards her hallucinations.

Not only that, the 'materials' required were increased with the change in effect. If she was able to create 3 hallucinations before without needing to 'replenish' her blood, she would only be able to create 1 of her desired hallucinations with the new change.

Which is why she created the blood bead. A compressed bead of blood that could help her achieve her desired effect.

She had tried to teach this technique of adjusting the ritual to Ria but it seemed as though no matter how hard she tried, Ria wasn't able to do the same. The very act of perceiving the flow of energy was beyond her and perhaps was only available to Alice due to Cayla's influence.

One of the many mysteries Alice has discovered after obtaining Cayla.

"Do you want to practice the new idea you had then? Since we have a week, it should be enough time to turn it from a proof of concept to something we can use in a fight." Alice suggested as Ria thought about it for a moment before nodding her head.

"We might as well use the training facility then. I'm sure they'll have no issues with us using it as intended."

Asking one of the staff where the training facility was, the two made their way down the airship.

The airship itself was split into five main layers. The upper deck where they are right now, the main deck where most of the entertainment such as gambling was held. The lower decks where the residents would sleep.

Beneath the lower deck was the training facility where they were heading.

Following the staff down to the training facility, they listened intently to the rules. Most of it was simply common sense where you don't want to cause trouble for others while the unique rules could be summarised as controlling your output so you don't injure others on the ship.

Even if the training facility had been created with Hunter's in mind, there were always bound to be exceptions and they wanted to avoid such a scenario.

After the staff explained this rule, Ria gave Alice a side glance with a smug grin as Alice acted dumb and ignored her.

Obviously, she wasn't going to use Void Flux in this place. Doing so was simply asking for death since she couldn't fly. And even if Ria could, there was bound to be a limit on her stamina, especially when they were this high up.

After explaining all of the rules, the staff bowed and wished them a good time before leaving.

Left alone, the two could see the full scale of the training facility. To their left, a group of what seemed to be trainee Hunters sparred with wooden weapons while talking with one another. Their movements were controlled and simply mimicked the action of a fight with a constant back and forth.

Rather than training, Alice much preferred to call it an amateur dance since they didn't put their heart into it.

In the centre of the facility was a large space where trainees could be found practising their Sigil powers while their bodyguards would help them with their training.

To their right lay a cluster of corridors and private chambers, each dedicated to a different aspect of training while allowing the users secrecy.

In one of the unoccupied rooms, Alice could see several training dummies and an assortment of weapons. Not only that, the dummies were also surrounded by contraptions that seemed to mimic attacks.

"Now then, I see a few private training rooms and a few fighting rings. There are some training dummies on the side and seems like some of the crew here are training as well. We probably want to use the private rooms if we want to practice the technique." Ria mused.

Nodding her head in agreement, Alice scanned the private chambers to find one that was suitable for their purpose.

"That room looks good. It seems to have a dummy focused on resilience and looks like it measures the power of your output." Alice suggested as Ria glanced over.

"Sure. Though the staff did tell us to control our output so we should be careful just in case." Ria chuckled.

Their idea was simple. It was to use Alice's third Sigil to act as a booster for Ria's attacks! The concept of their technique was to somehow 'fuse' Alice's violet flames with Ria's lightning in a way that allows the fire to burn away the defence before Ria's attack landed.

That way, even if they were resistant towards lightning based attacks, Ria would still be able to cause significant damage.

It was an idea born from Alice's concern regarding her technique. Void Flux was powerful yes. But it was still avoidable unless she took her opponent by surprise or risked losing her own arm to guarantee a hit.

In such a scenario, where Alice couldn't guarantee her strongest attack, she would need to support Ria instead and have her attack while she nullified the opponent's Sigil.

Entering the training room, the two locked the door and began experimenting on how they should manifest this technique in a fight.

Chapter 205 - 205: Ria's Preparation For Arrival

For the next week, their schedule consisted of getting food, testing out new combinations and rest. Occasionally, Alice would visit the bar to enjoy some alcohol since she didn't want to drink all of her mead at once.

Ria on the other hand was tempted with the gambling tables.

After much persuasion, Alice agreed for her to try it out once. The result of which was Ria losing 25 times in a row and losing 30 gold in the process. In the end, she vowed not to play around with gambling tables. Instead, she would gamble at fighting arenas where she knows she could win instead.

Having lost 30 gold, the duo was left with 47 gold in total between them.

As for the young noble whom they ran into on the first day, he avoided them in the rare instances where they would meet. Having laid eyes on Alice, his face would lose colour and his body would tremble at the thought of what had happened before.

The sights he saw and the horrors he felt, it was far too real for just a hallucination.

They were, after all, her own experiences.

Thanks to that, they weren't given any trouble through the week even though she expected the crew to talk to her about the incident.

"We will be arriving in Silverwind Valley shortly. May all passengers collect all of your belongings and prepare for arrival. Please make sure you do not forget anything and should you misplace or lose your items, please talk to the supervisors at the port to inquire about missing items."

Hearing the announcement over the loudspeaker, Alice yawned as she slowly opened her eyes.

She had fallen asleep in the training room since they had gotten a little carried away last night.

Seeing the marks left behind by their training, a smile crept up on Alice's face.

'It's a little difficult to use but not impossible. In the middle of a fight, we should be able to execute this attack with some effort and distractions.' She mused to herself.

Stretching her body, Alice walked over to Ria who had also fallen asleep in the training room and shook her on the shoulder.

"Wakey wakey. The airship is about to arrive."

Letting out an annoyed groan, Ria swatted away Alice's hand as she curled up into a more comfortable position.

Seeing this, Alice sighed and allowed Ria to sleep for a little longer.

Returning to her room, Alice had a shower before looking over her wardrobe once more.

Since they were going to meet Ria's long-time friend, Alice didn't want to look sloppy. Plus, they were going to enrol at the Academy too and according to her old knowledge, first impressions are rather important.

'Even if I'm strong, if I don't look the part the staff at the Academy might hold some bias.' Alice thought to herself as she picked out a few dresses.

'Do I go with a smart look? Serious or cute?'

Furrowing her brows, Alice had a hard time choosing the outfit she wanted since all of them looked good. But in the end, she settled with a rather practical attire that would help her out in combat.

The outfit consisted of a large white jacket with a hood. Oversized sleeves to hide any weapons she may be holding or attacks she might be preparing such as the blood beads.

Beneath the jacket was a large shirt hiding some padding. It wasn't much in terms of protection but better than nothing.

Wearing a pair of shorts and black stockings, she put on a pair of armoured boots that reached just below her knees.

