

Abyssal A 481

Chapter 481 - 481: Exploring The Capital

Opening the letter for her appointment once more, Alice could see that the time for their appointment was at 1pm.

But right now, it was 10am giving them around 2 hours of free time with 1 hour to find where they were.

Even though Alice was eager, she couldn't change the fact that they still had to wait.

In the end, they decided to understand the layout of the city first.

Egil decided to be their guide for the time being even though the appointment didn't include him.

The first thing Alice and Selen did was to acquire a map of the city due to its sheer size. According to Egil, as shown by the map, the city first began as just a single layer around the centre. But as Queen Verona gained power, the capital began to expand. There was once a point where despite being a new nation after defecting from Extalia, the Queendom of Verona couldn't be targeted easily.

The war on the border was a more recent thing that's been occurring after Extalia revealed ambitions to reclaim the land lost in the coup.

From the first layer around the centre, the city was split into five sections. Residential, Market, Factories, Research and Barracks.

Currently, they are at the intersection between residential and market, as these were built into the canyon itself.

"Aren't they afraid it'll melt?" Alice asked curiously. With the city being created inside the ice, she couldn't help but wonder if they'd be bothered by the fact that the ice could be melting.

"A lot of people who come here for the first time wonder about the same thing. But these canyons don't melt. In fact, people will sooner die than see them melt since they are held in a kind of stasis thanks to Lord Frida's power." Egil chuckled.

Though if it wasn't for Lord Frida, none of them would dare to live in such a dangerous spot after all.

"What happens if she was too... Ya know, stop focusing on it?" Alice whispered over. She didn't want to be seen as disrespectful asking about something so ominous. But in the event that Frida does forget or was to fall unexpectedly, what happens then?

Glancing around for a moment, Egil leaned in.

"The public can't exactly imagine a Lord passing especially when the title can be passed on. But this case is rather special and even if Lord Frida were to disappear, the ice would remain. It's not something that can be melted naturally."

Hearing this, Alice nodded her head. While it's good news that the ice can't be melted naturally, it meant that people can directly sabotage it. Her flames for example, it burns away Abyss Energy.

Alice could imagine what kind of chaos she could cause if she was to unleash it here.

Just thinking about it made her shiver as doing so would make her the enemy of Verona and that was not something she wanted. Especially when there are three Lords in the capital with the Queen even looking to become a God.

'Yeah I should probably avoid using my second Sigil if I can.'

Just as she thought of this, she got curious about something else.

"How come it's... not cold then? With all this ice I thought this place will be colder than what it is." Alice blinked.

"That's due to Lord Sigurd. His powers of the forge is what gives the capital its warmth. The closer you get to the factory section, the hotter it'll get. Compared to here, the ice there is to cool down the section instead of decoration purposes."

Asking some more questions, Alice got a general understanding of the city.

Out of all the sections, the factory was in most risk of 'melting.' Not because of the enemy or natural causes but rather due to Lord Sigurd's hobby of making numbered equipment.

Each time he makes something of that calibre, the heat created by his smithing would cause the surroundings to melt.

One look at the canyons told you everything you needed to know. After all, it was caused by him.

During the early days of the capital, Sigurd crafted a piece of equipment dedicated to the Queen.

The effects of doing so melted the lands around them, forming a spider web of canyons and cracks.

This was during the time where Frida had just become a Lord so she wasn't able to mitigate the damage. However, in a strange turn of events, the civilians loved it so much they decided to make it a part of their capital.

With her history lesson of the capital concluded, the three of them began to explore the city. Alice got to see the homes hidden within the canyons, the crystalline walls that protect them and the transport around the city.

Ice slides and metal carts.

One would think that safety was going to be a concern but as Alice rode in one of them, she was somewhat disappointed by how stable it was. It wasn't an exhilarating rollercoaster but more of a gentle cruise.

However, if she was to consider the fact that civilians will be riding this, it made sense. It would be more concerning to see civilians being flung from one canyon to the other via slide after all.

After visiting the Residential and market sections, the next place they went to was the factory section. Compared to the other sections, it was indeed different as the harsh metal structures collided with the gentle icy paradise. A contrast of metal and nature.

The factories were placed in/above the canyons while the buildings on the bottom would send the supplies on carts and have them sliding down their own supply slides towards the marketplace.

Once she finished exploring the factories, Alice looked at the map and decided the next stop should be the research section.

"Actually... Can we save it till last?" Egil requested.

Tilting her head, Alice thought about it for a moment before remembering and nodding her head.

'He probably has to prepare himself a little before going there.'

With that being the case, they took a little detour and found the slide to visit the barracks.

The instant they arrived at the barracks, Alice was assaulted by a sense of coldness.

"What the hell?! I thought they were keeping the place warm so what's this???" Alice questioned while hugging her arms.

"Training." Egil chuckled. It was all he needed to say.

In order to prepare the soldiers for some of the harsh environments of the north, this kind of training was mandatory. They had to learn how to keep themselves warm and ready to fight at all times in this kind of scenario.

"A bit simple but it does have its uses." Selen spoke up as Alice jumped up in shock.

"Holy sh*t when have you been here???"

". . . Bit rude. I've been here the entire time." Selen's eye twitched in annoyance.

"I've just been practicing my new skill and see if I can blend in with your peripheral vision. As long as I keep out of direct sight, it should allow you to pretend I was never here. Though the target kind of needs to be a little preoccupied with something else first." She shrugged.

She tried this earlier with someone else and they immediately asked why she was standing so close behind them.

A small embarrassment but it allowed her to make some more notes on this skill of hers.

The more practise she gets, the easier it is to know the limits of her skill and when she could take advantage of it.

"You can do that?" Alice blinked her eyes.

"It takes a bit of practise but I have the theory in mind already. All it takes is to put it into action. At least now, even if I can't make then space out, I can still camouflage myself. I could probably use this for stealth as well if I do it right." Selen mused.

So long as she keeps herself to the peripherals, no one would be able to notice her even if she was to walk in the middle of a hallway.

Of course, there were other factors that go into survailence but this was a good start.

"I see..." Seeing Selen's rapid improvement and development of her skill, Alice couldn't help but feel eager to perfect Void Steps herself.

While she may be ahead in brute strength, there were plenty of aspects that Alice found herself lacking. She didn't want to fall behind after all, not when she has the goal of rebuilding Ayr and taking out the Zenia family.

Once they were done with exploring the barracks and seeing the warriors train and spar, they made their way to the final slide that led to the research section.

The research section looked average with no large buildings, no contrasting elements or even temperatures that was different to the other sections. All it had were plain buildings scattered everywhere.

Walking through the streets with familiarity, Alice and Selen followed behind in silence as they noticed a sombre expression on Egil's face.

Upon entering the building, Egil began to talk to the receptionist as Alice and Selen stood back a little.

"You know what happened right?" Selen asked.

"Mnm. Do you?"

"Yea, he told me." Selen sighed.

Opening her mouth, Selen wanted to question the motives of the Zenia family. Why they were willing to go this far just so they could've gotten their hands on the Inverted World. But asking Alice wouldn't give her the answer.

She knew the greed of the Zenias, their desire for power and lust for control. The scholars that found ecstasy in playing the role of God, dictating life and death.

Following behind Egil, they took an elevator deep underground as white walls and glass windows could be seen.

Seeing this environment, Alice instinctively shivered as her finger traced her neck. It was similar, very similar yet at the same time different.

Standing in front of a window, Egil placed his hand against it and looked at the woman inside with sadness.

There she was, lying in bed as bestial limbs and mutations protruded from her body. Tubes and life support connected to her arms. With each passing second, the infection seemed to grow and expand.

Biting his lip, Egil opened his mouth as his voice carried a tremble.

"I'm back... mum."

Chapter 482 - 482: Governor Of The Capital

"I'm back... mum. I managed to join the army and stopped fighting my squad mates. I even got recognition from the captain of all people. You know how I wasn't on good terms with them before." Egil smiled as he began to recount all the things that had happened thus far.

Standing behind while listening to all of this, Selen felt like her heart was about to break in two.

Seeing how Egil was talking to his mother even though glass and walls separated them, she felt the urge to help. But how?

She didn't have a way to help his mother. She wasn't able to revert the mutations on her body.

Thinking of this, she turned to Alice.

Noticing the pleading in Selen's eyes, Alice didn't even need to ask her what she wanted to say as she already knew the question.

"I don't know. I've been working on a cure so far but I haven't figured out anything yet. And... I don't think you'll want me to experiment on Egil's mother of all people." Alice sighed and replied honestly.

She didn't want to give him false hope, especially when the results of her experimentation may cause more grief than what he's going through already.

"Is there nothing we can do though? Maybe help relieve her pain a little or something like that."

"I don't know. I haven't had much chance to test my theories out. Trying to separate the influence of the Abyss and mutations from the body is like trying to unmix two colours that have been thoroughly blended together." Alice shook her head.

She understood Selen's desire to help Egil as she too felt the same desire. Over the course of time and through the battles they shared together, she could see the kindness in Egil as well as his desire to help his mother.

When faced with that kind of determination and resolve, it was hard to say no. And even harder to fail the trust he'd put in her if she was to say she had an option to help his mother.

Biting her lip, Selen took a deep breath and sighed. If it was anyone else, Selen would've kept asking, hoping for a miracle. But since it was Alice, she knew that it wouldn't change no matter how much she asked.

Alice is someone to take in as many variables as possible when making a decision like this, especially when it comes to a precious friend like Egil.

It was times like this when Selen wished the Zenia family could've taken a different path in life. If they focused their efforts and research on helping people. But if they were to do that, Egil's mother wouldn't be in this kind of situation in the first place.

Listening to Egil speak to his mother, the two were silent as he stood and soon ran out of things to say. Looking at the state of his mother from beyond the glass window, he clenched his fist.

