

Abyssal A 581

Chapter 581 - 581: Order of Dreams

The first target of Alyss's long route of sects to fight was the Order of Dreams sect.

Located just a little further from Jejin Port, the Order of Dreams sect was one that focused on fluid movements and a lucid dream like state during a fight. They weren't very renowned considering the weak strength of their disciples but they couldn't be considered weak either.

They were located in a valley of two waterfalls but Alice wasn't there to admire the scenery.

"Stay close Jin but not too close. Wouldn't want a stray attack to blow you to piece now okay?" Alice smirked as Jin nodded his head in fear.

He was the one who insisted on staying close since he wanted to observe her fight. If she wasn't going to teach him, he'd study the fights himself.

Taking a deep breath, Alice closed her eye as her aura burst out, warning the sect of her presence.

'You're up now twinnie. Have fun.'

Golden chains appeared around the waist as Alyss switched her outfit to the one that suited her.

Seeing Alyss change into something so revealing, Jin couldn't help but cover his eyes and peek through the fingers.

"If you're gonna look do so without pretending that you're not." Alyss rolled her eye while Jin was a little taken aback by her sudden change in tone.

Taking a step forward, two whips crackled towards Alyss as her lips curved up into a grin.

Since she had just recently stolen the martial art from the chick that attacked her, she might as well put it to good use.

Instant Draw – Soul Chaser!

Expanding her zone, Alyss released two slashes to shred apart the whips before her body began to flicker.

The disciples that launched the attack froze up in shock as an overwhelming amount of killing intent appeared behind them.

There was only one thought in their mind.

'I'm dead.'

*BANG!!!

Knocking out both disciples with a kick, Alyss landed on the arc leading toward the sect building and gave her body a stretch.

Unlike the sect at the port, it seemed like this place was going to put up more of a fight since she could already see all of the disciples reacting to her presence and being ready for a fight.

Naturally, Alyss could see through this false bravery as fear gripped their hearts.

What use is numbers if they're all cowering in fear? This was going to be an easy hunt for Alyss as she jumped towards them.

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Gritting her teeth, the sect master could feel cold sweat down her back as she watched the intruder flicker through her disciples and take them out like it's nothing.

The only thing that could help track the intruder's location was the screams of those who were taken out.

The rope dart was trembling in her hands as her eyes scanned the battlefield.

Occasionally, she would see a flicker of purple before it disappeared again.

"S-Sect master!" A disciple cried out before her cries were cut short.

Standing above her, Alyss could be seen massaging her neck before disappearing again.

'There!!' Turning to her right, the sect master spun the rope dart around herself and launched it towards Alyss.

*CLANG!!!

However, her dart was parried as two more disciples were taken out.

"All disciples! To me!" The sect master shouted out as she activated her second resonance.

Second Resonance – Realm of Lucidity.

Dragging the intruder with herself into her realm, the sect master furrowed her brows.

"You know, you should've done this in the first place. At least then, you would've spared the pain your disciples felt. Why wait so long?" Alyss asked, transforming her sword into a rope dart.

However, the sect master didn't respond as she twisted her body and began launching attack after attack.

The constant sound of parrying rang out with the sect master mixing her attacks with elemental spells weaved in the middle.

There was a bored expression on Alyss's face.

"I think that's enough now." She shook her head.

Summoning a singularity, she slammed it into the ground.

*CRACK!!!

Fractures appeared across the realm before it was forcefully shattered, causing the sect master to widen her eyes in shock.

Before she could react, Alyss had already rushed forward, grabbing her by the face.

Twisting her body, the sect master was thrown into the waterfall in the distance before turning to the sign of the sect.

Once again, Alyss released a slash and destroyed the sign before leaving.

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Taking over her body once more, Alice could see that her twin was rather disappointed.

However, it was only natural considering the fact that she was essentially scammed.

According to what Jin said, this sect was supposed to be all about fluid movements and so on. However, the reality of the situation was that they were 'cheating' by using Sigil abilities rather than actual movements.

Hallucinations to make their movements seem harder to track than what they actually are.

"That was amazing!" Jin ran over with an impressed glint in his eyes.

"Amazing my ass, that was sh*t." Alice shrugged, confusing the lad as he tilted his head.

"It wasn't martial arts at all. They were taking a shortcut and the sect master was no different. No wonder this place is a lesser sect."

Seeing how Alice was speaking about the sect in such a manner, Jin realised that she was already very strong and experienced without fighting sects. Instead, she was fighting them to get a grasp on eastern martial arts!

"If you give me some time, I can track down the sects that have actual martial arts and heritage. The Order of Dreams Sect could be considered to be a young sect so maybe that's why it disappointed you." Jin stood up straight as Alice smirked

"Perceptive little sh*t aren't you? If you do well, I'll see if I can teach you something called the Zone." Alice patted him on the shoulders before walking away.

She wasn't sure if mastery over zone was needed for all martial arts. But at least for the Instant Draw, it was necessary. Even with her limited knowledge, she understood that it was a strong martial arts.

Therefore, if the Zone was needed for the foundation of a strong martial art, it would certainly make Jin's life a lot easier.

"Zone?" Jin followed behind Alice as he wasn't sure what she meant.

"Yep. I'm not sure what you call it in the east but the Zone is an area of control around you. There are three forms, offensive, passive and absolute. Offensive is an aggressive form of Zone that increases your attack in the area around you. But it lacks in defence.

"Passive zone is a mix of both offence and defence. Either way, you can just think of it as a circle of control around your body where you focus your senses in perceiving as much detail as you can." Alice explained loosely.

Folding his arms, Jin tried to think of what people in the east called it but he couldn't find an exact match.

Instead, he'll see if he has time to do some research and gather information about this Zone.

###

In a courtyard, Qiu Qiu could be seen in training clothes as she held a wooden blade on her waist.

Her eyes were closed while a wooden target dummy stood in front of her.

She wanted to recall that sense of death. The boundary where life was ever so fleeting.

The moment of focus that she reached and that final strike.

But before she could reach that, she needed to perfect the killing arc.

Expanding her Zone, Qiu Qiu rushed forward for a strike before frowning.

"This is wrong." She muttered, returning back to where she stood.

Her Zone was still incomplete and without its final version, she'll never be able to unleash the perfected killing arc.

The killing arc was one of the most lethal attacks in the Instant Draw style martial arts. It lacked the flair and impressiveness of most martial arts that are used nowadays but in exchange, it has high practicality and lethality.

However, the power generated by this attack is also determined by the skill of the user. Namely, their mastery and control over the zone.

Without perfecting this step, she'll never be able to unleash the full power of her martial arts.

And the fact that an outsider not only stole it from her but also mastered it before her, was akin to a slap to her face.

She had believed that she was strong and more talented than most, being able to use the Instant Draw but that was not the case.

Her vision was simply clouded.

"It's not often I see Captain Qiu train so fervently. Did something happen on your holiday?" A voice called out as Qiu Qiu didn't even turn around.

"What do you want?" Qiu Qiu asked as she stood in front of the dummy once more.

She took a deep breath and focused her mind.

"There's been a new report that matched the attack on the port. A lone split haired woman attacking a sect by herself, not killing anyone and breaking the sign."

Hearing this, Qiu Qiu's eyebrow twitched before expanding her Zone.

"They were seen making their way to the south west. According to their predicted route, they're probably going to go after another sect."

*BANG!!!

Unleashing an incomplete killing arc, Qiu Qiu frowned as the sword in her hands broke apart.

"And you're telling me this because?"

"Because it doesn't match the movements of the Cult. You know how they are, they leave corpses wherever they go. But the fact that this lady is not killing anyone is raising some confusions and concerns on whether or not they're truly part of the Cult." The man clarified.

"There's no doubting it. Her body contains the unique energy of the Cult that can't be found elsewhere. Even if she's not a part of it, she definitely has a connection." Qiu Qiu answered, grabbing another sword to resume her practice.

"Are you going to join the hunting squad then?"

"No, going wouldn't benefit me at all. I'm still too weak." Qiu Qiu shook her head.

She wanted to master the Zone before seeing the woman again. Otherwise, she'll simply be inviting death. She got lucky once and survived by chance. She doubted that'll happen again.