During the week they were training, they weren't solely focused on bringing forth their ideas with the new technique.

Alice wanted to learn more hand to hand combat and who better to ask than Ria. But unlike Ria, Alice lacked the upper body strength to properly attack her opponent so they opted for a fighting style that prioritized kicking rather than punches.

With her flexibility and reactions, Alice turned out to be quite the lethal fighter with her legs.

Which is why she chose a pair of shorts rather than a skirt since she'd rather not reveal herself in the middle of a fight.

Feeling satisfied with her choice of attire, Alice gave herself a light spin to make sure everything looked good.

Packing up her belongings, she made her way back to the training room and saw that Ria had now woken up but was still feeling groggy.

"Seems like you're finally awake. Airships almost reached the destination. They're telling passengers to get their stuff ready." Alice explained with a smile.

Hearing this, Ria paused before jumping up.

"Oh sh*t already? Why didn't you wake me up?!"

"I did but you slapped my hand away." Alice shrugged as Ria dashed back to her room.

Shaking her head with a smile, Alice glanced back at the training room before leaving.

The crew might have a slight headache trying to repair all of the damages but believe it or not, they actually held back a lot.

Arriving at Ria's room, Alice noticed Ria panicking about what she wanted to wear.

"Argh! Dammit this wouldn't work!" Ria cried out in annoyance as she stuffed one of her martial split dresses into her suitcase.

"Why wouldn't it work? I thought you liked that dress quite a bit?" Alice asked curiously as Ria folded her arms.

"I mean yeah but it's lacking something. I dunno... I can just feel it ya know? The moment I wear that Luke will definitely make fun of me. I wanna find something that can really knock him off his senses, make him speechless." Ria explained.

"Oh? Are you trying to impress him?" Alice paused in surprise but Ria shook her head.

"Nope just want to make him speechless that's all. He's always got so much sh*t to say to me so I want to change things. Come on, help me pick something. What do you think will make him speechless?"

"I mean if you really want to make him speechless you can just throw some rainbows and glitter on a tattered dress and vomit some colours on it. I'm pretty sure that'll make anyone speechless not just your friend." Alice smirked, causing Ria to roll her eyes.

"No sh*t. I meant in a good way. Like wow! Way."

"So, to achieve this you decided to ask someone who's been locked away for 10 years? I mean if you trust my aesthetic sense sure, but it might be a bit outdated." Alice warned.

"It's fine. Now which one do you think looks better on me?" Ria asked, showing Alice a selection of five dresses.

With no other choice, Alice sat down and started to help Ria with picking out an outfit.

###

Glancing up at the time, a young man removed his glasses before massaging his eyes.

He was currently sitting by a desk with a mountain of textbooks and notes.

"I think it should be time for Ria to arrive. Her airship should be landing in 30 minutes." He muttered with fatigue.

Closing the book in front of him, he stood up and grabbed his jacket from his seat.

The jacket was black and red in colour and adorned with an intricate golden emblem and embroidery.

Swinging the jacket over his shoulders and allowing them to hang off thanks to the clips, he stepped away from his workstation and prepared to meet his old friend.

He stood at 6ft 2 and had a slender frame. He has muted long purple hair that looked as though it was losing its colour into a grey and was loosely tied into a low pony tail as strands of hair framed his face, swaying with each step that he took. Behind his glasses, a pair of turquoise eyes looked on with fatigue yet there was a sense of dormant power in his gaze.

Beneath the black and red jacket, he wore a sleeveless black vest that contrasted the long-sleeved red shirt he wore under the vest. A pair of suit pants and polished black shoes to match.

Luke Isander. An orphan thanks to the rituals of the Cult of the Eclipse. Much like Ria, he was saved by Gin during his purge of the cult and the two travelled with him for a period of time until Luke decided to branch away and enter the Academy for study.

Yawning softly, Luke didn't notice the small smile he had on his face as this was going to be a reunion long overdue.

Ria mentioned that she was bringing along a friend for this trip but didn't specify any details regarding this friend.

All he could hope was that she was less talented than Ria when it came to stirring up trouble.

For Luke, a quiet life was the best life. Having one person bring chaos with her every time she visited was enough. Two was going to be far too much of a headache.

###

"I think this should be good enough no?" Alice groaned as she felt exhausted from helping Ria pick an outfit.

Every time she made a suggestion Ria would shoot it down with a reason and this has continued until the crew has announced that there were only 10 minutes left until arrival.

"Urg... F*ck it! This should be just fine right?" Ria bit her lip as she glanced into the mirror.

"Don't ask me. I'm not the one trying to make the target speechless. I don't know your friend so it's up to you if you think this is enough." Alice sighed.

However, she had to admit that with the outfit Ria had chosen, she felt like a completely different kind of person.

The usual Ria felt like a crackling bonfire. Exuding energy and a sense of eagerness no matter what she was doing.

As for the current Ria, she was more akin to the gentle moonlight. Soft, charming and elegant.

"Erm... Alright! This will do. I'll make sure I make him speechless today." Ria puffed out her chest as the fires of determination burned bright in her eyes.

Packing the rest of her things into the suitcase, the two arrived at the deck and watched as Silverwind Valley came into view.

Chapter 206 - 206: Arriving In Silverwind Valley

Standing on the deck of the ship, Alice looked on in awe as no words could describe the feeling she felt in her chest.

Even though she had heard the description of the Silverwind Valley, the words failed to live up to the sight she was seeing.

Before her was a mountain range with two colossal peaks piercing into the sky. The sheer size and height was far bigger than anything she had ever seen, yet the way the mountain bent towards a singularity that lay in between these peaks defied the laws of nature.

A swirling orb of darkness that radiated violet lights and consumed everything around it. Absorbing the realm into a chasm of oblivion and distorting the very fabric of space surrounding this orb. This distortion created an inverted world where the skies and land have swapped places.

Staring at this orb from afar, it almost looked like an eye belonging to an unspeakable demon that peered into their realm while the residents were ignorant of its existence.

Embedded into the valley itself were countless buildings and towers. Their architecture blended seamlessly with the natural surroundings and invoked a sense of mysteriousness when paired with the vibrant purple motes of light that danced in the air.

Each mote is akin to a celestial firefly, radiating an ephemeral glow upon the land and with the extinction of a mote, another would appear to replace it.

From the heart of the singularity was a cascade of water that poured forth ceaselessly. Its crystalline streams flowed down to the river between the twin peaks and weaved towards the city below the mountains.