"I'll be back soon mum. After a short break, I'll be deployed to the frontlines again. I'll make a name for myself and ask them to fix you." Egil promised before taking a deep breath and calming his emotions.

"Shall we head up now?" He asked with a forced smile.

Without saying anything, Selen walked up and gave him a hug.

Egil's smile faltered as he bit his lip, turning his head away.

While Selen was comforting Egil, Alice walked up to the window and looked at Egil's mother with a sad expression.

[I'll memorise the energy pattern and work on some theories based on the abilities that you can use.]
Cayla spoke up as Alice nodded her head.

'Thank you.'

The current state of Egil's mother was similar yet different to the people suffering from extensive use of Abyss Blood. If anything, it was closer to the hybrids than side effects. The uncanny energy was mutating within her body and latching onto the connections of her spiritual heart.

Ironically, it's due to the fact that she isn't a warrior that she was able to survive this long. Had she gotten more Sigils, this energy would've attached far more aggressively and tried to break her down from the inside in a much more violent manner.

'If you have more Sigils, this disease hits fast and deadly. If you don't have that many Sigils, you're left in a vegetive state and left to rot while it takes over your tether to the spiritual Heart. What a brutal disease.' Alyss frowned.

Even a slight understanding of this disease left them stumped on finding a potential solution.

However, no matter how difficult it is, they had to start somewhere.

After a few moments, the three of them made their way up as Egil excused himself for a bit. He wanted some time to himself and clear his head.

Watching him walk away, Selen felt sorrowful. Despite his large stature, his shadow felt small right now.

"I'll try my best to find a solution." Alice patted Selen's shoulder as she nodded her head.

After exploring the city and meeting Egil's mother, they spent most of the free time they had available. The appointment was coming up and they had to go to the centre of the city, near the large ice tree.

The journey there was silent and the mood was heavy. Selen didn't feel like talking, not when she thought back to what's happening with Egil's mother.

Alice was occupying herself by trying to figure out a solution for the corruption. In order to save Egil's mother, she had to be careful if she was to operate on the spiritual heart.

With a heavy heart, Alice wasn't able to fully appreciate the glacial sanctuary beneath the tree and arrived at the building where the meeting was going to take place.

"Let's see..." Alice muttered, rereading the letter to make sure she had it correct.

Rather than meeting the Queen and the higher ups of Verona, she was going to meet a proxy. The assigned governor of the capital city.

Waiting outside the office, they were soon welcomed in as Alice couldn't hide her surprise at the appearance of the governor.

She had dark grey hair that would flicker with a light silver due to the lights. A pair of sharp crimson eyes and a scar on the corner of her lips.

Her outfit consisted of a turtleneck black jacket/dress with a belt and several pockets scattered across the surface. A pair of shorts and long boots.

The governor's entire attire practically screamed slaughter as Alice noticed a dagger just behind her waist.

But the most noticeable feature of the governor was the wolf ears atop her head.

Feeling Alice's gaze, the ears twitched as the governor narrowed her eyes in annoyance.

Noticing her rudeness, Alice coughed and apologized before sitting down.

'I wanna touch them...' She thought to herself, seeing the fluffy ears twitching every time her eyes scanned up.

"Are my ears that much of an eyesore to you?" The governor asked with annoyance in her voice.

"Ah! Nope! Sorry, they're very fluffy ma'am." Alice instinctively responded, causing Selen freeze up.

". . ." Deciding that it was in her best interest to just ignore this weird girl, the governor opened a file and quickly scanned through the contents.

"I see. So you're the one who helped our warriors return from the frontline. Thank you for your service. The rewards allotted to you are a compendium of beasts that frequently appear in the north and a meeting with Lord Sigurd of the Forge, yes?" She asked, glancing up.

Nodding her head, Alice watched as the governor spun her chair around and stood up. She reached for one of her cabinets and pulled out four books.

However, Alice wasn't focused on the books. Her gaze was pulled by the fluffy tail behind her.

'I wanna touch it...'

Taking a deep breath to calm her annoyance, the governor slammed the books on the table, jolting Alice from her staring as she coughed awkwardly.

"Here are the books that you requested. But before I give it to you, I have to verify something first.

Tapping her finger, Alice felt as though she's been transported into a frozen forest while snow drifted down from above.

In front of her, stood the governor and wolves began to surround the two of them.

"I will ask you two questions. First, are you affiliated with Extalia?" She asked with a glare.

A girl with a far too mysterious background making so many contributions so quickly? Suspicious.

Realising that this was a trial, Alice scratched her hair.

"Nope I'm not. I'm more affiliated with the Abyss than anything. It's simply coincidence that I found myself in the north." Alice replied truthfully.

Giving her wolves a quick glance, the governor nodded.

"Second question. Did you orchestrate the incidents that allowed you to gain a large amount of merit?" She asked.

Once again, Alice shook her head.

"Nope. I was just there when it happened." Alice shrugged.

Staying silent for a moment, the governor nodded as Alice realised she was back in the room.

"Alright. That's everything. Take the books and this medal. Go to the factory department and place it into the elevator. It'll allow one meeting with the Lord of the Forge but whether or not he'll actually listen to your request is up to the Lord."

Alice was tempted to ask about any monetary reward but seeing as how they managed to get a meeting with the Lord, it was probably best not to be greedy for more.

Just before she left, Alice couldn't help but glance up at the ceiling before furrowing her brows.

'Weird.' She thought to herself before closing the door behind them.

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"Did she notice me?" Frida frowned. She had placed a small snowflake within the room, barely noticeable so that she could keep an eye on the new guests.

For her to be this sensitive to even a small snowflake, Frida concluded that the assessment of her spiritual stat was probably incorrect.

A double S didn't justify this kind of sensitivity.

With this in mind, she decided to keep watching for a little longer.

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Meanwhile, the governor couldn't help but rub her ears a little.

"They're... fluffy?" She muttered.

It was the first time someone had called her ears fluffy... A strange feeling.

Behind her, her tail was waving back and forth. Barely noticeable but it was indeed doing so.

The governor is in a good mood.

Chapter 483 - 483: Sigurd

After leaving the appointment building, both Alice and Selen made their way to the factory section while looking at the token in their hands.

Compared to the other tokens that she's gotten in the past, there wasn't a wisp of Abyssal energy on it. Rather, it's a completely man made key with moving parts and shimmering crystals housed in a small compartment in the centre of this medal.

"The governor was pretty scary wasn't she?" Selen suddenly spoke up as Alice glanced up in confusion.

"Was she? I thought she was rather chill." Alice replied, recalling the twitching ears and fluffy tail.

Once again, the desire to pet them arose in her chest but she managed to suppress the feeling.

"You call that chill? I thought she was going to bite my head off if I wasn't careful." Selen shivered.

Sitting in front of the governor felt akin to sitting beneath a guillotine. A primal sense of fear was instilled in her despite everything she went through. A passive fear of an unknown source that she couldn't get rid of.

Perhaps it was part of her Sigil power or perhaps it was something else. But regardless, Selen didn't feel comfortable in front of the governor.

Yet despite this, Alice had the courage to comment on how fluffy her ears were?!

It baffled Selen.

She was focused on trying to maintain her composure but Alice was more distracted by the ears and tail.

"I'm not sure how to put it... But I guess she looks tough outside? I mean when she was asking me the questions wolves began to appear. They seemed pretty threatening but I didn't sense any killing intent from her." Alice shrugged.

When placed side by side next to some of the enemies that she's been put against, their pure hatred against her, Alice didn't find the governor to be threatening. If anything, her mind was still thinking back to the fluffy tail and ears.

She couldn't help but wonder how it was attached to her and what the sensory was like. Plus, since her hair was in the way, Alice wasn't sure if the governor had human ears on the side or not. If she did, was her hearing improved?

With all the weird questions out of the way, the two made their way to the factory section.

A few of the workers who noticed the medal in Alice's hands couldn't help but cry out in surprise before whispering to his colleagues next to him.

There were a few eyes locked onto Alice while they entered the elevator but Alice ignored it for now.

She didn't notice it before but there was indeed a strange groove perfect for the medal she was holding.

Following the instructions, she inserted the key and watched as a crimson energy pulsed through the elevator.

She could hear the gears turning and the elevator began to descend rather than ascend.

"The Lord of the Forge is below?" Selen raised an eyebrow, feeling a little surprised.

She thought the Lord would prefer a larger working space than the claustrophobic underground. But as they descended deeper into the bowels of the earth, her questions were soon answered.

Facing the gentle coolness of the ice caves around them, a wave of blistering heat caused her to stumble back.

Both of them widened their eyes as a chaotic fusion of ice and flames danced before them. A realm crafted from conflicting elements, a boundary line of clashing forces surrounded a single building that supported the ceiling of this cavern.

Towering ice crystals housing flickering flames hung from the ceiling, illuminating the land.

Looking above, a crystalised sea of radiant flames.

Looking below, the jaws of piercing ice.

It is within this harmony that a single towering forge stood unyielding.

Surrounding the forge, a graveyard of myriad weapons and equipment.

*CLANG!!!

Each strike of the hammer sent a pulse of energy rumbling out, causing the flaming crystals above to flicker before holding their flame true.

Each strike caused the chains hanging down from above to clash against each other, orchestrating a harmonious choir as though to welcome the next masterpiece.

Each strike pushed the energy out from the centre before collapsing in and condensing.

Alice stared at the forge in silent awe.

While the dazzling nature of this forge blinded others, Alice saw what lay beneath.

The raging sea of energy, a chaotic spiral of energy forced into submission and put to work. Enslaved and sealed beneath the ice. There was not just one aura of a Lord here.

No, there were two.

"F*cking hell..." Alice couldn't help but mutter.

