

Abyssal A 211

Chapter 211 - 211: Miki Nightingale

"So what do you think about what Xinbei said about the Inverted World?" Ria asked curiously as the two made their way back to the inn.

"Honestly I'm not sure. The relationship between Abyss Lords and the Abyss is... strange to say the least. I told you that I felt the Abyss was mourning the death of the Lord. Do you think it's related to what Xinbei said?" Alice answered with another question.

"Hmm..."

Furrowing her brows, Ria wasn't sure.

"Maybe it's because it's lost a part of itself? I'll be pretty sad if I lost an arm ya know? Could be similar to that." She shrugged.

"True..." Turning her head to look towards the Inverted World once more, Alice couldn't help but feel herself being drawn towards it ever since she first laid eyes on the orb.

It was a strange curiosity but now the feeling has grown stronger. Perhaps it's her curiosity growing stronger or perhaps it was the reaction between Cayla, the crown and the Inverted World.

"But all of this theory and all this talk is making my head hurt. I thought we were just going to enrol and punch some things not do all of this fancy stuff with the Abyss." Ria lamented.

"I mean you mentioned that it's one of the most popular Academies right? It's only natural that they're on the more Academic side. That and we've only been talking to people that are focused on the theory side. Well... Not exactly theory side but they're more focused on matters other than just fighting." Alice chuckled.

If they wanted to talk about fighting it was better to talk to the Combat Department students or teachers.

"Ah speaking of fighting... Did we even ask if we could take the exam as a duo or is it strictly solo?" Ria blinked her eyes and turned to Alice.

"That... I don't know. I assume it's probably solo only right?"

"Well, I guess we'll find out on the day. Surely it's not that hard right? If Luke can pass it we should be fine. He never managed to beat me in a spar when we were younger hehe~" Ria grinned as she flexed her arm jokingly.

"Xinbei did say that his Sigils are supportive until his Resonance. Maybe you'll have a harder time beating him now." Alice chuckled since one Sigil could make all the difference.

'Since he's probably going out to get his fourth Sigil, Ria will probably get a chance to fight him once he's back. It'll give me a chance to see what kind of supportive abilities he has access to.'

Allura had mentioned that Luke would make for a great third party member for their group since his fighting style compliments theirs.

Right now, Ria served as artillery and melee hybrid while Alice considered herself a control type fighter that's focused on offence.

"I mean... I don't know until I fight him. But considering my speed and power, I should be able to overwhelm him pretty quickly. Naturally, I'll have to hold back since it's just a spar and not a battle to the death." Ria shrugged.

"So you're confident that you'll win?"

"About 80% confident. Might have a little trouble depending on what his supportive abilities are like when stacked but I'm sure it'll be fine~" Ria reassured.

She didn't even need to ask if Alice would since she was basically the bane of everyone. No matter your defence or supportive ability, once you're affected by her blood it all becomes useless. At that point, only your physical body will be able to help you.

Ria could practically imagine it.

In the future, should someone be overconfident in their defensive capabilities and show off in front of Alice, they'll be cut in half before they even realise what had happened.

"Say Alice..." Ria called out as Alice glanced over curiously.

"What do you say we go for a spar first? It's been a while since we last sparred since we've been focusing on developing the new technique."

Hearing this, Alice thought for a moment before nodding her head.

They haven't sparred properly since she got her third Sigil and Resonance.

Naturally, that was out of fear of what she could do without a proper understanding of her own strength.

Now that some time had passed and she had better judge of her own abilities, a spar wouldn't be an issue.

"Sure let's go for it. Though do we even have enough money to rent a place to spar?" Alice asked curiously since their spar would definitely, without doubt, leave lasting damage on their surroundings if they were not careful.

Without a specialized facility, it was too dangerous to fight.

"Nope. But we're at the Academy, aren't we? I'm sure we can borrow a few facilities. They're not that stingy right? It's just borrowing a room for a bit after all." Ria shrugged but Alice guessed that it was probably going to be more complicated than that.

"If you're going to spar you need to be a student here first. Outsiders aren't permitted to use the facilities nor are they allowed to enter this far. I don't believe I've seen you around the department before. May I see your ID's?" A voice rang out as Alice and Ria glanced back and saw a woman staring at them.

She had short pink hair that reached around her shoulders and a pair of purple eyes.

Much like Luke, she had a grey jacket draped over her shoulders with the collar being linked together by a golden emblem. Beneath the jacket, she wore a white shirt with a black tie. A pair of well fitted suit pants and polished black boots.

Adorning her waist were several belts, each with an array of different contraptions and gadgets.

However, the most eye-catching feature of her appearance was no doubt the twin blessings bestowed by the Gods themselves.

Two large melons hung off her chest, each practically the size of Ria's head. Each melon looked as though they weighed around 15% of her body weight as Ria glanced down at her own chest and felt the sheer chasm of potential.

As for Alice, her reaction was similar yet also different.

She also looked down at her own chest before turning to Ria.

And finally, she looked towards this strange girl with a single thought floating in her head.

'Are those the side effects of Abyss Blood?'

"Hello? Did you hear me?" The Girl asked once more, furrowing her brows after seeing the two looking down at their chests.

"Ah yes sorry. We're not students yet. Our friend brought us here to meet the Department Head and we've just finished talking to him." Alice explained as the girl thought for a moment before nodding.

"Can you let me know who brought you here? They should know the rules of the campus. No outsiders are allowed to be left alone before they become students. If they can bring you to see the Department Head, it means they're probably an Advanced Student. Yet they left you alone is not something I can overlook."

Looking at one another, Ria scratched her hair before turning to the girl.

"Well Luke's not an Advanced Student. He's a Special Class."

Widening her eyes in surprise, the girl took a moment to digest what the two had just said before opening her mouth.

"Luke Isander?"

"That's him." Ria nodded.

"Ah...I see you're friends of Senior. Did the Department Head send him away on an errand before he could guide you out of the campus?" The girl smiled as the serious aura around her disappeared in an instant.

"The Department Head said that Luke will be away for a week or so and had us leave on our own."

Hearing this, the girl sighed before massaging her eyes.

"Department Head is always like this. Leaving all the annoying tasks to Senior while he gets to laze around. Please let me guide you out so you don't run into more troubles. My name's Miki. Miki Nightingale." She bowed slightly.

"Ah... No wonder you have pink hair. So you're from the Nightingale family." Alice muttered in realisation.

Pink hair wasn't a common colour by any means but a few of the Noble families had this genetic trait. A rather dominant one at that.

While they're not the most famous, the Nightingale family was still a competitor to the Zenia family and one of the noble houses that got effected once the Zenia took over the market.

"You know of my family?" Miki blinked her eyes in surprise.

After the Zenia's took over the market, few took notice of them as they practically disappeared from the public eye and became a family focusing on the distribution of Abyss Engineering instead.

"Kind of but not really. Just some whispers from the past." Alice shook her head as there was no reason for her to say more.

"But my name is Alice Agnelia." Alice bowed back in courtesy.

"Ria. No surname. Pleasure to meet you." Ria followed up.

"So you mentioned that we can't use the facilities without being a student. Is there anyway for us to use it just for today?" She asked as she was now fired up to spar with Alice.

Not doing it was practically pouring cold water all over her and dousing her fighting spirit.

"Well since you're friend's with Senior it would be possible. But I'll still need to get permission from the Department Head first since Senior is not here." Miki nodded her head.

Asking the two to wait for now, she jogged towards the Xinbei's house while Alice and Ria could see her body swaying from the motion generated by her large assets.

"They look like a pain to handle in a fight. Not for the opponent but for herself." Alice mumbled.

"Mnm. But what they lack in practicality during a fight grants her boons of seduction through everyday life." Ria nodded.

"What did she eat to even get that large? I'm thinking it might be Abyss Blood side effects."

"Possibly... If I had boobs that big just trying to punch would be a pain." Ria sighed.

Turning their gaze to one another, specifically their chests, the two shrugged. At least they won't have back problems or be thrown off during a fight.

Chapter 212 - 212: Crescent Crown Arena

After waiting a while, Miki came back with a set of keys and waved to the two.

"I've gotten permission to use the training facility. We'll have to take a bit of a detour since he specifically mentioned that I should take you two to the high end Training Facility."

"Hou~ High End? Better than we expected right?" Ria whistled in surprise as she was fine with just using a standard facility.

But if they were going out of their way to give them the High End one then she wasn't one to complain.

"Perhaps he's worried that we might cause some damages after what he saw in the trial." Alice chuckled.

Of course, she wasn't going to tell Xinbei that they actually held back a lot. Neither Alice nor Ria used their full power as doing so would cause too much unwanted attention.

Especially Alice's Void Flux skill.

While Alice and Ria were joking to one another, Miki couldn't help but doubt their claims. After all, Xinbei told her how many Sigils they had.

One had three while the other had four.

Quite the standard amount for students of the Academy. But their confidence, especially Ria's confidence against Senior Luke irked her somewhat.

'Department Head told me to observe their sparring and see if I can learn anything from them. But...'
Furrowing her brows, Miki could only sigh and play her part as a guide.

She wasn't going to question Xinbei's decision as despite his actions and demeanour, he was still a Hunter who became the Department Head of Handiwork.

"Please follow me." Miki smiled as she led the way.

'Only actions can prove what the Department Head claims. And since they're Senior Luke's friends too, I doubt they'll stoop as low as to brag to one another.'

As the three navigated through the Academy, Alice was in awe of the sheer scale of this institution. Even though she had seen parts of the Academy from outside, most of it was hidden by the mountain around them.

A maze of buildings and corridors that twisted and turned. Spacious atriums adorned with carvings of important figures or historical moments.

Occasionally, there would be gaps in the mountain where the light of the Inverted World would peak through, casting a dreadful red glow upon the stone floors below.

With Miki guiding them through the Academy, Alice and Ria noticed that all of them were wearing a similar jacket with different emblems and slight variations in design.