Similar to the strange waters that Ria submerged herself into when choosing a bounty, this river shimmered with a strange, otherworldly light that reflected a myriad of colours that danced from the inverted world around the orb.

But that was just what normal people saw.

Through the gaze of Cayla, Alice observed the invisible reality of energy. Swirling currents of Abyssal energy that was being drawn inexorably towards the heart. A mesmerizing kaleidoscope of colours that pulsed and shifted to the rhythm of a beating heart.

It was a sight that filled her with a mixture of wonder and trepidation, for she did not know what this kind of phenomenon represented. Was the Abyss Lord dead? Are they still alive? Will this orb collapse in on itself?

Countless questions floated past her mind as within that swirling vortex lay countless secrets that defied comprehension.

However, on an instinctual level, Alice felt as though she could sense the emotions of the Abyss itself as its energy surrounded the orb.

Mourning.

'The Abyss... is mourning the Abyss Lord? Why? All of the Abyss Lords of old were sealed and doomed to repent their sins apparently... How come the Abyss is mourning this one? Or was it mourning the others and I simply wasn't privy to that information?' Alice thought to herself as the airship came to a stop at the port.

"Oh gods we're here... urg... I'm feeling nervous now." Ria lamented as she bit her lips while hiding behind Alice.

It was quite the comical sight considering the fact that Alice was a head shorter than Ria.

"I mean it's now or never. Didn't you send a message to him that you were going to arrive? Though if you want to stand him up we can just sneak out and try not to bump into him." Alice chuckled seeing Ria feeling nervous.

She who wouldn't even flinch in the face of a beast was now nervous at what her friend thought regarding her outfit.

"Look, if you want, you can use me as a cover. Point out where your friend is and I'll walk you there then you can step out when you're ready. How does that sound?" She offered.

Nodding her head without hesitation, Ria took a deep breath and hid behind Alice as the two of them stepped down from the deck and made their way through the docks in search of Ria's friend.

###

'Where's Ria? The ship's been docked for a while now but she's nowhere to be seen...' Luke sighed as he was currently sitting on a bench by the entrance of the docks.

Seeing the masses of people leave the ship, he couldn't help but feel more worried as time went on.

'Did... Did she get lost? Surely not... Right? Ria's not that directionally challenged that she can't find a ship. Or is she? Sh*t.' Sighing in anxiousness, Luke bounced his right leg up and down as the seconds passed by.

Yet there was no sign of Ria.

It wasn't until the final passenger had stepped off the ship did he prepare to leave.

However, he noticed a strange girl walking towards him.

She had split hair with one side being white while the other being a dark purple. A pair of curious eyes tinged with a hint of helplessness.

Luke wondered if her eye and hair were the results of Abyss Blood intake or something else since side effects are usually more... pronounced depending on the blood you drank. Rarely would it look harmless like this.

Naturally, he didn't know the effects she was suffering from but for all he knew she could be blind in the right eye.

"Sorry to be a bother but are you perhaps Luke?" Alice called out with a small smile as the man in front of him blinked his eyes in confusion before nodding his head.

Seeing the height comparison, Alice couldn't help but complain inwardly as everyone in the Abyss seemed abnormally tall, especially Allura while she herself was a meagre 5 foot 2 in comparison.

Squinting her eyes in displeasure, she hid her inner thoughts before carrying the usual smile.

"Yes I am. And you are?" Luke nodded his head.

"Alice Agnelia. A pleasure to meet you. Ria has told me much about you but..."

"Did that girl get lost again? Please don't tell me she got lost and missed the airship. If that's the case then I'll have to commission some people to look for her." Luke sighed as he took off his glasses and massaged his eyes.

"Well... I can guarantee that she didn't get lost." Alice smiled awkwardly as she noticed Ria trembling in annoyance while hiding behind some cover.

'When is she even going to come out.' She chuckled before turning back to Luke.

"Oh? She didn't get lost? Impossible. If she didn't get lost then where is she?" He asked, looking around the port but couldn't spot anyone that would match the description of Ria.

"You're quite certain that she got lost huh?"

"I'm not sure if you know this but her sense of direction is pretty abysmal. I'm not talking about standard forgetfulness no. I'm talking about she'll leave the house and never come back because she mistook someone else's house as her own and forgot her way back." Luke explained before standing up.

"I'll have you know my sense of direction has improved dipsh*t!"

Unable to hold herself back anymore, Ria stepped out of her hiding spot and stormed towards her long-time friend in annoyance.

Hearing the familiar voice, a smile appeared on Luke's face as he prepared to recount a few tales regarding her sense of direction. Yet the moment he turned towards her, his smile froze.

She wore a delicate white dress, the fabric billowing around her slender frame with each movement. Silver embroidery traced intricate patterns along the hem of the dress in the design of flowers. The dress itself was modest in length, almost reaching her knees while revealing her slender legs.

Frilled sleeves adorned her arms, giving her an almost vulnerable aura.

On her feet, she wore a pair of silver coloured shoes to match her accessories.

But despite all of this, her language broke the illusion of a frail girl.

"The f*ck do you mean my directional sense is abysmal? If anything same could be said for you when you forgot to eat for 3 days and had to have me kick down your damn door and force-feed you so you didn't f*cking die!" Ria raged, forgetting her original goal of making Luke speechless.

Granted, she achieved her goal as Luke was indeed speechless but she hadn't noticed.

"Well?" Ria pouted seeing no reaction.

"You... Did you get your head kicked in by an Abyss Beast? I knew you were insane but at least you dressed the part back then. The hell is all this?" Luke asked as he recovered his composure.

"!?!?!!" Widening her eyes, Ria felt the urge to smack him in the arm as they had spent quite a lot of time choosing this outfit yet all he had to say was to ask her if she got her head kicked by a beast?!

"I don't know about you two but I'd rather not walk around with suitcases in tow. Perhaps we can find a inn to stay at for now before we continue to argue?" Alice asked, gesturing to the people who were turning their heads towards the trio.

After all, they didn't control their voices at all so everyone could hear what they were talking about.

Realising that she was still out in public, Ria felt a little embarrassed but recovered her composure.

"Ah sorry about that. Please, let me show you the way to the Inn. How long will you be staying in Silverwind Valley?" Luke asked curiously as he offered to carry their suitcases.

Without hesitation, Ria threw her suitcase towards him since she wanted to get a bit of revenge while Alice rejected the offer.

"We'll be staying here for a while. Me and Alice will be enrolling for a short period and see what we can get from it. We still need to travel to the mainland after this." Ria explained while walking ahead of the two.