Within this forge, a sealed Lord slumbered!

Reaching the bottom of the elevator, the two of them cautiously stepped out as there was only a single path and that path led towards the forge.

Swallowing her saliva, Alice took the lead as her eye couldn't help but track the energy downwards.

There was only a single layer of ice separating them from a sealed Lord. However, the biggest question she had was why it was on the surface!

To her knowledge and Cayla's, all the sealed Lords were locked away either in Terminus or the other layers of the Abyss, forever tortured for their 'sin'.

Yet for one to be on the surface... Being used as the flames to a forge at that...

[Simply illogical.]

Right as they were about to walk up the steps leading to the forge, a pulse of energy pushed out, preventing them from advancing.

"After you ring a bell, wait for the owner to respond before walking in. It is common courtesy." A deep voice bellowed out from the heart of the forge.

Taking this as a warning, both Alice and Selen waited just outside the forge as the sounds of clashing metal began to speed up.

Even though they couldn't see what was happening, sparks continued to fly as the ice above reflected the moment of impact. A flash of light with each crash of metal.

*TSSSS!!!!

"Tsk, trash again." The voice grumbled.

*BANG!!!

Before either of them could react, a chunk of metal slammed into the graveyard behind them as the metal began to melt before reforming around the weapon, shattering it in the process.

"Alright, what's going on here. What the hell do you two want?" The voice grumbled as it was clear the owner was in a bad mood. And soon, a frowning man came into view.

Contrary to his deep bellowing voice, the owner of which looked like a fearsome young man with his arms folded. Black hair and a pair of sharp golden eyes illuminated by what seemed to be the light of a flickering flame.

A well trained muscular physique with scars, burn marks and tattoos of Sigils.

He wore a set of loosely fitted white and black clothing with bandages around his arms. Baggy pants and thick boots.

Alice wasn't sure what she was looking at considering the... strange flow of energy. Or rather, the lack thereof. This 'Lord' in front of her didn't feel like a Lord. In fact, he felt like a normal human right now.

"Well? Or are you two mute?" Sigurd asked in annoyance. The mismatch of the voice and appearance caused both Alice and Selen to freeze up before Alice took the lead and opened her mouth.

"We're here as a reward for our recent exploits. We wish the esteemed Lord of the Forge will craft us suitable weapons." Alice replied.

Silence dominated the cavern as Sigurd narrowed his eyes at Alice.

"Are you mocking me?" He asked, clearly annoyed and confusing both of the girls.

"Huh?"

"I can see the weapons you have on you. A personal Artifact and a sealed weapon that clearly shows signs of growth. Even if I make you something, you'll sooner default back to these two am I right?" Sigurd appeared next to Alice, lifting her arm and glaring at the bracelet.

"So why should I make something for you if you're just going to toss it aside in the first place? Is this not a mockery of my craft? Well?" He asked, lifting Alice up so that they could look at one another at eye level.

Surprised by the fact that the Lord of the Forge actually recognised Void Fang on her wrist, Alice quickly recovered and shook her head.

"Ah you misunderstood me, my Lord. I meant my friend here a suitable weapon. If anything, I just want the gift from my mentor fixed." Alice chuckled despite her current position.

Reaching into her pouch, she pulled out the damaged wire gloves.

Narrowing his gaze at Alice, he was silent for a long moment, long enough for Alice to wonder if he was spacing out.

"Depends. You, what's your name." Sigurd glanced over at Selen who pointed at herself.

"Yes you! Who else is here??" Sigurd snapped, feeling as though these two were a bit slow in the head if their reaction was this delayed.

"It's Selen, sir."

"Alright then Selen, I want you to show me what you can do. Use every trick you have, every ability you can command. If you interest me enough, I'll consider it." He gestured as though commanding a jester to perform.

While she was a little annoyed by his attitude, she didn't dare show it considering he's a Lord and began to demonstrate what she could do.

Meanwhile, Sigurd was giving Alice a side glance with a slight frown.

He wasn't even sure what he was looking at.

It felt as though he was staring into a bottomless hole of impurities and corruption. A foul mixture of energies overlayed by a heinous layer of curses enough to kill a man. What did she do to require such a vile curse? And most importantly, who was strong enough to apply such on a lowly warrior?

Chapter 484 - 484: Forging Equipment

Keeping his focus on the two girls, Sigurd couldn't help but fold his arms in silence.

This was the first time he'd seen such a strange combination. With each move that Selen performed, he could see the strange influence her Sigil produced in the area around her. How she would slow down time to a near halt or accelerate it.

"I'm still watching, keep going." He spoke out. Selen had slowed down a little out of concern once she noticed he wasn't giving her his full attention.

But Sigurd didn't need to. Just reading the flow of her energy and the way she manipulated her surroundings was giving him plenty of information to deal with this.

'She can't make the time move back but slowing it down or speeding it up is no issue...'

He'll admit it. After seeing this kind of power, his interest in making a weapon for her grew. All that was left was now to figure out the most optimal set of abilities or 'skill paths' to follow for this weapon.

When he looks at someone's ability, he sees it as a tree. The more they show, the more branches this tree grows. As he takes a step back to look at this tree, all of the possibilities will manifest as branches that have yet to take form.

Synergies and a flow of ideas from combining multiple aspects of the skills they show.

When he makes a weapon for a specific person, Sigurd will take hold of one of these skill paths and optimize it as much as he can. In essence, a fake personal Artifact.

However... There was something off about Selen's skill paths.

He could see the tree growing and showing more paths, but the largest part of it was missing.

"You've been practising something else recently, haven't you? Since it's your focus, demonstrate it even if it's not finished." Sigurd called out.

Hearing this, Selen glanced over in surprise.

"Don't ask questions, just do as I say." Sigurd interrupted before she could question how he knew.

Furrowing her brows, she eventually nodded her head.

"If it works on you, you'll be surprised." Alice chuckled next to him as he glanced at her with doubt in his eyes.

Making sure that Sigurd was focused on her, Selen activated her skill.

As Selen activated her skill, Sigurd unfolded his arms.

"What the f*ck?" He couldn't help but mutter as Selen appeared not far from him.

It was only a brief moment, far shorter than what Alice and Selen expected. But the fact that it even worked to begin with showed that Selen was on the right path!

A skill that can affect Abyss Lords despite her having five Sigils!

"Oi, girl, do it again." Sigurd demanded as his eyes began to glow with a radiant gold. Sigil markings appeared on the corner of his eyes as Selen nodded her head.

This time, she wanted to see if she could traverse the distance between them to launch a surprise attack.

Activating the skill, she rushed towards him but he was faster.

Appearing in front of Selen, he placed his palm against her stomach and stopped her in her tracks.

Leaning down, he stared into her eyes and furrowed his brows.

'Erasure of time? No... not quite. The energy doesn't stop nor does it freeze. It continues to flow and reappears where it should be if time flows as usual. Meaning... She's somehow jumping the time ahead. But there doesn't seem to be signs of manipulation.

'So it can only be me.' Sigurd concluded.

"Perception huh? I didn't think you could use your powers on my perception rather than the time around you. Not bad." He offered her a rare praise.

The skill tree that he could see for her split apart, revealing a new branch of skills that could be made depending on how she wanted to combine her attacks.

Ideas flowed into his mind like a waterfall while strands of energy began to unravel from his body.

However, before it could get out of control, he snapped his finger and reigned it in.

"Alright, I have a few ideas. Rejoice girl, you've inspired me enough to make you a new numbered equipment." Sigurd smirked as Sigils began to light up across his body. Massaging his shoulders, he walked towards the forge while gesturing for Selen to follow him.

Alice tagged along after noticing the strange movement of energy from his body. Despite originally feeling like a normal human, his aura was beginning to climb.

From one Sigil all the way to six before breaking through to seven and reaching the realm of Lords.

***BANG!!!**

Taking a step past a boundary, his figure immediately exploded into a ball of flames as his body transformed into a towering icon of raw strength. A layer of molten rock and flames flowed across his body as his Sigils transformed into flaming tattoos.

Standing in the presence of such a being, both Alice and Selen felt like they were going to melt from the heat.

However, Alice couldn't move her eyes away.

This flow of energy, the colour of his aura, it matched the radiant dance of flames sealed by the ice crystals above.

There wasn't a Lord sealed here. No...

He was the Lord bound to this place!

Raising his hand, flames converged from his surroundings as he condensed it into a single hammer.

*BANG!!!

Slamming it down, the collision of his hammer against the anvil fractured the realm around him as a pulse of flames rushed out, colliding against the boundary but failing to break through.

"Beautiful..." Alice muttered.

One strike was all it took for Sigurd to unravel the weaves of energy that bound the realms together. One strike to strip away what he didn't require and gather only the necessary materials.

Raising his hammer once more, Sigurd struck down.

*BANG!!!

A swirling vortex of weaves danced beneath his hammer, converging into a storm of energy that threatened to tear apart everything that approached.

Yet strangely, within this swirl, a sense of harmony and balance could be sensed.

*BANG!!!

Before the swirl could calm, he struck down once more, inviting chaos into the moment of peace.

"You two should back off, it's going to get dangerous from now." Sigurd warned as he glanced back. But what he saw caused his pupils to constrict in shock.

Selen was shielding herself from the flames and was blown back.

But Alice?

She stepped through the boundary without care. The flames tore away at her skin but her regeneration was far stronger!

But this wasn't what shocked him.

The way she was staring at the swirl of chaos beneath his hammer...

That concentration...

'She can see the flow!!!'

The gift of being able to see energy was something he gained after sacrifice. A gift to help him forge the masterpieces he wished to bring out to this world.

Yet a girl who's not even a Lord could see the strands?

*Badum!