Chapter 582 - 582: Weapon Domain

"In terms of martial heritage, it can be basically summed up as whoever made a decent name for themselves at the dragon phoenix gathering. There's a ranking type system in place with the type of martial art they use.

"Naturally, the top 10 are those with the best skills while they become weaker the lower down the list you go. Seniors and sect masters don't usually participate but it's the assumption that if the student is strong, the master should hold some skill." Jin reported while Alice was enjoying a glass of fine eastern alcohol by the tavern.

They were currently by the riverside and enjoyed the gentle breeze.

"Hou? So what you're saying is, if I want a decent challenge, I should target those in the top 10?" Alice asked, swirling her glass.

"Yep. The three sovereign sects took the top three spot as expected while the last 7 would be split between the sects and houses. But this year, there was a surprising twist of events as only 1 sect managed to claim a spot while the other 6 were taken by the houses."

Rubbing her finger along the rim of the glass, Alice contemplated for a moment before opening her mouth.

"Plan out a route for the six sects first. Once I'm done with the sects, I'll attack the houses. Once that's done, we'll move onto the three sovereign sects and that'll be the Jejin region complete." Alice ordered as Jin nodded his head.

"Ah before I forget, you know how you said you were going to teach me the 'Zone'?"

"What about it?"

"In the East, we call it a weapon domain. Each weapon has a slightly different 'shape' based on their own ranges and so on. Once you master the domain, it becomes a boundary around you. This is the best fit I could find for the Zone that you were talking about."

Pulling out his notebook, Jin began to explain the eastern concept of domains.

The most common type of domain was the Sword Domain, a semi circle in front of them that allowed the fighter to exert more focus and power.

After that was the Spear Domain which was in the shape of an hourglass.

If a person could awaken their senses for a domain, they were considered a genius since the difference between having one and not having one was akin to an unbridgeable chasm.

Domains granted the fighter absolute control within that specific area.

However, the weapon domains were just a start for geniuses. As they increase their proficiency, the shape of the domain naturally change with the passing time. As the range increases, it'll soon encompass an entire area around them.

Once that happens, it reaches a state called the complete domain.

Listening to this information, Alice folded her arms and contemplated the differences.

Under the tutelage of Apostles, Alice was only made aware of three forms of Zone. Granted, this was information from the old era so it could be outdated by now.

She had been classifying everything under the Offensive domain but clearly that was wrong. It also explained why Qiu Qiu could still expand her zone despite being incomplete.

It wasn't that it was incomplete but rather it was merely in the first stage of domains.

[Perhaps establishing an offensive zone was too difficult. After all, even the offensive zone requires control over an area rather than just certain sections.] Cayla theorised as Alice nodded her head.

The easiest one to master would be the passive zone. But from the sound of it, even the passive zone was considered a level above the weapon domains.

"Then what about Absolute Zone? One that granted full control and focus?"

"That's known as the state of unity. I think there are only four masters of this state in the Jejin region. That being the sect masters of the Sovereign sects and an elder that's not affiliated with them."

However, there were now technically five with Alice being here as well.

Which only proved to Jin that his decision was the right one.

While he didn't know how old Alice was, the fact that she had already reached state of unity was incredible! Far greater than any of the geniuses he's seen compete in the dragon phoenix gathering.

Had she arrived a few months earlier, her name would've been spread all over the region by now. Hell, forget the region, the entire nation would know of her!

"Really? It's not that difficult to grasp though." Alice furrowed her brows.

"The key to doing it is your senses. You have to tune yourself to your surroundings. Taste, hearing, sight, smell and touch. Naturally, instincts play a part in this as well.

"If you can focus on these senses, you'll naturally grasp the Zone. Or in this case, the state of unity I suppose." She tapped her chin but Jin's smile twitched.

She made it sound easy but this was knowledge that most people could guess. However, succeeding in it was a different case entirely.

Seeing that Jin wasn't convinced, Alice scratched her hair before getting an idea.

She'll try and repurpose some of Sheira's lessons that she took while trying to learn the Zone stance.

Looking around for a clearing, Alice found a decently sized empty spot by the lake and gestured for Jin to follow.

"I want you to attack me like you want to kill me. I'll use this to determine what level you're on." Alice gestured for him to attack as he hesitated for a moment before nodding his head.

Immediately, his eyes became focused, surprising Alice since he didn't seem like the kind of person to enter such a state during battle.

If anything, he seemed like the more emotional kind of fighters.

Watching Jin pull out his weapon of choice, Alice couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

His weapon choice was a pair of swords connected by a chain along the handle. Wrapping the chain on his arms, he entered an offensive stance while spinning one blade by his side.

Taking a deep breath, Jin lunged forward.

*BANG!!!

His blade collided against Alice's shield with surprising force before hooking against the shield.

Whipping his chain, Jin controlled the blade to attack Alice who caught it with her fingers.

Using this chance, he pulled himself towards her using the chain and twisted his body.

'He's using the momentum of his spin to increase the strength. By choosing when to let go of the chain at the right timing, he can amplify his attack power beyond what is usually possible.' Alice thought with a smile, dodging the slash from above.

However, Jin wasn't done. Anchoring his body down, he used it as a leverage to rip the blade out from the ground and swing it towards Alice.

His attacks weren't limited to just his arms as he could use his entire body to spin the chains!

Letting go of the first blade, Alice flicked away the second blade using her finger.

Chaos Fang!

Whipping both blades behind Alice, Jin pulled back on the chains, causing them both to stab towards her back.

Doing a back flip, Alice dodged with grace and tapped her foot against the blades, stomping them into the ground.

"Not bad, anything else?"

"Naturally!" Jin shouted, a stark contrast to his usual quiet self.

Jumping up into the air by pulling the chains, he unleashed a heel strike that Alice caught but he wasn't done.

Going into a handstand, he unleashed two more kicks before following up with a backflip into a chain pull, ripping out the blades and sending them towards Alice.

Analysing Jin's fighting style, Alice understood the efficiency of his movements. Even though his mastery was rudimentary, if given enough time, this was a martial art designed for combat with little to no wasted movements!

Infinite variations between hand to hand and chain blade combat.

Through whipping the chain and snapping the blades back to himself or the attacker, he is given countless choices to choose from.

It's a martial art that'll only get stronger with more experience and split moment decisions!

Twirling both blades, Jin dug up the dirt around himself before slamming them with the blade face, sending the dirt flying towards Alice who blocked using the shard of Kara.

Bladed Tempest!

Sending out both blades, a cyclone of chains and blades wrapped around Alice.

If he had fought her when she only had a few Sigils, this would've given her some trouble. But now?

Not even worth a glance!

Stomping down, a wave of invisible energy pulsed out, disrupting the formation but to Alice's surprise, Jin wanted her to focus on the cyclone.

Bladed Tempest wasn't one that had the user attack the enemy using the twin blades!

In the instant that Alice disrupted the cyclone, a wave of hidden weapons shot towards her through the gaps at surprising speeds.

Twisting her body, Alice created a swirl of blood to parry the hidden weapons.

Chain Snare!

Chains whipped around Alice's ankle as she raised an eyebrow.

However, Jin couldn't force her to move since the gap in strength was simply too wide!

"Alice, why are you so heavy???" Jin complained.

*PUCHI!!!

*BANG!!! CRACK!!!

Before Jin could even react, Alice had already flickered in front of him, unleashing a gut punch into a back heel against the torso. A rapid one two combo that even the Apostles of Solaris would praise.

His body was sent crashing into the lake as a giant wall of water was created from the impact.

"Your mother's heavy! I'm considered light you little sh*t!" Alice snapped as veins bulged on her neck.

She was simply anchoring herself down to the earth! Plus, she gets plenty of exercise through combat to lose weight in the first place!

Jin didn't respond as his body floated on the water momentarily. Air bubbles appeared around his head before he sank down.

'Did you kill him?' Alyss's smile twitched.

'... Sh*t.'

That shouldn't have killed him right? Right???

Chapter 583 - 583: Teaching Jin

"Urg..." Groaning softly, Jin could feel his consciousness returning.

Even before he opened his eyes, he felt something soft beneath his head.

A pillow?

What happened?

Right... He called Alice heavy and felt like he was about to cross over to the afterlife in the next moment.

But that still doesn't explain this soft sensation. It felt familiar in a sense...