"You? Wanting to study?"

"Ha- Ha- very funny jackass." Ria rolled her eyes while giving him the middle finger.

Shaking his head with a smile, Luke walked on ahead and showed them to a relatively cheap Inn that they could afford without any issues.

Chapter 207 - 207: Luke Isander

Helping the two find an inn to stay at for now, he decided that it was time to properly introduce himself to Alice now that they found a place to stay.

"Sorry for the late introductions but as you've probably heard from Ria, I'm Luke Isander. A pleasure to meet you." Luke bowed politely as Alice returned the bow.

"Alice Agnelia. A pleasure to meet you."

"Now that we have properly introduced ourselves to one another, I believe we can talk about your enrolment to the Academy. I'm not sure how much this stupid duck has explained to you but she

probably said something along the lines of enrolment is rather simple." Luke sighed, glancing towards Ria who felt offended by her nickname.

However, she couldn't quite retort since that's exactly what she told Alice.

"Something along those lines." Alice nodded, sitting down by her bed as the three of them were in her room right now.

Ria sat by the desk and she by the bed while Luke stood by the door.

"I knew it." He sighed.

"You see, while it is true that the enrolment for the Academy could be considered... Easy in some aspects few have actually managed to enrol using these methods."

"Oh? Do you know the details of the test?" Alice raised an eyebrow as Luke spoke as though he knew the details.

"Partially. I was one of the few that passed this test but from what I know, each test given to the contestants is different.

"Mine was to survive and Hunt certain beasts within the inverted world. I couldn't bring anything except the tools I had made myself in order to get my scholarship. Of course, this wasn't the only thing I had to do but it was by far the hardest part of the test if I'm being honest. The theory exam was easy with a bit of dedicated study." Luke explained.

Hearing that part of his exam was to Hunt down beasts, Alice focused her gaze above his head and saw three Sigils just like her.

But there was something else that confused her.

"Inverted World? What's that?"

"Hmm... It's a bit hard to explain since it's still being studied. But so far, it seems to be a reflection of the Abyss within the orb. There's a passage from the Academy that allows you to approach the centre where you can venture into this alternate world. Unlike our reality, beasts are far more frequent and aggressive in the Inverted World.

"The concepts of this world are... strange to say the least and honestly the teachers can explain it far better than I can. In my area of study, I don't need to visit the Inverted World after my initial test. But those in the combat department would frequent the realm." Luke admitted as it was not a topic he had researched much about.

"But as I said, combat is not the only requirement needed for you to enrol freely. There are other tests and in recent years, the difficulty has only increased. If you want to enrol freely right now... It's probably easier for you to study well and get in the normal way."

"Urg... The normal way is boring though. I don't want to study." Ria groaned while playing around with the frills on her sleeves.

"Then you don't need to come to the Academy yet here we are. Also, you still haven't told me where Sir Gin is." Luke retorted before inquiring about Gin's whereabouts.

"Grandfather's sorting out some stuff with Allura. Apparently some trouble came knocking on our door and their mission for us was to get as strong as possible before going to the mainland. Since we've been given free rein on what we want to do before they contact us, I figured we might as well see what the Academy can offer." Ria shrugged.

"Well giving the exam a try certainly doesn't hurt. If you want, I can help you arrange a trial exam to see if you can qualify for the main exams. That way you can skip a lot of the boring procedures needed." Luke offered, causing Ria to raise an eyebrow in surprise.

"When did you become such a hotshot? Didn't think you had connections like this."

"Being one of the few that can actually pass this test comes with some perks. But setting everything aside for now, how many Sigils have you got for Sir Gin to be okay with letting you roam free?" He asked

curiously. With his knowledge of Gin, Luke knew that Gin wouldn't let Ria go so easily unless she was able to fend for herself.

"Hehe~ It may surprise you but I'm actually a four star Hunter now! I even got my resonance!" Ria grinned, puffing out her chest in pride before Alice could even warn her.

"Hou~ Congrats. You finally caught up to me but I'm already thinking about my fifth Sigil." Luke chuckled, pouring cold water over Ria's enthusiasm.

"Tsk, you always have to one up me don't you."

"No sh*t. If I don't, you'll get carried away with your crap." Luke rolled his eyes before turning to Alice.

"So what's your plan then? Are you interested in this trial?"

"Just a tad. I'm more interested in this Inverted World you speak of though." Alice nodded, glancing out of the window towards the orb hovering between the mountains.

"Alright. There are three types of study that you can choose within the Academy. Theory, Combat and the one being handiwork. Theory involves research and study of anything and everything related to the Abyss, its history and even strange anomalies like the Inverted World. Combat is self-explanatory and focuses on Sigils and combat techniques.

"As for handiwork, it's what I enrolled in and focuses on craftsmanship. Whether that be blacksmithing or engineering, the course covers pretty much everything. Which one do you plan on enrolling in? I know the muscle head over here is going to go for Combat since it's the only thing she has an interest in." Luke asked curiously while Ria didn't deny his claim.

"Which one has the most interactions with the Inverted World?"

"Combat. The Inverted World is like a training realm according to them. You'll spend a lot of your time training and entering the Inverted World for Hunts if you join the combat group." Luke answered directly.

"Oh? I thought theory would be the one that interacts the most."

"Most would think that. But I rarely see theory students entering the Inverted World since they're off trying to prove their hypothesis and performing experiments related to their theories." He shrugged since it wasn't the first time he had heard this assumption.

"Then I guess there's only one choice since I'm a bit of a musclehead like Ria." Alice chuckled while glancing over to Ria who gave her a victory sign with her fingers and a wide grin.

"Mnm... Understood. If you don't mind, how many Sigils do you have right now?"

"Three." Alice held up three fingers.

"Don't let the number deceive you. Alice is more than a match for those with four Sigils. She got both grandfather's and Allura's stamp of approval for her strength." Ria chimed in.

Hearing this, Luke couldn't help but pause and reevaluate the girl sitting on the bed right now.

Unlike Ria who only dressed to look harmless despite having foul language and an aggressive personality, Alice felt like she was the complete opposite.

That being said, he hadn't seen her in combat yet so he couldn't confirm anything.

Contemplating in silence, Luke eventually nodded his head and made a mental note.

"Alright. I'll see how quickly I can help you two arrange for a trial once I get back. But now business is over, let's relax for a bit." Luke chuckled as Ria smiled.

"Took you a while. Business mode is finally over huh?"