Clutching his chest, Sigurd couldn't hide the smile on his face as his heart beat with excitement.

How much could she see? How much could she understand?

He could finally share the view of this world that had enamoured him for so many years!

'Keep looking, don't get distracted. With that eye of yours, witness the hidden truths of these lands!' Sigurd roared out inwardly as his aura soared with his excitement.

Reacting to his emotions, the flames around them broke free of the ice as a maelstrom of inferno rushed towards their area but Sigurd didn't care.

These flames were not there to harm but rather to allow his techniques to match his mental image. A pathway to his desires and the fuel to give life to this equipment!

'Watch carefully young one!'

*BANG!!!

Slamming down with his hammer, Sigurd let out a laugh as all light in this realm was exhausted for a split second where only a single source existed. The impact point of his hammer.

*BANG!!!

Each strike birthed a waterfall of sparks and new weaves of energy that Alice had never seen before. The strands of his Sigils weaving together with the foundations of this realm to bring forth a new material.

*BANG!!!

From this material, golden lights illuminated the centre, filling the empty shell with power.

*BANG!!!

The ice around him began to shatter as the echo of energy breached the boundary and pulsed towards the surface.

Before the wave could reach the civilians, Frida intervened.

'What is this idiot doing?!' She gritted her teeth.

For a simple reward, this was going far beyond what should've been allowed. Something must've happened for Sigurd to go this far.

At this rate, the equipment he forges could rival the masterpieces he created near the start of his journey!

That moment when his inspiration was at an all time high and his desires burned brighter than the cosmic star. The burning will that caused the great God of the Eclipse to ask him for a weapon!

*BANG!!!

With the final strike, flames burst out, engulfing the entire cavern. But this was not the flames of destruction.

No, this was creation.

The flames of birth that will bring forth Sigurd's newest masterpiece.

*RUMBLE!!!

From above, lightning crackled as strands of energy weaved into a cosmic figure. From his hands, flames birthed forth as he wrapped his palms around where Sigurd stood.

At that moment, a vacuum began to greedily suck in the energy from around them. An ever growing black hole that refused to stop.

*BANG!!!

The final strike of his hammer.

With this final strike, the equipment was complete. Time seemed to halt in this world as the all the energy condensed into a single ring.

Chapter 485 - 485: Aeternum Vow

Looking at the floating ring, Sigurd couldn't hold back the smile on his face.

The ring was crafted from a dark metal that shimmered with the boundless weaves that were fused together to grant it form. An ever changing, ever glowing faint layer of energy danced across the surface of this ring.

Located in the centre, a small intricate design resembling that of a sundial could be seen with patterns surrounding it on the side. Along the ring, wings of flowing ribbons wrapped in a loop, forming the main body.

Engraved on the inside of the ring was the name he had granted this equipment.

Aeternum Vow.

A Vow of Eternity. The perfect name for Selen who's skill is to mess with time and perception, dragging it out so that one feels as though they're stuck in eternity for that moment, unable to register what had just occurred.

"Girl, come here and attune to this equipment so it can recognise you as its master." Sigurd called out as Selen had barely recovered from the recoil of Sigurd forging the ring.

"What do I do?" She asked curiously, standing in front of the ring. Even without attuning to it, she could sense the power it was radiating.

"Drop your blood on it. It'll latch itself onto you. Unlike the split haired girl over there, this aint no personal artifact so don't get your hopes up. It'll only be suitable for the skills you've shown thus far. If you decide to go down a different path in the future, it might struggle to keep up in regards to what you need." Sigurd warned, taking a step back and holding his arms.

Nodding her head, Selen grabbed a dagger and made a small cut on her finger.

Squeezing out a single drop of blood, she watched as strands of energy jumped up from the ring, infecting her blood and travelling into her finger.

A foreign force wormed its way inside.

Selen could feel her insides burning up with this energy as her Sigils began to glow one by one. From this weave, strands could break off, linking with her Sigils and forming a resonance!

While Selen was trying her best to attune to the ring with her eyes closed, Sigurd walked over to Alice.

"What do you think girl?" He asked with a small smirk.

"Huh?"

"The energy. You can see it right?" Sigurd clarified, gesturing towards Alice's eye.

"You saw the way the energy moved to my command, how my hammer forged it a new form." He grinned, twirling the hammer with one hand before dismissing it.

"Maybe, maybe not. Who knows." Alice shrugged.

However, her guard was already raised. The fact that Sigurd is even mentioning the way energy moved meant that either he could see it as well or he had a rough idea.

But if he could see it, then the question becomes how?

The only two people who could see energy or at least to her knowledge were herself and Velouria. And that was only because they both have the Eyes of the Abyss, a blessing that lets them see the truth of the world.

Cayla's power.

So, how can a Lord of the north possess the same or a similar power?

"Hah! Keep your secrets then. I know the truth anyway. So what do you think? Do you think you can replicate it? If you do, I'll give you something good.

I'll even fix that glove of yours free of charge." Sigurd offered.

Furrowing her brows, Alice wondered if there was a catch with this offer. From not caring about her to suddenly offering a reward and even a free repair.

[Suspicious.]

'Suspicious as f*ck.' Alyss agreed.

'Definitely suspicious.' Alice nodded.

However, if this was a true offer with no catches then Alice would be stupid to reject this offer.

Plus, she wanted to try it out to begin with.

"I don't think I can replicate it. Especially since the way you forge requires all of your Sigils to work at the same time. But I'll give it a go." Alice shrugged.

But her response caused Sigurd's smile to grow as he told her everything he wanted to know.

The fact that she could even tell he was using everything meant that she could see far more than what he initially estimated. This gift, this talent... this eye. She was perfect for the role of a blacksmith!

Finding an empty spot, Alice closed her eye and recalled the scenery that she saw. That magnificent scenery of energy and the way Sigurd commanded it.

If Sigurd's method was forceful, she'd go for a more gentle approach.

*Badum

At that moment, Alice felt a beat in her chest. From her core, a dark energy surged forth, wrapping around her heart. Above her head, energy began to converge into obsidian shards that took the rough shape of a crown.

Without even activating her Resonance, the relics of the Abyss began to harmonize.

Unfortunately, this harmonization was stopped. A thick wall of curses prevented the link from being linked up. A resonance between the crown and heart was formed while excluding the eye.

Activating her second and third Sigil, violet flames burst forth from her hand. Around her, blood pooled into a whirlpool. Sparks danced across this pool as Alice furrowed her brows.

The scenery that she saw was clear in her mind yet the surge of energy began to go out of control. She couldn't reign in the violet nature of this whirlpool.

"You can't be gentle when using this method. Asking a bull to move slowly while you jump onto its back is asking it to throw you over and stomp on you. Wrap your hands around and grab tight. Go with the flow but don't let it dictate the pace. Use its momentum against it and reign that b*tch in." Sigurd called out after seeing Alice struggle.

Taking a deep breath, Alice gritted her teeth. Veins bulged along her arm and neck but she didn't give up.

She didn't need to make an earth shattering weapon. Even if it's a shell, she just needed to follow the rough theory and the process behind Sigurd's method of creation.

Naturally, there were gaps in their abilities that Alice had to somehow bridge herself.

Snapping her eyes open, a singularity swirled into existence within her pupil.

Creating a black hole above her palm, a vacuum began to suck in the flow of energy.

Sigurd recognised this step immediately. While it was slightly different, it was no doubt the same method where he could create a vortex with his hammer strike.

'Now she needs to introduce balance and harmony within this chaos.' He thought to himself, observing her actions with amusement and focus.

This was probably the hardest part of the entire forging process. To create chaos and introduce peace within the centre. Then before this peace can settle, throw it back into chaos once more.

From one extreme to the other, it's this reinforcement process that will truly allow his equipment to shine.

Wrapping her hands around the black hole, Alice narrowed her eye as she began to compress it own to a single bead.

The swirl of chaos around her raged but her focus didn't waver.

*BANG!!!

Crashing the orb, flames, briar thorns and spider lilies exploded out from the centre of this maelstrom, creating a field of malevolence around her. Rather than peace, it's more akin to a harrowing forest that's been set aflame.

*CRACK!!!

Unfortunately, a glass crack appeared in the middle of this forest and the scene was torn apart. The convergence of energy could no longer be stopped as Alice understood that she had to condense it into a shape now or else all this energy would've gone to waste.

Bloodline Release!

The image of her soul burst out from behind as black tears began to fall. Taking hold of this energy, Alice created another vacuum, sucking in all the energy around her and condensing it into the shape of a sword.

Taking deep breaths to calm herself, the crown disappeared and so did the singularity in her eye. She returned to her base form.

Glancing at the sword in her hands, she could tell that it was far better than the haphazard weapons that she made in the past.

With her spare hand, she created a blood blade using the method she used previously.

Even without testing it, the answer was clear. But to see the exact difference, Alice tossed the newly created blade into the air before infusing energy into the blood blade.

Void Flux – Cleave!!!

*BANG!!!

A trail of stellar flames followed her slash but upon colliding with the newly forged blade, her blood blade shattered into countless pieces and the energy used for the cleave dissipated without striking the target.

"A little rushed but not bad for an initial product. Seeing as how you controlled it with such familiarity, seems like this power isn't something recent for you." Sigurd clapped his hands.

While the new blade was an unfinished product, the foundations was there. All she needed was time.

Time and guidance. With these two, she could become a blacksmith far better than he could ever be. A girl with talent that far surpasses his limits.

"Takes a bit too long to use it in a fight though. I doubt they'll wait for me to forge something good to use against them." Alice shook her head.

There was no doubt that this blade is strong. Far stronger than what she used before but it took too long to form.

In the thick of things, when every second counted, she couldn't afford such a blunder as doing so meant death!

She needed something both fast and strong. For this reason, this method didn't suit her.