Like what his mother used to do for him when she would play with his hair.

Could it be? A lap pillow?

"Ohya? The young man is awake now." A deep gruff voice sounded out.

Realising something was wrong, Jin snapped his eyes open and saw a buff middle aged man leaning in close, observing his complexion.

"If you stare so hard, I'll get shy." The man blushed as Jin immediately rolled away and jumped to his feet.

"If you can make that kind of movement, there shouldn't be anything else wrong with your body. Thanks boss, here's the promised extra." Alice smiled towards Jin before turning to the middle aged man.

Catching a small pouch with some coins that Alice threw towards him, the man smiled and gave a respectful bow before entering his shop again.

"What happened?" Jin asked, sitting opposite Alice while making sure all his belongings were still there.

He wasn't missing anything except for his weapon which was next to Alice right now.

"Don't worry about it. Do you want to continue the lesson or should we take a break first?" Alice asked.

The fact that she almost killed him with that attack should probably be kept a secret.

It wasn't her fault that he asked such a rude question. Yep, it wasn't her fault at all. If anything, he should say sorry for asking such a question. Definitely.

Thinking about it for a moment, Jin nodded his head.

"Can we continue the lesson please?"

"Of course. Let me think... I have a decent judgment of your instincts and senses now. Your mastery over your martial art is a little low but I assume that's because you haven't fought against people often. Judgement is pretty good... Hmm... the best way to hone your instincts is probably through exposure." Alice thought to herself while pouring herself a drink.

"During our travels, I'll keep you exposed to my killing intent at certain parts of your body. You should use this time to familiarise yourself with how it feels. Once you get a hang of that, I'll mix in some attacks and your options are A, sense where they're coming from. B, dodge out of the way or C, parry it.

"Achieving these should allow you a brief insight into what the zone is like. Naturally, I'll also do a demonstration for you since I can't expect you to figure it out without a reference."

Standing up, Alice walked away from the table and stopped around 3 meters away.

Just as Jin was wondering what she was doing, he felt a surge of killing intent erupt from Alice. Just the intent to harm was enough to cause him to hallucinate a gruesome death as the skies turned into a blood red with his entire body breaking out in cold sweat.

Fading away after a moment, Jin didn't even realise he was holding his breath and panted heavily.

"I filled my Zone with killing intent just now. Most of the time, you won't be sensing this. I'm just making it easier for you to recognise the boundary. Instead, sensing a zone requires both experience and instinct. You have to use these two to accurately gauge the distance of safety and the sudden expansion of the zone."

Expanding her zone once more, Alice flicked her finger, confusing Jin when the glass next to him was suddenly cut in half.

"You were in my zone just now but I didn't release my killing intent. That's what I meant by trying to sense the boundary and potential danger. Had my target been you, you would've died before you even understood what happened to you.

"Therefore, our first task for your training would be to hone your senses." Alice 'smiled' as Jin suddenly felt a chill down his back.

He unconsciously clutched his stomach as the phantom pain of being punched there persisted.

As they were packing their things away, Alice asked Alyss a single question.

'Do we have a Sigil that can heal?'

Folding her arms, Alyss was silent before curving her lips up into a smile.

'We do. It's not very potent but if you keep things toned down and limit yourself to physical hits, it'll certainly help.'

'Perfect.'

Instinctively, Jin felt another chill and jumped away, surprising Alice as she watched him look around in confusion as well.

"Are you alright? Did you hit your head or something?"

"Erm... Yeah, I'm fine. Weird..." Jin frowned, unsure as to why his body suddenly had the urge to run away.

Shaking his head, he suppressed this urge and figured out where they were before making their way to the next destination along their journey.

There were three requirements for Alice's route.

1: Places to drink alcohol.

2: Nice scenery to match the drink.

3: Places to attack.

One would usually think that number three would be the most important considering the context of her goal but it was actually number 1.

If there was a sect there but no drink stops or scenery, Alice didn't want to bother with it.

Of course, if the route was towards one of the major sects, she'd begrudgingly accept.

"If we travel through this path, we should be able to reach the swallow tail sect in about 2 days at our current pace. There are a few small sects and houses on the way there and there is a city on the route too." Jin explained while checking out the map.

The swallow tail sect was part of the six sects, boasting a martial art that heavily focused on speed and swift strikes. It wasn't the kind of swift strikes that was commonly used with hidden weapons but rather attack speed.

In terms of martial arts, it would be classified as primarily revolving around their unique footwork and paired with complimentary sword styles and so on.

"Speaking of which, why don't we take the carriages? We would be able to get there in a few hours with good scenery too." Jin asked curiously as Alice never mentioned why she wanted to travel by foot.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice asked if he had a talisman or something similar on him.

Once he handed her a talisman, he felt a sudden surge of energy burst out as she immediately threw it into the air.

*BANG!!!!

"As you can see, anything I touch that's made by Suyin is destroyed in mere moments. Since we met at the port, I'm sure you heard about the sudden terrorist attack that blew up a building right?" Alice mentioned as Jin's pupils constricted and stared at Alice.

"That was me teehe~" She gave him a peace sign along with a grin while his smile twitched.

Thankfully, he didn't carry many talismans since he couldn't afford them. Otherwise, when Alice grabbed him, he might've blown up then and there.

Just thinking about it sent a chill down his spine as he couldn't help but wonder if choosing to join Alice was the right choice or not.

But when recalling her strength, he dismissed this worry. When is it that you get a chance to follow someone this strong? Not only that, she didn't want him for some weird purpose either.

He wasn't going to be used as a cauldron for refining medicine or a human storage for Abyss blood either. He was simply acting as a guide.

"But if we are ever in a rush, I have alternative means of travel. I just want to enjoy the nation a little you know?" Alice smiled, walking ahead. She wanted to fully embrace the feeling of freedom.

Hearing this, Jin ran after her with a smile when a sudden wave of killing intent washed over him, causing his movements to suddenly freeze up and trip over on the ground.

"If you keep freezing up in the face of killing intent like that you'll die ya know?" Alice smiled, lifting him up using some blood threads.

Jin wanted to say something but decided not to.

It wasn't like he was unfamiliar with killing intent but there's no way her's was normal!

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Wiping away the sweat on her brow, Qiu Qiu glanced at the broken dummies with a frown.

More. She needed more control, more lethality.

This still wasn't enough to defeat Alice.

"I was wondering what might've caused little Qiu to hole herself up in the training grounds for days. Facing a bottleneck?" An older gentleman smiled as Qiu Qiu glanced over with surprise.

Leader of the Demon Extermination Squad!

Just as she was about to kneel, the old man stopped her with a single wave of his hand.

"So what's gotten you so troubled? Perhaps I can offer some advice."

Thinking about it, Qiu Qiu decided to recount what had occurred at the port.

Her battle with Alice, the perfected Killing Arc that she revealed and her strange state during that last attack.

Listening carefully without saying anything, the old man didn't expect Qiu Qiu to meet this kind of opponent and live to tell the tale.

Especially if his theory was correct.

Grabbing a wooden sword, the old man weighed it in his hand before turning to Qiu Qiu.

"By chance, did the young girl perform this kind of strike?" He asked, expanding his zone and reaching the state of unity.

Immediately, Qiu Qiu felt a familiar sensation wash over her as her instincts kicked into overdrive.

*CLACK!!!

Widening her eyes, she didn't expect herself to attack the leader out of nowhere.

"Ah! I'm sorry! I don't know what came over me!" Qiu Qiu apologised but the leader waved it off with a smile.

"It's fine. So you want to defeat this kind of opponent do you?" He asked as Qiu Qiu nodded her head.

There was a fiery resolve in her eyes as the old man nodded in appreciation.

"Follow me, I'll show you to one of my old training grounds. It should help you achieve what you are seeking."

It's rare that a disciple would have such a fire lit under them after facing a user of the state of unity. Since this was the case, he won't let her determination go to waste.

Chapter 584 - 584: Jinghua

"Jinghua, you're doing good. But you're too focused on just one aspect. You need to learn how to multitask. The Skybound Swallow's martial art is one that allows you to rapidly switch between attack and evasive manoeuvres.

"If you focus too hard on one aspect, you'll lose sight of your other choices. It's is because of this that Hao Qing managed to defeat you during the Phoenix Dragon gathering." Elder Shen explained while demonstrating my lacking movements.