'That must be the uniform they're supposed to wear. Each one represents a different department or level of the student.' Alice mused to herself as her eyes wandered through the array of buildings.

Entering an inconspicuous building, Miki showed them to the elevator as they descended into the depths of the mountain.

"The High End training facility is made using the combined power of Abyss Engineering and Sigils. If you have any specific requests for the environment please let me know and I can make some changes." Miki informed with a smile.

"We don't need anything fancy. Just a large open area will do." Ria shrugged.

"Understood. There are certain presets but I believe the Crescent Crown Arena matches your description the best."

Arriving at the bottom of the elevator, a corridor with countless doors revealed itself as Miki brought them over to what seemed to be an empty room.

Inserting her key into a strange contraption on the wall, a strange interface appeared and she inputted a set of instructions before walking over to the two.

"Since this is your first time, you may feel a sense of dizziness or the urge to throw up. Please hold it in as cleaning up is a little annoying." Miki warned.

Before the two could reply, an array lit up beneath them as energy flooded into the room. A wave of weightlessness overwhelmed the two and caused them to collapse onto the floor.

Shielding their eyes from the wave of light that obscured their vision, they soon felt a cool wind blowing over them as their location had changed.

The Crescent Crown Arena, a magnificent platform that hovered in mid air by unseen forces. Pillars rise from the edges of the platform, adorned with carvings and statues that radiated ethereal energy.

Above, the vast expanse of the stellar sky unveiled itself. Countless jewels of space flickered with starlight as a large crescent moon hung on the celestial canvas. Its soft glow casting a soft radiance upon the arena below.

Seeing this, Alice was silent as she didn't think this kind of place existed.

"Feel free to fight to your heart's content. Please do not be worried about falling into the abyss as there are invisible walls around the edge as most of this is scenic rather than reality.

I believe you have experienced Department Head's Sigil power that transported you to his dimension, this is something similar." Miki explained, noticing Ria who seemed to be trying to peak over the edge of the arena.

Finishing her explanation, Miki stood over to the side where there was a protected room for observers.

"Seems like we're getting spoiled if they let us use a room like this." Ria chuckled, walking towards the centre of the arena as Alice nodded her head in agreement.

"Any rules for this spar?"

"Nope. Same rules as usual but we'll need to hold back a little since Allura isn't here to heal us with expensive Healing Blood." Ria shook her head.

Around her, lightning started to crackle as Alice could feel her hairs stand on end.

Now that they were properly beginning the spar, she could feel the dangerous aura around Ria that was solely directed towards her.

'I've seen Ria fight. Her overwhelming speed and power are not to be taken lightly.' Alice thought to herself as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

Calming her mind, she surrendered part of her mind to the hunger within, enough to hone her instincts and sharpen her senses but not enough to lose her mind and go berserk.

Reaching to her waist, Alice unsheathed the bloodflame blade and held it in a one handed aggressive stance.

"Ready when you are." Ria smiled as she too entered a stance while orbs of lightning hovered around her body.

With Ria allowing her to take the first move, Alice curled her lips into a smile and stomped down. Twisting her body, she did not hold back and immediately conjured her violet flames and sent a crescent slash towards Ria.

Seeing this vertical cleave, Ria understood that trying to contest against this flame was futile. Knowing its properties, the most efficient solution for her was to dodge and counter!

Snapping her fingers, four orbs flashed out as Ria teleported to the top and looked down at the arena.

She wanted to get a good overview before planning her next move but Alice was prepared!

Having fought side by side for so long, Alice knew the way Ria would fight and her habits.

Creating footholds for herself, Alice rushed towards Ria as a swirl of blood circled around her, preventing Ria from conjuring orbs of lightning around her body.

***BANG!!!**

A bolt of lightning shot out as Ria immediately appeared next to Alice, her fist pulled back and ready to punch forward while being charged with electricity.

Immediately entering a defensive stance with her blade, Alice managed to capture everything that happened thanks to Cayla and reacted accordingly!

'Coat the blade with my flames to reduce the impact. With my other hand, I should aim to manipulate my blood and metal!'

Slamming her hand down, two blades manifested near Ria and stabbed towards her.

"Tch!" Clicking her tongue, Ria exchanged places with a lightning orb before snapping her finger, allowing the orb to detonate in front of Alice!

Thankfully, the storm of blood was there to protect her otherwise she might've been taken out in one go.

Landing on the ground, Alice looked up at Ria who was floating in the air as the two of them began to laugh.

"Alright, enough of a warm up. I'll be cranking it up a notch, make sure you keep up okay?" Ria warned.

"Right back at you."

Just as Alice finished saying this, a bolt of lightning appeared in front of her as she immediately twisted her body and cleaved up using her blade. With the properties of her violet flames, the lightning was torn apart in an instant but the barrage wasn't over!

After the first bolt, two more appeared, each flanking her side.

Taking a note on their location, Alice narrowed her eyes and swiped up with her finger. Two spears coated in her blood intercepted the lightning before erupting with flames to cancel out the attack.

Following that up with snap of her finger, Alice controlled the blood she had scattered around the arena and shot several threads towards Ria who teleported out of the way in fear of having her powers sealed.

However, what awaited her at her destination was Alice as she had used the threads to catapult herself towards Ria!

Teleporting out of the way once more while firing back at Alice, Ria watched as she used the threads to swing herself away from danger.

Landing on another thread that she had set up, Alice had now created the best environment for her to fight in!

Watching all of this happen, Miki was speechless. This speed, this power, the way they reacted to one another and their abilities. Just watching the spar as a bystander caused a chill down her spine.

But what made it worse was that they weren't even giving it their all!

'They're holding back because it's a spar but what kind of power would they exhibit if they were fighting for real?' Miki asked herself.

A part of her wondered if she would be able to hold out against the barrage that Ria had sent out. While she may survive, she would definitely be hit by at least one of those lightning bolts!

But Alice was untouched! Even the lightning orb that detonated in her face failed to do any damage due to the barrier of blood that she had conjured.

'What kind of beasts did they even hunt to have this kind of power at three and four stars?'

Watching the fight slowly unfold, all Miki could do was watch on in silence as their strength was engraved into her mind.

Chapter 213 - 213: Reinforcement, Displacement And Discharge

Watching Alice set up a web around the arena, Ria took this time to take deep breaths and calm her mind.

After spending all this time with Alice, she knew that Alice was no easy target to overwhelm with pure brute speed.

'Cayla helps her kinetic vision to the point she can practically react to anything within her sight so long as her body is able to keep up. The blood she keeps around her blocks out Sigil abilities to an extent while her instincts and reaction help her counter. She's practically the perfect counter for every Hunter.' Ria thought with a bitter smile.

But Alice wasn't invincible.

There were gaps that she'll be able to exploit but the key is to create that opening!

Ria jumped back and surrounded herself with lightning lances as she remembered the training she had with Kaden.

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"Listen up brat. The power of lightning is fast and destructive. When people see lightning, they think of speed. Generally, they will tell you that you have two options of attack. Either reinforcing your own body or the method I'm showing you. Ranged attacks." Kaden explained as he created a strand of shadow to mimic lightning.

Flicking his wrist, he sent the bolt forward and in the blink of an eye, it crashed into the mountain in the distance, creating a large cavity.

"Personally, I like to say that there are three types of usage to lightning. Reinforcement, displacement and discharge. But that's based on what I've seen thus far so if you can figure out more that's on you. First of all, reinforcement is something you do already on a very basic level.

"Enhancing your body with lightning to increase your speed. Displacement is similar to what you do with the Leviathan Sigil, you swap places with your lightning bolts. The power of teleportation.

"Discharge is what I'm teaching you now, a method to gather your power and discharge it in one go to achieve maximum speed and power."

Demonstrating the different techniques using his shadows, Kaden was surprisingly patient and meticulous with his demonstration as Ria observed every detail.

"Before we move to the next part of the lesson, any questions?" Kaden asked, noticing the light of curiosity and eagerness burning in Ria's eyes.

"I know you want me to learn ranged combat but are there more methods to Reinforcement? You said I'm doing it on a basic level, but Grandfather and Allura never taught me more." Ria asked.

*Sigh...

"I'm not a reinforcement user so there is a limit to what I can tell you. Allura is a reinforcement expert since close-quarters combat is pretty much all she does. As for that brat you call a grandfather... I believe he is a Discharge user like me. But putting that aside, show me how you reinforce your body for now."

Following his instructions, Ria stood up and coated her body with lightning. Sparks crackled across her body as her hair flared back from the fluctuation of energy around her.

Standing next to her, Kaden placed his hand on her shoulder as shadows erupted from the ground and wrapped around her.

"You're wasting too much of your power on reinforcement. Try to contain everything within the vessel known as your body. If you want to achieve greater efficiency in reinforcement, you'll need to first control the flow of power within you without leaking."

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Narrowing her eyes, Ria started to draw lightning towards her body as she could feel the pain flowing through her body.

'More. I need to prevent the power from leaking out. If I have the power of lightning, I need to have the reaction to wield it. I need to supercharge my body so I can keep up with Alice's kinetic vision!'

*RUMBLE!!!!

Dark clouds loomed around the Crescent Crown Arena as bolts of lightning struck around the arena.

Seeing this, Alice felt a chill down her spine as she immediately conjured several spears coated in violet flames.

She needed to watch out for Ria's teleportation and react accordingly.

'Ria can teleport to bolts of lightning. If I create a zone of blood around each bolt that I can see, I should be able to narrow down her options.' Narrowing her eyes, Alice snapped her finger.

The swirl of blood that surrounded her dissipated into blood mist that started to spread through the arena. Her instincts told her that Ria was about to attack!

*Crackle!

Instantly turning her head to the right, Alice sent a dagger towards the bolt of lightning that pierced down.

However, Ria only appeared briefly before disappearing!

'She's teleported twice!'

Gritting her teeth, Alice jumped down from the thread before looking up.

But what she saw exceeded even her wildest expectations!