Waving her hand, Alice dismissed the blade as it crumbled apart.

"So now that you've seen this, what do you want?" Alice asked.

It was clear that Sigurd wanted to see her capabilities with his method of forging. The only question left now was why.

Curling his lips into a grin, Sigurd stopped in front of Alice.

"What do you think about inheriting my title of Lord?"

Chapter 486 - 486: Aeternum Vow's Properties.

"What do you think about inheriting my title of Lord?" Sigurd asked with a grin as he folded his arms.

"Hah?" Alice blinked her eyes.

"My title as Lord of the Forge. Do you want it? Become my student and I'll pass everything to you. My techniques, my knowledge, my blueprints. Everything, I'll give it to you." Sigurd clarified.

'With such an offer given to her, it'll take her a moment to fully digest everything.' He mused to himself.

But that was fine. After all, Alice is the first one to show such promise of inheriting his technique.

"Nah, I'll pass." Alice yawned, waving her hand dismissively as she turned to Selen.

"That's right, who would pass on this opport- What?" Sigurd blinked his eyes.

"I'll pass. I'm not interested in becoming a Lord of the Forge." Alice scratched her head, wondering if Sigurd heard her wrong. Which shouldn't be the case since the physicality of Lords, even for those that aren't focused on the body, should transcend human limits.

There was no chance of him mishearing her.

"I'm offering the status of Lord! Do you even know what that entails?" Sigurd questioned, catching up to Alice.

He didn't think anyone in the world could reject the offer of becoming a Lord.

After all, this was the apex of humanity they're talking about! The strongest beneath those that are blessed by divinity!

"Of course I do. But I don't see why I would want to become the Lord of the Forge. It's not like I'm a blacksmith or have an interest in making weapons and equipment. It'll just be wasted on me." Alice shrugged her shoulder.

Making weapons out of blood was never her main focus. If anything, it's more of a temporary measure put in place by her due to Void Fang being sealed. She still needed a weapon to fight with and this was the easiest option rather than continuously buying weapons.

Doing so would waste far too much money when she could be using it for something ACTUALLY important like mead.

Blinking his eyes in disbelief, Sigurd was speechless while watching Alice walk up to Selen who slowly opened her eyes.

The ring had completely attuned to her now and a new source of energy could be sensed flowing through her body.

"How you feelin'?" Alice asked, scanning Selen from head to toe.

"A little tired but pretty good in general." Selen chuckled, holding up her hand and showing off the ring.

"That's good. So how does it feel to have proper equipment of your own?"

All this time, Selen had been conjuring a staff to act as a medium for her abilities or a sword similar to what Alice would do.

But the difference between them was the fact that Alice was mainly a caster to begin with. She didn't need the weapons while Selen did.

If Alice is a caster, Selen could be better classified as a spell warrior. Someone who fights using their body while weaving spells between each attack.

'Going off by that logic, wouldn't you be classed as a spell warrior too twinnie?' Alyss questioned.

After all, Alice liked jumping in and throwing jabs at people. One of her main attacks was even a physical enhancement on a sword strike!

'That's just personal preference.' Alice stuck out her tongue.

'Plus, Selen has always been a monster with her body control. It's just that she never really got the chance to use it aside from the time she's been fighting against us. Now that I think about it, aside from being a spell warrior, Selen is probably an Anti Hunter focused fighter right?

She's been struggling hard with fighting beasts.' Alice paused as she recalled the three classifications of Hunters.

Anti Beast, Anti Hunter and Anti Army.

Alice thought that these classifications are mainly limited to the Sigils they've obtained but that wasn't the case at all.

Depending on how you utilise your abilities and your experience, you could be a 'Anti Hunter' type Hunter that is specialized as Anti Beast. In Alice's case, she was a strange fusion of the two due to the skills that she's copied from her mentors.

The destructive power to take out large beasts with high defence and the Sigil abilities to counter the power of Hunters.

The only thing she lacked now was Anti Army.

Thinking back, with all of her experiences, Alice figured she could probably organise the three into a rock paper scissors format.

Anti Hunter beat Anti Beast as they are able to release devastating attacks that focus on taking the life of an individual.

Anti Army beat Anti Hunter as they release large scale abilities that is hard to avoid, especially with some abilities being airborne.

Anti Beast beats Anti Army as they are proficient with defending against large scale attacks and may even take charge against opponents focused on Anti Army.

Of course, there were probably better ways to categorise these with more context behind their strengths and weaknesses. But this worked as a relatively accurate representation of the general power dynamic between these three skill sets.

Setting aside her own thoughts for now, Alice focused on Selen.

"It feels... A bit weird? Not quite uncomfortable but also not exactly comfortable either." Selen scratched her hair, lifting her hand.

"I'm not sure what this ring does either. It just feels like another reservoir of energy."

Recovering from the shock of having Alice reject one of the most sought after statuses in the world, Sigurd walked over with a deep sigh.

"Number 247 – Aeternum Vow is Legendary grade and its specifically designed on enhancing your time based abilities." Sigurd grumbled.

Pulling out a sheet of parchment, he grabbed a pen and began to write down the abilities.

[Aeternum Vow – Legendary Grade]

Upon intaking time attributed energy, will significantly reduce the energy needed to cast.

Upon intaking time attributed energy, increases potency of acceleration or deceleration of time.

Upon intaking time attributed energy, will enhance time based Sigil abilities.

Enhances range and targeting of time based abilities.

Reduces enemy resistance to time based abilities.

Grants skill – [Truth Seeker], twice per day.

[Truth Seeker]

Makes a prediction of enemy movements based on the actions, habits and abilities shown thus far. This state lasts for 10 seconds.

Superior Durability.

"Give it a try at your own time." Sigurd waved his hand, gesturing for the two to leave him be.

"Ah before we go, didn't you say you were going to fix my glove if I replicated that skill of yours?" Alice grinned, pulling out the damaged gloves from her pouch.

Seeing this, Sigurd's smile twitched as a vein bulged on his neck.

'You come into my home, demand my equipment, copy my technique then reject me when I offer my status and NOW you're wanting more from me???' Sigurd screamed in his mind but didn't vocalise it. After all, he is still an Abyss Lord respected by all.

Losing his temper to some youngsters would be unbecoming of him.

"Tsk, pass it here, I'll sort it out." Sigurd clicked his tongue.

Grabbing the glove, he examined it for a moment before furrowing his brows.

While the use of this glove was rather simple overall, the contraptions needed to pull this off was rather ingenious. On top of that, the crafter was even able to fit it all into a small inconspicuous glove.

Depending on the skill of the user, the glove could either become something extremely deadly or a something useless. A high skill weapon for a high skill user.

This only annoyed him more as the damage done to this has made it pretty much irreparable. At least for him.

He wasn't suited for this kind of delicate work.

"Yeah I don't think I can-" Before he could finish his sentence, he saw the smug provocative grin on Alice's face.

It practically screamed "Yeah I thought so. I didn't think he could repair it.".

Just this thought alone caused his blood pressure to rise.

"I don't think I can leave it as it is. You're a high level warrior now so using a glove that isn't enhanced by Abyss abilities wouldn't be good." Sigurd adjusted his words.

"Come back in a day or so. I'll have it sorted by then. Now shoo!" He rushed them out.

Once that he was left alone, Sigurd let out a huff in annoyance.

"Come out now. They're gone." He glanced to the side and watched Frida step out of the shadows.

"For a reward, didn't think you'd go out of your way to give her a Legendary equipment." Frida folded her arms.

"Can't blame a craftsman on giving his best when inspiration hits. If I miss this, then I'd regret it later." Sigurd shrugged.

"Plus, how often do you see time manipulation?"

"And how about the split haired girl then? Any particular reason for you to try and give up your status as a Lord?" Frida raised an eyebrow.

His offer to Alice took her by surprise. Had Alice accepted, it would mean this nation could've potentially lost a Lord level being, putting them at a big disadvantage.

"I just felt like it. She's got even more talent than I do to the point it makes me wonder if she's able to create Holy grade equipment with enough time, practice and tutoring. Don't you find the thought exhilarating? A mortal creating weapons on par with that of Gods." Sigurd grinned as killing intent began to seep out from his body.

Hearing this, Frida sighed.

There was only one goal that Sigurd had when it came to creating equipment.

God Slayer!

To create a weapon capable of killing a God!

Chapter 487 - 487: Inspiration From The Forge

Leaving the forge, Alice couldn't help but recall the forging method that he showed her.

The vibrant scenery as the world was bent to his will. How he wrestled the energy under his control and used it to forge Selen's ring.

This kind of tyrannical forging method... She wanted to see if she could modify it and make it hers. To adjust the fundamentals and change certain properties to match her needs, just like what she did with Allura's Nova Core and Executioner's Blade.

Both of which were transformed into Void Flux and Void Flux – Cleave.

However, this was not the time to try it, she'll find some spare time later to experiment.

Glancing to the side, Alice could see Selen playing around with the ring as she's slowly getting used to the new vessel of energy within her.

"Seems like you're pretty eager to test it out." Alice chuckled as Selen nodded her head.

"Of course I am. After all, it's the first proper equipment I've ever got. The other times have just been spare weapons that the guards use or I create it myself using my Sigils." Selen shrugged.

Waving her hand, energy weaved together into a staff.

Observing this, Alice noticed a change. She noticed her gaze focusing more on the strands as the small details that were previously looked over now became clear to her.

A single instance of exposure to a truly marvellous forging method developed by Sigurd was enough to open her mind to a new world of detail and focus. If she had to describe it, it would be akin to a person who needed glasses all their life finally got their hands on a pair that were suited to them.

From a life of seeing everything blurred and muddled to seeing true clarity.

Looking down at her own hand, Alice began to wonder.

