

Abyssal A 351

Chapter 351 - 351: Ria's Assignment

"Can you seal Cayla and Void Fang?" Alice asked seriously as Kaden stared at her in silence.

A silence loomed over the two as he narrowed his gaze before curling his lips into a smile.

"You know I'm not going to let you back out of this risk right, kid?"

"I know." Alice nodded her head.

This was her own determination as well. Her overreliance on a weapon that was too good for her level and the Cayla who acted as the foundation of her strength.

Without these two, her journey would've been cut short but at the same time, if she continues to rely on these two, she'll never attain her true potential.

"Ah but don't seal her soul alright? I still want to talk to Cayla when I can."

Squatting in front of her, Kaden stared her in the eyes.

"Do you still remember the words I said to you when I first found you?"

The words he first said to her.

Of course she does, how could she forget? The meeting allowed her to escape her old life as nothing but a resource for the Zenia family.

"Do I wish to leave this hell and trade it for another right?" Alice chuckled as Kaden nodded his head.

"The seal I'll place on your eye and the weapon won't be a simple one. Either you succeed in reinforcing your foundations or you die trying. So I'll rephrase my question for you kid- Nah... It's not kid anymore. Alice, are you ready to enter hell?" Kaden smiled.

Closing her eyes, Alice took a deep breath and nodded her head.

Taking a few steps back, Kaden reached into the void in front of him.

*BANG!!!

A dark aura burst out from his body as he pulled out his personal relic!

[Grimoire of Original Sin]

Flinching slightly from summoning his relic, Kaden opened the book as his form began to shift.

Looking at Alice in front of him, he snapped his fingers and a ritual circle began to form around Alice.

Purple tendrils crafted from malevolent energy slithered up from the circle as it jabbed towards Alice's eye.

"Curse of Binding."

At that moment, Alice could feel the connection between her and Cayla faltering. Her vision began to distort as she was unable to keep her right eye open. Once it was forced close, Alice flinched in pain as the curse was akin to a hot knife, carving through her skin and digging deep into her eye.

As for her connection to the Void Fang, it felt like a normal bracelet now, unable to be called upon with her blood.

Letting out a strained groan, Alice blinked her left eye as she had to get used to the sensation of losing vision in her right eye.

[A rather drastic choice O' master mine. But I suppose if this choice helps you grown then I will respect it.] Cayla smiled. She didn't mind falling asleep for a little longer though she'd feel a little regretful. Yet Alice requested her soul to be set aside so they could still converse.

This way, she could still observe her master's growth.

'Sorry about that, I should've talked with you about it but I could only think about improving myself.'
Alice apologised while Cayla shook her head with a smile.

[No need to apologise. Ultimately, I am here to support your growth. Doing this simply makes my job easier for the upcoming period.] Cayla chuckled.

Taking deep breaths to calm her breathing, the pain soon subsided but Alice felt disorientated by the loss of her right Vision.

However, what bothered her more was Kaden's condition. His face was a little pale as he returned his grimoire to the Void.

"This Curse will last for quite a while and even with my tampering, I can't remove it anytime soon. That's the kind of restriction I've put on it and it'll be a test for you as well."

"Good, it's better that way." Alice nodded.

Snapping her finger, she wanted to conjure a blood mirror like usual but noticed her control was a little lacking.

[It's natural. The Seal that Kaden used on me was one that isolated all of my influence. Meaning any assistance I may have given you passively, whether that be seeing the flow of energy or controlling it, has disappeared.]

'That much huh? Seems like there's more I need to learn than expected.' Alice chuckled as she focused her mind and solidified the shape of the mirror.

Seeing her own reflection, Alice could see a rather nasty looking scar across her eye. It was as though a blade tore through her flesh and left behind an inky wound that stretched across her skin like a spider.

"If you were going to seal it, couldn't you make it look cuter?" Alice pouted, brushing her hair a little so that it covered the seal.

"Should've made that request before I sealed her. Plus, do you even know how hard it is to seal away her power? I don't have the kind of luxury to focus on making it look cute you brat." Kaden knocked Alice on the head in annoyance.

"Get used to this vision and lack of control for a few days. You're still preoccupied with the Zenia's right? The discussion regarding the Inverted World should be over soon and if you go in your current state, you'll struggle." He warned.

Blinking her eye in surprise at the fact that he knew, Alice scratched her cheek embarrassingly.

But he was right.

The more she interacted with them over the days, the more on guard she was against the guards. Especially Selen who was next to Erick. No matter how she wanted to imagine herself killing him out of the blue, she was positioned in a way that would always ensure his safety no matter how fast she was.

Leaving Alice to get used to her new vision, Kaden made his way over to the other two under his care.

Luke didn't worry him a lot since he was reflecting on the advice and making considerable improvements to his own movement and instincts.

Once again, the issue for him was Ria.

Walking over to her who was sitting by the side and watching everything happen, Kaden sat down.

"How does Alice do it..." Ria asked while clenching her fist.

"How does she do what?" Kaden asked, leaning back and getting himself into a comfortable posture.

Since he was going to deal with something annoying, he may as well get himself comfortable.

"I... Don't know how to put it into words. But she just keeps going forward without looking back." Ria bit her lips.

She had seen Alice go from a one star Hunter who struggled against weak beasts to someone who could now defeat five and six star Hunters despite only having four Sigils.

Yet here she was, struggling to make the improvements that Kaden expected of her.

What was she lacking?

"She's a monster you know? She's the kind of talent you'll struggle to find anywhere. To put it bluntly, she's bat sh*t insane." Kaden shrugged.

It was the truth. To endure what she had to endure in the Zenia family for ten whole years yet still retain her sense of self was insanity. During the time between finding Alice and now, he's done his research on the Zenia experiments.

There wasn't much he could find as they'd been careful with their traces after his last break in but for the things he did find, it disgusted him to the bottom of his soul.

The experiments, how they documented it and how they saw Alice as nothing but a beast for the next test. This complete disregard for her as a living breathing being.

To them, she was nothing but an object defined by her worth of tolerance to Abyss Blood.

"But I'll be honest, you don't have to keep up. Her talent stems from her insanity to look death in the face and keep pushing on. The instinct for survival that's been silently brewing beneath her façade of giving up during her captivity has finally been allowed out.

"Yet her talent is also her shackle. She needs to learn how to reel that eagerness in, how to control it and polish it. You could say that you two are two sides of the same coin. Your issue is a direct inverse of what Alice has." Kaden explained while Ria contemplated his words.

"A direct inverse..."

"Talent and geniuses are fickle words. It can either make or break a person, tricking them into thinking they're invincible. Alice has taken the initiative to seal away her sword and shield, to render herself bare to the howling storm and survive.

"You also have the talent but your approach towards that is holding you back. I got an assignment for you and it'll determine how you'll proceed from now." Kaden sat up.

It was a risky assignment, one that pushes Ria into the face of danger but without this, she'll never truly get out of her slump. He had seen this in Hunters many times during his long years wandering the surface.

". . ." Staying silent, Ria looked down. She recalled the words she's said to reassure her grandfather and a smile appeared on her face.

"What do I need to do for this assignment?"

Curling his lips into a smile, Kaden sat up and turned to Ria with seriousness.

"Go back to the Eclipse. Whether you get captured, infiltrate or kill, I want you to face them head on and see the things they do without turning away. Remind yourself of the hell that you were pulled out from and crawl out of there yourself with your own two hands."

Chapter 352 - 352: To Cut Down The Eclipse

"Go back to the Eclipse. Whether you get captured, infiltrate or kill, I want you to face them head on and see the things they do without turning away. Remind yourself of the hell that you were pulled out from and crawl out of there yourself with your own two hands."

Hearing this, Ria froze up as her pupils shrunk in shock.

'Go back... to the Eclipse?'

Just the thought was enough to paralyze her body. To go back to the hell that Gin pulled her out from, to go back to bloody rituals that she was forced to partake in.

Meanwhile, Luke who had overheard what Kaden said gritted his teeth and walked up to the man, grabbing him by the collar.

"What the f*ck are you telling Ria to do?!" He shouted, glaring at the man without caring about his status.

"Get your hands off me, boy." Kaden narrowed his eyes.

"Do you even know what Ria had to go through in that place?! And you're telling her to go back?!" Luke gritted his teeth.

Before he could continue, Kaden grabbed Luke by the wrist and removed his hand from his collar.

"So what if I knew, so what if I don't? The reality of the situation is that if the kid wants to get stronger, she needs to face what's holding her back. The Abyss isn't a place that anyone can just thrive in. Only the truly insane reach the top of the food chain here, boy. Do you think the people that survive here survive with clean slates?"

Standing over Luke, Kaden's figure towered over him as Luke was the first to avert his gaze.

"Everyone that's reached the top has killed scores of people, seen hell worse than you can imagine. The kid isn't the first one who's seen the hell of the Eclipse nor is she going to be the last. But if she wants to put a stop to it, she has to stop averting her gaze and running away from the problem.

"To kill your enemy, you must first understand them. Study their movements and memorise their philosophy. Everything that dictates their movements and choices must be observed before you can truly secure a kill. The Eclipse runs far and wide, just killing a branch wouldn't be enough." Kaden explained before pushing Luke back.

"Oi kid! Tell me the goal that you set for yourself when you became a Hunter!" He shouted, glaring at Ria who sat in silence clenching her fist.

Gritting her teeth, she stood up and glared back at Kaden, not averting her eyes.

Even though she didn't speak, Kaden could see the answer in her eyes.

"There's some life back in there. So what do you say, kid? Feeling up to the task?" Kaden grinned as Ria nodded her head.

Looking down at her hands, she could see her body trembling from the thought but he was right. She's spent every moment of her life after leaving the Eclipse running away, killing stragglers when she could.

But just killing the rats not involved with the main operation of things won't be enough. If she wanted to root them out properly, she needed to fully understand the organisation.

"What do I do? Where do I start?" Ria asked as Kaden shrugged.