Countless bolts of lightning struck towards her as each one seemed to hold a mirage of Ria.

Even with the help of Cayla, Alice found it impossible to distinguish the real from the fake. With no other choice, she could only resort to a brute force method!

Swinging on a thread, Alice created several spears of blood and launched them towards the different bolts of lightning in a desperate attempt to force Ria to react.

But every single spear phased through Ria as they were all fake! The real one was never amongst the group.

Realising this fact, Alice barely managed to turn her head in time to see Ria waiting below her.

Flickers of lightning seemed to flash past her eyes but all of the energy was contained within her body.

Ria's left palm was held out, aiming towards Alice while her fist was pulled back and ready to punch forward.

Even if she was to spread out her blood right now to cancel the effects of Ria's lightning, she would still be hit by the punch and the gap brought forth by this hit was more than enough for Ria to finish her off.

Smiling bitterly, Alice understood that in this spar, Ria had won.

But just because she knew this didn't mean she wasn't going to try!

Letting out a shout, Alice aimed her hand towards Ria and created a wave of chains while flames roared forth in defiance. Yet Ria was faster.

*BANG!!!

In a single strike, her lightning crashed through the chains and shattered them into pieces as the force of her punch slammed into Alice's chest, sending her crashing towards the pillars.

Teleporting away before the flames could reach her, Ria followed up with a spear of lightning that was ready to pierce Alice's chest but stopped herself since this was just a spar.

"Seems like it would've ended a bit differently if this was a real fight rather than a spar." Ria chuckled as Alice had aimed her index and middle finger towards Ria's neck.

The motion for gathering power to perform a Void Flux.

"If this was a real fight you would've used your Resonance and finished me off earlier." Alice sighed, understanding that this was her loss. She had the option of Void Flux but it wasn't as though Ria had used everything she's got.

Both had trump cards left and there was no reason for a spar to be so serious to the point they had to unleash their strongest attacks.

"Same could be said for you. But urg... I didn't think trying the reinforcement that Kaden taught me would be so taxing." Ria groaned, collapsing on her back as the lighting faded from her body.

While she was able to reinforce and enhance her body with her orbs of lightning before, the method Kaden taught her brought forth better results yet the stress it placed upon her was far greater.

It showed her how flawed her previous method was with how much energy she was wasting.

'With my old method, not even five orbs reinforcing my body would be enough to pull off that last attack. But with the new method, just the energy of one orb at maximum efficiency was enough to outperform what I was doing before.' Ria thought to herself.

The knowledge and experience Kaden held as an Abyss Lord was clear as day. Just one lesson with him improved her power by a visible margin to the point she was even able to overwhelm Alice who had the help of Cayla.

"Was that the last move you showed?" Alice asked curiously as Ria had never shown a move like that before.

"Mnm. Yeah it is. Anyway, let's go get some food shall we? I just want to eat a fat meal then go to sleep. Too tired to do other crap." Ria laughed as Alice helped her back on her feet.

"Any preferences for what you want to eat tonight? I lost so I'll see if I can find us a place to eat."

"Ohou~ Let's see... How about some grilled meats? After a hard fought victory I want to sink my teeth into some meat." Ria asked with an excited light in her eyes.

"Should be possible if we look around a little. This is a large city with one of the best Academies after all." Alice chuckled.

While the two were discussing what they wanted for dinner, Miki was completely silent having witnessed their full spar.

She had completely lost track of Ria during her last attack! Had she not seen this and fought Ria, she would've been eliminated by Ria at that exact moment.

In fact, she doubted that there was anyone in the Combat Department that could match Ria's last attack except for the those at the very top. And even then, it felt like a coin flip whether or not they'll be able to counter.

'Anomalies! They're anomalies! What kind of low rank Hunter showcases power like this!?!?!' Miki cried out in her mind as her standard for how powerful a Hunter should be was completely shattered.

Chapter 214 - 214: Alice's Theory

As they approached the safe spot within this arena floating in the sky, both Alice and Ria noticed a small change in the way Miki looked at them.

Within her gaze, there was now a mix of disbelief.

"Are you okay?" Ria opened her mouth first since Miki wasn't saying anything.

"Ah yes, sorry. It was rude of me to keep staring. Is your spar finished now?" Miki replied, composing herself and revealing a smile.

"Yeah, we're finished now. So how do we leave this place?" Ria asked as there didn't seem to be an exit here.

"I have that covered don't worry. Please stand next to me and brace yourself. The journey back will be similar to the journey here as you may feel a sense of discomfort." Miki reassured.

Once she made sure both Alice and Ria stood next to her, she reactivated the key in her hand and an array appeared beneath them.

A familiar feeling washed over the two as with a single blink of an eye, they were returned back to the underground room.

"That's handy. Can't we use this as transport between two locations?" Ria asked curiously as that would eliminate the long travel time needed between cities but Miki shook her head.

"Transportation between two locations is a little difficult, unfortunately. You see, this works because the realm we're entering doesn't move. It is a stationary coordinate that doesn't need recalibrating and thus a transportation circle can be drawn to link the two together.

"With one target being stationary, it is far easier to calibrate the location of transportation. But if both targets are moving, quite a few issues begin to crop up. Of course, that's not to say that people aren't researching this side of transportation. If a breakthrough does indeed happen, it'll benefit the entirety of humanity." Miki explained as she made her way to the door.

"Sounds complicated." Ria groaned. It was just an offhanded question but she didn't think Miki would reveal so much.

"Really? It sounds pretty simple though." Alice blinked her eyes in confusion while Miki paused.

"Simple?" Miki asked, doubtful that Alice truly understood the brief explanation.

"Well, you said it was easy to calibrate if one side was stationary right? I assume it's similar to when I swing using my threads."

Snapping her finger, two pieces of metal floated in the air while a thread of blood connected them to one another.

Keeping one side stationary, she flicked her finger and it began to swing.

"With one side being stationary, the moving side will always orbit the centre, no? So long as the connection is maintained, it will never go off course. But if you were to remove the stationary side..."

Flicking her finger, Alice allowed both sides to move at will and it began to spin uncontrollably around the room.

"That happens and trying to pinpoint where it is becomes difficult." Alice explained.

Since the pocket dimension was stationary, the coordinates always stayed the same.

"Yes... That's surprisingly accurate." Miki blinked her eyes in disbelief as it was surprise after surprise with these two.

"Wait... but a city doesn't move though? So why wouldn't it work?" Ria tilted her head.

"Allow me to explain. You see, when we create the passage towards the Crescent Crown Arena, the dimension itself is the entire arena. Everything outside doesn't exist and you can think of it as decoration on the walls. Meaning we're forming a pathway to the entire realm.

"But if we were to link it between the cities, we're linking two very very small points inside a large realm where the edge hasn't even been discovered yet. Can you understand why it would be difficult to locate two locations within this realm? And it's been confirmed that our coordinates are always being shifted. Every second of every day.

"Meaning, unless one side is completely stationary, like a pocket dimension, it would be almost impossible to perform the calculations needed to link two locations using Abyss Engineering." Miki tried her best to break down the information.

". . . F*ck it. I just want to eat something, it's not like I'm here to study about Abyss Engineering in the first place." Ria sighed while Alice chuckled.

"Will you be interested in taking some courses in the Theory department or perhaps the Handicraft department to try solve transportation between cities?" Miki asked, turning to Alice.

"I will have to decline. I only had a rough idea since-" Pausing mid sentence, Alice's eyes widened as she realized a large fact that she had been overlooking.

Gateway to Terminus!

The gateway they found within the Emerald Glade, where she retrieved the crown. There was a portal there linked to the deepest parts of the Abyss. It proved that while difficult, it wasn't impossible and it had even been accomplished in the past.

Yet this technology was lost to time and the current scholars of this era had no clue on how to achieve the same feat.

'How did Ayr accomplish something like this in the past? How was it still working after all these years? How can technology like this just disappear from history with no one having any idea of it? Not only that... How is Kaden able to teleport me into the Abyss? Forming a pathway between the surface and the Abyss, accurately at that is... Absurd!'

Countless questions appeared in Alice's mind as she flicked her finger and dismissed the diagram she had created.

Sitting down, she started to create smaller simulations based on her understanding of the Gateway she found.

Her experiences using the Sigil of the Blood Maiden, what it felt like when Kaden teleported her around and the example that Miki had just given her.

"Ria I explain how you swap places with your lightning bolts. Does it come naturally? What do you feel when using it?" Alice asked.

She wasn't doing this to help humanity or Miki, it was merely to satiate her own curiosity and form theories based on what she had experienced herself.

"Huh? Eh? Well... I throw out a bolt of lightning and there's like a... feeling? No... A mote that appears in my mind. Kinda like when you poke your finger on the skin, you know where it's touching. I just tug at that and my place swaps." Ria scratched her hair as her teleportation was mostly instinctual.

"Hm... I see." Nodding her head, Alice furrowed her brows and thought deeply.

She had to organize the facts she knows, her experiences and then fill the gap with theories.

First, she knows that the coordinates within these realms are always shifting. Because the pathway within this building was linked to the entire dimension of Crescent Crown Arena, one side of the coordinate didn't move.

So why was Kaden able to pinpoint where Allura was so accurately? Why can Ria teleport to her lightning bolt despite the coordinate moving on both sides?

Alice felt as though she was on the precipice of a breakthrough yet there was an unbreakable veil blocking her from the truth.

'Think Alice think... When Kaden teleported me, it felt like I was falling through an ocean before I realized I was swimming in the Abyss Waters. Teleporting through the blood was similar. I could dive into this mirror like surface and find myself appearing at the exit...

'With the blood, Ria's lightning and the Crescent Crown Arena, there was always a target. I'm guessing Kaden's target was Allura and the gateway's target was Terminus. So why was I dropped into the Abyss Waters rather than right next to Allura?

'Was there some problems that Kaden ran into when transporting me?' Thinking to herself, Alice created diagrams of all the forms of teleportation she had experienced. Or at least her best understanding of these paths.