"You decided to dump me with a bunch of work after not seeing each other for so long. Naturally, I had to take it seriously and deal with it first before I could actually relax." Luke chuckled, sitting down opposite Ria and crossed his legs.

Reaching into his jacket, he pulled out a block of wood and a small knife.

"Ohya? Showing off your figure sculpting to Alice even though it's the first meeting?" Ria asked with a grin as Luke shook his head.

It was a hobby that he never showed others with the exception being Ria, Allura and Gin.

"Well considering the way you spoke about Alice, it seems like you've really opened your heart up to them. In order to preserve the friendly atmosphere between you two, I'd rather not be rigid and lock myself up else I may spoil the mood." Luke chuckled as he delicately shaped the wood in his hand.

Each stroke would remove a layer of material as his finger moved with practised ease and familiarity.

Leaning on the table, Ria rested her chin on her arms as she watched him carve away at the block of wood.

Even though it was a mundane task to her, she didn't know but it was enjoyable seeing the focus and dedication Luke showed towards this craft. She wouldn't be able to achieve the same feat if she was to try her hand at woodcarving.

With Luke carving away at the block of wood and Ria enjoying the sight, Alice grabbed some cups from her table.

"Care for a drink while you work?" She offered, opening her flask and allowing the aroma of the mead to drift through the room.

"Yes please." Luke nodded as he received a cup of mead from Alice while Ria got a cup as well.

Sitting by the window, Alice had a smile on her face.

She enjoyed this kind of peaceful atmosphere without any fighting or worry.

They didn't need to talk, just being in the presence of one another was more than enough.

Glancing out of the window and looking towards the orb, Alice couldn't wait to see what kind of revelation she would find within this Inverted World and why the Abyss mourned the passing of an Abyss Lord.

Chapter 208 - 208: Head Of Department

After relaxing for a while, Luke decided to take his leave since he needed to arrange a meeting between these two and his department head.

Only through the recommendation of his department head could Alice and Ria skip the process of proving themselves and immediately go on taking the trial to become an Honoured Student in the academy.

With Luke leaving, Ria decided to change into a set of pyjamas while relaxing in Alice's room.

"So what do you think of Luke?" Ria asked with a smile while looking at the sculpture that Luke had carved out.

It was rough around the edges and lacked a lot of detail since he didn't have much time, but it was a sculpture of Alice where they first met at the port before Ria appeared. A gift for their first meeting.

"Hmm... How do I put it? I guess you can say he's a man of responsibility and stability. He deals with the main things first before allowing himself to relax and takes his role seriously." Alice replied after a brief pause.

From the way he worked on the sculpture, Alice understood that Luke was a man of focus and dedication. Since they've only just met, Alice didn't have a concrete impression of him but as it stands, he showed the impression of stability.

"Hehe~ Yep. Luke's definitely become more mature as time went on. Though to be fair, he was always kinda like this. Not surprised though since he was another victim of the Cult like me. It's hard to act normal after going through that kind of ordeal when you're young. Which is why I'm surprised he dropped a lot of his walls despite this being your first meeting." Ria nodded with a soft smile.

"I mean he did say he didn't want you to feel awkward and disrupt the atmosphere. It's more about you rather than me." Alice dismissed with a wave of her hand.

She could see clearly that Luke favoured Ria and focused on making sure she was comfortable despite his words against her.

"Ehhh I doubt that."

Spending the time chatting with one another, the two decided not to do anything for the day and just rest up as they were mentally fatigued from travelling. Anything else will have to wait till tomorrow.

###

Waking up the next day, Alice and Ria wanted to take this time to explore the city. However, upon going downstairs, they saw Luke having some breakfast by the canteen and waved towards the duo.

"You're here so early. Don't you have your studies?" Ria asked curiously as she got some breakfast as well as sat next to him.

"Don't worry, missing a day or two won't affect me since I'm studying pretty much every day." Luke chuckled before turning to Alice.

"I've talked to the head of department. He said he has some time to take a look at you and see if you're fit for the trial. The combat department head is currently away on an expedition within the Inverted World so he won't be available and the Theory department head doesn't care and doesn't want to bother with it.

"We can meet with him whenever you want since he's pretty free today. As for what's in the trial... He hasn't told me so I don't know." Luke shrugged his shoulder.

"Already? It hasn't even been a full day since we told you that we wanted to enrol. What the f*ck." Ria blinked her eyes in surprise as she didn't think Luke was able to arrange it so quickly.

"Like I said, passing the special exam gives you quite a few privileges. But the department head also looks at me favourably so that helped." He smiled in response while Alice contemplated for a while.

"Well if the department head is ready then I don't see a reason not to go now. The sooner we pass the trial the faster we can arrange for the exam right?" Alice asked.

"Indeed."

"Then let's finish up here and go quickly." She smiled and began to finish her breakfast with a side of mead.

Seeing that she was drinking this early, Luke was a little surprised but didn't comment on it since it didn't look like she was getting drunk.

As the three finished their food, they left the Inn and made their way up the mountains with Luke taking the lead.

The main transportation around the city was actually through trains that go through the mountains. Each carriage was controlled by Abyssal Engineering and had dedicated drivers ensuring that everything was working as intended.

Not only that, there were mechanics and students on standby ready to repair the trains should anything go wrong.

As they approached, several students would greet Luke with respect while the mechanics did the same.

Both Alice and Ria said nothing and only looked on as Luke was far more well known than they had expected.

"Seems like passing the special exam is a big deal." Ria whispered over as Alice nodded her head.

"When the number of people passing the special exam hasn't reached beyond three digits since the inception of this Academy, it's only natural that people will remember you if you pass." Luke interjected before signalling for a train.

"Department of Handiwork. Building 1."

"Of course sir. We will be arriving in 10 minutes." The driver nodded, allowing the three to sit down comfortably inside the train.

Sitting down, Alice could see that they were the only passengers in this carriage while other trains were filled with civilians and students.

"Let me guess, special privilege?" Alice asked with a smile as Luke nodded his head.

"Before we arrive, I'll tell you a little about the department head. He's a little eccentric but he means no harm. Likes to slack off but can be provoked very easily. If you want anything from him you usually have to make a bet to get him to work. The final point would be that he loves an inquisitive mind so don't hesitate to ask him any questions.

"But aside from that, he's a pretty laid back person and won't take offence to pretty much anything. Of course, if you go out of your way to insult him then you're asking for a slap." Luke explained with a shrug.

"I see..." Nodding her head, Alice couldn't help but wonder what Luke meant by eccentric.