If she could see the true flow of energy that she unconsciously skipped over before, what else could she see? What else could she modify?

Clenching her fists, Alice was ready for a spar. Hell, not even a spar would suffice at this point. She wanted to just isolate herself and do a complete overhaul on the skills that she's learned over the course of her journey.

To reflect and modify the flow of energy to be more efficient. To recall the lessons that she's learned.

But there was something else she wanted to test before any of that.

"Hold out your staff for a moment." Alice asked as Selen tilted her head before nodding.

She wasn't sure what Alice was wanting to do with this but with what she's been doing recently, Selen figured that Alice was probably about to make a breakthrough.

Scanning her eye across the body of the staff, Alice could see the flow of energy and how it weaved together to form this staff. It was a similar construction method to how she made her own weapons.

Very basic and rudimentary but fitted the purpose.

However, after experiencing how Sigurd forges his weapons, Alice could see the shaky foundation of such a creation.

Gathering a small mote of energy on her finger, she paused for a moment before tapping it against the shaft of the staff.

*KRK!

A crack stretched across the entire body before shattering apart.

One tap, one spark of energy to disrupt the flow.

One tap was all it took to disassemble the staff.

Despite being shocked, Selen didn't say anything as she noticed that Alice had entered a flow state. Her eye lingered on where the staff had been and Selen could tell Alice was forming new theories in her mind.

A smile appeared on her face as she couldn't help but sigh inwardly.

The mental state of a hunter/warrior was the most important part of their skill set. A free minded hunter can make a myriad of skills from the building blocks of their Sigils.

Most would be able to create one or two specialised skills based on what they know. But Alice? She's like a sponge.

No matter what you showed her, she would break it down in her mind, understand it as best as she could and see if she could replicate it. One glance was all she needed to see the truth of the skill and the theory behind it.

This was what caused Selen to create her new skill in the first place. A counter measure against those who are similar to Alice, those who are extremely perceptive and focused on the details.

A smile curved on Alice's face as she closed her eye.

"Selen, have you ever wondered about how the day is far too short?" Alice asked.

The ideas that flooded through her mind, even if she was given a week, it wouldn't be enough time.

"Not really. But with my powers, it's not hard to extend my perception of the day." Selen shrugged.

"Fair point. I'm simply lamenting that there is only 24 hours in a day as there is too much to do for this short period of time." Alice laughed.

After leaving the forge, the two of them looked around for a place to spar.

Making their way to the barracks where warriors could be seen training, Alice and Selen booked a training room sealed by ice. A room dedicated to those with a minimum of five Sigils and designed to contain as much destruction as possible thanks to Frida's reinforcement.

With such a perfect sparring spot, Alice gave her body a stretch and changed into a different outfit that didn't restrain her movements.

A sleeveless white and black one piece dress with the icon on Ayr on the chest. The dress reached down to the thighs.

Gloves that reached up to her bicep and a pair of long boots reaching past her knees.

Tying her hair into a ponytail, Alice gave her neck a light massage before entering an offensive stance.

In the distance, Selen created a new weapon that Alice had never seen before.

"What's that?" Alice couldn't help but ask curiously.

In Selen's hand, she held a single blade while her spare hand controlled an orb that seemed like it was removed from the head of her staff.

"Just testing some things out, don't worry about it." Selen chuckled.

Creating a small blood orb, Alice tossed it into the air as the two waited for the start signal.

###

I can feel the sweat gathered on my palms as I faced Alice.

Despite her appearance and joking nature, she's the most fearsome Hunter I have ever seen. That thick killing intent, the instincts and the adaptability. She was in a class of her own.

However, there are still weaknesses that I can exploit as proven by my skill.

With the addition of Aeternum Vow, the chances of victory should be much higher than before. Yet even with this new equipment at my disposal, my heart couldn't rest easy.

I recalled her words in the elevator, her quick demonstration as ideas entered her mind.

Every time Alice had been eager for a spar, she's always showing something new. Therefore, I was going to go all out from the beginning. To end this fight as soon as possible before she could test it out.

This is a Hunt and I have only one goal.

To Hunt Alice!

Taking a deep breath to calm my mind, an action that I've seen Alice perform many times, I focused my gaze on Alice's body as energy flowed through my body.

'I must use everything at the start. Resonance, perception manipulation, acceleration and even the new skill Truth Seeker.'

If I don't do this, there was a high chance that the fight will end before it can truly begin.

*BANG!!!

With the detonation of the blood orb, it was my cue to begin.

[Truth Seeker!]

Usually, Truth Seeker should make a prediction based on what its seen so far. But because this is the start of the battle, I'm going to use my own knowledge and understanding of her to supplement the gap in information!

In the split moment when Truth Seeker was activated, I could feel blood drip from my nose as a flood of information assaulted my mind. All the possible combinations that Alice could do, all of her preferred routes of attack and how even the slightest movement from me would overhaul the predictions that Truth Seeker has made due to Alice reacting to me.

Truly, this skill showed me just how monstrous Alice's instincts are. A perfected honed weapon for battle.

However!

If she can't react then the movements won't change. I know that Alice is familiar with my skill so it wouldn't last for long but even a slight moment would be enough.

Perception Adjustment + Acceleration!

Power from the ring flowed into my body as an iridescent blue aura wrapped around me. I felt my mind open up from the flow of energy as the world seemed to slow down around me.

Resonance!

To make the most of the abilities of the ring, I dragged Alice into the monochrome world.

Right here, right now. I will defeat her!

###

"How many hybrids do we have gathered?" Elowen asked as she glanced at the mountain range in the distance.

Even from afar, she could sense the powerful barrier that Queen Verona had erected around the capital city. Even for them, infiltrating and unleashing the disease was not going to be easy.

"6 Hybrids have gathered in total. Two of which are still on the way." Troy replied.

"Good, we attack at nightfall." Elowen curled her lips into a menacing grin.

It will be a banquet of blood and horrors as they watch their loved ones turn into malformed beasts.

Chapter 488 - 488: Third Version Of Alice's Skill

Upon being dragged into the monochrome world, Alice immediately reacted and activated her personal Artifact.

Fractured Form!

Even after unlocking the artificial Resonance, Alice could still use each of the forms individually. For this instance, the Fractured Form was perfect as it interrupts the usage of domain like abilities that seal her in a certain space.

*CRACK!!!

Glass cracks webbed through the boundaries of this domain as Alice could see the flow of energy being cut off and interrupted, preventing it from forming properly.

However, in the time that it took for her to interrupt the cast of Selen's domain, Selen had already activated her perception manipulation along with acceleration!

*CLANG!!!

Right before the attack could hit, Alice had instinctively activated Void Steps, throwing herself back. Even if she didn't land, just dodging Selen's strike was good enough with how dangerous it was.

Rolling across the ground, Alice recovered from the haphazard void Step and slammed her hand down.

In an instant, a blood pool expanded outwards as Alice surrounded herself with a forest of blood briars.

However, time began to slow as Alice noticed her movements becoming sluggish.

"Even though I've only been using perception and acceleration, don't forget I can designate targets for deceleration as well!" Selen reminded with a grin.

Landing in front of Alice, Selen prepared a horizontal slash to finish their spar. But right before Truth Seeker ran out of time, she saw Alice reacting and instantly jumped back.

*BANG!!!

The space in front of Alice erupted as cold sweat dripped down Selen's back.

If she continued her slash, the one who lost would've been her!

"Seems like you caught a glimpse at the last moment." Alice chuckled, standing up and breaking out of the deceleration.

A singularity spun to life in her eye as the flow of energy around her became clear.

Artificial Resonance!

Snapping her finger, the space around them began to crumble. Even with Selen's time slow, preventing the destruction of space was still beyond her.

*BANG!!!

Slamming her staff down, Selen created a barrier to slow down the destruction of space as much as possible. While prevention may be beyond her powers, a delay is still within reason.

But in a spar against Alice, reason wasn't going to be enough.

A maelstrom of energy converged around Alice as she created a singularity between her palms.

Recognising it to be the skill Alice was developing, Selen wondered if this was still safe.

"Originally, I wanted my new skill to be something that can ignore defences similar to my mother/mentor's skill. But without certain pieces in my skill set and certain blessings, it was always going to be impossible.

"Then I began to wonder. If I could supplement this lack of blessing with something else. My unique body for example. But it wasn't quite what I was looking for either. My flames burns from the outside and carves away the layers one by one. Useful but not the same as breaching the defensive layer in one go.

"So I adjusted the skill. To reach from point A to point B in a split moment. Using this momentum to forcefully implant the skill as deep as I can before exploding it out. But this method has its faults too. So what do you think the next iteration of my skill will be?" Alice asked as a smile crept up on her face.

Bloodline Release!

Behind her, the soul form appeared as black blood bled from the eyes.

After seeing Sigurd's forging method along with her own brief experimentation, Alice had a new idea in mind. An attack that specifically targets the 'foundation' of each object in front of her. A blanket of flames to see which part crumbles first while the rest of the attack assaults the weakness.

In her hands, the singularity began to explode in size as the accretion disk formed around it. Around her, violet flames transformed into a dress before slowly shifting in colour. From a bright violet, it began to fade until only darkness remained.

Black flames surged around Alice's body, converging towards the singularity, fuelling it.

With all the conditions reached, Alice took a step forward.

*BANG!!!!!!

"What do you think you're doing?" A voice rang out.

At that moment, both Alice and Selen were transported into a different realm. A realm constructed solely of ice and snow. Large crystalline trees decorated the landscape while northern lights could be seen hanging above them.

Ice chains locked around Alice's wrist as the skill was forcefully imprisoned in ice.

"The sparring rooms are for sparring and small scale abilities. Are you perhaps trying to destroy this facility?" Frida narrowed her eyes as her aura crashed against the two, pressuring them.