The pathway to Crescent Crown Arena, one side being stationary while the other is moving.

Ria's connection to her lightning.

The pathway between blood.

Then came the diagrams for Kaden and the gateway to Terminus. These two were a complete mystery to her as she didn't even know where to begin.

While Alice was lost in her own world, both Ria and Miki looked at her with confusion as she was creating, destroying then redrawing the diagrams of what they could only assume to be forms of teleportation.

'Does she have an idea? She caught onto the concept pretty quickly...' Miki thought to herself.

"This is a bit of a stretch but... What if you were to throw yourself loosely rather than having a secure pathway?" Alice asked out of nowhere as Miki blinked her eyes.

"Pardon?"

"Like this. Say you have a general idea of your target and you know where you are currently. So long as you know the general direction of your target, can't you, using the method where both sides are not stationary, fling yourself towards the target using the right calculations?" Alice suggested.

Creating a target with metal and a bola of sorts, she swung it around before throwing it towards the target.

*CLANG!

Seeing the bola hit the target, Miki's smile twitched.

"You realize that throwing yourself, no, HURLING your body through a pathway could easily shred you to pieces right?"

"You just gotta reinforce your body right?" Alice asked but Miki shook her head.

"It's not as simple as that. Reinforcing your body doesn't matter much as this method could result in your arm being teleported away from your body. Or... even your head and you'll die."

"Figured. I was thinking that method one was a bit of stretch." Alice shrugged while standing up.

She had a second method in mind, but it was far more outlandish than the first.

However...If her theories are correct, the chance of success was much higher if they could fulfil the required conditions!

Chapter 215 - 215: Alice's Second Theory Of Teleportation

"Well it was worth a try." Alice smiled, heading out while Ria followed. Looking at them from behind, Miki could only sigh before thinking about the theory that Alice put forth.

No matter how she approached the idea, it seemed too far-fetched for it to work and dismissed the thought.

After escorting the two out of the premises, Miki made her way back to Xinbei's house and saw that he was leaning on his sofa while enjoying a drink.

"I've completed your assignment. The two have been safely escorted out." Miki reported.

"That's good. Miki, did they do anything interesting while sparring? Manage to learn anything?" Xinbei asked, curious as to whether or not Miki benefitted from watching them spar.

"Aside from understanding that the two are clearly abnormal when it comes to raw power, not much. I cannot replicate what they do in a fight." Miki shrugged with a sigh.

Most of their techniques were entirely based on intuition and was not something she could easily replicate to a usable degree.

"What a shame. The split-haired girl's flames were pretty interesting. If you were able to replicate it, it could've served as another potential research topic. The fact that it could burn through my summons already made it worthy of attention." Xinbei chuckled.

"Unfortunately it's not possible sir. I've already tried and as I mentioned, it's simply out of my reach."

"It's fine, I'm not faulting you." Xinbei waved his hand dismissively as Miki handed back the keys.

"Ah there is another thing to report though. After just experiencing the teleportation once and a brief summary of the inner workings, Alice seemed to have understood how the teleportation worked and even tried to come up with a working theory based on her own ideas.

Hearing this, Xinbei raised an eyebrow in surprise.

"Oh? So she tried to come up with her own theory? Interesting. What did she suggest?"

"It's an outlandish idea. Instead of creating a tunnel between two locations, she proposed to have the second location act as a target. Using this, she would then hurl herself towards the target using the unstable method like a bola." Miki explained.

"What? What do you mean by 'like a bola'?" Xinbei tilted his head in confusion.

Drawing out a diagram to show Xinbei, Miki recounted everything that Alice had talked about.

Crossing his legs, Xinbei analysed the diagram silently. Something was nagging at his mind, a connection that could be formed, but he wasn't able to figure out anything.

'She wouldn't have formed this theory if she didn't have anything to base it on. With just lightning gal's and my own teleportation, it's not enough for her to figure out this kind of method. In theory, if you are able to keep yourself intact, this method should be achievable. In theory. Surviving it is another matter entirely.' Xinbei thought to himself.

In the end, he chose to give up for now since he still had to sort out their registration for the Special Exams.

It was one that required the presence of all the Department Heads and the principal.

"Thank you for your hard work as always. Take tomorrow off since I'll be busy with notifying the other Department Heads." Xinbei smiled as Miki nodded her head and left the house.

###

"So you're telling me you had 5 different theories and only settled on the two that seemed most likely. One was what you told Miki and the other you haven't said anything yet. How the f*ck did you get five theories from just a brief explanation???" Ria asked as the two were walking to a restaurant where Ria could eat as much meat as she wanted.

"It just kind of appeared in my head. It's like seeing one plus one is two and so on. It just made sense." Alice shrugged.

"I've had Kaden teleport me, I've tried out teleporting myself through blood, I've seen you use your lightning teleportation and I've just experienced Xinbei's teleportation using the training rooms. After this many interactions, it'll be weirder if I didn't have a few ideas."

"I see... So what's the second idea then? If you didn't say anything about it, I assume it's because it's linked to Cayla or your body." Ria asked curiously.

"You're on the right track. It's actually because of Cayla. If you want, I can explain it in great detail or I can simplify it." Alice offered as Ria didn't hesitate to pick the simplified version.

"You see, the Abyss is filled with this kind of strange energy that is always on the move. An invisible flow that lets me see when you're preparing to activate a Sigil for example. When I was doing my simulations, I realized that this energy wasn't only just there for looks.

"Think of the Abyss as the beach and this energy as the sea. I can see it, I can touch it, but I can't exactly manipulate it to a great extent considering the sheer magnitude. But, if I was to fulfil certain requirements, I'd be able to surf this wave of energy to my destination.

"When Kaden sent me to the Abyss, he had wrapped me with a protective cover. I can only imagine that this is one of the requirements and once this is fulfilled, I'll become a raft in the sea, waiting for my destination." Alice explained while Ria stared at her blankly.

"To simplify it even further, my current theory is that the Abyss is like the sea. Depending on my control, I can either travel the sea via raft which I have very little control over to get a ship and sail to my destination, no matter how chaotic it becomes.

I can only assume that Kaden's mastery and understanding of the Abyss allows him to teleport people with ease along with the help of his Sigils."

"Ah... Alright, I get it now." Ria nodded.

"You sure about that?"

"Not really. But, if your requirements are met, you can teleport wherever you want. In theory right?" Ria shrugged.

"Ehh close enough. But yeah that's the basic idea." Alice chuckled.

Making their way to the restaurant, the two enjoyed a hearty meal and tried their best to forget about how much this cost. They were going to take some commissions to replenish their funds after this.

###

Sitting on a building with his raven cloak billowing in the wind, Kaden had a strange expression on his face while looking over the city in the distance.

He had already left the Abyss yet there was a deep sense of yearning once more. A feeling he had forgotten after so many years.

But all it took was one trip back to revive this long-dead emotion.

*sigh...

Sighing out softly, Kaden leaned back.

"The brat's thinking of some interesting theories with teleportation..." Kaden muttered with a small smile on his face.

He had noticed that she had disappeared into another dimension again and decided to check out what was happening. He saw their spar, he saw Alice's initial theory and he heard her second theory.

Overall, he was satisfied with the spar as Ria had performed better than he anticipated while Alice wasn't far off either. But what caught his attention was her second theory.

"Seems like Cayla is close to waking up if she could see the flow of the Abyss. Once she wakes up, everyone will realize. Lua is... Buying time for Alice in the Abyss. Keeping the other Lords distracted in the frontlines. I suppose my job is to keep the ones on the surface busy." He mused to himself.

She was on the right track as he did indeed manipulate this flow to transport her. That was the foundation of his teleportation as someone who can exert a degree of authority over the Abyss.

But what she described was a crude variant, similar to her initial mimicry of Allura's skill.

'I suppose she should be able to make something better or at least usable for her in the near future. Kids grow up so fast these days, it's only been a week or so since we parted ways.' Kaden thought to himself as he stood up.

"Now... how should I distract the Lords on the surface."

Playing around with a feather in his hands, a smile slowly crept up on his face.

Naturally, the best way was to piss off the church of the Sun, Moon and Eclipse. With the connections they've made, going after them is basically stirring the hornet's nest. Not that Kaden was afraid, brats like them could only wish they were able to touch a feather on his cloak.

"Kill three birds with one stone. Or is it piss off three religions with one... Hmm. Well whatever, I'll just stir some sh*t then leave." Kaden laughed, taking a step off the edge of the building.

The best way to piss off all three of the religions quickly was simple. All he had to do was 'borrow' some of their strongest relics.

For the Church of the Moon, he was going to 'borrow' the Twilight Moonblade. A weapon blessed by the Goddess of the Moon herself.

For the Church of the Sun, he was aiming for the Eternal Solstice. The Eternal Solstice was a bow that could be transformed into a spear. Both forms of the weapon harboured the might of the Sun God.

And last but not least, for the Cult of the Eclipse, he was going to steal- no 'borrow' two items instead of just one. The first was the Tablet of Judgement and the second was the Blade of Dusk. Both were heavily involved in their rituals and depriving them of both would definitely send the Eclipse into a frenzy.

'Plus, if I manage to borrow all of this, they'll pull back the forces they sent to the frontlines. It should give Lua a bit of breathing room too.' Kaden thought with a soft chuckle.

Falling in a standing position, he flicked his finger and his entire body was wrapped in raven feathers before disappearing.

Chapter 216 - 216: Grimwater Wyrms

Sitting on a tree branch, Alice couldn't help but sigh as she looked at her surroundings.

She was currently in the heart of a murky swamp. The air was filled with the scent of decay and rotting corpses. Around her, countless broken trees reached for the sky with their withered fingers while parts of the trunk sank into the swamp.

Despite the moonlight that was ever present in the Abyss, the swamp was filled with a sickly green fog that threatened to corrode the skin and flesh.

Located in the midst of the withered trees was a solitary broken-down hut with broken planks and a bridge branching out to different parts of the swamp.