Arriving at the Department of Handiwork, Alice was surprised to see a lack of students walking around but Luke explained that they were working either in their rooms or at the workshop. It was natural that the students here wouldn't walk around often.

Guiding Alice and Ria through the building, they arrived at an inconspicuous room far away from any light source as dust piled up to the point it was visible to the naked eye.

Knocking on the door, Luke cleared his throat before opening his mouth.

"Lazy sack o' sh*t, we're here."

""?????" Both Alice and Ria widened their eyes in shock as they didn't expect Luke to address the head of department like this.

"Alright alright~ No need to call me that when we have guests." A lazy voice rang out from within the house as the head of department opened the door.

He had messy long black hair that was tied into a lazy man bun and a pair of tinted blue glasses. He wore a baggy white tank top, a large jacket that hung off his shoulders and oversized pants with a pair of slippers.

Scratching his leg with his foot, he yawned and welcomed them in while both Alice and Ria were speechless at his appearance.

"Alice, Ria, this is the head of department, Xinbei. Lazy sack o' sh*t, this is Alice and my friend Ria that I mentioned before." Luke introduced as he stepped into the house without care.

"I know I let you get away with it but I'm still head of department, Lulu." Xinbei sighed before giving both Alice and Ria a small wave.

"Pleasure to meet you two. Please don't mind the mess, it's been meticulously handled to ensure I remember where I placed everything." He smiled before gesturing for the two to enter his house.

"It translates to he couldn't be bothered to tidy things up so he just left them as it is."

Luke's voice rang out from inside the house as he retrieved two pairs of slippers for Alice and Ria.

"Pft... Thank you Lulu~" Ria grinned, holding back her laugh as she didn't expect Xinbei's nickname for Luke was actually Lulu.

"Shut it." Luke frowned, scratching his hair in annoyance.

"Please sir can you have some professionalism? We're handling actual business now." Luke sighed a Xinbei nodded his head.

"Fine fine. Help me clean up a bit while I talk to these two okay?" Xinbei asked as they entered his living room.

"I don't see the point when you're just going to make a mess of it anyway." Luke complained.

"I can get you more research materials for your project." Xinbei offered.

"With pleasure." Luke replied without hesitation. Going to the closet to get a broom and dustpan, Luke started to clean up the house with surprising efficiency as though he'd done this hundreds of times before.

"Ah~ life just isn't the same without having someone to help you out. Now then, my teaching assistant has told me that you two want to attempt the special Exam through a trial. If you don't mind, can I ask what department you're signing up for?" Xinbei asked, sitting down on the sofa.

His gaze was focused on Alice who hadn't said anything yet but her eyes were fully focused on him.

After all, he had six Sigils above his head!

"Is there something wrong with my face?" Xinbei asked, seeing that Alice wasn't responding.

"Ah... sorry I was thinking about something. We're going for the department of combat." Alice replied after realising that she had just been staring without a word.

"Just like what Lulu said then. And it's for the both of you right?"

"Yep." Ria nodded.

"Then let's see what you can do." Xinbei narrowed his eyes with a smile.

Tapping his finger against his knee, the world around them transformed into a white canvas as splotches of ink splattered against the realm, transforming into a painted scenery with beasts slowly manifesting from the gaps.

"I have high hopes for you since my dear assistant spoke so highly of you two. Don't disappoint me now."

Chapter 209 - 209: Xinbei's Impression

Peeking into the living room, Luke noticed that Xinbei had transported the two into his own pocket dimension for the trial.

"Is there something you need Lulu?" Xinbei asked as he glanced back with a smile.

"I wish to request some time off sir."

"Oh? I'm guessing you're going to hunt down your fourth Sigil then?" Xinbei raised an eyebrow as Luke had been researching his fourth Sigil for a while now but didn't make a move.

"Mnm. I may have bluffed and said that I also had four Sigils to my friend. But it's about time I hunt the beast since I've been tracking it for two weeks now." Luke sighed as he felt a little embarrassed by his actions but it had already happened.

He didn't think that Ria was able to grow at such an astonishing rate. He knew that Allura and Gin wouldn't let her take something weak, so the fact that she had gotten her fourth Sigil meant that her strength had reached a satisfactory standard for the two!

Luke couldn't let himself fall behind so he bluffed.

"Oh? It's not like you to bluff like this. I'm guessing you got caught off guard then ahahaha. Would a week be enough time? I can tell them I sent you on a separate mission in the same area." Xinbei offered.

"A week should be plenty."

"Should I get Miki to join you? Hunting down a Vermilion Quartscale on your own might pose a bit of a challenge. Having Miki join you should make it easier." He asked as Luke shivered for a moment before shaking his head.

"I'll have to decline."

"Why? Miki's pretty fond of you though Lulu." Xinbei tilted his head as Luke sighed.

"That's exactly the issue sir. She's a little too fond if anything. It'll distract me from the Hunt."

"Mnm... Alright. Since you're going alone get some backup blood from my room. They're pretty high in purity so you shouldn't worry about the side effects but don't use them unless you're about to die. You already know what they are so just pick the ones that suits you the most okay?" Xinbei waved his hand as he turned his gaze onto the orb in front of him.

Nodding his head, Luke retrieved a bottle of blood before leaving the house. He had no doubts that Alice and Ria will be able to pass this little trial easily.

'They're trained by Gin and Allura after all.'

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As Xinbei turned to the orb, bewilderment filled his mind at the sight before him.

"Eh?" He saw all of his summons breaking apart and disintegrating!

And from within the realm, Alice opened her mouth.

"Is the trial over? I hope our performance hasn't disappointed you."

'It's over already? Nono, I can't let it end like this. I haven't even seen them in action yet!' Xinbei cried out in his mind as he regained his composure.

"Ahem. Not bad. But I need to see a little more than that. Shall we increase the challenge a little?" Xinbei smiled as he snapped his finger.

Countless strokes of ink splattered across the sky of the realm as from this inky darkness, claws started to emerge before converging into one point.

Creating an egg of sorts, it began to beat to the rhythm of a heart as a crack appeared on the surface and a new beast was born.

A humanoid figure completely wrapped by the ink as uneven butterfly wings sprouted from its back. Countless eyes filled the surface as they locked their gaze on Alice and Ria.

From its shadow, a mixture of hands and tentacles emerged.

"Careful. This one is a bit stronger than the previous beasts." Alice warned as her senses were warning her of the power this creation possessed.

"I know. I'm getting goosebumps just looking at this damn thing. But that's about it. Same plan as before or shall we adjust?" Ria asked as she gave her body a good stretch.