Despite sealing the skill in ice, Frida could feel its destructive nature trying to break out even now. Layers were being destroyed at a rapid pace and she had to constantly update the prison to contain the skill.

"Sorry sorry~ got a bit carried away. Though I wasn't planning on destroying anythingahaha~" Alice laughed awkwardly.

Just from the aura alone, Alice could tell this woman was an Abyss Lord. Out of all the possibilities, her being the Lord of Winter was the highest.

"I was planning on firing this skill then disassemble it before it could hit anything. It's a hollow form after all, not the full attack. If anything, it's more of a proof of concept." Alice explained.

Within the ice prison, she flicked her finger as the skill dissipated without any issue.

Seeing this, Frida's pupil trembled for a moment before composing herself.

However, her mind was in turmoil.

She couldn't believe that skill was 'just' a hollow form. Something that could be cancelled easily.

If that was the case, what was the true form of the attack?

"Fine, just don't do anything to damage the city." Frida waved her hand, recalling her domain and her chains.

With nothing else she needed to take care of, she disappeared with a swirl of snow.

Now that Alice and Selen were alone again, they collapsed on the ground.

"Jeez, for a moment I thought you were trying to kill me." Selen sighed out. Just being in the presence of that skill was enough to freeze her in her spot. She didn't dare use the perception manipulation either as there was a chance the skill could just implode.

"Why would I be doing that? Like I said earlier, it's just a proof of concept. It still holds some power but not enough where I would lose control don't worry." Alice reassured with a chuckle.

"So what does this new iteration do exactly?" Selen asked curiously.

"Hmm... If I had to put it simply then it's a f*ck everything in that direction attack. I was planning on launching it using Void Steps so it reaches the target even faster. Similar to what I did to your staff, it basically unravels and deconstructs the energy used to maintain form.

So defences reinforced by Abyssal Energy will be unravelled, artificial shields and so on." Alice explained as she held up her hand.

She could still see the lingering of energy that she had gathered.

Calling it a hollow shell wasn't wrong though since the skill was still incomplete. In this variation, it would've breached the defence but wouldn't have enough power to kill.

If she had to explain it, would be such.

The first iteration she used against Keira had High power, medium penetration while also being relatively avoidable if the enemy is prepared.

Later, she adjusted it for slightly more penetration and slightly more speed but the power dropped.

This time, it had low power but extremely high penetration and extremely high speed.

Just like when she was training her casting with Kaden in the Inverted World, she had to find a balance between the three for an optimal attack.

Regardless, she was satisfied with being able to adjust the values to this extent.

Realising that Selen was silent, Alice glanced up and saw a bitter smile on Selen's face as she contemplated in silence.

"Something wrong?" Alice asked but Selen shook her head.

"Don't worry about it. Just speechless at your improvement." Selen sighed, leaning back.

She couldn't help but wonder if it was simply the gap in talent or circumstances. The way Alice thought, the way she perceived the world. Everything was different at a fundamental level.

While she hasn't reached the limit of her power, she couldn't help but despair at the sheer difference in talent. Even though she couldn't see the peak, she could already tell Alice will reach greater heights than her.

She felt small when standing at the base of this mountain. Even when she thought she had caught up using her newly developed skill, Alice sped ahead in the blink of an eye.

How was she ever supposed to keep up?

If this was the talent needed to go against the Zenia family, what was she supposed to do?

The more she thought about this, the more her smile faded.

Alice didn't know what to say.

She knew that Selen was extremely proud and happy when she won using the new skill she developed.

But now?

"Shall we get something to eat then? I'm pretty curious of what the food is like in the capital." Selen suggested, changing the subject.

"Sure." Alice nodded, sitting up.

She wasn't sure what she should do but regardless of the results, Alice didn't want to hinder her own improvement.

She had to keep moving forward. Without sufficient strength, she cannot rebuild Ayr. She cannot take revenge against the Zenia family. She cannot avenge her first friend back in the slaughter docks.

She cannot avenge Velouria who's corpse was being defiled by Nyer.

Without strength, she cannot do anything of this. Thus, she must keep moving forward.

Chapter 489 - 489: Shadows In The Mind

After getting some food, they decided to book separate rooms at the inn.

Using the excuse of clearing her mind, Selen decided to have a walk around the city.

Countless thoughts swam around in her mind as the feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy plagued her.

No matter how much she wanted to convince herself, it simply won't disappear.

A permanent shadow in her mind, lingering, watching, smirking.

For the brief moment when she felt proud of the skill she created, that pride was instantly shattered with Alice finding new ways of improving.

Glancing up at the sky, Selen took a deep breath and sighed.

"Why am I even trying?" She asked herself with a bitter smile.

No matter what she does, no matter what she tries, she simply can't keep up.

Frustration.

Gritting her teeth, tears began to form in her eyes as Selen wiped it away with her sleeve.

Closing her eyes, she tried her best to calm her emotions. A simple task considering what she had to go through before.

Reaching back with her hand, she traced the scars that painted her back and a burning fury rose up in her heart once more.

However, this fury was quickly dosed once she remembered the power of the hybrids. The Zenia family could have made hundreds of these abominations. She was simply a failed product that did slightly better than the rest.

Selen could still remember the disappointed gazes of the scholars after she failed to truly adapt to Alice's blood.

While she's gained some form of resistance, it was still far too lacking.

To them, Alice is the perfect specimen of what they've been striving for. They only needed a bit more work before she was 'perfect'.

But she escaped.

Thinking about this, a self-mocking smile appeared on her face.

'It's to be expected. I'm just a failed product after all, how can I even dream about catching up with the original.'

###

'Shouldn't you go after Selen? She didn't look well.' Alyss asked while laying upside down on her throne.

'Even if I go, I'm not sure what to say to her.' Alice sighed.

Hugging her knees, she glanced at the floor in contemplation. This has been something that's happened with both Ria and Selen now. Their gazes of uncertainty as she improves at a rapid pace.

'I suppose that's true. She might even take it as pity which will be the opposite result of what you want.' Alyss scratched her hair.

It wasn't going to be an easy issue to resolve considering it's an issue regarding the mental state. There's only so much help that they can give Selen and the rest she has to resolve herself.

'It is wrong of me to improve so quickly?'

For her goals, she needed to be stronger. But the faster and stronger she gets, the more it seems like she's pushing the people around her away. To do things solo.

Even though she had already told herself that she had to keep moving forward... Seeing her friends drift away...

It hurts.

Biting her lip, Alice clutched her chest in pain as tears welled up in the corner of her eyes.

Seeing her twin like this, Alyss gave her a hug from behind.

She didn't have the answer to this question either.

Between the two of them, Alice was the more unstable one when it came to emotions. Despite her power and the brutality of her actions, she's someone who'll laugh, get angry and become sad like everyone else.

She's still just a girl on the inside.

Watching this, Cayla was silent.

Alice's fate was going to be a lonely one. Upon gathering all the relics, she had already solidified herself as the future ruler of the Abyss. The next generation queen and Goddess.

Not only that, but her body is a product of Nyer's designs. A fated clash was unavoidable thus she had to get power in order to protect herself.

She couldn't hold herself back.

But even so... Cayla hoped that Alice could spend her time as a normal girl before any of that happened. Seeing her master like this broke her heart as she wished she could give her the answers she desired.

[Where are you Allura... Your daughter needs some comforting.] Cayla sighed inwardly.

This loneliness, perhaps only those at the top could relate to.

Both Allura and Kaden had lived countless years, reached the pinnacle of strength and experienced partings. They may have taught her how to fight and survive, but she still needed guidance as a human.

###

Sitting by a bench, Selen held a bottle of juice in her hand as she slumped back and wondered why she was even doing all of this.

No matter how much she tries, the day goes on regardless. The morning come and go without care or worry about what the humans experience.

"Are you feeling alright?" A familiar voice rang out as Selen glanced back and saw Egil standing behind her bench. "I'm fi- Nah never mind. I'm feeling a bit sh*tty right now." Selen originally planned to put up a brave front but anyone could tell she wasn't doing great right now.

"Want to talk about it?" Egil asked, jumping over the bench and sat down next to her.

"Dunno. Want to get something to drink first?" Selen offered.

"If you're offering I won't reject."

Grabbing a bottle of juice for Egil as well, the two sat down on the same bench.

"So what's been on your mind?"

". . .Have... have you ever thought about how no matter what you did, it was futile?" Selen asked, causing Egil to choke on his drink.

"Hmm... Yep, I have. The thought never leaves my mind." Egil chuckled, taking another sip.

"How do you deal with it?"

"I can only assume this is about Alice, unless I'm wrong. I've never told you about my childhood have I?" Egil scratched his chin.

"No you haven't."

"I see..." Leaning back for a moment, Egil closed his eyes before a smile appeared on his face.

"You know about my physique right? I wasn't always this bulky. In fact, I wasn't even supposed to grow this much you know?"

"I was quite the shrimp growing up. I wouldn't say malnourished since my mother made sure I was fed. But rather I was born sickly and weak. I was always jealous of those who could run around and smile like nothing because I could not do the same.

"My father, however, was a proud warrior with a strong physique. He simply couldn't understand how his genes created such a shrimp like me and blamed it on my mother. The two didn't have a single peaceful day after I was born." Egil smiled bitterly while swirling the juice in his hands.

"I couldn't take it anymore. I was jealous of the people around me, jealous of my father and you could even say I was resentful of my mother at one point. I believed my father's words saying that my mother was the cause of my weakness. I said some pretty nasty things to her back then."

Clenching his fist, Egil swung his head back and drank a mouthful of juice.

"So I cheated. I couldn't change the weakness of my body so I decided to cheat. I drank Abyss Blood and modified my body in order to become 'healthy and strong'. You know how us northerners are with our perception of the Abyss." Egil sighed while looking up at the sky.