The Skybound Swallow was made up of five key forms with each form having its own branching set of movements.

Form one, Swift Strikes. A form that prioritizes speed over strength.

Rapid precise strikes that seek to disarm your opponent before they can react. Out of the different branching paths, the ones I've gotten mastery over are the Drifting Feathers, Piercing Wind and Whispering Fang.

Drifting Feathers alternates between slaps and backhand strikes to forcefully open up the opponent's guard. Whispering Fang focuses on attacking pressure points and key nodes through the body where energy flows. Striking with precision will dull their movements.

And... Piercing Wind. A finishing move of sorts that focuses on one swift strike to the throat and eyes. Not to be used during a spar only during a fight to the death.

"When you were fighting Hao Qing, you weren't switching between the Drifting Feathers and Whispering Fang fast enough. Our martial arts is well known. The instant our enemy discovers that we're targeting the pressure points using Whispering Fang, you should've switched to Drifting Feathers in order to open up their guard.

"However, you became tunnel-visioned when using Whispering Fang, which was your first mistake."

Indeed...

I can still remember the panic I felt when Hao Qing caught my strike. No matter how I tried to enhance my speed, he kept countering my Whispering Fang and I kept trying to break through. Had I used the Drifting Feathers... No, it probably won't change much but it would've been a start.

"That's the mistake of your attack. Next was your footwork. Hao Qing is part of the Hao family. Like us, the Hao family focuses on speed and evasion. When facing someone from the Hao family, it is never a matter of speed but rather decision making.

"It doesn't matter if you are faster or if the Hao family is faster, what matters is how you choose to use your speed. The game that you used to play when you were young, rock paper scissors. In a contest of speed, it's like a game of rock paper scissors. Before the final moment, you must keep changing your actions to counter your opponent."

Phantom Swallow Steps. The footwork of the Skybound Swallow.

Glide, Shift, Gale, Veil and Drift.

Glide is a low sweeping dash to evade and reposition. Shift is a sudden step, pivoting my body past an attack and opening up for a counter against the opponent. Gale rotates and deflects, pushing attacks off course rather than fighting head on. Veil deceives. A feigned retreat into an explosive counter.

And finally, drift is a state of constant evasion. Efficiency and focus is key.

Using these five steps, I should've kept my options open. The moment I locked into one form, Hao Qing already won.

Form three, Swallows Rain. Fast quantitative strikes that link up into a long string of attacks seeking to overwhelm the opponent. A mixture of kicks, hand to hand and weapon strikes that aim to use every part of the body to its maximum effectiveness.

Form four, Swallow Reversal. Evasion and counter is the key focus. Soft parries, hard parries, twists to disorient balance, seeking counters through gaps in attack and even delayed strikes to throw off timing. A form I'm not entirely familiar with.

And the final form of the martial arts. Final Flight.

A set of finishing moves aimed at ending a fight. The culmination of several generations of the Swallow Tail sect's efforts. Each generation of sect masters has added their own understanding, comprehension and refinement into the finishing moves.

Piercing Beak, Sky Waltz, Skybound Phantom, Scattering Feathers and Eclipsing Flight.

Unfortunately, I couldn't comprehend the secrets behind any of the five final strikes, leading to a martial artist who can prolong a fight but lacked the power to finish it.

Had I learned one of these, maybe I could've finished the fight. But who's to say that Hao Qing wasn't holding back himself?

*Sigh

Noticing my doubts, Elder Shen patted me on my shoulder.

"Jinghua, there will be moments of doubt in your life. However, you must remember that life is an ever-moving gale of wind. Whether you like it or not, it will continue without care. You must learn to ride along the gale and use it to your benefit. Learn from this defeat against Hao Qing, understand why you lost and use it to empower your training."

Closing my eyes, I reflected on the bitterness of defeat. The tightness in my chest as I realised I had let my sect down and everyone who believed in me at that moment.

"I under-"

Before I could even finish my words, I felt a killing intent so malevolent, so tyrannical that my entire body froze up and the world around me seemed to change.

Blood beneath my feet, the chilling touch of death's fingers against the back of my neck. An endless horizon of death and despair. The wailing of the eternally tormented.

Their pain, their grief, and their insanity were carved into my mind.

Is this how their life ended? In agony?

Should I... Free them of this pain?

Should I... Free myself from this torment?

"JINGHUA!" Elder Shen's panicked cries snapped me out of my trance as I watched him rip my hands away from my neck.

*GASP!!!

Taking a deep breath, my eyes darted around in panic wondering what had happened.

"Stay close, there's an attack." Elder Shen frowned.

But even without him saying this, I understood.

The source of this killing intent surging by the gates of our sect.

This... demon was walking towards the centre without care.

Even without a domain, I could sense the location of the invader. That was how potent the killing intent was.

I want to run. I want to run. I want to run. I want to run!

"Calm down. Take deep breaths. I don't know what they're here for but someone with this kind of killing intent can't be here for a good reason. You're not ready yet, remember my words and walk with pride."
Elder Shen smiled, patting my head.

Standing up, he glanced towards the source with a frown as azure winds wrapped around his body.

I wanted to stop him, to call out to him. But I found no strength. My legs couldn't stand, my voice wouldn't come out.

Biting my lips, the only thought that dominated my mind was to run.

***BANG!!!!**

In the distance, violet flames tore into the sky, dying it into a deep purple while chains and threads lashed out.

I could see the shadow of the sect leader and different elders flickering through the sky. The forms of the Swallow Tail martial arts linking up to form an array in an attempt to push back the invader.

However, black limbs burst out from the buildings, grabbing the elders before slamming them into the ground.

A faint figure flickered behind the sect leader, unleashing one heavy punch that the sect leader barely parried off to the side even with his mastery over the martial art.

Just parrying this attack alone was enough to send a shockwave through his body as blood rained down.

I watched the sect leader attempt to fend off the invader using Drifting Feathers. Slapping and striking the punches away but each punch was akin to an unyielding tide, unable to be moved!

Falling Petal Strike!

An attack I haven't mastered. A downward palm strike to unleash a pulse of force that pushes the two combatants away in order to create some distance.

But just as the sect leader jumped back, the invader had already unleashed two chains to wrap around his body.

Pulling him towards them, the invader unleashed two devastating kicks against the leader's stomach before throwing him away.

I could only watch. Even though I knew I had to run, my legs refused to move.

Above the invader, I saw Elder Shen strike down with Piercing Beak but the invader stepped to the side, dodging it with ease.

An uppercut into an elbow strike followed by two jabs against the throat and stomach.

I foresaw death.

The death of Elder Shen. My father figure.

I was tossed away and abandoned, left to survive on my own. It was Elder Shen who raised me from young, took me in as his own and looked after me with care.

My fear of his death was greater than my own!

Gritting my teeth, I punched my own thigh, forcing myself to stand up as I activated my Sigils to support my martial arts.

I had to help. Even if it may seem futile, I don't want Elder Shen to die!

Phantom Swallow Steps – Shift!

"Ohya? Ohya ohya? Another disciple coming to use yourself as a meat shield? Is that even smart?"

The invader looked no older than I was. Split hair of black and white, sharp eyes-no, a sharp eye of crimson and an outfit that was clearly designed for movement.

"Jinghua! Run you fool!" Elder Shen cried out as blood poured from his wounds.

But how could I run? I was already abandoned by my family before. I don't want to lose the only family that cared for me.

The invader reached towards me with a swift grab.

I already know that trying to parry was futile. Against an opponent like this, I had to focus on evasion!

Gale!

Twisting my body, I weaved through the grab, clearly surprising the invader. I needed to take advantage of this!

Every lesson, every experience. Every bitterness of defeat that I suffered, I needed to use it all. I need to use it all so I don't lose my father!

Chapter 585 - 585: Alyss Vs Jinghua

Alyss was rather surprised.

In front of her flew a platinum haired young lady with strands of green. She wore a white, silver and green attire with a pair of fans in her hand.

She had expected to grab the girl and throw her aside but she managed to evade the grab at the last moment and even weave past it.

All of the disciples that she had faced on her way here had tried to parry her attacks. All of them failed to judge her strength accurately. To ensure that her strikes always land true, she was using a mixture of space lock + threads to make it difficult to move her fist.