"Don't ask me, I'm still trying to figure out sh*t like that since the day- Nah never mind. If you want to ask anyone, ask Alice. She's trying to root out something just as big ya know?" Kaden smiled.

The more he researched the Zenia family, the more he understood the true size of this noble family. Rather, instead of a family, it's more like an 'organization' similar to the Eclipse.

Everything they do revolves around the Abyss Blood.

No one can deny the benefits they brought to the surface with the research yet one mustn't look away from the mountains of corpses created in doing so. No research is done without sacrifice but the death count for the Zenias was... abnormal.

Even taking into account of their experiments with Alice's blood, the casualty rate was simply too high. There was something that neither he nor Alice knew about and if Alice wanted to root them out, she'd need to tackle this unknown variable.

Nodding her head, Ria became reinvigorated as the doubts that had been covering her mind over the last few days were dispelled.

Watching Ria run towards Alice who was stumbling around trying to get used to her new vision, Kaden sat down and gave Luke a sideways glance.

Seeing this, Luke clicked his tongue and turned away, annoyed.

"Why do you avert your gaze boy? Is it because I'm an Abyss Lord? I won't kill you over this." Kaden smirked while Luke was silent.

"Everyone has their circumstances. But the Abyss isn't a place where you can let that circumstance tie you down otherwise you won't survive. Maybe you don't see it the way she does since you've already resolved a part of your problem." Kaden chuckled.

Glancing down, Luke recalled back to the time when the Eclipse kidnaped both him and Ria.

The ritual that she partook in, he too was a victim of it.

But at some point during that ritual, he started to take the initiative. To push himself to the advantage.

Their screams as he clawed away at them, their faces of horror as he ripped life from their lungs.

He could remember everything but it never bothered him. He simply had to do it to survive.

But Ria wasn't the same.

During that ritual, he saw her fear. The tears that rolled down her cheeks each time she was forced to do something she hated.

And even though he might become an enemy in the next moment, she still tried to help him.

"Ria doesn't belong to this kind of bloody world." Luke muttered.

"Nah, that's where you're wrong. With that kind of perspective, you're looking down on the girl. Who are you to decide where she belongs?" Kaden patted his head as he gestured for Luke to sit next to him.

Following his instructions, Luke sat down and looked at Ria who was talking to Alice.

"She's stronger than you think. Even though she's suited for ranged fighting, she's still going into close quarters combat. I can only imagine what she thinks every time blood splatters on her." Kaden sighed.

"I'm familiar with how the Eclipse work. Their doctrine and philosophies. Have you ever thought about what she sees every time she draws blood?"

Pausing for a moment, Luke watched Ria's every movement. Her smile, her seriousness. But not once did he think about what she saw when she fights.

Gritting his teeth, he slapped himself with both his hands.

"I'm pathetic." Luke muttered. Subconsciously, he's been building a cage around Ria. Seeing her as someone who he needed to protect.

But Ria never requested that of him.

"The first step into becoming a man is to recognise your own shortcomings. Not bad boy, you bounced back faster than I thought." Kaden laughed, patting him on the back.

"So what do you think you should do now?" He asked, wanting to hear Luke's response.

"Not sure. I haven't thought about it much really." Luke glanced up at the sky but Kaden shook his head.

"That's not it. Think harder, I can see a reason in those eyes of yours. The basis of all your actions."

Unsure as to what Kaden meant, Luke tilted his head while Kaden let out a helpless laugh.

"I suppose you're just a boy at the end of the day. Work hard chess boy, someday you'll understand. But the you right now is already better than what you were moments ago." Kaden patted his head with a grin, seeing a slight shadow of himself in the lad.

"But still, I hope you three will stop giving me annoying jobs to do. Taking care of y'all is such a tiring ordeal." Kaden waved his hand while creating a portal beneath his feet.

Sinking into the portal, he disappeared, leaving Luke behind in the seats.

"What a strange man." He scratched his cheek.

One moment he's harsh, another he's gentle. Sometimes an asshole and cruel b*stard during training, other times he's giving them eye-opening lectures.

Truly, Luke couldn't get a grasp on what Kaden was thinking.

"A basis of my actions huh? I wonder what that is." Luke muttered, standing up and making his way to Ria and Alice.

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"How I plan on rooting out the Zenia's huh? Hmm... Well, I haven't really thought about itahaha~" Alice scratched her hair while sitting on the ground.

"Ehhh what do you mean? I thought that was your goal no?" Ria blinked her eyes.

"I'm not strong enough yet. Even if I'm given the chance to go after the main family, I'll be pretty helpless at the end of the day." Alice smiled.

She knew that trying to fully root out the Zenia's was a difficult task. A testament to their influence over the world. Even now, there were signs of their presence in the corners of her eyes when she wanders the markets.

Merchants who sell their wares, families who depend on their medicine.

"But if I had to go about it... Probably go for their pillars of support? What keeps the family afloat and so on. Wealth, research, reputation stuff like that." Alice shrugged while Ria began taking notes.

"I see. . . But how would you collapse the Eclipse? Their reputation is already pretty dog sh*t since everyone hates them. But there are still people following their teachings." Ria sighed.

Tapping her chin, Alice recalled everything she knew about the Eclipse. How they fought during the battle of three Gods and how they reacted to Enris, their God.

Their devotion and belief in her.

If Ria truly wants to cut down the Eclipse then there's only one real way to do so.

"You just gotta kill Enris, the God of the Eclipse."

Chapter 353 - 353: Red Thorn Arachne

"You just gotta kill Enris, the God of the Eclipse." Alice shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly while Ria's smile twitched.

"You what now?"

"You just gotta kill Enris. If you kill her, the Eclipse should collapse rather quickly since the ones near the top have a pretty unshakable belief in her. There's the Apostle of Famine and War, not sure if they're still alive and kicking but they probably are.

"The Eclipse is a cult built entirely on Enris' whims. What interests her at the moment. She'd even go as far as to cancel all of her previous plans if the situation is chaotic enough." Alice explained as she recalled her experience with Enris.

Their relationship was... strange to say the least. One moment she was interested and another they were tearing at each other's throats.

Truly a strange God.

"No, that's not what I mean. What I want to ask is that you're telling me to kill... A God??? Can they even be killed?" Ria asked while Luke paused mid-step, wondering what the hell did he just walk into.

"The three Gods of the surface aren't invincible ya know? I'm not entirely sure of their functionality but from what I've seen, they can indeed be killed. Or at least brought close to death." Alice glanced down.

She could remember Nyer utilizing a strange method to cause Enris to receive a backlash strong enough to stop her from fighting. And with Velouria's fate as proof, Gods can indeed be killed.

"But it's God you're talking about. Beings above Lords who can kill us with a single sneeze and above Apostles who can kill Lords easily." Luke raised an eyebrow while sitting next to Ria.

"Yea but you've been talking to one this entire time though." Alice rested her chin on her hand as Ria nodded her head before pausing as well.

"Who?" Both of them asked as Alice rolled her eyes and pulled out a feather.

"Kaden. He's an Apostle for... A fallen God that I met in the Inverted World." Alice explained as she began to explain the history of Ayr and Velouria.

She didn't go into too much detail but enough for them to understand the strength of the person who's been training them.

The longer Luke listened, the paler his face became as he just grabbed the collar of an Apostle of all people.

"But yeah, you just gotta get strong enough to kill Enris and the Eclipse cult should collapse in on itself. Without the head, the rest can be dealt with easily even if it is a bit difficult. It'll be much easier and less effort than carving away at it from the countless branches." Alice smiled while focusing her mind on making a couple of blood daggers.

The formation and durability of these weapons were poor but when mixed with some metal to help stabilise its form, it was sufficient.

Now that she no longer had the passive buff of Cayla to help with her control, it just proved how difficult it was to be an effective caster.

Leaning back, Ria dwelled on Alice's words as she began to furrow her brows.

"Arg!!! It's simple when you phrase it like that but how do I even get strong enough to kill a God. I'm not a God after all." Ria scratched her hair.

"I dunno, it's something for us to find out isn't it?" Alice laughed, throwing the daggers into the air and juggling them to the best of her abilities.

Her depth perception was very poor with just one eye and she failed to catch the daggers. But it was a start as she slowly began to adapt to the vision.

*Sigh~

"You're not wrong. Something for us to figure out huh? One's trying to kill a God and the other is trying to topple the biggest noble family working with Abyss Blood on the surface." Ria sighed.

"Don't forget trying to revive Ayr while I'm at it."

"That too. What about you Luke? Do you have any grand goals to work towards?" Ria asked curiously as she sat up, looking towards him with expectant eyes.

"A goal huh? Hmm..." Rubbing his chin, Luke tried to think of one but nothing came to mind.

"I'll probably play it by ear and see what happens."

"Boo~ That's boring. What about your Abyssal Engineering? You're talented at that, do you not have any grand goals for your talents?" Ria did a thumbs down as Luke chopped down on her head with his hand.

"No goals here. Even with the things I make, it's mostly miscellaneous stuff and gimmicks for people fighting in close quarters combat. Honestly, I don't even get the big inventors in the first place. Why should I invent stuff for the whole population to use? It'll be pretty ironic if I die when someone kills me with my own invention." Luke scoffed as he'd rather make stuff for Ria than other people.

"Exactly! You get it don't you!" Alice clapped her hands with a wide grin on her face.

The same went for her, why should her blood be used for the masses? It didn't make sense for her.

Reaching into her pouch, she revealed a devious smile and pulled out some mead and skewers.

'Oh sh*t let me out! I've been starving for those.' Alyss shouted as she wiped away her drool.

'Don't worry I will.' Alice reassured as the party resumed between the three of them.

Ria partied, feeling happy that the confusion in her mind was cleared.

Alice partied, feeling happy that Luke understood what she felt.

Luke was dragged along in confusion.

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Clutching her head after the party, Alice could feel the dizziness take over and having just one eye didn't make things any better.

