

ABYSSAL AWAKENING

Chapter 5: Abyss Hound

As the event began, Alice could no longer keep her attention on Lars. Her own survival was now at stake. But in the short moment she observed him, she gained information about things previously unknown to her.

'So, sigils are powers that appear on a person's body?' She wasn't sure. She hadn't seen anything like it.

'It seems like the more sigils you have the more powerful you are and the more favourably you are looked upon. Unlike the powers of the Abyss Blood, it seems like sigils don't affect your physical traits permanently, either.' She mused to herself. In a way, it was functionally similar to how her mutation worked.

'How nice... If only I had something like that.' She glanced at Lars fighting the Grave Robber in wonder.

Feeling a set of eyes lock onto her, Alice turned away from the fight between monsters. One of the Abyss Hounds, which Alice deemed appropriate to name, crouched above a set of wooden walls next to her, its body low and ready to pounce at a moment's notice.

Alice could feel her hands shaking in fear. Her body felt sluggish and her vision seemed to focus in on the Hound's jaws and claws.

Did she fear the pain she could feel? No, she didn't. Did she fear death? She didn't either. She will not let such a beast take her chance at vengeance away from her!

There were several weapons stabbed into the ground surrounding the arena. Most of them were too large or heavy for Alice to use. However, there was a shortsword near where she was. The blade looked red and broken, but she wasn't sure.

As the two stared down at each other, Alice could hear the sound of battles erupting around her. The sudden movements of the Hounds, the clashing of bone against steel, the screams of the dying.

Ignoring everything, her attention was solely focused on the beast in front of her. She didn't know why but her eyesight seemed to have improved dramatically. She could see the faint contractions of its muscle fibres, the small flicker of its eyes as it scanned her up and down.

Unable to hold herself back anymore, she rushed forward in impatience, lunging to grab the sword. But she was too slow. While Alice wasn't drained of energy, she wasn't exactly overflowing with vigour either.

The Abyss Hound could smell something strange from the girl. It made the Beast hesitate to strike. However, with Alice making the first move, it gave in to baser instincts and bared its fangs.

***BANG!**

Launching itself off the wooden walls, the Hound leaped at Alice, the sheer force of its jump shattering the planks behind it.

Widening her eyes in shock, Alice's brows furrowed before she stretched her hand forward and barely grasped the sword. Desperately pulling and swinging it from an awkward angle, she tried to protect herself.

Feeling a stinging pain on her shoulder, Alice crashed to the side and rolled across the floor. Blood oozed from the girl's shoulder as the Hound's claw cleaved her flesh. He barely missed her neck.

The Beast turned and began to circle around her once more, relentlessly looking for another chance to kill its prey.

'How the hell does anyone fight beasts like this?!' She screamed in her mind. Although Alice knew the bedtime stories she heard of heroes fighting Abyss Beasts with ease were fake, nothing could prepare her for the sheer hopelessness of her current situation.

The stories of Abyssal Hunters sung of calm and fearless warriors, heroes who, no matter what tried to kill them, would stare down death without flinching. They wouldn't miss a single moment of weakness and strike the beasts, ending them in one blow.

But she wasn't like that. She could feel her knees buckling from the weight of the beast's attack, her mind muddled with confusion as to what the beast would do next. She could feel her heart pounding against her ears as the world seemed to darken around the Hound.

Sensing her confusion and fear, the Hound curled its bestial maws into a haunting smile that sent shivers down Alice's spine. Sadistic pleasure radiated from its eyes. It launched towards Alice once more. This time, its body exploded with even greater speed, causing dust to scatter behind it.

Alice froze in fear. The smile was familiar to her. It was something she had seen often before, plastered across the face of her tormentors. As the face of her tormentors and the Beast overlapped, she could feel a wave of anger rising from her heart.

Her instinct of survival merged with rage and desperation as Alice rolled off to the side and grabbed the corner of a wooden barricade scattered across the arena as part of an obstacle. Using it to throw herself away from danger, she watched as the Hound slammed against several barrels, breaking them apart as though they were made from paper.