While she disliked Nyer just like Alice, Alyss admitted that his technique of freezing up space was rather ingenious. Not just in the department of stopping people from leaving but rather to prevent external influences from affecting the body.

In this case, it was perfect in stopping the Swallow Tail disciples from shifting her attacks to the side.

This was the first time aside from the elders and the sect leader that the disciple had actually chosen to evade the attack.

'Although... she looks like she's got a lifetime grudge against you now. Did you kill her parents or something?' Alice asked, crossing her legs in amusement. The anger in the girl's eyes and the tears that streamed down her face... It almost made her feel like they were the villain.

Granted, they were attacking the sect and knocking out anyone that got in their way with a few injuries.

...

Alright, perhaps the unconscious body surrounded by a pool of blood looked like a murder scene but still.

All of them were alive.

Shrugging her shoulders, Alyss went in for a slash using her fingers.

Phantom Swallow Steps – Veil!

Jinghua's body flickered back momentarily before a fan suddenly entered Alyss's view.

*BANG!!!

Blocking the attack with the shard of Kara, Alyss couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

She could practically see the gears turning in the girl's mind. She was processing all the information she could despite knowing that she was weaker in terms of strength.

Even when drowning in the killing intent that she was releasing, this girl was still trying to find a way out.

'I'm pretty sure most of the disciples should've lost their will to fight though.' She mused to herself.

Thinking about it for a moment, she understood that this girl must've picked herself back up with renewed motivation.

Since that was the case, Alyss will play around with her for a bit.

To see what she could learn, what she could copy and more importantly, what she could do to sow a seed of potential like she did with the intruder.

That final strike was still fresh on her mind. If she could become a target for these people to reach, they might turn around and give her a surprise that surpasses her expectations.

'Is this how Allura felt?' Alyss chuckled to herself as she jumped down.

Throwing the elder in her hands away, she taunted the girl with two fingers.

Swallow's Rain – Soaring Tail Sweep!

Lunging down, Jinghua unleashed two high kicks that Alyss caught and pushed away before following up with a leg sweep.

However, it felt like she was kicking an immovable tree as she immediately used Glide to duck under Alyss's strike.

Swift Strike – Whispering Fang!

'She's going for the pressure points.' Alyss narrowed her eye as she could sense Jinghua's gaze on certain points of her body.

Shifting her balance, Alyss flicked her strikes away using her fingers and went in for a devastating kick from above.

Shift!

Weaving over the kick with surprising flexibility, Jinghua unleashed two fan strikes with the help of her Sigil.

Swallow's Rain – Gale Cutter!

Several wind blades rushed out, surprising Alyss as it was done in close proximity.

Avoiding the first two, Alyss could see strands of her hair being cut as she parried the rest using the shard of Kara.

But through the gaps, a hidden final wind blade slashed against her cheeks.

'Hou~' A smile appeared on Alyss's face as she pulled her arm back and punched down.

*BANG!!!

Shattering the ground beneath her, pieces of debris flew out but Jinghua pushed them away using her footwork.

Swallow's Rain – Seven Talon Barrage!

Lunging forward, Jinghua aimed for Alyss's neck but it was parried by a palm strike. Unphased, she transitioned the attack into a parry following it up with an elbow strike, a fist strike from below, a stab using the folded fans towards a pressure point and finally, a knee strike against the stomach.

But to her shock, a familiar set of movements was performed by Alyss.

Phantom Swallow Steps – Drift!

The footwork that focused on evasion!

However, her shock was yet to end as Alyss used Shift to close the gap and attacked!

Swift Strike – Piercing Wind!

Sensing the danger from this strike, Jinghua immediately protected her eyes and throat but it was actually a feint all along.

'I misread!' Jinghua realised her mistake.

It was never Piercing Wind to begin with but rather Phantom Swallow Steps – Veil!

A high level application that deceives the opponent by turning this from a normal feint to one that mimics one of the attacking techniques of the swift strikes!

Swallow's Rain – Soaring Tail Sweep!

"ARG!!!" Letting out a cry of pain, Jinghua was forced to guard herself against two high kicks before getting her balance disrupted by a low leg sweep.

Swallow Reversal – Dancing Swallow Turn!

Going into a handstand, Jinghua stopped herself from falling onto the ground and released a kick towards Alyss, pushing herself away and creating some distance between the two.

Unfortunately for her, Alyss wasn't bound by a singular martial art.

Instant Draw – Soul Chaser!

Her zone expanded in an instant as several phantoms rushed towards Jinghua who panicked.

*CLANG!!!

"Calm your mind, focus your gaze! No matter what, maintain your composure!" The sect leader intercepted the attack.

"Old fossils should stay out of a youngster's fun!" Alyss shouted out, appearing next to the sect master.

Instant Draw – Killing Arc!

Instead of a blade, Alyss repurposed it into a kicking technique as her heel slammed into his ribs.

*CRACK!!!

The sound of broken bones echoed out as his body was flung away.

Despite the sect leader intercepting, Jinghua didn't let this moment go to waste.

She saw Elder Shen perform this strike in full clarity. It's now or never!

Final Flight – Piercing Beak!

The fastest strike in the Skybound Swallow set of martial arts. The fastest strike seeking to use every ounce of power for speed and power.

"If you're going to use an attack like that, make sure it can actually wrap up a fight." Alyss smirked.

Catching Jinghua by her wrist, Alyss threw her over her shoulders, slamming Jinghua into the ground.

Gritting her teeth, Jinghua refused to backdown!

Swallow's Rain – Storm's Descent!

Slamming her palms against the ground, a burst of energy erupted, pushing Alyss away.

Jumping up, she adjusted her grip on the fans as it expanded from 160 degrees to a full 360, turning it into a set of chakrams.

If sect leader can't even do anything to this invader, then what can she hope to achieve by playing it safe? It's going to be all or nothing!

She'll put her life on the line even if it may be futile!

At that moment, Alyss sensed a shift inside Jinghua. A change of mentality.

From her body, a boundary expanded out in an instant!

'Weapon Domain! No, it's a little bigger than that.' Alyss's eye narrowed as her smile turned into a grin.

She exposed Jinghua to it briefly a moment ago. Offensive Zone!

This wasn't a weapon domain but rather a step above. It was almost a complete Offensive Zone with no regard for defensive measures!

Swallow Reversal – Vanishing Step!

Appearing next to Alyss, Jinghua twirled the chakrams in her hands and unleashed two lethal strikes that clashed against the shard of Kara, causing sparks to fly out around her.

Seeing that her strike failed, she immediately followed up with Shift into Swallow Reversal – Echoing Strike!

A delayed attack aiming to throw off the opponent's timing in combat!

*CLANG!!!

Catching the attack using the handle of a blood sword, Alyss stomped down, disrupting Jinghua's balance and preventing the use of her footwork.

*BANG!!!

In an instant, Alyss slammed her palm into Jinghua's chest as she coughed up a mouthful of blood.

But before her body flew away, she released a counter against Alyss's leg.

Glancing down at the wound on her thigh, Alyss couldn't help but tilt her head back and laugh.

"Sh*t, now I get why Allura keeps on beating me the f*ck up during training. Growth comes from adversity. Either rise to the challenge or drown!" Energy burst out from Alyss's body, coating it with a malevolent aura that made her look like a demon.

Soul Chaser + Killing Arc!

Sensing her impending doom, Jinghua gritted her teeth and forced herself to stand up despite the wounds.

Swallow's Reversal – Feather's Kiss!

A soft parry into a whip like counter that snaps against the opponent's body!

She had already given up defence. All that matters now is what she trades her wounds for!

Sacrificing her left shoulder, Jinghua's counter whipped towards Alyss's neck as she ducked down, avoiding it at the last moment using Shift.

But before her movement could finish, Jinghua was already onto the next attack.

Gale Cutter! Piercing Wind! Veil into Seven Talon Barrage!

Storm's Descent + Vanishing Step into Whispering Fang! Drifting Feathers, Soaring Tail sweep, Echoing Strike!

With each technique that Jinghua unleashed, her Offensive Zone was continuously refined as Alyss used Phantom Swallow Steps – Drift along with Passive Zone to dodge.

Right now, she could tell that Jinghua was in a state of focus that she had never reached before. A state of battle with her entire essence and being on the line. A desperate gamble, a dance on the thin line between life and death.