There were quite a few things she needed to deal with. The Zenias, The Underground, Academy department transfer and even the Principal. She wanted to ask her about her relationship with Allura but Alice wasn't able to find a chance to speak to her.

Though considering the incident, her schedule has been rather free since the Academy was trying to get things rolling again once the repairs were made.

But as always, her main goal was still the Zenias. Since her vision was now impaired, her 'performance' as Kale was going to be affected. In order to reduce the impact of having one eye, Alice needed to fight.

A lot.

It is through constant fighting could she truly get used to this view and there were two options.

A, she goes back to the arena.

B, she takes some commissions.

Taking commissions as Kale was difficult since she didn't have an ID nor did she have a Guild License. But it wasn't impossible, she just needed a fake ID and the best one to do that would be the Underground for the right price.

Alice wanted to limit her dealings with the Underground if possible and the consequences of faking a Guild ID were unknown to her. She doesn't know if they have a method of tracking her down or not and she wasn't willing to risk it at this moment.

Naturally, this meant going back to the Arena.

With how much she's been relying on the Arena, Alice couldn't help but feel as though she's becoming more like Ria but as it stands, it's more for convenience than actual gambling.

Upon making herself a new identity using the Mirror Jester Sigil, Alice tried to sign up for the Arena once more but her hopes were shattered. After her little stunt as Kale and causing quite a big loss for the Arena in terms of earnings, they were restricting who could sign up to participate.

The limitations basically made it impossible for Alice to sign up as she had to give up on plan B and fall back on plan A, guild requests.

But just as she thought of this, she gave herself a huge facepalm. She's been so preoccupied with tricking Zenias and the Underground that she forgot she could just take the Guild requests as herself.

It's not like people aren't going to see her new 'cute' seal that Kaden placed on her.

Finding a chance to dispel the disguise, Alice made her way to the guild as a few students who were wandering the city noticed her eye.

Since Alice had always been seen with an abnormal right eye, seeing her having it closed was rather eye catching.

Ignoring the curious gazes, Alice made her way inside the guild and looked at the currently available requests.

Once again, most of the easy ones were getting stolen by Vultures while the hard ones were left untouched.

'Right now I have a three Star licence. If I want to take the four star quests I'll need to do another rank up with an examiner. I should probably get a three star hunt and then arrange a rank up for when I come back.' Alice mused to herself as in the end, she picked a rather simple Hunt commission just outside of the city.

It'll take her a short journey via sea but she could get it done in around two days since most of it was spent travelling.

There were other Hunts that was closer to the city but this one in particular, took her interest.

[Hunt a Red Thorn Arachne]

A Red Thorn Arachne has been terrorising the Cradles Orphanage. It's been appearing in the vicinity and kills anyone who approaches it while creating a territory around the home.

The reward of the Hunt wasn't anything to be impressed with but according to Cayla, Red Thorn Arachne's aren't known to create a territory like this and that this was too conspicuous for the Arachne.

With this in mind, Alice recalled the Blood Moon Maiden that she killed and seeing as how this was another abnormal beast, she wanted to check it out and see what was going on. It was wishful thinking but if it was indeed a byproduct of the Eclipse then there was a rare chance that it might give her a Sigil similar to her second Sigil.

Upon accepting the commission, Alice made her way down to the docks and took a boat to Verten, a small town to the west of Silverwind Valley where the Cradles Orphanage was located.

Chapter 354 - 354: Verten

The ride to Verten was rather uneventful as Alice simply spent the time sleeping on the boat.

Once she arrived, she could see that the town was rather deserted for a coastal town with only a few ships surrounding the docks. The people that live here seem dispirited, lumbering around like lifeless zombies.

Furrowing her brows, Alice hopped off the boat and wandered around the place.

No matter who she talked to, all of their responses were lacklustre and they didn't find anything wrong with it. Meanwhile, the people who sailed into this town were just as confused as Alice but they went about their day, thinking this was probably just how it's always been.

In the end, Alice decided to sit atop the tallest building for now.

During the time she spent around asking for some information, she managed to get the directions to Cradle Orphanage but the person who told her warned her about the dangers.

"They say the Orphanage is cursed right now and it's not because of the beast guarding it."

Aside from this, they refused to elaborate and made sure to hurry away before Alice could ask them more questions.

'What do you think?' Alice frowned while Alyss scratched her hair.

[Just from surface glances, it doesn't seem like they're under any Sigil abilities. All of them just seem tired to me.] Cayla shook her head.

Of course, if she could still access her power, it would make it a bit easier but with the seal in place, she can forget about that.

'Regardless, our goal is the Arachne right? Let's deal with that and leave. This place is giving me the shivers.' Alyss frowned, surprising Alice as there wasn't much that Alyss would be cautious about.

But if she's being on guard towards this area then Alice should complete this hunt as soon as possible.

Her main goal was to adapt to her new vision and lack of control, going out of her way to cause trouble was beyond what she wanted to do.

The town could be described in three sections. The docks leading to Silverwind valley, the centre where most of the shops, stalls and so on were placed and finally the outer edges.

The Cradle Orphanage was situated just outside of the outer edge, a little further out from the town and there was only a single path leading towards the building.

Buying herself a lamp to help with her eyesight, Alice stabbed it to her waist while making her way out of the town.

The soft glow of a blue flame flickered, its light illuminating the path out of the town as Alice repeated a small experiment with her third Sigil to practice her control.

She would make a line of blood that wrapped around her fingers and have it slither through the gaps. The goal of this exercise was to control the line of blood to make sure the blood was evenly distributed while hovering above her skin at the slightest elevation.

Once it's done five laps around the fingers on her right hand, she would conjure a line of blood on the left and repeat.

If she could still use Cayla, this would be a walk in the park but right now, these lines of blood left a trail on her finger as she wasn't able to ensure the consistency nor could she hover it just above her skin.

Rather than a hovering line of blood, it was more a blood worm wiggling across her fingers.

Letting out a helpless sigh, Alice continued this exercise all while trying to maintain a basic zone around her perimeter, warning her of any external dangers that might be lurking just outside of her sight.

After a while, she began to spot threads that were barely visible to the eye. Had it not been for the lamp, she would've walked straight into it.

[Red Thorn Arachnes don't use threads as their primary weapon but more so as a tool for alerting them. There have been cases in the past where it's been used as triggers for traps so be careful if you're trying to get rid of them.] Cayla warned as Alice took her warning to heart.

Leaning down to avoid the thread, Alice began to navigate her way through this field of threads and soon, a building came into view.

A gentle fog rolled around the building as Alice narrowed her eyes.

The Orphanage featured a large prominent clock tower with broken hands and moss that grew on the surface, showcasing the passage of time. Arched windows devoid of light, broken stonework revealing gaps in the building and pointed spires with broken tips.

Tall trees draped with thin thread acted as a veil that blocked the entrance of the building.

Surprisingly, the threads began to glow from the moonlight, covering the orphanage in a ghostly visage as Alice extinguished the flame in her lamp and stored it in her pouch for now.

'Four healing vials and a berserk vial. Should be more than enough even if things go south.' Alice thought to herself, creating a sword that mimicked the shape of Void Fang using her third Sigil.

A blood blade using metal as its core.

Just as she took a step towards the building, Alice felt her entire body break out in cold sweat as though a thousand eyes had just locked onto her being.

In that split second where she felt the chill, a speeding object breached her Zone!

'ALICE DUCK!!!' Alyss shouted in a panic.

Without even thinking about why she needed to duck, Alice relaxed her legs, allowing her body to fall limp as her reflection could be seen against the silver blade of a scythe like limb.

*BANG!!!

Even though the initial strike missed, the explosion of it colliding against the ground was enough to throw Alice tumbling away as she managed to catch sight of her prey.

A large spider like beast with a woman's torso. She was taller than the average human, even above Allura as her face was partially obscured by chitinous claws that protruded from the side. A pair of glowing red eyes with no pupils, white hair that fluttered loosely behind her.

She wore a wide grin revealing a row of sharp jagged teeth. However, this is where her human features begin to fade away.

The upper half of her body was a chimeric blend of flesh and chitin stitched against her body and stretched her skin. Cracks revealing a pulsing red energy flooded out from her body while synthetic tubes hung from her back, looking as though it's been pulled apart forcefully.

The Arachne's blood dripped from these tubes and onto her spider like lower half. While one may assume that the girl's upper body would be cut off and attached to the body of a spider, Alice could see signs of what used to be legs blended into the armoured plates. Twisted and bent the wrong way.

Her overall figure, a grotesque amalgamation of twisted human flesh, limbs and arachnoid parts, merging into a single being that bore a faint resemblance to a Red Thorn Arachne.

The spider like limbs are spread out in unnatural ways, a mutation. Each limb, gnarled and cracked, ending in sharp clawed appendages that clutched against the dirt.

One look was all Alice needed to understand the truth of this creature as she gritted her teeth.

This was not the sign of the Eclipse.

No, their methods would not result in such a haphazard amalgamation.

Jumping back, Alice focused her mind as her second Sigil lit up.

Void Flux!

Firing the orb of energy towards the beast, Alice watched as its figure stabbed one of its legs into the ground.

*BANG!!!

A single red thorn erupted from the ground, piercing the Void Flux and forcing it to detonate early while Alice rushed towards the beast.

In an instant, golden chains manifested around her body as Alyss took over, ducking a leg sweep before slashing up with the blade.

*CRACK!!!

"Tsk! Hard!" Alyss clicked her tongue in annoyance.

The shell protecting the beast was far tougher than what she had expected as her blade cracked apart in her hands.

Taking over in one swift motion, Alice created a blood mirror and flung her body away since she wasn't able to set out correct coordinates for an instant teleportation.

Rolling across the dirt, Alice could see the beast studying her movement, observing her actions and learning how she fought.

Her gleaming eyes narrowed while the smile only stretched wider.

'Do you want me to take the lead in this twinnie or should I leave it to you?' Alyss frowned.