"Maybe he wasn't happy with how fast we cleared the last one. Let's go with the instant kill." Alice narrowed her eyes as Sigils flared across her body.

"Hou hou~ Alright~." Ria grinned as she stomped her foot down.

***RUMBLE!!!!**

Lightning crashed down on her as she activated her Resonance!

With Ria activating her Resonance, Alice charged forward with her blade in hand. Flicking her wrist, a storm of blood and metal erupted around her and surged towards the beast as Alice used the metal as footholds to launch herself into the air.

Twisting her body, violet flames erupted around her and converged towards her blade. Slashing towards the beast, Alice released a wave of flames that was blocked by a wall of tentacles.

Much to Xinbei's surprise, the flames tore away at the wall with ease!

'What the... How is she burning through the wall so easily? Is it her weapon? No... her weapon shouldn't give her this kind of power.' Xinbei furrowed his brows as he sat up and watched carefully.

With the wall being unable to hold back the flames for long, the beast jumped back and sent a swarm of hands towards Alice but she wasn't phased.

Without changing her pathing, she charged towards the swarm.

***BANG!!!**

At that moment, five orbs of lightning manifested around the swarm of hands, blasting them to smithereens and clearing a path for Alice.

With a clear path now laid out before her, Alice enhanced her physical attributes using her first Sigil, increasing her speed in an instant and rushed towards the beast.

Cleaving up with her blade, Alice forced the beast to jump into the air in order to dodge her slash in fear of being burned.

"Gotcha."

Snapping her finger, her third Sigil burned bright as blood rushed towards the beast, forming blood chains and metal swords that stabbed into the beast's body, suspending them in mid-air.

Without delay, 3 orbs of lightning manifested above the beast as Ria teleported into the air. In her hand, lightning roared violently as it lashed out and tried its best to escape her grasp but Ria was unaffected.

Narrowing her eyes, she pulled her arm back and turned it into an arrow before firing it at the orbs.

*BANG!!!!

A chain reaction flashed through the orbs and a pillar of lightning struck the beast, exploding it apart in an instant while Xinbei was speechless.

'No wonder I didn't catch the fight earlier!!! What the hell is with their offensive power?!?!' He shouted in his mind as both Ria and Alice were far more powerful than what he had expected.

Alice had her strange flames while Ria had her unbelievably high attack power using her lightning.

While he had held back slightly with his summon, it was still not something that could be dealt with easily.

'My connection with the summon faltered a little and the blood seemed to eat away at its defences when Alice suspended it. Is she focusing on weakening the target while the Ria girl is fully focused on attack?' Xinbei analysed but he had seen more than enough.

These two clearly proved that they couldn't be judged through normal standards.

"And here I thought Lulu was the only abnormal one around here with his Sigils. Birds of a feather flock together I suppose... They seem to be more troublesome than Lulu too..." Xinbei groaned as he tapped the orb.

*Crack!

Breaking apart, both Alice and Ria were teleported back to the sofa as Xinebi scratched his hair.

"You two pass with flying colours. I'm sure none of the department heads will have any complaints since I'm vouching for you. But who did you even train under? Or rather what kind of noble family do you belong to? I haven't seen anyone with this kind of power since Lulu." He sighed, gesturing for the two to sit down.

"I'm an orphan, my grandfather took me in when he found me and we've been travelling together. I don't belong to any noble family." Ria replied, omitting the fact that Gin was the Abyss Lord of Death.

"I used to be a slave then my... Adoptive mother and master took me in and trained me. She's a little harsh and strict but her training is effective." Alice followed up.

"You don't say..." Xinbei's smile twitched as what Alice demonstrated wasn't just 'effective' it was too damn strange!

"But setting that aside, what do you mean by you haven't seen this kind of power since Luke? He only bullies me or talks about his engineering stuff so I actually don't know much about his Sigils." Ria asked curiously.

"He hasn't told you? Then I guess it's not surprising since he doesn't care much about Sigils. But yes, his power is rather... unique since he can work both as a supportive Hunter and an offensive one." Xinbei chuckled as Alice's interest was piqued.

"His Sigils are those that empower the people around him rather than himself. Increased strength, speed durability even Sigil output. He's the best support this Academy can offer if a large group decides to do an expedition into the Inverted World. The only issue is that these buffs do not apply to himself.

"But that changes once he activates his Resonance. With how much he uses his gadgets, you'd think he's weak in close quarters combat but a lot of the seniors learned the truth the hard way." Xinbei chuckled remembering how many fights Luke had gotten into when he first enrolled.

Not only was he an orphan with no backing but his Sigils were all supportive and many questioned his qualifications on passing the special exam.

Several rumours saying he somehow cheated his way through.

"Why didn't he mention anything before!? Urg... I should've asked if he wanted to spar before we came here. Is he still around?" Ria asked curiously as she glanced around the house but Luke was nowhere in sight.

"I've dispatched him on a little mission of mine. It's a little... urgent so he couldn't say goodbye. But he'll be back by the end of the week." Xinbei waved his hand as Alice raised an eyebrow at this.

'Is he going on a Hunt? He said he has four Sigils even though he only has three... I guess he doesn't want to lose to Ria.' Alice mused to herself as they began discussing the main topic.

The Special Exams!

Chapter 210 - 210: Explanation On The Inverted World

"I'm sure that Lulu has already told you a little about how this Academy works. Or did he skip over the details?" Xinbei asked as he didn't want to repeat the information that Luke had already given them.

"Ah, he kind of glossed over it. He did mention that the Special Exams are different for people but that's about it. Didn't mention what kind of class and only that there are three main departments." Ria shrugged as Xinbei sighed in response.

"That little huh? Well that's fine. It's a teacher's job to explain in the first place. You see, Silverwind Valley Academy is different to the other Academies you may be familiar with. In this school, your lessons and what you can learn is determined by how strong you are. If you are capable, you can seize more opportunities.

"Whether that be visiting the Inverted World or otherwise. There are four grades of Students. You have the Special Class, composed of those that have passed the Special Exam and are given free rein on what they want to do. Naturally, you still have to show proof that you're doing research.

"Next you have the Advanced Students. They have a schedule and get specialized training from the teachers. They have quite the degree of freedom as well. This rank is limited to 100 people no matter what. If you want this role you have to either fight for it or defend it from being taken from you." Xinbei chuckled.

"Next are the Normal Students. They get some training and schedules and enjoy the facility provided by the Academy. Overall, they're treated like the high ranking students in other academies.