Unfortunately for her...

*KRKKK!!!!

The flesh on her arms and legs tore apart as blood poured out from the wounds.

Unleashing so many techniques with such frequency and power along with the awakening of Offensive Zone was too much for her to handle.

"Not bad. You can rest now." Alyss smiled, reaching towards Jinghua as her Offensive Zone faltered.

But just as Alyss was about to touch her, the boundaries were reinforced and condensed into a small zone around her!

Offensive Zone + Piercing Beak!

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. What's with you easterners and one last strike?" Alyss laughed, catching Jinghua's final attack before she passed out.

Chapter 586 - 586: Alyss's Goal

Slowly opening her eyes, Jinghua felt pain all over her body. She couldn't move a single limb and could only look around with her eyes.

The last thing she could remember was the attack on the sect as her throat tightened up.

Maybe it was a miracle that she was still alive. But the others...

"Stupid girl... I told you to run but you chose to fight instead. Look at what happened to your body." A gentle voice rang out next to her as her eyes widened in shock.

Glancing over, she could see her father figure injured but still alive.

He sat next to her bed, gently patting her head. His hands were coarse and wrinkled but Jinghua felt warm.

"Sorry..." She apologised but Elder Shen simply shook his head.

"It's alright. Next time don't do something so foolish okay? The old shouldn't have to bury the young."

"What happened?" Jinghua asked.

She wasn't sure why they were still alive but she could vividly remember the killing intent released by the intruder.

Even now, when she closes her eyes, that intent has imprinted itself deep into her mind.

"After you passed out, the intruder didn't do anything else. She simply broke the sect sign and left." Elder Shen sighed.

Their prestige has already taken a hit after the gathering. But now that one person stormed into their sect and destroyed everything before leaving without so much as a scratch, it was clear that the consequences of this would be long lasting.

However, compared to the prestige of the sect, he was far more relieved that Jinghua and the disciples lived. None of them took major injuries that couldn't be healed.

"She was strong..." Jinghua muttered, feeling bitter. But the gap of strength was simply too wide.

"Indeed. Neither I nor the sect leader could do anything to her." Elder Shen nodded.

In addition to her strength, the intruder had also blatantly stolen their martial arts in their face. No prior knowledge, just the short period of demonstration and she took it all. The secrets of the Swallow Tail Sect are now taken by an outsider.

Thinking about this, Elder Shen couldn't help but sigh.

What kind of monster attacked the sect? In less than an hour, she had already gained mastery far greater than most of the disciples and could even defeat the sect master through brute strength and technique.

Then there was also the Instant Draw.

The martial art belonged to Qiu Qiu, one of the captains of the Demon Extermination Squad. Renowned genius of the next generation.

If the intruder could perform the Instant Draw, it was clear that she had already beaten Qiu Qiu and stolen her martial arts.

Elder Shen couldn't help but think that a calamity was about to sweep through the entire eastern nation.

"But you did well Jinghua. You managed to awaken and even push your weapon domain to the next level, a bottleneck that has troubled you for so long." He praised her as he saw her final struggle against the intruder. The barrage of martial techniques, her mindset and decision making at that moment was perfect. It was a shame that the gap of power was beyond what technique could make up for but regardless, it was something to be proud of.

###

A few days later. . .

"Wake up." Jin nudged as Alice grumbled while waving her hands dismissively.

There was a stack of empty alcohol gourds around her as she had gone a little crazy last night from drinking.

Letting out a sigh, Jin was now familiar enough with Alice to understand that once she gets like this, there's no waking her up in the morning.

Finding a spot to meditate for now, Jin reflected on everything he saw.

During the fight against the Swallow Tail sect, he was watching the fight from a safe distance, making sure he memorised everything that happened.

The way that Alyss employed her domains, how she would react to people and how the disciples, elders and sect leader would try to stop her. He made sure to memorise as much as possible since it's not like he was going to fight them himself.

During the final exchange, he saw a genius of the next generation, Jinghua put up a decent fight.

Halfway through, it felt like he could visualise the boundaries of their domains clashing against one another.

Jinghua trying to exert her control and offensive nature while Alyss focused on evasion through the supposed Passive Zone.

Maybe it was just a hallucination but he felt like he could see it.

Then after the Swallow Tail sect, they attacked the Poison Sect. A sect that handles countless poisons and hidden weapons.

When it comes to martial arts, they were on the weaker side but for some reason, none of the poisons was working on Alyss. She simply shrugged it off and stormed through the sect through a mixture of the Skybound Swallow and Instant Draw martial arts.

There wasn't much to learn in the poison sect compared to the Swallow Tail but regardless, Jin still made sure to keep watch.

'I shouldn't focus on the poisons they use but rather the hidden tools. None of them could hit Alyss. Needles, spikes, daggers, she dodged everything.'

Her explanation of this when asked about it was simple.

"The Swallow Tail sect has an evasion based movement art. I think one of them called it Drift or something. Basically, it's just a case of heightening your focus on external attacks and choosing the right steps to dodge. If you use Absolute Zone with it to concentrate on everything within your range, it's much easier to plan things out."

In the end, it was about the state of unity again.

Scratching his head, Jin let out a sigh. Alice wasn't... the best teacher he had to admit. Her explanations were lacking but her demonstrations were insightful.

Pulling out his chain blades one more, he twirled it in his hands before narrowing his gaze.

Alice's movements were too fast for him to observe at times.

"Be fluid with your movements. The chain isn't something you can achieve great things with by using rigid thinking. Consider how it wraps around certain objects, how you use your body as the object and so on." Alice's groggy voice rang out.

Feeling the lack of effort to sit up, she waved her finger and some blood converged near Jin, turning into a silhouette of herself with the shard of Kara hovering next to her.

"That'll be your training dummy, have fun." Alice yawned.

Nodding his head, Jin glanced at the dummy before entering an offensive posture. Seeing that Jin was ready, Alice sneakily curved her mouth up into a grin.

How dare this brat wake her up from her sleep.

Shift!

"!!!" Widening his eyes, Jin didn't expect the blood clone to suddenly disappear from his sight and enter his range.

Swallow's Rain – Soaring Tail Sweep!

Before Jin could even think about countering, the blood clone released two devastating kicks into a leg sweep, knocking him off balance.

Adjusting the martial arts so it wasn't as lethal as it could be, the clone began to unleash a barrage of attacks similar to Jinghua's final stand. Each technique linked to the next with fluid motion.

Whatever action Jin tried to do to counter would be parried and countered back with a snap, disorientating him.

The sound of Jin's cries along with the melodic attacks brought a smile to Alice's face as she decided to do a little bit of day drinking.

'Drinking again? Aren't you going a bit crazy?' Alyss folded her arms.

'Of course not. The alcohol that I bought is a bit on the weaker side so I can drink more without worry.'
Alice waved her hand with a smile.

Seeing this, Alyss could only shake her head with a helpless smile.

Ignoring the drinking, she was rather surprised by Alice's demonstration of the Skybound Swallow martial arts.

While it lacked the proper decision making and judgement to make full use of the arts, it was still impressive nevertheless.

To put it into perspective, the difference between them is that Alice mimics and replicates what is done. If the sequence was ABCD, she'll perform ABCD.

But Alyss on the other hand, would judge the most effective sequence to destroy her opponents.

One opponent might be weak against the sequence of ACDB, or BDAC and so on. She'll make the changes necessary.

One prints and repeats what she sees, and the other studies and comprehends.

Naturally, this was the same when it came to casting. Alice understood casting on a deeper level while she could only replicate it to some extent. Enough to help her fight but not enough to make changes like she does.

Therefore, Alyss had an idea. A new goal that she wanted to achieve.

If Alice was going to make a skill based on all of her experience on knowledge when it came to casting, she'd do the opposite. With all her knowledge and martial arts that she'll steal from now on, she'll make the best martial art unique to her.

A set of attacks, evasive footwork and counters that complement everything she does. Her instincts, her fighting talent and her desire to destroy her opponent. She'll take advantage of it all and create a form for this desire.

'So obvious.' Alice let out a small giggle while thinking to herself. Her twin was so obvious when it came to her desires. That burning passion in her eyes as she stepped away to practice the martial arts, it was clear what she wanted to do and Alice supported it all the way.