However, she wasn't here to admire this scenery. Her target lies in the murky waters that surround this hut.

Its massive form was barely visible through the dark, churning waters. Yet the ripples caused by its movement betrayed its location and its size. Circling around the house, its glowing eyes would pierce through the darkness and survey its surroundings before diving back down, waiting for any signs of its next meal.

The Grimwater Wyrms, the target of her hunt.

*Sigh...

"I should've found out more about this beast if I knew it was in a swamp." Alice groaned in annoyance.

After they had finished their meal, the two of them decided to split up and complete some commissions to earn some money. For her, she chose a three star hunt while Ria chose a four star hunt.

The closest target that was only a day's journey away was the Grimwater Wyrms and the reward for this hunt was 120 Gold pieces. A little less than what she had hoped but considering it was close to the city, Alice couldn't exactly complain.

Standing up, Alice massaged her neck before taking a deep breath.

Her target had two main features that she had to watch out for. First was its skin which has a high tolerance against weapons and Sigil powers.

Second was its Frenzied form where it gives up all of its defensive abilities for offensive power.

'I've done my research, made my preparations. If all things are accounted for, this hunt should be over before it can enter the Frenzied form. And even then, dealing with it in the second form should be easy since I've already prepared for it.' Alice thought to herself.

A Hunter's job was to prepare and ambush their prey, aiming to kill it as fast as possible before it could retaliate.

There were several ways Alice could approach this fight with one of them being pure brute force and destruction with Void Flux. But she didn't want people to redraw the map constantly.

Swinging herself from the branch, Alice created a single thread of blood that connected between two trees and balanced herself on it.

Wrapping her foot around the thread, she dangled herself down and created more threads as well as traps using a mix of her third Sigil and blood beads.

Her plan was simple.

Using her blood beads and third Sigil, she'll lure the Wyrms into her optimal striking range before suspending it using her traps and killing it in one go before it can even retaliate!

Narrowing her eyes, Alice finished her preparation and sat up on the thread.

With a single snap of her finger, she detonated one of the blood beads.

***THRASH!!!**

The instant she detonated her blood bead, the beast shot forth and snapped its head at the location, causing a wave of swamp water to splash outwards as Alice smiled at the response.

'Seems like this beast has fallen prey to its instincts, lashing out at anything that moved. No wonder beasts around here avoided this area.' She mused to herself as she snapped her finger once more, detonating another blood bead.

Watching the beast thrash around the swamp, Alice watched on calmly while sitting on her thread.

Crossing her legs, she noticed that the beast had realized something was amiss.

Snapping its head towards her direction, the beast let out a deep growl as it prepared to attack.

"Ohya? I've been spotted. But don't you think it's a little too late now beasty?" Alice chuckled before snapping her finger.

From the swamp, countless blood threads burst forth, wrapping around the beast and forcefully dragging it out of the water. While it was busy thrashing around to catch her blood beads, she was busy laying out the trap for it.

Seeing the beast suspended above the swamp, Alice was able to see its body in its entirety.

Its serpentine body was covered with tattered fins and jagged spikes that protruded from its back. Layers upon layers of scales flowed down its body. Upon its head, it had two pairs of eyes that glared at her in anger.

Letting out another growl, Alice could see a row of sharp teeth lining its maw.

The Grimwater Wyrms were a deep green while the edges of its fins and underbelly were illuminated by a bioluminescent turquoise with a strange hypnotic pattern printed across the surface. The inside of its jaw was a bright turquoise stained with crimson due to her blood beads.

Just as she was able to act, Alice noticed a strange flow of energy gathering towards its body.

She could see the energy that permeated through the Abyss coalescing towards the beast, seeping into its body.

'Is this the Frenzied form?' Alice thought to herself.

It was easy to end its life here and now, but her curiosity burned bright. She wanted to see how the energy flowed through its body and transform its innate nature of having high defence.

Curling her lips into a smile, Alice flicked her finger and released its bindings.

"Go on, entertain me." Alice taunted.

Understanding that it was being underestimated, the beast reared its head back and let out an ear shattering cry. Energy from within its body entwined with the energy flowing in from the Abyss and a burst of energy exploded forth from within.

The horns upon the head of the beast grew longer and more jagged while its flesh split apart, revealing the pulsing green flesh beneath. Spectral green energy wrapped around the Wyrms body, creating a strange veil that trailed behind it as though it was floating underwater.

Observing the transformation of energy within its body, Alice's eyes lit up with intrigue.

'The way it mixes its own energy with the Abyss is similar to Resonance...' Alice thought to herself while the beast lunged forward in the blink of an eye.

Leaning back and falling from the thread, Alice laughed as the beast missed its target before creating another thread to catch her mid fall.

"Not bad beast. You showed me something pretty interesting." Alice grinned as she slashed down with her finger.

From above, the metal converged into a greatsword before cleaving down at the Wyrms.

Cracking open a second jaw, a pulse of light trailed up from the tail and flowed up its body before stopping at the neck.

*KSHHH!!!

A stream of violet acid roared out, melting the sword in an instant. Turning its neck towards Alice's direction, the torrent of acid whipped towards Alice who created a net of blood before detonating it into a wall of violet flames that burned away the acid before it could reach her.

Balancing herself on the thread, Alice decided to test something out.

'When activating a Resonance, we directly connect ourselves to the Abyss using our Sigils as a link. The Abyss then provides us the power to change our bodies to a certain extent in order to bring out the best of our abilities and the culmination of our first three Sigils.

'But with the method the beast has shown, it seems like there's an alternative method in this connection. One that wouldn't burn through all of my power at once to activate my Resonance.'

When the beast had activated its Frenzied form, the flow of energy was slow and methodical, slowly changing its body to bring out the power rather than a sudden violent burst which is what the Resonance Hunters can activate.

Narrowing her eyes, Alice observed the flow of energy around her and started to gather it towards her own body.

She didn't need to open her full Resonance.

If the Resonance is created through the reaction of all three Sigils connecting to the Abyss, what would only having one Sigil create? What about two?

It was similar to the partial Resonance activation that Allura demonstrated yet very different. The partial Resonance was still done with all three while this was aiming for a partial activation with just one Sigil.

Closing her eyes, Alice jumped back and deactivated the rest of her Sigils except her first.

The Sigil belonging to the Spectral Hunter!

From her chest, she could feel the crown within her body stirring as a connection was formed. The Sigil that was glowing on her forearm started to move and squirm. Little by little, it started to spread through her body as Alice felt a new reservoir of strength within her.

Flipping her body in mid air, she landed on the roof of the broken hut as broken fragments started manifesting themselves before hovering above her head in the shape of a crown. The Sigil pattern representing her first Sigil could now be seen across her body with parts of it visible on her neck.

Narrowing her eyes, Alice dashed to the side and realized the physical boost granted by her Sigil had been enhanced!

'It's a lot more exhausting than normal but not quite at the level of using my Resonance. Though using this would probably reduce the time I have in my Resonance form.' Alice thought to herself.

If Resonance took power from all three Sigils to activate briefly, this method allowed her to space out how she wanted to use her strength. Handy for situations where her Resonance would be overkill.

"As thanks, let me finish you off quickly and painlessly." Alice called out to the beast as she drew her blade.

Flaring with black and red flames, Alice's figure shot towards the beast who tried to retaliate but its vision blurred.

With the blood bead being consumed by it, Alice activated her illusion to create a gap in its defense! Now the first Sigil was enhanced, even a beast of this caliber was helpless against her.

Unable to defend itself, the beast didn't even know when the blade cleaved through its neck, separating its head from its body.

Landing on a tree branch, Alice deactivated her partial Resonance and panted heavily while satisfaction filled her heart.

"Now... How the f*ck do I carry this back with me?"

Chapter 217 - 217: Side Effects Of One Sigil Resonance

Looking at the corpse of the Grimwater Wyrn, Alice figured she should get some sort of verification that she killed the beast.

'I should probably get its eyes, fins and maybe an arm for good measure.' She thought to herself, creating a butcher's blade to hack away at the beast.

Even though she'd left most of its corpse behind, the parts she wanted to bring back was still quite a handful.

Tying it up using her threads made of blood, Alice started to haul her quarry back when a wave of lethargy hit her, causing her to stumble onto her knee.

Widening her eyes in surprise, she wanted to move her body but it didn't listen.

*Drip

"Eh?"

Looking down, she could see a droplet of blood hitting the moss-covered planks beneath her as she slowly reached for her nose and realized that she was bleeding.

'Is this a side effect of using a single Sigil as my Resonance?' Alice thought to herself with a frown as she tilted her head back and stopped the bleeding.

Forcing herself to stand up, Alice could feel a stinging pain emanating from her left arm where her Sigil was engraved.

Pulling up her sleeves, she could see the Sigil itself pulsing with life. Parts of the Sigil tried to branch out and cover her body once more but there was an invisible force holding it back, stopping it from doing so.

'Wait...' Pausing for a moment, Alice felt as though she needed to reevaluate her understanding of Sigils and Resonance. If the Abyss was simply bringing out the dormant power within your body using Resonances, it wouldn't have created this much of a reaction.

Yet her Sigil felt... 'alive'.

Furrowing her brows, Alice focused on the flow of energy within her arm and realized that something foreign was being generated within the Sigil. The connection that she had formed between the Abyss and herself using just one Sigil was still connected.

It was faint but the connection was enough to stir her Sigil.

Trying her best to suppress the Sigil, turning it off as she had done many times before, Alice felt as though she was in a tug of war. A struggle within the body over the control of her Sigil.

In a single burst, she exerted as much power as she could to suppress the Sigil and managed to regain control of her Sigil, turning it off in the process.

Taking rapid breaths out of exhaustion, Alice collapsed on the bridge with a frown on her face.

A single thought was present in her mind. Whether or not the Sigils are truly alive or not.

Or else why would it have tried to override her control? Perhaps it wasn't even the Sigil, perhaps it was her own body.