'Leave it to me. I'll make the switches when we need since I don't think I can survive that well up close right now.' Alice nodded as she dashed towards the beast.

There was a light in her gaze that Cayla was surprised to see, a light that only appeared when Alice was talking about a certain family.

Weaving through an onslaught of red thorns despite some grazing her skin, Alice created a dagger and threw it above the beast's head.

Since she couldn't accurately set the coordinates for her teleport, she'll use a dagger as a marker!

Switching places with her dagger using the blood mirror, Alice swapped roles with Alyss as she created two blades.

*CRACK!!!

Slashing down with both blades, she clicked her tongue once more as the blades couldn't penetrate the skin but she wasn't done.

Doing a backflip, she created a bow as violet flames gathered into a single arrow.

Aiming towards the tubes sticking out of the beast's back, Alyss fired the arrow!

*BANG!!!

Watching the spire of violet flames roar out in this darkness, Alyss grinned as she handed back the controls.

No matter what they do, they had to take care of this beast and find the source.

After all, this was a product of the Zenia's! A beast caused by forced side effects!

Chapter 355 - 355: Fighting The Arachne

From within this torrent of flames, red thorns pierced out once more as Alice tried to parry it to the side only for the thorn to stab into her arm.

"Tsk!" Clicking her tongue, Alice slashes the thorn using her sword before jumping back.

She could feel it pulsing within her flesh as the Arachne glanced towards her and flicked her finger.

*CRACK!!!

Widening her eyes, Alice glanced down and saw the thorn piercing out of her arm and growing at a rapid pace.

Without any hesitation, she conjured a blade and stabbed it into her shoulder before cutting off her arm.

Activating her second Sigil, red spider lilies blossomed from her flesh as bones began to reconstruct itself followed by tendons, veins, flesh then skin.

Clenching her fist, Alice ducked under another strike as red thorns threatened to pierce her eye.

Leaning her head to the side, the thorn scratched her cheek as she gathered her energy and fired a Void Flux at point blank.

*BANG!!!

Crashing against the Arachne's chest, Alice watched as she stumbled back a few steps but was mostly unharmed.

'How tough is this b*tch?!' She cursed inwardly while creating a blood blade.

Taking a deep breath, she released a horizontal slash.

Void Flux – Cleave!

*KRRR!!!!

Colliding against the Arachne's scythe like leg, the slash struggled to maintain form before dispersing in a firework of sparks.

Seeing this, Alice's smile twitched as she felt a chill down her back and rolled to the side.

*BANG!!!

A pillar of thorns erupted where she stood as she immediately got to her feet and circled around the beast.

Thorns continuously stabbed up from the ground as she couldn't afford to get hit in a bad spot. After all, doing so means the thorns would explode from the wound! Even with her regeneration, there was a limit to how much damage she could take before she straight up dies and Alice wasn't willing to f*ck around and find out.

Jumping into the air, she narrowed her gaze and threw two daggers towards the beast.

Both were knocked aside as she created a blood mirror behind her.

Seeing this pattern before, she swung towards the daggers only for Alice to grin.

What was teleported wasn't herself but rather two condensed orbs of Void Flux!

*BANG!!!

Watching the beast engulfed in an explosion of violet flames, Alice felt excited for a moment before that feeling was quenched by disbelief.

Even with her violet flames that burned against the flesh of beasts and used it as fuel, the Arachne walked through the flames as though it was nothing. Flames latched onto its flesh yet it showed no reaction and soon, pieces of her body began to fall off, taking the flames with them.

'She's regenerating all the wounds caused by the flames.' Alyss frowned, seeing how potent the regeneration was.

'Ya don't say.'

She was forcefully expelling pieces of her flesh and letting it take the fire with them. Making it very difficult for her flames to hinder this healing.

Narrowing her gaze, Alice wondered if using her first Resonance would help solve the issue.

Dispelling her blade, she gathered energy into her finger before firing a blast at the beast's head.

Swatting it to the side, the beast expected Alice to follow up the attack when she noticed Alice running away at top speed.

'Wait we're just running?!' Alyss widened her eyes as Cayla let out a laugh.

'Of course I am. Take a step back so I can take 2 steps forward. I need to figure out a way to get past that defence and regeneration otherwise how the hell am I supposed to kill this b*tch?' Alice rolled her eyes, jumping over a log while creating a small bundle of flames to hover around her.

These flames helped illuminate the threads as she navigated back to the main road.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like the Arachne was following her as Alice sighed out in relief.

But her relief was short lived as she noticed a single thread attached to her clothing.

"You've got to be shitting me..." Alice muttered as she was suddenly tugged with an overwhelming force that sent her into the air.

Gritting her teeth from dislocating her shoulder, Alice glanced down and saw the Arachne holding the thread with a menacing grin.

'F*ck it, we're killing this b*tch here and now! Cayla anything I need to be careful of?' Alice shouted out in her mind as she created a blade coated with violet flames and slashed the thread apart.

[Watch out for her berserk state. All of her attacks will shoot out with increased intensity but her defences SHOULD drop. Don't count on it though since it's an abnormal Arachne with a surprisingly high toughness. Once the berserk ends, she'll be back to normal.] Cayla warned as Alice nodded her head.

Closing her eye, she opened it to reveal the pattern of a Red Spider Lily!

First Resonance!

Her form shifted as she swiped with her hand, creating a cascade of red spider lilies that rained down on upon the beast.

The roots of the flower dug into the gaps of the beast as it recognised the danger and tried to pull the flowers out but Alice intervened.

Landing in front of the beast, she created a dagger and stabbed towards the abdomen.

*BANG!!!

Blocking it with its limbs, the Arachne growled at Alice who stuck out her tongue before jumping back, exploding the dagger into blood mist.

Snapping her finger, red spider lilies began to blossom from the mist.

Little by little, cracks began to form across the beast's body. From these cracks, red spider lilies took root and began to blossom!

"You inhaled the mist didn't you~" Alice grinned as she created another sword in her hand.

Realising the implications, the beast wanted to purge the mist but it was too late. From its back, flowers began to blossom as Alice rushed into its range.

Taking over, Alyss released several swipes against the back of the legs, making shallow cuts that allowed more lilies to take root before swapping back to Alice.

Creating a blood mirror, Alice used it as a shield to block the Arachne's strike, creating a gateway away from her.

Wanting to forcefully close the gateway, Alice clicked her tongue as the corners of the portal stopped around the legs, unable to sever it cleanly.

Jumping back, she expelled the leg from the gateway before dismissing the mirror then created a Void Flux above her finger in one movement.

It was the variant that she had used in the training room while she was practising with Kaden, one that focused on penetration power!

*BANG!!!

Firing the Void Flux into the abdominal area of the spider half, Alice watched as the spiralling strike clashed against the hard exterior, digging away at the chitinous armour but soon lost its momentum.

Creating a portal behind her, Alice leaned back and teleported away to safety as the beast tried to crush her with its weight.

'Seems like we can only go for the limbs. The shell is too hard for us to bypass.' Alice furrowed her brows, creating two daggers and letting Alyss take over.

Revealing a wide grin, Alyss let out a laugh as she dashed towards the beast who was recovering from the earlier attack.

Seeing Alice rush towards it, it released a scream before thorns erupted around it in a frenzy.

Weaving through the forest of thorns, Alyss stabbed the dagger into the back of the leg before using it as a foothold to jump up.

Creating a hook, she jammed it inside the beast's mouth before throwing her body over the shoulder and forcing the head back.

Creating a wire thread using blood and metal, Alyss wrapped it around the hook before switching with Alice who snapped her finger.

From the wire, red spider lilies began to blossom as the beast widened her eyes, biting the hook in half to prevent it from reaching her body.

But in doing so, Alice achieved her goal.

*CRACK!!!

From her neck, briar roots tore through the flesh as it intertwined with the beast's flesh. No matter how it tried to discard her flesh, the roots would take hold.

Now that she was in her Resonance form, Alice was glad that her control over her abilities had recovered to a certain extent, allowing her to achieve feats that would be in her standard form.

Narrowing her gaze, Alice knew this wasn't enough thus she prepared the next strike.

A standard blood weapon wouldn't be able to withstand her full power in a slash.

Therefore, Alice decided to draw blood directly from her body to create the weapon. A blade that held the full power of her blood.

Creating a cut on her palm, Alice rushed towards the beast while blood swirled into a single orb before extending into a guardless blade and handle.

Executioner's Blade!

Twisting her body, Alice released a horizontal slash aimed towards the limbs as the space began to collapse in on itself from the vacuum caused by the slash.

Collapsing under her own weight, the beast glanced down in shock as all of its legs were separated from the body!

Turning towards Alice, it wanted to release a final desperate attack but it was already too late.

*BANG!!!

A single violent downwards cleave at full speed cracked through the Arachne's collarbone, digging into her flesh and tearing her upper body in half.

Flickers of violet flame and red spider lilies began to grow from the wound, taking root and preventing the flesh from joining together.

Rolling onto the ground, the beast coughed up a mouthful of blood as she crawled away from Alice desperately with one arm. Unintelligible mutters could be heard as she dug her fingers against the dirt, reaching towards the orphanage.

Looking down with pity in her eyes, Alice took a deep breath before releasing one more slash, ending the life of the mutated Arachne who reached towards the building with her final breath.

Chapter 356 - 356: Zenia Experiments

Staring at the disintegrating pieces of the Arachne's body that were being consumed by her violet flames and spider lilies, Alice felt a bit of pity for the girl.

If it wasn't for the resilient nature of her own body, this might've been her fate as well. Living and dying as a tool of the Zenia family.

But thinking up to this stage, Alice began to wonder what a product of the Zenia's was doing this far out. The only candidates in mind were Erick and his group but she had no evidence to back it up. For now, she simply made her way to the orphanage to see what the Arachne was trying to protect.

Brushing aside the threads, Alice furrowed her brows upon seeing the crest belonging to the Church of the Moon.