Nothing will change the fact that they were sharing one body so why not take advantage of it? There's also more to duality than what they know. Depending on how she develops this skill, there might be a chance for the two of them to fight at the same time.

###

"That's four sects down now and it doesn't seem like this demoness will stop her attacks. I believe a bounty should be placed on her. To track her movements and deal with her when she reveals herself."

Chapter 587 - 587: Bounty

"That's four sects down and it doesn't seem like this demoness will stop her attacks. I believe a bounty should be placed on her. To track her movements and deal with her when she reveals herself." A young man proposed while standing at the front of the table.

He was currently talking to 10 others. Each was a representation of the different sects, houses and sovereign sects.

Currently, after Alyss's rampage, there were six houses that were untouched, 2 sects that were further away from the other four and the three sovereign sects.

"And what do you propose for this... bounty? I hope you're not suggesting to have vagrants help you fight her." The representative of the Vermilion Clan asked with his arms folded.

"No, we will not have vagrants fight her. All they need to do is to report her location when they spot her. Nothing more, nothing less. If there is anything that we know, it's that she doesn't kill. . . Often. None of the sects have anyone that died but disciples running after her once she left were... dealt with." The young man clarified.

None of them were sure what her motives were and the representatives of the sects that were attacked couldn't make it to the meeting.

All they knew was that she hadn't killed anyone during her attacks with a few exceptions outside of it. And even with that being said, they couldn't be sure it was her or if it was someone taking advantage of the chaos she was leaving behind.

The news was already spreading after the Swallow Tail sect got attacked. The pillars of fire and chains drew too much attention from the civilians living nearby.

"And I'm guessing once you obtain this information you want us to help you fight her?" The representative of the Hao clan frowned, clearly displeased by the arrangement.

"That... is indeed the case." The young man faltered.

Right now, the only ones that sustained damage was the sects. With their previous conflict in mind, it was practically impossible for the clans to help.

*Tap

Before any of the clan representatives could respond, the representative of the Silent Lotus sect tapped her finger against the table.

Out of all the sects, only the Silent Lotus Sect managed to achieve a status above the clans outside of the sovereign sects. The rest of them were all defeated.

"I believe this is no ordinary demoness that we are facing. The longer we give her, the stronger she becomes. There are already reports of her stealing the martial arts of those that she fought before.

"Skybound Swallow from the Swallow Tail sect, the Poison sect's hidden weapon arts, Scorching Tyrant Arts from the Blazing Sun sect and the Unyielding Colossus from the Titan sect. All four of these martial arts have been stolen, replicated and even improved.

"If you are satisfied with the demoness taking everything including the martial arts from your clans then be my guest and do nothing. Unless... You're f*cking scared?" The woman smirked as veins bulged on the necks of the clan representatives.

Despite looking peaceful and polite, the words of the woman cut sharp with mockery at the end.

"That's enough Miss Meilin. We are here to deal with an anomaly. If you there are any lingering grudges between the sects and houses, you may continue this in the next gathering." The retainer of one of the three sovereign sects spoke up while Meilin simply shrugged.

"Is there any more information that you wish to share?" He turned to the young man who was speaking.

He belonged to the last remaining sect that hadn't been attacked yet, the Phantom Sect.

"We've also received news from Miss Qiu Qiu, a captain from the Demon Extermination Squad, that she has exhibited signs of having a complete domain. She was able to study and master the Instant Draw – Killing Arc beyond a level that Miss Qiu Qiu could achieve."

Hearing this, all of the clan representatives realised how dangerous this was now.

Despite her young age, Qiu Qiu was one of the top geniuses of the next generation. Had it not been for the fact that she's affiliated with the Demon Extermination Squad, she would've long been recruited into one of the sovereign sects!

The representatives began to whisper to one another, trying to figure out the best course of action. Meanwhile, the sovereign sects weren't planning on acting at all. After all, they were deterrents for the other regions of Sikha. If they were to have their power weakened and the news was to spread out, it's very likely that one of the sects from the west or south would come to attack.

They needed to maintain as much fighting power as they could.

After much discussion, they finally settled on a plan. They'll spread a bounty and a rough drawing of what the demoness looks like. Once news starts flowing in, they'll collapse around the area and attack her all at once.

With the meeting concluded, they all left preparing to spread news about this new bounty.

Meanwhile, Meilin left the meeting room first before waiting by the entrance.

The three sects consisted of the Celestial Sect, Abyssal Tyrant Sect and Empyrean Dragon. As for the one hosting the meeting, it was naturally the Celestial Sect, strongest out of the three.

But Meilin wasn't here for them.

Instead, she was here for the Abyssal Tyrant Sect.

In the distance, she could see the representative make a single movement as she smiled.

'The sovereign sects are no different from us. At the end of the day, they're still motivated by greed.'
Meilin smirked, making her way to the previously agreed location.

###

"And here I thought I was the only shrewd one. I didn't expect you to come in person despite saying that we should send representatives." A voice rang out as Meilin smirked.

She was currently sitting by the lake deck, watching her reflection in the water.

"It's an important discussion. Naturally, I have to come in person even if it's through disguise." Meilin chuckled.

A ripple appeared on the calm lake surface as her appearance shifted.

She had long brown hair with a pair of buns on the top, a red lotus pattern on her forehead, sky blue pupils and red markings around the edges of her eyes. A devious smile could be seen on her face as she glanced up at the man who also dispelled his disguise.

"If anything, shouldn't I be the one that's surprised? The Sect leader of one of the Sovereign Sects actually came here in person. What would the others think?" 'Meilin' chuckled, her voice different from before.

"It doesn't matter. It's good that an anomaly appeared at this time since it draws the eyes away. Does the agreement still stand?" The sect leader asked as his appearance was hidden by a strange veil, distorting the details.

"Naturally. We will be using this time to smuggle shipments up from the south. Though... I have another message for you."

"From the master?"

"From the master."

Hearing this, the Sect Leader frowned before nodding his head.

"Is it time?" He asked as this farce had gone on long enough but 'Meilin' shook her head.

"Nope~ He only had one order. 'Let her play around as much as she wants.'"

Confusion filled the sect leader's mind as he wasn't sure what 'Meilin' was talking about. But as he soon connected the dots, he furrowed his brows.

"The demoness?"

"Yep~"

###

"Alice."

"What is it?"

"Can you explain what I'm looking at?" Jin scrutinised with a frown.

"I'm not sure. Seems to be my net worth. How did they know what was inside my pouch?" Alice scratched her chin.

"No no, I don't think it's a matter of your net worth. Do you not see the words above your head?" Jin's smile twitched.

"Now that you mention it... Yeah, that is weird. Do you think they're trying to steal what's inside my pouch?"

"No, I'm pretty sure this is a bounty." Jin sighed as they were currently waiting for their food by a small inn on the side of the road.

There was a sheet of paper stuck to the side with the words 'WANTED' written in a bold red.

It spoke of a reward for anyone who has any information regarding her current whereabouts and even a reward for capture.

As for the picture, it was... a generalised picture of Alice based on the rough descriptions of her key features.

One eye with a nasty scar on the other and split hair of black and white.

Of course, the picture looked nothing like Alice but it's not like anyone else was walking around with split hair.

"I guess four major sects is enough to warrant a bounty now. But it's not like I killed anyone." Alice pouted.

"You didn't kill anyone that didn't try to kill you during your attack. but that's not including those that tried outside of it." Jin interrupted as Alice tried to smack him on the back of the head.

Sensing the smack approaching, Jin instinctively leaned forward only to see two fingers waiting for him.

"MY EYES!!!"

"Who told you to try and dodge my smack." Alice shrugged with a smirk.

"You! You told me to dodge!" Jin clutched his eyes.

At this point, he didn't know if he should call this training or abuse!

"Don't be a baby about it. You still have both eyes no? Look at me, I only have one right now." Alice pointed at the sealed Cayla.

In her mental realm, Alice suddenly noticed Cayla standing right behind her and staring at her silently.

Feeling the stare, Alice could only cough and try her best to ignore it.

While joking around with Jin, she couldn't help but notice that their food was taking longer than expected to arrive.

Tapping her finger momentarily, she sighed.