"You can imagine how my father treated me afterwards. Hurling all kinds of words my way while the people I was jealous of before called me a monster. I became quite hateful after that you know? I began to fight everyone who said anything bad about me and refused to play nice with my teammates. That's how I got my poor reputationahaha." Egil scratched the back of his head.

"But my mother never gave up on me. The only thing she cared about was who I was on the inside. I may have walked off the right path but she guided me back."

While Selen's situation may be different, he'll try his best to help her. Just like how his mother helped him get over his jealousy and inferiority, he'll dispel the doubts in her mind.

###

'Sorry...' Alice mumbled, wiping her tears away. The corners of her eyes and nose were red and swollen.

'Don't be sorry. As long as you're feeling better.' Alyss waved her hand dismissively.

'Mnm... I didn't think I would feel that bitter about it ahaha...' Alice smiled sadly as Alyss scratched her cheek.

'I'd say it was a long time coming. If you didn't feel hurt or emotional, I'll be more worried about that instead. Just proves you're human like the rest of us on the inside. Not just an experiment or a product.' She couldn't stand seeing her twin like this.

She wanted to see Alice bounce around happily while shopping for cutesy clothes, struggle to manage her money as she bought too much mead and laugh when she makes a breakthrough in her skills.

Alyss didn't want to see her twin cry.

Hearing Alyss's response, Alice was silent as she dwelled on the words.

To feel these emotions is to be human. She wasn't just a product who's only purpose was to fight.

Just thinking about this brought a smile to her face.

'Thank you.' Alice laughed.

'Yeesh, has anyone told you that you got a goofy ass smile after crying? Tears and snot everywhere, such a brat.' Alyss stuck out her tongue but there was a hint of relief in her eyes.

'Shaddap! You try and smile nice after crying.' Alice pouted.

'Hah! I look fabulous all the time, My smile, perfect. My looks, immaculate.' Alyss flipped her hair.

'We look the same jackass!'

'This is where you're wrong my dear twin. It's all about the elegance.' Alyss grinned.

Seeing the two arguing like nothing happened, Cayla chuckled.

Things were going to be fine in the end. After all, Alice had a caring twin by her side, comforting her, teasing her and backing her up.

Chapter 490 - 490: Egil And Selen

Listening to Egil's story, Selen was silent. She glanced down at the floor and contemplated in silence.

"Afterwards, my father left and it was just me and my mother. For a period, I was still harbouring a hatred but at one point, it was my ego that got in the way. I was still being rude to her despite knowing everything she did for me.

"Then the pandemic hit and she was left bedridden. I realised how foolish I've been this entire time." Egil sighed, finishing his drink.

Looking at the people walking around hand in hand with their parents, a small smile appeared on his face.

"When you ask me if I ever thought about the futility of my actions, I can only say yes. I question why I drank that vial of blood, why I wasn't nicer to my mother and why I couldn't be a better son for her until she was bedridden.

"And when you ask me how I deal with it? I think back to my mistakes and how I don't want to make it again. How I want to be a better son for my mother. When I think of these, I feel a fire in my chest, burning, urging me forward. To do my best without regret so I won't make the same mistake as I did with my mother.

"Once everything is over, I want to stand in front of her with a proud smile. Telling her that I've changed my ways and that she doesn't have to worry anymore." Egil smiled but tears welled up in his eyes.

"Ahaha... Sorry..." He apologised, wiping his tears away as Selen gave him a hug from the side.

"I'm meant to be the one comforting you yet you're helping me instead." He let out a small chuckle while Selen patted him on the back.

"It's fine. But I never knew you had that kind of childhood, must've been tough on you."

Nodding his head, Egil took a moment to calm his emotions before recovering a smile on his face.

"Enough about me, back to you. Are you... afraid of Alice's improvement?" Egil asked with a slight pause.

Without saying anything back, Selen nodded her head.

"I don't blame you for thinking that. I still remember what we saw in Kvia you know. That attack she launched made me realise how much of a monster she really is. All that while she's injured too. So just imagine what she'll be like at peak condition." Egil chuckled.

"But there's something else you need to think about before that. Should a frontline worry about how to heal? Should a damage dealer worry about how to keep the beast's focus on them? Should a healer worry about how to deal damage? Everyone has their roles in life. Focusing on yourself is far more important than looking around you.

"If you spend all the time looking at the people around you, you wouldn't even know when you step off the path you're meant to take. In my eyes, Alice is raw power while you focus on control. Of course, that's not to say you don't have power. But just like how Alice defaults to power, you default to control.

"How many people have you seen can manipulate the perception of enemies? How many have you seen that can slow down or speed up time? Believe me when I say both of you are menaces in your own right. I don't think you need to be jealous of Alice's growth when you also improve at a rapid rate." Egil reassured.

There was one more thing he wanted to say but hesitated.

It was the same thing that his mother did for him.

Even if it was a little embarrassing, he wanted to do it. To support her like his mother did for him.

At that moment, Egil hugged Selen and patted her head.

"Your efforts, I've seen it. I'm proud of you so don't worry about what other people think or say. I will always support you no matter what."

Selen's pupils trembled for a moment before a smile appeared on her face.

Such a simple answer but Selen didn't know why when Egil says it, she felt like she could do anything. The fire that burned in her chest, her desire to improve so live up to his support.

"You said that you cheated when you were younger right?" Selen asked as Egil nodded.

"You're not the only one. I'm also a bit of a cheater."

Grabbing his hand, she hesitated for a moment before allowing him to feel her back.

Her body trembled the moment his fingers traced her scars but she wanted to be truthful to him. He exposed his past, his weaknesses and his doubts just to comfort her.

She wanted to do the same for him. She wanted to believe that if it's him, he'll accept her past for what it is.

"I'm also a cheater since my powers are a product of experimentation. None of it was earned by myself."

Once she started, Selen couldn't stop. She began to tell him about the experiments, the truth of the Zenias, the things she had to do. The experiences that she had to endure, the humiliation caused by Erick.

How he dirtied her body even more.

Even thinking about it made her feel sick.

But not once did Egil's hug falter. He continued to hold onto her, acting as a protective barrier.

Running out of words to say, Selen hugged Egil tightly. She feared his response, his rejection. But at the same time, he wanted to hear his words of comfort. His acceptance.

Her heart crashed against her chest as thoughts rushed through her mind. She waited and waited, patiently for his words.

But silence.

'Ah... He must be disgusted...' Selen thought to herself as sadness crept into her heart.

"Sorry, that was a lot wasn't it." Selen apologised as she tried to pull away from his hug but his arms didn't budge.

"I'm an awkward guy. I'm not good with my words. I... just didn't know how to say what I'm feeling. But... I'm sorry that you had to go through all of that. I'm sorry that I couldn't be there for you sooner. No matter what happens in your past, you're still Selen to me. If you need an extra pair of hands to help get your revenge, I'll be there. If you need someone to comfort you, I'll also be there. No matter what, I will keep supporting you as I have been."

Hearing this, Selen's pupils trembled as a smile appeared on her face.

Punching him lightly on the chest, she pressed her head against his body.

"You made me wait that long for this kind of responseahaha... What a jerk. It sounds like a confession you know?"

"That's because it is one." Egil scratched his cheek.

"!!!"

Sitting back, Selen widened her eyes as she glanced up at his face. Despite his tough appearance, she could see a blush on his face and an awkward smile.

Immediately, Selen could feel blood rushing towards her cheeks as well as she began to stumble over her words.

"Eh?! But?! Huh!? I-I mean... I told you about what I did in the past didn't I?" Selen held her arms as she could still remember the disgust she felt from Erick.

"You did. But that still doesn't change what I said. I will keep supporting you as I have been this entire time." Egil nodded.

"Idiot! Jerk! Stupid! You're supposed to care about these things though?!" Selen pouted, hitting him on the chest but couldn't hold back the blush on her face that extended to the tips of her ears.

"But I don't. Because it's you. I know what you're like on the inside, you're a wonderful woman through and through."

She couldn't believe he could say something like this without hesitation but it brought a warm feeling to her heart. It's like all of her doubts have been dispelled.

"If you're gonna confess, at least bring me some flowers next time dummy." Selen chuckled.

"Ah... So is that a no?" Egil sighed.

Glancing up in disbelief, Selen's smile twitched as she saw the sadness in his expression.

Rolling her eyes, she couldn't help laugh.

"That's- Forget it. Look over here stupid jerk."

"Hm?" Glancing towards Selen, Egil wondered what she was going to say when she leaned in and kissed him on the lips.

The kiss felt like it lasted an eternity before Selen pulled away, making Egil desire that warmth again.

"Is my response clear now?" Selen asked, licking her lips with a seductive gaze.

"Should I bring some flowers?"

"?!?!?" Selen wanted to smack Egil on the head.

"I'm kidding. Even I know what you mean if you make it that clear." Egil laughed, pulling Selen in for another hug.

"Jerk." Selen smacked him with a pout but it was soon replaced by a happy smile. Sitting on his lap, she enjoyed Egil hugging her from behind.

They enjoyed each other's company as Egil rested his head on her shoulder.

"You really are cute." Egil couldn't help but mutter as Selen blushed in embarrassment.

"W-Where did that come from???" She replied, her voice a little higher than usual from the embarrassment.

"I just felt like saying it." Egil laughed. A joy like no other filled his heart. He was truly glad to have met Selen.

###

Standing on the mountain overlooking the capital, Elowen couldn't restrain the smile on her face. Everyone had gathered and all preparations were now done.

Activating her resonance, scales began to form on her body as transformed into her bestial form.

With a single flap of her wings, the Void began to tremble.

Tonight, the capital will become the new host of the disease.