Pushing open the orphanage doors, dust trembled from the wooden frame as moonlight filtered through the gaps, revealing rows upon rows of broken seats and a fractured altar. There were no signs of anyone being here as Alice wandered the halls.

Every room she visited was empty yet it had shown signs of people living here in the past.

Belongings such as toys, books and so on were strewn about haphazardly.

'This is too... 'clean.'" Alice frowned as Alyss agreed.

'If there are no signs of being living here recently, then why is the beast guarding this place? Or do you think it used to live here?'

'Maybe...'

Crouching down, Alice activated her third Sigil as blood began to swirl around her. Stretching it out as much as possible, she had the blood mist envelope every inch of this orphanage, marking down every nook and cranny while a small model of the interior manifested in front of her.

Turning and flipping the model, Alice wanted to see if there was anything she had missed when her mist discovered a gap beneath the orphanage. A secret passage leading far below the surface beyond the reach of her mist.

Dispelling her third Sigil, Alice made her way to where the entrance was discovered and it was right below the altar.

There were small signs of movement that she only noticed once she knew there was a passage but without this knowledge, she would've overlooked this mark.

***BANG!!!**

Punching down with her fist covered by a swirl of blood, Alice was surprised at how sturdy the floor was. Furrowing her brows, she created a Void Flux and forcefully punched a hole down into the unknown.

None of them were talking right now as all three simply wanted to see the end of this path. What the orphanage was hiding and possibly what the Arachne was 'guarding'.

Pulling out the lantern from her pouch, Alice lit the candle before hanging it on her waist.

Keeping her right hand on the wall to stabilize herself, she made her way down the staircase.

###

Pausing momentarily, Selen furrowed her brows and pulled out a talisman that had cracked in half.

"Sir, one of the nearby research stations has been broken into." She reported as Erick frowned.

"Tsk... troublesome. Pick two that you think are suitable for the task and get rid of the mongrels that breached the station immediately. Make sure you clean it up properly as well." Erick ordered as Selen nodded her head.

There was a complicated light in her eyes but it soon faded away as she carried out his order.

Meanwhile, Michael and Melissa overheard this and frowned.

"Do you need us to check out the situation?" Michael asked curiously. As researchers, this task ultimately falls to them.

"No need. Since it's been breached, I can only assume the people left to guard it were killed. Going there would only cause unnecessary trouble for the Guards. Just focus on what we need to do here." Erick shook his head.

The family sent him here to 'negotiate' access into the Inverted World but if there was trouble at a nearby station then he may as well sort that out while he's here. There's been cases like this in the past but they were quelled rather quickly since they killed the intruder before the news could get out.

This time was going to be no different.

###

After walking for what Alice assumed to be 15 minutes, she began to see the bottom of the stairs.

However, the faint hums of equipment brought back bad memories of her time in the Zenia prison. Clenching her fist, she held back her anger continued down.

But as she reached the bottom, she was stunned beyond belief.

In the large open space filled with countless expensive equipment, corpses belonging to the researchers were strewn out. Their innards were pulled from their body, their limbs twisted in abnormal directions and their bodies pierced by crimson thorns.

Their eyes gouged out with parts of their skin flayed and peeled.

Yet this wasn't what shocked her.

Aside from the researchers, there were casualties among those with a familiar collar around their neck.

While it was broken now, Alice could vividly remember the pain and torment it brought her. Subconsciously, her hand rubbed against her neck.

Among the casualties, many of which were lying down on the operating tables. Pregnant woman who had their stomachs torn open by countless hands from the inside. Malformed foetuses that were a mix between child and beast.

Their faces were warped in pain and tears in their last moments.

Many of the fetuses held a resemblance to the Arachne they saw on the outside as their mutated bodies meant the death of their own mother.

Neither Alice nor Alyss were surprised as they were familiar with the methods of the Zenia family but Cayla was speechless. Her eyes watched with horror as she couldn't believe humans were capable of such cruelty. Against their own race no less!

Holding back her anger, Alice looked around for some research documenting what had happened here but most of the notes had been soaked in blood. What little she could glean from the pages documented the process of applying side effects while the child was still in the womb.

When injecting blood into a human, adult or child, their body would show some signs of rejection, forming defects with little to no practical use.

Side effects that hindered their movements and so on.

However, if they were to modify the blood to a certain extent via experimentation and then apply it directly to the fetuses in regular doses while it matured, they could observe the growth and ensure a perfect specimen for observation.

A merge between human and beast. There was little success but by taking the blood samples of those failures and impregnating the mother once more, it suppressed the side effect of the beast enough for more doses of Abyss Blood that didn't directly kill the child.

Through this method, they were able to produce better results such as beasts with harder defences, more lethality and even features from other beasts merged into one.

A lot of the details between the initial experiments and the final experiment were obscured but seeing the state of the mothers with their stomachs torn open from the inside, Alice could already guess what had occurred.

[Vile creatures! They don't deserve to be called human! O' master mine, tell me what I can do to help you rend these cursed parasites from the face of this realm! How dare they insult the love that Velouria had shown them in the past!] Cayla raged.

'Don't worry, I know. They all deserve to die though it seems the Arachne outside had already taken care of that for us.' Alice nodded.

The Arachne that she had faced was never given a name by her mother. But she was the final product achieved by these Zenia researchers. Their pride and joy.

'How ironic. Their best masterpiece became their downfall. And likewise, I'll become the blade that cuts down the Zenia family.' Alice smiled.

Taking this research and storing it in her pouch, she looked for more evidence of their cruelty. While the Zenias may hold sway over public opinion, with enough evidence and regular exposure, she could turn the public perception of this family in due time.

Once she had gathered everything she could find, Alice condensed all of her energy into a single spark.

Narrowing her gaze, she fired the spark towards the centre of the lab before diving into a blood mirror to teleport herself back to the surface. After killing the Arachne, Alice left a marker to act as an anchor point for her teleport.

Landing roughly on the grass, Alice glanced back and watched as a pillar of flames tore through the ground, creating a spire of pure destruction, consuming the entire orphanage.

Giving a silent prayer to the victims of the experiment, Alice turned and prepared to make her way back when her body froze up.

"What the hell happened here." A voice rang out as Alice glanced back and saw two figures dropping from the sky.

One had large draconic wings on her back while the other Alice was familiar with. Both were part of the Zenia guard department!

Jyn whom she had fought before. During their fight, he had held back due to it being a spar and the second, a woman called Rita. She was mostly silent, rarely giving her input yet her eyes had always been observing her when she was acting as Kale.

If both of them were here then it means...

'Sh*t!' Cursing in her mind, Alice immediately raised her guard as Jyn's blade tore into her flesh, crushing her bones with its sheer weight as her body was sent back, slamming against the tree.

"F*cking hell... I didn't think a rat would actually sneak in." Jyn cracked his neck as he hoisted his ring blade onto his shoulder while Rita was silent. She glanced at the scattering of energy from Alice's Void Flux and frowned.

"Clean up. Then we go back." She ordered as Jyn grinned.

"You don't have to tell me twice." Jyn laughed, approaching the motionless Alice who slumped over in the remains of a broken tree.

Chapter 357 - 357: Dragon Slayer Mausoleum

'Ah... How long has it been...' Alice thought to herself, unable to muster any strength in her body.

She could see the blurred figure of Jyn approaching her while both Alyss and Cayla shouted in her ears but she couldn't hear them properly.

Their shouts simply acted as noise as Alice felt a wave of drowsiness wash over her. As if she could just close her eyes and let go of everything.

###

"Papa!" A familiar voice sounded out as Alice slowly opened her eyes.

She noticed a familiar hallway, familiar butlers and maids. A familiar landscape and a familiar figure in front of her with a soft smile.

"Alice." He called out gently as a young Alice ran into his arms with a happy smile.

"Did you listen to Mama's instructions today?" He asked, patting her head while lifting her up with his arms.

"Mnm! I did! I left my picture with Mama, let me show you." Young Alice revealed a wide smile while the patriarch of the Zenia family showed the same warmth back. A sincere smile.

Alice watched in disgust.

She glared at her father, the patriarch and the one who ordered her torture. To think he could show this kind of face disgusted Alice as she wanted nothing but to sever his head here and now.

To think the very same man who ordered such a cruel fate to his daughter would be able to show this kind of smile.

Her vision flickered once more as she was shown a scene after her birthday.

The haggard sight of her father approaching her hesitantly as she sat in her own room, playing with her toys.

". . . A-Alice." Her father called out as young Alice turned around happily.

"Papa!" She cried out, running towards him but this time, he didn't open his arms.

He simply allowed her to hug his leg while staring at her with conflicted emotions in his eyes.

"Do you remember Mama?" He asked, clenching his fist as young Alice tilted her head.

"Mama? Of course I remember Mama. She gave me something super tasty for my birthday right? Mnm... I wish Mama would give me that food more often." Young Alice revealed a smile as her father trembled at the reply.

"Alright. I'll tell Mama, you play with yourself for now okay?" He forced a smile, leaving her in the room before locking the door.

Slumping against the wall, he covered his face with his hands before taking deep breaths to compose himself.

Revealing a set of hostile eyes behind those fingers, he opened his mouth.

"Begin the experiments. I don't care anymore, just get as much value from her as you can." He ordered while Alice stood face to face with him, observing the expression on her father's face.

Within the fatigue in his eyes burned the flames of hatred as Alice simply stared at him.

###

"Ya know... I'm glad."

Approaching Alice's body, Jyn froze up upon hearing her voice. He was sure he landed a rather heavy blow against her during the surprise attack. One that would've killed most Hunters, but she was able to talk?

"I'd glad that you Zenia's is the same. That you're irredeemable trash. If it had been otherwise, I might've hesitated a little. But now that I know you're not uninvolved..." Alice trailed off as she pulled herself from the rubble and limped to her feet.

Blood dripped from her head, covering a part of her vision and rolling down the side of her cheek.

She understood that Alyss and Cayla were talking into her ear right now but she couldn't understand their words. Rather, it felt as though she was subconsciously filtering them out.