"And last but not least are the Basic Students. As the name suggests, they get the most basic training and schedules with a limited number of teachers watching over them. What they can do is limited which is why they're urged to try as hard as they can to become a Normal Student."

Hearing this, Alice understood that the Basic Students are probably those who don't show enough results or improvement.

"Once you enrol, you'll be given a choice of several topics that you can take. Since you two are going for the Combat Department, you'll be given a choice of different fighting styles and techniques. It's anything from Tracking all the way up to martial techniques to help you utilise your Sigils better."

"But that's once you enrol. The enrolment process is usually a mix of theory exams and practical. However, with the Special Exams, you'll be taking tasks focused on what kind of specialisation you're going for.

If you're a blacksmith going for the Special Exam, it'll be blacksmithing tasks under certain restrictions and so on." Xinbei explained as he rummaged through some of the documents placed next to his sofa.

After a short while, he sat back down and scratched his hair in annoyance.

"I forgot where I put the report. Oh well. But I do have a general idea of what you're supposed to do for the Combat Department test. You'll be competing with a few people for the role since there are Advanced Students aiming for the role of Special Students. I believe you should be heading into the Inverted World and hunting down a list of beasts that the Department will provide to you." He shrugged.

'I thought he said he had everything meticulously placed...' Alice thought to herself as she stared at him with a deadpan expression.

But that wasn't what she was interested in right now.

"I heard a lot being talked about regarding the Inverted World. But I still don't know what it is exactly. Luke hasn't explained it to us." Alice asked as Xinbei thought for a moment before leaning back.

"Honestly we still don't know much about the Inverted World. But let me start from the basics." He narrowed his eyes as his aura changed.

Both Alice and Ria understood that he was now serious and no longer was the same lazy department head that they had seen till now.

"First of all, why do you think Hunter levels are split into three realms? The first realm from one to three stars are those who are slightly stronger than normal humans but with additional abilities. The second realm where the destruction they can cause means they're observed by the government as to not cause mass destruction.

And finally, the realm of Lords." Xinbei asked as both Alice and Ria thought about it for a moment before replying.

"Isn't it just a scale of power based on Resonance? Three Sigils is the requirement to gain a Sigil hence it's split into three sections." Alice suggested while Ria had another thought.

"Is it because of how the body changes once they get the four or seventh Sigil?"

"Exactly." Xinbei smiled towards Ria.

"As young Ria has said, the stages of power are split due to the changes it causes in the body. Think of it like this." Xinbei stood up and walked to his kitchen before coming back with a cup and a bottle of water.

"This cup is your human body. This water is the powers of the Abyss granted by the Abyss itself."

Pouring the water into the cup until it's full, he pushed it in front of the two.

"From Sigils one to three, nothing really changes with your body except for the boost in power granted by the Sigils. For the sake of simplicity, we're going to ignore the effects of Abyss Blood for now since that's a whole different topic that I'm not qualified to explain." Xinbei chuckled as he flicked his finger and ink started to wrap around the cup.

"Once you get your forth Sigil, your entire body is reformed to accept more power. The human body is limited in its durability no matter how much you train it. There is always a soft limit and a hard limit. Breaking the hard limit will break you.

"Which is why the fourth Sigil will reforge your body and change it to accommodate more power. Think of it as a rebirth of sorts."

Tapping his fingers once more, the ink solidified and he poured more water into the cup.

"After your forth Sigil, you can say that your body is now fully prepared to accept more power from the Abyss. The fifth and sixth Sigil enhances your body and power to the point you can no longer get any stronger no matter how much A.B you drink. Your body will never bridge the gap between being the host of six Sigils and becoming a Lord."

Snapping his finger, the water started to overflow but the cup didn't change.

"To become a Lord, the methods have been debated quite a bit as it's not just a simple case of getting the seventh Sigil. However, succeeding in the attempt to become a Lord will connect you to the Abyss on a deeper level."

Tendrils of ink shot out from every corner of the room as it formed a web of sorts that converged around the cup and transforming into a basin that accepted more water.

"The most popular theory right now is that the Abyss itself becomes an extension of the container known as an Abyss Lord. Now, what do you think would happen when an Abyss Lord that's linked to the Abyss on such a deep level perishes?" Xinbei asked as he clenched his fist.

At that moment, the room itself seemed to fracture with the cup in the centre breaking into countless pieces.

"No ideas?" Xinbei asked again seeing that both girls were silent.

"Not really." Ria sighed as she had a guess but wasn't sure if it was what Xinbei wanted to hear.

Meanwhile, Alice was silent as all she could think of was what she felt from the Abyss when she first laid eyes on the orb between the mountains.

Mourning.

'*Sigh...* Lulu was more fun to talk to. But setting that aside, when an Abyss Lord that's linked to the Abyss at this level perishes or rather, begins to die, the world itself will fracture from the sudden collapse. Much like what happens to a container underwater, the realm implodes around the Lord and in this case, with the death being sealed and halted, a strange phenomenon occurred.

"Many of our teachers call it a pathway while some call it something else entirely. But the official name for this phenomenon is the Inverted World. A world where we can dive in and discover more of the

Abyss's secrets. Due to the connection between the Abyss Lord and the Abyss, this hole that was formed from their death is intricately linked to the Abyss.

Meaning..." Xinbei smiled as he reached his hand into one of the tendrils of ink that represented the Abyss.

"Through this Inverted World, we can communicate directly with the Abyss on a level that's only open for Abyss Lords despite not having gone through the second rebirth. The Inverted World is simply another manifestation of the Abyss. A purer version if you could call it that. Meaning the influence is stronger and so are the beasts.

"However, the Department Head of Theory has been researching a rather curious topic for a while now. She discovered that some of the manifestations created by the Abyss seem to trace back to history. It's only happened a few times but it proved enough for her to latch onto it as a research topic.

Most believe the Inverted World is simply a pathway to further our connection with the realm that grants us power. But the Department Head of Theory believes it's a doorway to a giant library of knowledge and we are simply 'reading' the books within and gaining experience as a result." Xinbei concluded as he given the two much to think about on their way back.

"The exam wouldn't be happening for a while so take this time to prepare. I'll send someone over to let you know when it's time since I need to put your recommendations forward."

Nodding their heads, Alice and Ria thanked Xinbei for his explanation before leaving his home.

Stepping out of the house, Alice glanced towards the Inverted World and placed her hand on her chest.

The crown that Allura's master left her and Cayla who was dormant.

Both seem to hold important ties to the Abyss and she couldn't help but wonder if Cayla would be stirred awake by the Inverted World or not.