'The pain from my shoulder isn't something I can't handle. But I can't use my left arm well.' Alice gritted her teeth.

She could only dread what kind of damage the Beast's lunge would have done to her body this time.

Scanning her eyes around, Alice found no additional weapons for her to easily use. To her left were several wooden walls, one of which she used to pull herself from danger. To her right, a set of barrels the Hound crashed through. There was another beast and slave locked in combat not far from her position.

The path behind it would lead her closer to the centre of the arena, where the main attraction fought.

'What can I do? I can't fight the Hound at all. Fighting it head-on is suicide... The only weapon I have is this stupid sword I can barely swing. If I run towards the middle, I'm asking to get killed by the big thing fighting Lars. I doubt he'll care about my issues considering he's got a fight of his own.'

Without realising, Alice had started to scratch her neck out of stress, a habit she slowly developed over time. It helped her focus.

She was trying her best to rationalise all possible options. Panicking would only increase her chances of death. She couldn't deny the fact that she was anxious. She didn't want her life to end here. But, Alice's body didn't move the way she wanted it to. She just wasn't fit enough to perform acts of strength like taking down this Hound in a head-on fight.

'Then stop thinking that way!' She smacked her neck in frustration. 'I have to fight this Beast! I have to kill it no matter what. If I don't, I'll die and everything will be for naught. I didn't hold out for 10 years to get ended by some stupid mutt.'

Taking a deep breath, Alice got back onto her feet. She could feel a throbbing pain in her shoulder. It didn't bother her, though; a mere shoulder injury was nothing compared to seeing your own ribs being pulled apart.

She could hear the sound of wooden planks being pushed aside as the hound recovered and began to search for her once more.

'I can probably use the wooden walls to my advantage. If I make it crash into a bunch of them, it should give me a chance to attack him.'

Grabbing the sword by the handle with her mouth, she reached up with her good arm and hauled herself up on the wall. Stabilising herself momentarily, she glared at the hound and waited patiently. She wanted it to throw itself against the wall in an attempt to knock her off and take that chance to stab it from above.

While Alice couldn't help but admit that it was a little above her skill level right now, she had to start somewhere.

Seeing her provocative stance, the Hound bared its fangs once more and let out an intimidating howl. Alice remained unfazed, glaring with determination at the Beast. Circling around the wall for a short moment, the Hound dashed toward her.

Contrary to her expectations, the Hound didn't ram against the wall as she hoped but leaped up and aimed for her jugular.

Taking a deep breath, she quickly jumped back so that she was out of harm's way and landed roughly against the ground. With the target now missing, the Hound overshot its jump on the wall and collided with a stack of planks.

'A chance!'

Charging at what she perceived as a golden opportunity, Alice ran with a fool's courage in an all-or-nothing effort with her blade in hand. With the Hound still recovering from its jump, she dashed behind him and plunged the blade down.

Unfortunately for Alice, her technique was lacking. The blade tip collided harshly against a protruding bone and veered off to the side.

'You've got to be shitting me!' She cursed out in her mind. She had finally worked up the courage, but her attack just missed!

The Hound moved its head towards her with fury. The cowardly prey quivering in fear actually tried to kill it?! Lashing out in blind rage, the Hound sunk its teeth into Alice's forearm.

Gritting her teeth, Alice tried to throw both of them against the wooden walls in hopes of trying to get it to let go of her arm. But its bite was firm. It refused to let go no matter what, wanting to take a chunk out of her flesh.

At this rate, she would lose her arm to this Hound. Until she gets her hands on some Abyss Blood, any and every wound was dangerous.

Her vision started to turn red as there was only a single thought in her mind.

Kill!

She had to kill or be killed! No matter the method, she had to kill this beast in front of her to live another day!

Opening her mouth, she sunk her teeth into the Hound's neck.