Her only focus was the man in front of her!

"!!!" Taking a step back and raising his blade in front of him, Jyn began to sweat as for a moment, he felt as though he was standing in front of something truly abnormal.

Every cell within his body screamed at him to run while her glare rooted him in place.

Even though he should have the upper hand, even though she was injured with her body desperately trying its best to piece itself together, Jyn didn't think he could win.

'Me? Think that I can't win? Bullsh*t!'

Without hesitation, he activated his first Resonance but Alice was already prepared as she's seen this many times by now.

Red spider lilies blossomed by her blood as she rushed towards Jyn who was surprised that she was taking the initiative. Just as he was about to parry her haphazard strike, he noticed the insane glimmer in her eyes as she twisted her body and threw her left arm at him!

She forcefully tore off the piece of her that was struggling to regenerate and threw it towards him as a weapon.

Smacking the arm aside with the face of his blade, he glanced up in shock as Alice had already regenerated her wounds. In her hand, she held a single blood dagger and stabbed towards his eyes.

*BANG!!!

Releasing a torrent of flames around him to ward her off, Jyn's composure was shattered when he noticed blood threads connecting to his armour.

From the flames, Alice crawled out while spider lilies and violet flames flickered across her body, fighting against the torrent of fire released by Jyn.

Revealing a maniacal grin, flames began to gather between them.

"Sh*t!" Cursing out loud, Jyn separated the thread connected to him and wanted to jump away but Alice had already detonated the Void Flux, causing a spiral of violet flames to erupt into the sky, startling Rita as she paused her work.

Furrowing her brows, she could see both Jyn and Alice being swept up by the flames.

Just when she thought it was going to be okay, a blood mirror appeared in front of Jyn's eyes as Alice reached through and gouged them out!

Plating two Void Flux's into his skull through the eye sockets, Alice grinned and leaned back.

*BANG!!!

The upper half of Jyn's head exploded as pieces of it rained down from above, covered by a layer of lilies and flames.

Widening her eyes, Rita didn't think Jyn would be done in so quickly as Alice revealed her body that was burnt and charred in the flame.

Yet by manually removing parts of her body that were damaged like the Arachne, she began to regenerate.

"One down~ One to go." Alice grinned, grabbing Jyn's body by the collar and lifting it in front of her.

Opening her mouth, she bit down on his neck!!!

Temporary six Sigils!

"Ah~ That's the sh*t. Come on! You're next!" Alice let out a laugh, rushing towards Rita who activated her first Resonance and revealed a set of draconic features much like Jyn.

However, compared to him, her speed was far greater!

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Alice's voice rang out as she created a blood mirror and jammed her hand inside.

Confused by this, Rita was about to counter when she slammed against Alice's hand choking her heck.

Without hesitation, Alice threw it into the ground before plunging down from above.

From the mist, a large wing spear pierced out, stabbing Alice in the abdominal area before tossing her away.

Rolling across the ground while spreading her blood everywhere, Alice stood up and healed the wound within moments.

Looking at Rita who glared at her from the dust, Alice revealed a grin and prepared a second attack.

However, now that she knew escaping was going to be difficult, Rita decided to go on the offensive.

Her speed didn't apply just to her movement but also to her attacks!

Feeling a chill down her spine, Alice wanted to duck down when another spear pierced her through.

Before it could try to tear her head off, Alice gritted her teeth and punched the side of the spear, gathering Tiamat's power as her fifth Sigil, Alice broke the spear in half and pulled it out, healing the wound on her neck.

However, Rita's onslaught didn't end there as more spears shot towards her. Creating a blade from metal and blood, Alice tried her best to expand her Zone but the edge was unstable. Parrying two spears, the third jabbed into her shoulder while the fourth severed her right arm.

The fifth pinned her foot against the ground and finally, the sixth was inches away from piercing her in the centre of the face when she barely managed to tilt her head to the side, letting it take her ear rather than her entire head.

Taking several deep breaths, Alice could feel the flesh on her body twist and pulse, stitching itself back together but it was already slower than what it was originally and Rita didn't fail to catch that either.

Without wasting any more words on Alice, she fired off spears while activating her sixth Sigil.

Each of the spears that she had fired began to tremble as Alice felt a chill in her heart.

*BANG!!!

Trusting this chill, Alice teleported herself away just in time to see the spears around her burst in a manner similar to how her spider lilies took root inside the Arachne's body. If she allowed that to hit her, her regeneration would be hindered.

"That teleportation ability. You rely on it too much. I just need to see the mirror to know where you are." Rita's voice rang out behind Alice.

Turning back just in time, Alice watched as she clasped her hands together.

Second Resonance – Dragon Slayer Mausoleum!

At that moment, Alice found herself surrounded by countless tombs with an assortment of weapons stabbed in front of each tombstone.

But the tombstones weren't the only things here. Large stone statues similar to the statues she saw in the Hall of Champions. Hung down from the ceiling was a chandelier housing 12 flickering flames.

One for each statue.

Unable to sense where Rita was, Alice wanted to use her blood to map out the area when two weapons lit up the moment she activated her Sigil.

Jumping out from the ground, the weapons stabbed towards their respective statue and it began to move!

Furrowing her brows, Alice noticed her control of blood had been reduced to the bare minimum as the statues began to run towards her. A hypothesis began to form as Alice widened her eye, and decided to take a gamble.

Activating her third Sigil, metal began to form. Once again, two weapons lit up, flying to their owners and Alice's control was reduced to the bare minimum.

She was right. Every time she used a Sigil power, the statues that awaken will act as a limiter!

Chapter 358 - 358: The Last Dragon Slayer

Taking a step back, Alice began to sweat as she tried her best to parry the attacks sent by the statues.

Each slash and stab of their weapon would send her tumbling back.

What's more, was that they were able to use her powers to some extent!

The first two statues would enhance their attacks using the same blood power that Alice had manifested while the second tried to limit her movements using metal cages.

Now that she was facing opponents who were using her powers, Alice couldn't help but click her tongue in anger!

'I can't use any of my other abilities without the risk of them being 'stolen' too. There are other statues who are dormant for now and Rita is nowhere to be seen.' Alice narrowed her eyes, creating a blood shield to parry the sword strike to the side.

However, her shield wasn't able to hold up as the blade tore off a chunk of her arm.

Jumping back, the flesh began to pulse and heal itself as Alice decided to run towards the statues in hopes of using them as cover.

But before she could, a spear shot out from the darkness, forcing her to bend her body back just in time to avoid a fatal blow.

Going into a handstand, Alice twisted her body and kicked the spear away while Rita disappeared back into the darkness.

'Annoying b*tch!' Alice thought to herself while she rolled to the side, avoiding the statue's attack.

Most of the second Resonances that she's seen thus far had all been personal realms that bolster the individual power. However, for Rita, her realm was one that siphoned her opponent's strength into these statues.

Narrowing her gaze at the statues, Alice decided that she had to deal with them first if she wanted to survive. And if that didn't work then her final option would be to forcefully expel herself using her fourth Sigil. But doing so was risky.

After all, if she's not fast enough, her strongest Sigil in terms of survivability would be stolen from her!

'ALICE!!!'

Flinching at the shout, Alice glanced at Alyss in a mix of surprise and confusion.

'F*cking hell you've finally calmed down enough to hear me.' Alyss clicked her tongue in annoyance.

This gap in concentration was enough for the statues to rush towards her but Alyss stole control from Alice and dodged the strike.

'I'm still fighting!' Alice frowned but Alyss ignored her.

Furrowing her brows, Alice wanted to say something when Cayla grabbed her arm.

[O' master mine, this is how Alyss had felt when you ignored all of our shouts earlier. We wanted to tell you information regarding these statues but you didn't listen.] Cayla shook her head as Alice paused.

She knew that they were trying to say something but as they said, she kept ignoring it.

Seeing as how Alyss was holding her own against these statues despite them stealing their power, Alice nodded her head and turned to Cayla.

[The Dragon Slayer statues aren't something unique to Rita as she's based it on the remanent of an old clan that used to fight dragons on a daily basis within the Abyss. After the fall of Ayr, the civilians belonging to the city split apart and formed clans, villages and cities by themselves.

[One of the oldest of which focused on holding back dragons and thus creating the Dragon Slayer Statues. Statues that could siphon the power of dragons from the beasts and use it against them.

But even with them stealing the power, they couldn't hold up against the strength granted to them by the bloodline awakening that was gifted to all dragons from Tiamat.] Cayla explained as Alyss gritted her teeth and activated her Partial Bloodline Awakening.

*BANG!!!

Slamming her fist against the statue's weapon, she was forced back but managed to hold her own, even if it was brief.

[However, if you manage to damage them, the power will begin leaking back to you.] Cayla smiled as Alyss slammed her hand against the ground.

Flames roared out around her as more statues awakened to siphon the ability but Alyss began to grin.

Since her flames are considered a countermeasure against the Abyss, if they don't have a body that can handle these flames, they can dream on if they wanted it!

*CRACK!!!

The newly awakened statues began to crack apart as flames burst out from their chest.

"That's what I'm f*cking talking about!!!" Alyss let out a laugh as power returned to her.

Cracking her neck, she coated her hand with the flame as she flickered in front of the statue.

Pulling her arm back, she created a Void Flux behind her but it was less skillful compared to Alice. But that was fine since she achieved her goal!

*BANG!!!

Slamming her fist into the statue's head, she detonated a spark at the contact point, destroying the head in one go as the newly awoken statue slumped onto its knee.

Looking at the five statues that were beginning to surround her, Alyss cracked her knuckle while Rita watched from the shadow in shock.

'She's actually able to destroy these statues with her power?! What Sigil even is that???'

Sweat dripped from her head but it wasn't over yet. There was still a chance at victory even if she was to destroy all of these statues!

Meanwhile, now that Alyss could use her flames, she began to fight back.