Scratching her hair in annoyance, Alice took a deep breath and sighed.

As much as she loathed the thought, she figured that getting the documents of her own experimentation may help her understand her body more.

If there were anyone in the world who knew more than her about her own body, it would definitely be the Zenia Scholars.

"Tsk... How would I even get their notes without getting recaptured in the process?" Alice muttered, unsure of how she should approach this.

But the more she knew about her strange condition, the better.

After spending a few moments laying motionlessly on the bridge, Alice managed to stand up without any issues as the fatigue left her body. Looking down at her arm, it was the same slender arm that she was used to seeing.

Activating her Sigil, it obeyed her commands without any resistance as though its previous show of defiance was merely her own hallucination. But she knew that wasn't the case.

'The connection between it and the Abyss has truly been separated for now. Seems like I'll need to borrow more than just the combat department at the Academy.' Alice sighed inwardly.

If she could get access to the other facilities, she might be able to redo some of the experiments performed on her and try to figure out something.

Noticing something strange on her reflection against the swamp water, Alice tilted her head before leaning in to get a closer look.

Pausing for a moment, she hesitantly raised her hand above her head and felt the broken obsidian crown.

Unlike before, it wasn't disappearing once her Resonance ended. Instead, it continued to float around her head.

But unlike her Resonance form, it merely looked like broken shards that floated rather than a crown.

"Urg... Is this a side effect of me testing the one Sigil Resonance? How am I supposed to hide this? I'm already getting a lot of eyes drawn to me because of my hair and eye." Alice lamented since it was going to be much harder to hide when she had such a conspicuous detail.

Flicking her crown with her finger, Alice sighed.

"How should I even explain what this is? I guess I could be dismissed as an Abyss Blood side effect."

Shaking her head, she dragged the corpse of the beast with her as she made her way out of the swamp.

Finding the carriage that had brought her here, Alice loaded the remains of the beast onto the back before gesturing for the driver to take her back to the port. She'll take a ship back to the city via sea and she should be back to Silverwind Valley in a few hours.

###

"I thought the crown only appeared in your Resonance form? How comes its... floating above your head now?" Ria asked as the two of them sat around a table with several cups of mead, all for Alice to enjoy.

"Urg... Just an experiment gone wrong I suppose. I was trying out something I thought was pretty interesting but turns out it gave me two kinds of side effects. One disappeared pretty quickly and this crown is the second." Alice sighed, drinking her mead before leaning forward, letting Ria touch the floating crown.

Tapping the cold obsidian that floated above Alice's head, Ria couldn't help but wonder if she could pull it away from Alice's head.

But try as she might, the pieces refused to budge.

"I mean... It's a pretty unique accessory." Ria shrugged.

"I'm not denying that. I'm just saying the unwanted attention is annoying."

Glancing around her, Alice could see several eyes staring at her while whispering to the people around them.

"Mnm, that is an issue. If we were to annoy anyone, all they need to do is ask around for a split haired girl with mismatching eyes and a crown. I doubt anyone would forget what you look like ahahah." Ria laughed since it was quite rare to have those features appear simultaneously on one person. And if someone did indeed see Alice, Ria doubted they'll see another with similar features.

"Don't remind me. I've been trying to be low key while we travel. But this doesn't allow that."

"By low key, you mean reshaping the map and the fully charged Nova Core that you fired at Blackrock City? I'm pretty sure the City Lord has an idea that it was you who caused that kind of destruction." Ria chuckled with a raised eyebrow while Alice couldn't refute.

Indeed, looking back, her actions haven't really been low key. Anyone near the site of her fights would probably remember the destruction she caused as well as a flip in personality should she allow her inner hunger to take over.

"You know what I meant. Setting that aside how was your hunt?" Alice asked curiously.

"Honestly, it was a lot easier than I expected. The beast was already injured in a territorial dispute with another beast so all I had to do was take aim from a distance and fire a bolt right through its head. Shredded the upper half of its skull so I had to take the lower jaw to verify my kill." Ria shrugged as she had gotten quite lucky with how easy her hunt was.

She half expected another beast to interrupt her or an accident were to happen but it was simply a normal hunt that didn't trouble her at all.

"But with two hunts done, I think we've gotten a decent amount of funds. I need to buy myself a pair of gauntlets to fight with even if I rely on my Sigil power. And you can probably find someone to fix your gloves in the Handicraft department. I'm sure there's a good blacksmith there that can try out some repairs since this is a famous Academy after all." Ria suggested.

This Academy was probably their best shot at fixing Alice's gloves without going directly to the mainland.

"Hmm... You're not wrong. If I could use these gloves alongside my third Sigil, I could focus my mind on controlling the metal rather than both the metal and the blood." Alice sighed as using her third Sigil was a little taxing on her focus.

But if she could relieve her burden by making blood threads to be used with the gloves, she could rely on her own muscle memory and instinct to manipulate the threads while her mind focused on fighting using the floating blades.

With their next steps decided on, the two finished their drinks. For Ria, it was a single tankard while Alice chugged down several with ease then letting out a sigh of satisfaction at the end.

Seeing Alice with a happy grin on her face, one that wasn't due to seeing blood or killing something, Ria couldn't help but chuckle at her love for alcohol.

###

Walking past the countless containers filled with a strange blue liquid and the bodies of Abyss Beasts, Xinbei kept a lazy smile on his face and approached a woman sitting in front of the operating table.

He needed to notify all of the Department Heads and have them be present at the exams. Naturally, that included this woman in front of him.

The Department Head of Theory, Elara Frost. A woman who's responsible for many of their breakthroughs regarding the Inverted World.

"Ara~ Good evening Xinbei~ I'm surprised you're visiting me. It's not often you come here, should I prepare some tea for you?" Her whimsical voice rang out as Xinbei shook his head. It was here for two reasons, both having something to do with Alice.

Chapter 218 - 218: Elara Frost

"Should I prepare some tea for you?"

Hearing this question, Xinbei could only smile and shake his head.

The woman in front of him sat in at the operating table without turning around.

Her hair, a chaotic mess of untamed grey strands reached beyond her waist and almost touched the ground. Even though he couldn't see her face, he knew that she had her signature eyepatch that covered her right eye, changed via beast blood.

Her singular golden eye stared unblinkingly at the beast pinned down on her operating table by strange appendages that reached out from beneath her lab coat.

She had sharp teeth, bestial in nature. Another change brought forth by the blood which flowed through the Abyss while bandages covered the stitches and defects that were more visible across her body.

Draped over her shoulders is a worn lab coat, stained with countless samples of blood belonging to different beasts, a symbol of her dedication and enthusiasm.

"I don't think I'll be staying long enough for tea." Xinbei replied, grabbing himself a chair in this dimly lit room and sat down.

"Aww~ But the beast blood tea I've brewed up recently is rather good for the body. It's rather rejuvenating once you look past the aftertaste." Elara snickered before twirling a scalpel between her fingers.

The beast strapped to the operating table had long died but that didn't stop her from continuing her experiments until she's gotten as much value as she could from said beast.

"So are you just here to see the cutie known as me or are you here for other reasons? I'll be disappointed if you're here just to take advantage of my maiden heart~" She asked, glancing back briefly before turning her attention back to the beast in front of her.

"I'll have to disappoint you then. I'm here to ask you to partake in the Special Exams after all." Xinbei shrugged. He knew that despite her whimsical attitude and disposition, she was probably the most dangerous person on this campus if you got on her bad side.

A single look at her experiments told you everything you needed to know.

"Boo~ You know I don't like to deal with official matters. They're all so boring, I'd rather find some cuties to play around with." Elara waved her hand dismissively.

"You're the Department Head of Theory. Unfortunately, it's part of your payroll to attend these kinds of events. As it is with me. Otherwise, do you think I'll have the motivation to go?" Xinbei laughed.

Both of them only took this position because of how useful it was and how it allowed them to get the resources they needed for their research topics.

"Should I give my job to Runi then? She usually takes care of all the boring stuff anyway. It's not something a maiden like me should be dealing with~"

"If you give it to Runi I'm pretty sure you'll get more work than before and have less time for your own entertainment. Plus, I think you'll be pretty interested in this round." Xinbei chuckled as he brought out a small crystal ball.

A recording of the trial that he conducted for Alice and Ria.

"Interesting? For my standards? Xinbei~ If you lie to me I'll be heartbroken you know? The last time you forced me to leave my lab for the boring exams was for your assistant. You promised me it would be interesting as well but in the end, it was boring as usual.

"There's only so many times you can play around with a maiden's heart before she loses interest in you." Elara replied with a sad tone while one of the appendages aimed a scalpel at Xinbei's neck but he didn't react.

"Ahaha, sorry sorry. But this time I'm being serious. I even managed to convince Garret after only showing him the recording. Didn't need further persuasion."

"Ohya? You've managed to convince that gorilla to take part?" Elara paused in surprise as Garret, the Department Head of Combat wasn't one that could be convinced easily.

If he agreed to take part in the exams from just one recording then the person doing the trial must be rather talented.

"But you know... You can't loop me and the gorilla together. One's a maiden and the other is a brute~ What makes you think I'll be interested?"

"Because I think she might be your kindred spirit." Xinbei smiled, throwing the orb at Elara who caught it with ease using one of her appendages.

"If you tease a girl this much she's bound to be interested. Alright, let me have a look then." Elara sighed.

As she peered into the recording, she watched in silence.

To others, she may seem composed as always, but Xinbei noticed the change in emotion within her.

Her eye focused solely on Alice.

Her hand trembled slightly as she watched Alice unleash the violet flames that tore away at Xinbei's summon and her pupil constricted.

Blood rushed to her cheeks as her lips curled up into a bewitching smile, revealing her sharp teeth.

Unable to contain herself, Elara bit on her finger as her gaze never left Alice.

"Alright~ You've convinced me. I am rather... no. Saying I'm interested may be an understatement aha~ What's her name?" Elara asked, rolling the orb back and forth on her table.