The main thing was to unlock her flames fully by destroying the fifth statue but the other four were blocking her way with a mix of blood and metal.

"Annoying!"

Converging the flames between her palms, Alyss slammed her hand down, releasing a pulse of purple flames that latched onto the statues but struggled to damage them.

Unlike the sixth statue that died from having her power burst out from the inside, the fifth statue was trying its best to hold onto this power.

'Let me take over now, I know what to do.' Alice smiled as Alyss clicked her tongue.

'Fine, but if we're talking to you don't ignore it next time.' She pouted as Alice apologised with a smile.

Giving control back to Alice, the chains faded away as Alice revealed a confident smile.

Closing her eye, she began to dodge the strikes while gathering power.

Upon opening her eye, the pattern of the spider lily could be seen.

First Resonance!

The pattern of the red spider lily appeared on her face stretching down her body as her outfit transformed as well. Two more weapons hummed in an attempt to siphon her ability but before they could even reach the statue, they cracked apart to reveal the roots of the spider lily spreading through the stone!

Seeing the weapons beginning to blossom while she maintained full control over her first resonance, Alice smiled and created a blade with blood and metal.

While the weapon was of low quality due to the statues still being undamaged, she reinforced its structure with the briar thorns of her spider lily.

Breathing out heavily, she focused her gaze and twisted her body.

Void Flux – Cleave!

Much like how the statues focused on siphoning abilities, this variant of the Void Flux harnessed the properties of her spider lilies and siphoned the durability/lifeforce of the target!

The phantom slash phased through the statues without leaving a single mark. But where a mark should be left lilies began to bloom.

Raising her hand towards the statues, Alice snapped her finger.

***BANG!!! CRACK!!!**

Bursting out with violet flames, the lilies forcefully pulled the statues apart as all of them crumbled in front of her.

Feeling her power return to her body, Alice massaged her shoulder with a smile on her face while Rita could only tremble at this sight.

To her, this was an impossible situation. A Sigil so potent that her statues broke upon trying to absorb it and then subsequently, she was able to destroy all of the statues at once with that same power?

"Impossible!" Letting out a shout, Rita stabbed towards Alice from the darkness as she had lost her composure upon seeing this demonstration of power.

"Gotcha." Alice grinned, ducking under the strike as she grabbed Rita's arm and slammed her into the ground.

Coughing out a mouthful of blood from the impact, Rita fired another spear at Alice who dodged at the last moment before sending a punch towards Rita's face, breaking her nose.

Gnashing her teeth in anger, Rita unleashed a circle of spears around her, ignoring the damage done to her own body as Alice was forced to jump away from the sheer volume of spears.

Pulling herself back onto her feet while blood poured from her wounds, Rita glared at Alice before pulling out a vial from her pouch and poured the contents into her mouth.

Swallowing the blood, purple veins bulged around her body as the statues began to tremble.

Shattering into dust, the dust began to converge around Rita as it formed a layer of stone around her.

Breaking out of the stone, Rita revealed her new form.

Second Resonance Stage Two – The Last Dragon Slayer.

Black obsidian armour surrounded Rita's body as she wore a helmet with a set of draconic horns and crimson scars that resembled the eyes. Spiked plating covered her entire body, leaving nothing exposed while draconic wings unfurled behind her along with a spiked tail that slammed against the ground.

In her hand, she held a single spear that sent a chill down Alice's spine while Cayla furrowed her brows.

[I... Have no information about this form nor can I search for information now that I'm sealed. My apologies o'master mine.]

'Don't worry about it.' Alice reassured as she took a deep breath and created a blade in her hand. Taking an offensive stance against Rita, she prepared for the worst.

Chapter 359 - 359: To Fight And To Struggle

Expanding her zone to the limit of her reach, the edge was still unstable but usable. Compared to before, the furthest she could reasonably control was the tip of her blade, an area of influence where she could still react.

Standing still, Rita raised her spear slowly before bursting into action.

'The right!'

Taking a step to the left and twisting her body, Alice covered her blind spot as she was able to see Rita approaching with her spear at the last second.

*CLANG!!!

Parrying the spear briefly with her sword, she watched as the sword broke in half from the impact and quickly created another sword in her left.

Void Flux – Cleave!

A haphazard strike aimed to force Rita back and create some distance between them but she read the bluff.

Batting her wing at the strike, it shattered upon contact as Rita jumped into the air and raised her spear.

*RUMBLE!!!

A torrent of red lightning and flames rained down from above as it began to fuse with her spear.

Releasing a horizontal swipe, a wave of pure destruction rushed towards Alice as she made a cut along both of her arms and splashed blood towards the wave.

Forming a wide horizontal mirror, the attack was redirected behind her as Alice wouldn't missed the timing had she used her third Sigil.

Panting from the sudden loss in blood, Alice tried to retract the blood when Rita rushed towards her blind spot and stabbed up with her spear.

"ARGG!!!" Letting out a shout of pain, Alice felt the spear stabbing into her rib.

The convergence of lightning and fire tore through her flesh as the smell of her own body being cooked assaulted her nose.

Before the destruction could reach the rest of her body, Alice took the initiative to twist her body, breaking off a rib and causing a nasty cut along the side of her body.

Holding the wound to stop her organs from spilling out, Alice reached for a healing vial. Without any time to open the lid and drink, she directly bit through the glass, ignoring the shards that stabbed against her gums and tongue.

Spitting out the shards of bloodied glass, Alice could feel her wounds healing as she began to retreat while creating a fan of blood daggers.

Throwing it towards Rita who tried to enter Alice's blind spot once more, Alice grinned as each of the daggers began to blossom.

Stopping her charge, Rita raised her spear and stabbed it into the ground.

*BANG!!!

Before the briar thorns could reach her, spears shot out from the ground, creating a graveyard of spears that burned the flowers to cinders as embers fluttered through the air.

'F*ck! What the hell is that lightning and fire?!' Alice shouted in her mind as she didn't think it had the power to destroy her spider lilies so easily.

[No information, unknown variable.] Cayla kept it short.

None of what Rita had demonstrated has ever been recorded in the Abyss that she knew of!

'Another Zenia experiment?' Alyss suggested with a frown.

'Likely.' Alice frowned while creating a blade in hand.

Clenching her fist, her veins bulged around her hand and forearm.

Gathering all of her power into the blade, she let out a sharp breath as blood converged into a mirror in front of her.

Mimicry – Executioner's Blade!

Tearing through the space in front of her, the blade entered the mirror and appeared in front of Rita.

But before it could collide with Rita's parry, the blade began to tremble before scattering into particles of energy.

"Tsk!" Clicking her tongue, Alice gritted her teeth in annoyance as the Executioner's Blade was too annoying to activate without the help of Cayla. The movement of energy needed to be so precise in

order to achieve the level of power and spatial manipulation and it was on a level she couldn't even approach at this moment.

Creating a wall of briar thorns around her to buy her time for recovery, Alice wanted to find some cover when a draconic head burst out from the ground and clenched its jaw, colliding against the walls of the thorn cage.

Realising that she had made a mistake out of desperation, Alice created a mirror to escape this predicament.

*BANG!!!

Watching the jaw crush the cage in an Armageddon of flames and lightning, Alice could feel sweat dripping down her back while Rita appeared above her.

Pulling her arm back, her limb transformed to mimic that of a dragon's as she slashed towards Alice with her claw.

*KRKK!!!!

Blocking the claw with her arm, Alice could feel the jagged nails tear through her flesh and bones as though it was butter before digging into her thigh.

Glaring at Rita who suddenly cracked open her mask to reveal the mutated innards of a dragon mixed with signs that used to be Rita's body, Alice widened her eyes as alarm bells rang out in her mind.

In a split second, energy gravitated towards Rita's mouth as a golden orb formed between her jaws.

*BANG!!!

Alice tried to use her blood to create a blood mirror in front of her but it was barely able to form before a torrent of energy collided with the surface.

Half of it was teleported away while the other half shredded apart Alice's right side.

Gritting her teeth, Alice traded places with Alyss as their Resonance began to shift.

From the remains of the red spider lily, violet flames burst forth, wrapping around Alyss's body as the wounds began to twitch. Countless tiny limbs burst out from the flesh, sewing itself together and starting to reconstruct the missing half of Alyss while she created floating flaming blades to keep Rita busy.

Feeling wary of the violet flames, Rita jumped back and created duplicate spears to ward off the blades before twisting her body and throwing her spear at Alyss.

Leaning down, Alice pivoted on her right foot and slammed her left heel against the shaft of the spear.

*BANG!!!

Knocking it off course, she flinched at the lightning and fire trying to tear apart her foot but thankfully, her violet flames managed to hold off the attack and heal the wound.

'What now twinnie? My regeneration can't keep up with how much damage we're taking. It's already slowed down this much.' Alyss asked, raising her hand as they could still see the bone while the flesh was stitching itself together.

Looking at Rita who flicked her wrist and conjured a spiral of flames that condensed into another spear, Alyss forced a brave smile despite having no idea on how to stop this monster of an opponent.

Scrambling her brain, Alice found herself coming on empty.

Rita is fast, too fast even and with enough firepower to breach Alice's defences. Not that her defences were great to begin with.

On top of that, she was wary of all their tricks. It took Alice everything to keep up with the sudden attacks that Rita was throwing out due to her blind spot.

'It'll be easier if I could still use-' Pausing the moment she had this thought, Alice shook her head.

Kaden was right, she was relying on Cayla and Void Fang far too much to the point that even when she thought she was being careful enough, her thoughts still drifted towards the two.

'We fight and we struggle. Like we always have.' Alice smiled as Alyss let out a laugh.

'Damn right! Let's go!'

Charging towards Rita, Alyss transformed their sixth Sigil into that of the Abyss Lord of Duality!

Coating her hands in a layer of violet flames, Alyss punched the side of the spear.

Once the spear was knocked off course, she released a palm strike against Rita's chest before flipping controls with Alice in an instant.

Snapping her fingers, Alice jumbled Rita's motor controls and gathered her blood into a single needle.