"Alice Agnelia. Just like you, it seems like her hair and eye are byproducts of Abyss Blood. She's rather smart too. After just one interaction with the training rooms, she's figured out the basic theory between how I connected my pocket dimension into a training room."

"Oh~ Smart and cute... I like her. Ah~ If only she was a beast. Then I can open her up and study her as much as I want. What department is she going for? I hope it's Theory." Elara smiled. Her eye was still fixated on Alice.

"She's going to be a student of the Combat Department. I doubt you'll have many interactions with her. That and also maybe you shouldn't say that out loud. If others heard you, they might get the wrong idea." Xinbei sighed.

"I know~ I can't help it you know? Just like Abyss Beasts, Alice has captivated my maiden heart~ When is the exam happening?" Elara giggled before finally turning to look at Xinbei.

"It'll happen roughly two weeks from now."

"The same time as the Student Advancement exams?" Elara raised an eyebrow.

"Mnm. The principal suggested that they should also go through the Advancement Exams before going for the Special Exams. Think of it as their enrolment test. They're already skipping a large queue."

"Two weeks? Alright~ I'll have to doll myself up for this cutie then. I'm sure the Hunter's Guild will have plenty of information on her right? I wonder what kind of beast did she kill for those flames." Elara mused to herself.

"Since I've got your confirmation I'll take my leave now. I have plenty of other things to do." Xinbei smiled and stood up.

"Take care on your way out~"

Making his way out of the lab, he was about to close the door when it was slammed shut behind him and then locked.

*Sigh...

"Seems like Elara has found her new target of focus. I'll have to apologize to Alice if Elara causes any trouble but she was bound to find out eventually since I need her." Xinbei shrugged and walked away.

Meanwhile, Elara continued to analyse the recording in the crystal.

Her mind brought forth all of her knowledge regarding the Abyss to prove the phenomenon that she was witnessing yet her mind could not comprehend this paradox.

The flames that seemed to eat away at the powers of the Abyss with ravenous hunger... belonged to a Sigil.

Through her understanding of this realm, her experiences and the years of effort she had put in, the scenario in front of her should be impossible.

Yet this impossibility was proven through the actions of this girl in the recording.

While she didn't understand Xinbei's summon and dimension fully, she still had a good idea of how strong it was and how it worked.

What she witnessed had flipped her understanding of how Sigils worked. Their powers, their limitations and the gap between Hunters.

It's as though her lifelong understanding of 1 plus 1 equals 2 was suddenly changed to 1 plus 1 equals 11. What Alice performed defied their knowledge of Sigils on a fundamental level of which Elara couldn't take her eyes off.

"Ah~ How do the flames work? How does she feel wielding these flames? What beast did she kill? What power do the flames originate from? How does it feel... To get burned by the flames?" Muttering the countless questions that flowed through her mind, Elara found it hard to restrain herself.

Slowly, her hand slid down between her legs as she moaned out softly.

Holding her fingers in front of the light she could see a sticky fluid drip from her fingers, her body shivered with anticipation as she brought it to her mouth and gave it a lick.

It's been so many years since she felt like this. Never did she think that something other than her experiments would invoke this feeling yet her first sight of this girl caused exactly that.

"Fufu~ Is this what they call love at first sight?"

This exam, she had to witness it no matter what. She had to get her hands on Alice.

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"!?!?!" Feeling a chill down her spine, Alice couldn't help but pause mid-step as she looked around in confusion.

She didn't know what had just happened but her instincts were warning her of something. She could feel her hairs stand on end, warning her of something dangerous.

"Are you alright?" Ria raised an eyebrow.

"I think so. I just got a chill... Look, I even got goosebumps." Alice furrowed her brows, rolling up her sleeve and showing her arm to Ria.

"Are you cold?"

"I... Don't think me being cold is the issue. Especially when we're at the blacksmithing district. If it's from the cold then I'll be more concerned." Alice frowned since they were practically surrounded by fire.

"That's true. Well I'm sure it's nothing." Ria reassured since there was no danger around them.

Hesitating for a moment, Alice sighed and nodded her head.

They were here to get Ria a better pair of gauntlets after all. One that could help with her new fighting style of mixing ranged attacks and close quarters combat.

Chapter 219 - 219: Vultures

"So what kind of gauntlets are you looking for this time? I thought the gloves you got from Blackrock City were pretty good no?" Alice asked curiously while the two of them walked through the streets of the blacksmithing district.

The rhythmic sounds of hammers clashing against metal echoed out with each step they took while the air surrounding the different forges warped from the heat.

"Don't get me wrong, these gloves are good. They help me parry attacks and control my lightning when I'm fighting up close. But the issues appear once I try to use long distanced attacks. I noticed it a while back but I thought it was just me.

"Turns out it was these gloves hindering me from gathering power to launch a long ranged attack since it passively stores some of my lightning to be used for parrying." Ria explained.

She couldn't exactly demonstrate it in the middle of the city unless she wanted to get into some trouble with the guards.

"So... You're looking to replace them with more offensive options?"

"That's the idea. I want something that doesn't hinder me when I try to go for the long ranged option. You know how surprised I was when my attack wasn't as powerful as expected? I still killed the beast but I expected half of his body to get blown off and not just his head ya know?" Ria lamented.

In her own words, the restriction caused by the gloves was one that completely sacrificed ranged for close quarter supremacy.

Of course, with her abnormal attack power, she was able to ignore this restriction to a certain extent. But that extent was roughly 20% of her original power.

Being restricted to 20% of her power when using long ranged attacks was a no go for her.

However, the more they browsed the Blacksmithing district, the more disappointed they became as the weapons available were either not up to par or far too expensive for their current funds.

To combat this, Ria had an idea of trading in her current gloves to try to bridge the missing funds but it was still not enough.

In the end, she could only settle for a pair of subpar gloves that simply enhanced her lightning attacks slightly.

The boost was small but it was still better than not being able to use her long ranged attacks effectively.

Looking at their coin pouch that had 219 gold pieces, including Alice's reward from her hunt, the two couldn't help but sigh once again when faced with money troubles.

"We can slaughter four star beasts yet we're still plagued with money issues." Ria lamented.

It felt as though no matter how many beasts they killed, money flew out faster than they could earn.

Travel funds, equipment funds, blood funds and so on. Try as they may, all they could do was amass 219 gold. More than enough for a small family but they're not the standard family. They were two Hunters.

"I'm starting to think that being a Hunter is not as profitable as I had initially expected." Alice smiled bitterly while scratching her cheek.

Currently, she had her hood over her head to cover the floating crown.

"Tell me about it. *Sigh... You know what we must do."

"Get more commissions?" Alice tilted her head.

"No! We must journey to the gambling arena! Only through blood sweat and lots of fighting can we earn the coin we need to fund our expenditures!" Ria shook her head as a fire burned in her eyes.

"Aha... You know we should probably cut down on that right?"

"Ehh? But why? It's not like I'm losing in there hehe~" Ria stuck out her tongue, feeling excited about going back to the arena.

"I'm not saying I think you'd lose. But what would we do if someone you can't handle appears? What then?" Alice asked, wondering if Ria had a backup plan.

"Erm... We run."

". . . But we're going to be studying here?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

"That's true... Alright fine. Unless we have no other options, I won't use this method okay?" Ria sighed.

She knew that Alice was just worried and it was justified. Now that they were at a more populated city, one that was rather famous at that, the level of combatants will naturally increase. This meant the Gambling Arenas would be harder to defeat if they tried to rig things as per usual.

"How do you think Allura and Gin earned money when they were on the road? Or do they not need to bother considering their connections and so on." Alice asked curiously, wondering if Ria had an idea of how they did it.

"Honestly, I think they just robbed whoever they killed. If their corpse is still intact. If anything, we could try our hand in hunting down some wanted people for their bounties." Ria shrugged.

"If their names are on the wanted list, wouldn't they prepare some guards to protect them?" Alice furrowed her brows as Ria's second plan sounded far more dangerous than the first. If anything, she would prefer Ria to gamble rather than taking on wanted bounties right now.

"Urg... Also true."

With no other choice, Ria relented to doing normal commissions within the city. That was if they could find any.

Upon returning to the Hunter's Guild, most of the commissions within the city were taken the moment they were put up on the board. It was only when trying to get the commission themselves, did Alice and Ria noticed that there was always a group of people, eyeing the board for the moment these commissions appeared.

With them around, it felt impossible for the two of them to get the commission they wanted.

"Is this a challenge? I feel like this is a f*cking challenge. All they do is sit around until the commissions are up then f*cking run up and grab them! Do they have nothing better to do?!" Ria complained, slamming her drink down in annoyance.

She had wanted to use her lightning powers to teach them a lesson by being faster but with how many people were crowded around, it was hard to use it without bumping into people and becoming public enemy number 1.

"Pftahaha seems like you're having difficulty getting commissions." The bartender laughed, handing Alice her mead while taking away the empty cups.

"Of course! I mean they're practically hunting these commissions. If they got so much time and effort they might as well go out and kill a damn beast." Ria clicked her tongue, glaring at the group of Hunters who were waiting around but they only gave her a provocative grin in response.

*PUCHI!

Feeling as though a vein was about to burst, Ria could only chug her drink in one go to try and soothe the anger within.

"You'll get used to it. These kinds of people are known as Vultures. People who wait around for the easiest tasks within the city and don't let the others get it. While it's a competitive environment within the group, they make sure 'outsiders' don't get a chance to grab the commissions."

"Oh? Seems like they got quite the background." Alice muttered in surprise as she hadn't noticed them before.

"Well, they're everywhere. The Guild's tried to deal with them before but you can't really stop people from getting commissions otherwise it'll cause all kinds of other issues. So they could only leave them be. And to be fair, it's not really accurate to call them a group as they're just regulars who recognize one another and stop others." The bartender shrugged.

"All in all it's just a matter of being faster and more perceptive against them."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head as she glanced over at the board.

So far it's just been Ria who's trying to get her hands on the commissions since she was the faster one out of the two. But Alice had an idea on how to potentially be faster than them.

This wasn't a matter of speed but rather perception and reaction. Both of which she has an edge over due to the existence of Cayla.

Finishing her drink, Alice stood up.

"I'll be right back." Alice smiled as Ria nodded her head.

"Good luck~ Hope you can bring one back."

Nodding her head, Alice narrowed her eyes and walked towards the commission board.

Naturally, the Vultures kept their eye on her as Ria had made herself known and as her friend, she became a target as well.

'I need to be subtle about it. Manifest only the metal. A small piece will do, as long as I can see the reflection.' Alice thought to herself as small fragments of metal appeared beneath her shoes.

Controlling them to move through the blind spots and hover in the air above, she sat down on an empty table and waited patiently.

She needed to set up her hunting ground before making her move. The basics of being a Hunter.

'I have four points of reflection. It doesn't seem like anyone has noticed. Refine their surfaces so I can see the reflections. If the metal isn't enough, I can use blood as a replacement.' Closing her eyes for now, she focused her mind on adjusting the properties of her metal.

After a moment of silence, she opened her right eye and focused on the pieces of metal above. It was rough but enough to make out a few words. All that's left now is to make her move when the opportunity presents itself.

Thankfully, she didn't have to wait long as a Guild Staff made her way to the board with a stack of papers in her hand.

Alice had seen a few of the commissions she had shuffled into the stack and knew this was her time to shine.

Standing up, she and several Vultures made their move. While she walked at a brisk pace, the Vultures were already there.

But this wasn't a race of speed. No, this was her hunting ground. Speed will not avail you in this place.

Curling her lips into a grin, she waited for the Staff to pin the commissions on the board since they needed to wait.

Once she was done with the final sheet, Alice struck!

A faint trail of blood mist diffused through the crowd as Alice's first Sigil lit up. She didn't need to make a big illusion since that would be too obvious. Just a momentary lapse in concentration as though they aimed for the wrong commission.

That hesitation was all the Hunter needed.

And in that moment, Alice snatched two commissions away from the hands of the Vultures before they could react.

Chapter 220 - 220: Arunya

Holding the two commissions triumphantly, Alice turned to the Vultures and gave them the same smug smile back that they pulled towards Ria.

Giving them a small wave, Alice made her way back without turning to look at their expressions.

"Tada~ Two commissions within the city." Alice chuckled, placing them on the table while Ria blinked her eyes in surprise.

Ignoring her surprise, Alice ordered another cup of mead while looking over the details around these commissions.

The first one seems to be commissioned by a student of the Combat Department within the academy. They required a sparring partner so they can prepare for the Student Advancement exams. The Hunter needed to have at least four Sigils and defeat his bodyguard.

If they are able to fulfil these requirements, they'll be sparring every day and the payment will be 50 gold per sparring session.

Seeing this, Alice figured that Ria would be the perfect fit for this considering her focus on martial techniques and close quarters combat. Between the two of them, she was the best candidate for this.

"This one is happening later today if you want to give it a go." Alice offered as she slid the commission next to Ria.

Reading through the details, Ria almost choked on her drink seeing that it was 50 gold per session. If they were doing one session per day for the next two weeks before their exam, that was 700 gold in total! It was enough for her to buy the gloves she wanted.

"Holy crap! What kind of rich young master can spare 50 gold per session?"

"Dunno. But if they're willing to pay the price why notahaha." Alice chuckled since this'll solve their funding for now.

But that was just Ria's commission, turning her eyes to the second one, she started to read through the details.

To call it a commission was slightly incorrect as it was more like an advert than anything. The poster was a Department Head's assistant within the Academy and required a helping hand while working in the lab.

'You will be required to be able to handle yourself in an environment filled with Abyss Blood. During this period, you will act as an extra pair of hands for me. You will not defy what I ask of you as all experiments and research require careful actions.

'However, in the time you are working as my assistant, you will be allowed to use some of the equipment provided by the academy so long as you notify me of the uses. The pay will be 30 gold per day but you will be expected to be by my side for a minimum of 8 hours. Depending on the experiment, you will be going into overtime but I will pay the fee accordingly.'

Tapping her finger on the table, Alice understood that most people would probably be cautious regarding this commission. Not only was it an environment filled with Abyss Blood, but the pay didn't match the risk not to mention the hours.

'Just being able to use the equipment doesn't cover the hour required. But... the environment isn't an issue for me. If anything, I can probably persuade them by saying my body's already been affected by side effects.' She mused to herself.

Should she decide to go through with this commission, she'll be able to earn around 420 gold pieces not including the supposed overtime.

In the end, she decided to meet the commissioner first before she decided to accept the task or not.

'If I can get access to the facilities early then I can run some tests of my own without waiting till I'm enrolled. Though even if I enrol, I doubt they'll lend testing equipment to a Combat Department student.' She sighed.

Finishing her drink, Alice stood up.

"I'm gonna go meet the commissioner for this task. Are you going to meet your commissioner as well?" Alice asked, glancing over to Ria who was also preparing to leave.

"Mnm. The sooner I meet them the faster we can set up the sparring sessions. And the faster I do that, the faster I get paid." Ria grinned.

"Pft alright. You're gonna get paid a bit more than me but hopefully, mine should be relatively relaxing if I decide to say yes to this."

Letting the Guild know that they were taking these two commissions, the two made their way back to the Academy. Ria made her way to the Combat Department while Alice walked to the Theory Department. They were both given a temporary pass that allowed them to wander the Academy without issue since they were here for a commission.

Each of the Departments was located in their own area. The Handicraft was located near trains that allowed them easy access to the rest of the city. The Combat Department was located directly below the Inverted World while the Theory Department was located around the mountain peaks.

There were several observatories built on the way up, giving a full view of the Inverted World.

While she was making her way up the path, Alice turned her head to the right and stared into the distortion that inverted the reflection of this world. In this distortion, Alice could see a reflection of herself.

But there was no need to rush since she'd visit this strange world in due time.

Shaking her head, she continued up the mountain and made her way into the Department of Theory.

Looking down at the commission sheet, Alice familiarized the details before putting it away in her coat.

Her would-be commissioner was the Assistant of the Department Head of Theory, Arunya.

'Seems like she holds a similar role to Luke. Though it doesn't seem like she's a Special Class student.'

Wandering around the area, she soon found the location mentioned on the commission sheet.

The entrance to the building was embedded within the mountains as expected. A wide, arched doorway with carefully carved statues welcomed any and all visitors.

Above the arc was a series of gargoyles that perched menacingly, their stony visages casting a dreadful shadow upon the path in.

Unsure as to whether or not these gargoyles could move or not, Alice couldn't help but furrow her brows as the feeling they gave her was reminiscent of Abyss Beasts yet no stars appeared above their heads.

Pushing past the heavy wooden doors that were reinforced by metal bands and adorned with intricate patterns, Alice was greeted by a dimly lit corridor lined with flickering torches mounted on each side of the pathway.

Further inside, the corridor opened up into a vast chamber, revealing the heart of the lab.

Large pillars supported the ceiling while bookshelves could be seen around the room. Containers filled with unconscious Abyss Beasts could be seen as their bodies were filled with tubes siphoning their blood while keeping them alive.

Standing in the centre of the room was a single woman with her dark blue hair tied up into a high ponytail and a pair of blue-rimmed glasses.

She had a pair of piercing blue eyes that didn't reveal any kind of emotion, a small beauty spot on her chin next to the corner of her mouth and a scar across the bridge of her nose.

She wore a pristine white lab coat and a crisp uniform. The coat was adorned with various pockets and compartments, each holding a set of pens and instruments for her experiments. On her chest was the crest for the Department of Theory.

"Ah... You must be the Hunter who accepted my commission. Do you understand the risks you take in becoming my assistant for two weeks?" Arunya asked in a soft monotonous tone, as though she couldn't spare the effort to speak.

"Yes I do. It simply requires me to be comfortable in an environment with Abyss Blood right?" Alice nodded as she noticed Arunya scanning her from head to toe. Her eyes stopped briefly on the crown, her hair and her eye.

"It seems like you've ran into your fair share of troubles... Please, if your body cannot handle more people don't force yourself. I'd rather not see someone succumb to side effects in my lab." Arunya shook her head.

"Don't worry, these are minor... side effects that have been with me for a while. They won't cause any inconveniences, nor would I succumb to the effects in your lab." Alice reassured.

"I'm not worried if you would fall to the effects but rather I don't want you to do so in my lab. Do it out of my lab so the janitors can clean it up when they see you... But it seems like you're aware of the risks. I'll conduct a primary test if that's okay with you." Arunya corrected herself, gesturing for Alice to stand next to the operating table.

Laying on the table and strapped down using several strange belts, a young woman could be seen with barely any strength to resist while several openings have been made across her body, revealing countless rows of sharp teeth, flesh whips and pulsing black mist.

"How familiar are you with being an assistant?" She asked, wanting to determine Alice's experience level.

"Never been one but I'm familiar with certain techniques required for surgery and such."

"Alright... It's never too late to learn. Familiarize yourself with the tools. I'll need you to hand me the tools I need when I call for them. Gloves are to the side, take a pair if you don't want to touch the blood directly."

Glancing to her side, Alice could see the bloodied surgical tools neatly lined up and ready to be used. All of which she had seen many times during her 10 year imprisonment.

After putting on a pair of gloves, Alice saw that Arunya was already poking and prodding the body on the table. The sight of which reminded her of her past.

But there was one thing that Alice couldn't help but praise morbidly. Arunya's technique was precise and fast, refusing to extend the suffering more than needed while observing the results.

Had it been Arunya operating on her throughout the 10 year imprisonment, she might've had a slightly better time.

Without wasting any time, Alice helped Arunya with the experiment. Whether that be passing the tools or holding parts of the organs open, she worked without saying a single word.