Flicking the needle towards Rita who wanted to slash it apart with her spear only for her to take a step towards the needle, she widened her eyes and gritted her teeth.

***BANG!!!**

Letting out a pulse of lightning and fire, she knocked the needle aside as it exploded into a giant wall of spider lilies and briar thorns. Sweating from the thought of having that explode in her body, Rita was shocked to see Alyss appear from behind the wall.

Slamming both palms against Rita's stomach, she followed up by grabbing Rita's arm and pulled her into a shoulder charge.

While Rita was stumbling back and fumbling around with her motor functions, trying to figure out which was which, Alice took over and fired a point-blank Void Flux at Rita's chest!

*CRACK!!!

For the first time, a splinter of damage appeared on Rita's armour as their constant efforts to focus on one area began to show itself.

Both Alice and Alyss were subjected to the same motor functions as Rita but as the ones who set the parameters, it was much easier for them to adjust to the changes.

Of course, it wasn't perfect but by sticking to simple movements and mostly focusing on energy control, they were able to skip this gap.

'Seems like Rita's figured it out twinnie.' Alyss chuckled upon seeing Rita gather energy around her, forming an array of spears.

'Yep. Now we hit her with the jumble part two, electric boogaloo.' Alice laughed, flipping the controls for energy control while resorting the motor functions.

Taking over the offence, Alyss rushed into Rita's range as the spears diverted from Rita's intended path.

Releasing a triple kick on the thighs, chest and head, Alyss reinforced her body using partial bloodline release before following up with a roundhouse kick against the face, knocking Rita back as she tumbled against the ground.

Shaking her head, she noticed her controls returning to normal as she tried to get up only for her motor functions to get flipped once more.

*BANG!!!

From above, Alice had teleported in and slammed a Void Flux against Rita's back, shredding a part of her wing as red spider lilies began to bloom.

Punching the ground, Rita conjured an array of spears around her to stab towards Alice who swapped with Alyss and kicked the weakened spears aside.

Stomping against Rita's back, she dug her fingers into the wings as flames roared out from her body.

*KRKKK!!!!

The sound of muscle fibres snapping rang out as Alyss tore off Rita's wings while blood poured from her wound.

In this onslaught of constantly shifting controls and confusion, Rita found herself unable to fight back!

Chapter 360 - 360: Rita's Fate

"ARGGGGG!!!" Letting out a shout of anger, Rita unleashed a torrent of spikes from her back the moment she realised her motor skills had returned.

Jumping back from the sudden attack, Alice took over but upon blinking her eye, a flaming spear was inches from piercing her head.

'She's beginning to adapt! We need to end this soon!' Alyss shouted out while Alice managed to block it by sacrificing her shoulder.

'I know.' Alice nodded with a frown as she didn't expect Rita to reach this quickly.

Tearing out the spear, Alice understood it must be the moment the golden chains manifested around her limbs, a clear sign that Alyss had taken over.

Narrowing her gaze at Rita who was slowly getting used to the jumbled controls and standing back on her feet, Alice decided to unleash one final onslaught with everything they've got!

'Target her back, her wings exposed a weakness!' Alyss instructed.

Rushing forward, Alice showed signs of switching to Alyss as golden chains began manifesting.

Seeing this, Rita prepared to use her spear when her controls didn't change! Alice had faked her out!

Jumping into the blood mirror and appearing behind Rita, Alice had just enough time to create two needles that stabbed into Rita's back as spider lilies exploded out from the wound!

A grotesque fusion of flesh, briar thorns and spider lilies protruded from Rita's back while spears tried to stab Alice only for Alyss to take over, knocking them aside.

Reaching towards Alyss with her hand, her controls got jumbled but Alyss didn't switch.

"Just because Alice is good with abilities doesn't mean I can't use them!"

Slamming her hand into the ground, black hands exploded out from her shadow, latching onto Rita's body before bursting out with violet flames.

From these flames, sparks began to form as Alyss swapped places with Alice for the final touches.

Void Flux!

*BANG!!!

An array of explosions exploded out with Rita in the centre as countless blasts of energy chipped away at her armour.

She wanted to ward herself from the explosions but once Alice had detonated the Void Fluxes, she immediately switched back to motor controls so that Rita would struggle and had to rely just on her physical body.

With no other choice, Rita tumbled away to escape the flames but they latched onto her armour with vigour while the grotesque wings that Alice had gifted her caught on fire.

Stumbling on her step, she rolled against the ground and into a puddle of blood.

Her pupils began to shrink as flowers could be seen blossoming in the blood before turning into spider lilies.

Having memorised what the controls of her body were even when it was flipped, Rita slowly got onto her feet while cracking open her jaw once more, ready to unleash a torrent of flames.

*Clack... clack... clack...

Each step Alice took echoed out in this personalised realm as Rita felt a chill she had never felt before.

As though death had finally wrapped its skeletal fingers around her neck and began to tighten its grip.

"You breathed it in didn't you?" Alice whispered against Rita's ear softly as she found herself unable to move.

Roots squirmed beneath her skin, digging into her flesh and coiled around her bones.

Spider lilies took root inside her eyes, draining the blood to blossom through the pupil while briar thorns erupted from her spine. Her vision trembled in fear, gasping for air but with each breath, the growth of the lilies would hasten.

Collapsing onto her knees, the roots began to pull her skin from her flesh as she began to choke.

The sound of Rita gasping for air while gurgling on her own blood was music to Alice's ears. Her blood soaked vision gazed upon the moon before the sensation of roots digging around her skull took over. The final red spider lily plucked out her eye as her entire body became a bed of lilies, briar thorns and blood.

A grotesque art piece reflecting the cruelty of Alice's ability once they allow it to take root within their body.

Seeing the walls of this personal realm fracture and crack, Alice snapped her finger and gathered all of Rita's blood into a single orb above her finger before throwing it into her mouth.

Compared to the normal blood she was used to eating, this one had a disgusting taste to it just like Jyn's. Making a face of disgust, Alice glanced back at Rita's body and detonated her lilies. Exploding into a spiral of violet flames, she erased the evidence of Rita's existence.

Once she finished taking care of Jyn's body that was left on the side, Alice didn't hesitate to run away from the area as she couldn't afford another fight. Her regeneration was running on empty for the first time and she didn't have any energy left to use her first Resonance.

Her Sigils were locked in so she couldn't adjust them to match the danger either.

Running back to the town, Alice waited on the outskirts as she could see a few concerned towns folk, looking towards the direction where she had come from

Considering the pillar of flames that she had unleashed when she destroyed the lab, it wasn't surprising for them to be alerted.

If it had been the work of a beast then all of the guards would be mobilised to defend the town while they called for more support from the Guild.

Sneaking past the guards who were setting up a perimeter around the town, Alice went to an Inn near the docks so she could catch the first boat back to Silverwind in the morning.

The innkeeper was a little concerned since he figured it was close to where the orphanage was.

Upon hearing this, Alice realised another issue.

'They're going to know that Rita and Jyn died after trying to investigate what went wrong with the orphanage. Since I was the only one who took this request from the Guild, I'm the prime suspect.' Alice thought with a frown while taking a sip of mead.

Furrowing her brows, she was a little upset that the mead from this town was lacking as she drank all of it in one go before filling her cup with some Ayrian mead instead. A luxury after such a close call against Rita.

'Aren't they going to wonder how a four star Hunter managed to kill two six star Hunter guards?' Alyss crossed her arms.

Not only that, but these two six Sigil Hunters were guards personally trained by the Zenia family. Jyn may have had the bad habit of looking down on his opponents but Rita wasn't the same.

Without the Sigil of Duality giving them the opportunity needed to finish Rita, the fight could've gone either way for them.

'I think they might hesitate with this reality. Perhaps even question the legitimacy and wonder if there's another power at play here. The branch manager said that they were here to negotiate with the principal so the orphanage probably wasn't their main goal.

'This incident should give us a bit of time for their negotiations while the branch manager gathers information for us on the rest of the group. If she shows evidence that all of them are cut from the same cloth then things become easy. Well... To some extent if I don't mind causing trouble for the principal.' Alice shrugged.

'Eh... I'm sure she can handle it. She handled the fall out of the Inverted World incident pretty nicely didn't she?' Alyss tapped her chin before waving her hand dismissively.

Hearing this, Alice let out a soft chuckle as she couldn't help but feel a little bad for the principal.

Making her way to her room, she rested for the night as exhaustion from the fight took over.

###

"Why isn't Jyn and Rita back yet?" Erick asked with a frown while sitting in his room.

Dealing with the orphanage was a delicate matter that couldn't be handled roughly. It had to be swift and precise yet the two weren't back yet.

"Would you like me to look into it, sir?" Selen asked while putting on her clothes.

Narrowing his eyes, he thought for a moment before nodding his head.

"Investigate the area and tell me what you find. If they've been caught, erase the evidence of them being the ones killed and detach the orphanage from the Zenia name. Don't let yourself be discovered.

"On the off chance that Rita and Jyn are trying to desert, which I don't think they're stupid enough to try, take care of them as per standard protocol." Erick smiled as Selen clenched her fist and nodded her head.

Just as she turned to leave the room, Erick smacked her on the ass as he revealed a grin while Selen bit her lips and left the room.

Even though she hated it, she couldn't defy nor fight against the Zenia family.

Lying on the bed, Erick thought about the annoyance that is the principal who was hindering their efforts of acquiring access to the Inverted World but thinking about seeing Kale again brought a smile to his face.

She's been playing hard to get for a while now and it was time for him to start reeling her in. And even if she doesn't want to, he has his methods of bending her to his will. As long as he takes care of it cleanly, the main family wouldn't care about his methods.

And once he acquires access to the Inverted World and claim the relic the main family desires, his promotion is just around the corner. Once that happens, he will be able to do whatever he wanted with the power of the Zenias.

Just thinking about it brought him joy as Erick looked forward to his next meeting with Kale.