"There's a reward for capture but isn't information fine as well? Just let me eat my food and let me be on my way." Alice lamented as she could sense three people getting ready to fight inside the Inn.

"Jin, I'll leave this to you." Alice waved her hand dismissively with a yawn. These three were far too weak for her to care about.

"Tch, demon. Poking my eyes then making me work." He grumbled under his breath while pulling out his weapons.

But one glare from Alice sent a chill down his spine.

"I meant the benevolent mighty Alice has given me this chance to demonstrate the harvest of my lessons! I will not let this go to waste!" Jin shouted, correcting himself.

"That's what I thought, now go have some fun."

Chapter 588 - 588: Eclipse Reaver

Taking a deep breath to calm his mind, Jin adjusted his grip on the chain blades in his hands.

'Analyse the opponents, see what they're good at. Visualise the boundaries of their weapon. Their reach, shifts in muscles.' Jin thought to himself as he entered an offensive stance.

The first opponent was a lady dressed in black and red. There was a strange orange flower motif around her outfit along with the sheath of her sword.

The second was a man wielding what seemed to be a greatsword. His stature was surprisingly, smaller than his but the fact that he could hold this sword with ease sent warning bells off in Jin's head.

As for the last person, it seemed to be an assassin cloaked from head to toe in black fabric, hiding their identity.

'Both the lady and the man have swords with long reach. They're probably going to find a gap in my defences so that the assassin can make a move.'

Twirling the blades next to him, Jin closed his eyes momentarily.

During their journey, he had Alice take a look at his martial arts.

Eclipse Reaver.

A style of martial arts that focuses on the chain blades and ferocity. It's not a style that's compatible with allies since it focuses on unleashing destruction in an area.

There were six branches within this style.

Chaos Fang, Blade Tempest, Chain Snare, Ember Steps, Guillotine and Wrathborn.

None of the branches had specific sequences to unleash a move but rather actions that'll help manoeuvre the chain blades.

To put it simply, they were akin to 'stances' that changed his attacking style.

He could still remember the lessons of his original instructor when he was learning the Eclipse Reaver.

'Unshackled, Unpredictable, Unstoppable. Remember these three words when using the Chaos Fang stance.'

*BANG!!!

Bursting into action, Jin hooked the chain blades around a table and threw it towards the man with the greatsword.

'The battlefield is a domain of war. Become a whirlwind of steel and leave none standing in your wake.'

Blade Tempest!

Using his body as the anchor, the blades whipped out around him as the woman tried to jump through the gap but the second chain blade stopped her advance.

'Ensnare, Strangle and Break whoever enters your grasp.'

Chain Snare!

Flicking his wrist, Jin sensed a splinter of killing intent behind him. After being exposed to Alice's killing intent for so long, something like this wouldn't even make him flinch!

The chains coiled behind him, wrapping around the assassin's arm, surprising the assailant.

'Each strike must end in death. Become the Guillotine of War.'

Pulling the assassin towards him, Jin tossed his spare blade above him before pulling down with all his strength.

*BANG!!!

Crashing down from above, the blade cleaved the Assassin in half before they could even roll out of the way.

'Pain fuels rage. Rage fuels power. Power fuels War. Let your body become the altar of which the might of war rages forth!'

*CLANG!!!

An overhead strike was unleashed by the man with the greatsword but Jin wrapped his arms with chains, taking on the strike at full force.

Blood dripped down his arms but a grin appeared on his face.

Twisting his body, the chain blade appeared from behind Jin, stabbing into the man's head as he placed the spare blade against his neck and stomped down.

Twirling the blade, he tossed the head towards the woman, surprising her and throwing her off guard.

Blade Tempest!

Two horizontal slashes shot forward, cutting the woman into threes as Jin whipped the blade back to his hands.

"Dirty as always. At this point, I should charge you for having me do the cleanup." Alice complained, flicking her finger as violet flames erupted from their corpses, burning them away and getting rid of the blood.

"If you're gonna complain about the blood shouldn't you take care of them to begin with?" Jin asked with a sigh.

"But they're weak and it's a chore to deal with them." Alice shrugged, pulling out some leftovers she had in her pouch and reheating them using her flames.

"Plus, weren't you the one who wanted to follow me? Can't complain about something as small as this if you tag along." Alice grinned.

Letting out a sigh, Jin put his weapon away while getting some food for himself.

If there's one thing that Alice had noticed about Jin during their journey together, it was that the lad had no reaction to killing people. From their first meeting, Alice had half expected him to be meek but that was clearly not the case.

Then there's also his martial arts.

Alyss had analysed it before and indeed, it was one extremely suited for the chaotic nature of battle. Or rather, war.

In the midst of war, his fighting style would benefit greatly as many would be concerned about hitting allies and so on. But his style forgoes all of it.

Live in chaos, live in war.

That was the feeling Alyss got from the martial art.

Of course, the name of the style also raised an eyebrow.

Alyss had wondered if Jin had connections to the Eclipse cult but that didn't seem too likely. And even if he was, shouldn't he be in the south?

Either way, the fundamentals of his martial art no doubt require the perfection of the Offensive Zone. That way, he can accurately react in the most aggressive way possible as instructed by his martial arts.

"So what's our next target?" Alice asked, slurping some noodles while Jin pulled out his map.

There were locations that were marked with an X symbol, signifying the sects they had destroyed.

"Hmm... With the bounty on your head, I don't think we can approach any of the cities right now." Jin muttered, trying to figure out an alternative route to reach the other sects and houses.

However, they were all located in major cities within Jejin. It was hard to find one that wouldn't result in them trying to attack the entire city in order to reach the sect or house.

"Oh you don't need to worry about that. You see, I'm a woman of many talents. And lucky for us, disguise is one of them." Alice smirked, tapping her finger against the table.

Little by little, glass fractures appeared around her body as her appearance changed.

Her split hair was replaced by a blonde with streaks of red and a pair of grey eyes. As for her physique, her height was increased and so was her chest.

"Tadah~ See? No problems right?" Alice grinned, her voice a little different from her usual tone as well.

Blinking his eyes, Jin paused momentarily before simply accepting it as normal.

At this point, Alice had showcased way too many weird things for him to be concerned.

Split personality, state of unity, talent in casting and martial arts and now even disguise.

He had even obtained a new mantra for himself during this journey to help cope with sudden surprises such as this or anything else she would reveal.

That mantra being: Don't question it. The answer is Alice.

"In that case, then the next target would actually be a house rather than a sect. If we follow this route, we should be able to find two houses in the next city.

"The Vermillion clan and the Chi clan. Both of the clans have been competing with one another for generations now. Rivals in other words yet despite this conflict, they're also good friends.

"As for their martial arts, Vermillion specialises in overwhelming battle strength. One powerful punch to end it all would be a good explanation for them. As for the Chi clan, it's the opposite.

"Softness in motion, fluidity in intent, strength in resolve. While the Vermillion focus on brute strength, the Chi clan focus on soft strength. Sometimes Chi Clan wins with the Vermillion unable to hit them. Sometimes the vermillion breaks through the soft guard of the Chi clan through brute strength."

Listening to this, Alice couldn't help but feel a little interested in the Vermillion clan.

If they focus on brute strength, then how do they accomplish this? How do they control their flow of energy to bypass defences? How effective is it?

If the principles of their attack is useful, Alice wanted to learn it.

'Say twinnie, can the next one be mine?' Alice asked as she had been letting Alyss have her fun till now.

'Sure, go for it. I need a bit more time to fully digest everything I've learnt after all. It's proving to be harder than expected trying to make everything work together.' Alyss nodded.

Some of the martial arts that she stole was completely incompatible.

Using it would be creating weaknesses that she didn't have before. Gaps in movement, delays in action.

In a fight, this kind of mistake was lethal and what wasn't compatible had to be cut out. No matter how good it is on its own.

With Alice now quickly finishing her meal so that she could get to the city, Alyss focused on her own task once more.

Right now, she was in the midst of fully understanding the 'thought process' behind the creation of martial arts.

How the users synergise their Sigil abilities and martial movements to achieve the best result.

The people of the east didn't follow the three type rule that most would follow in the Abyss.

Instead, through generations worth of effort and research, each sect have their own 'set' of Sigils that work best with the martial art.

Some required a mix of Anti Hunter and Anti beast, causing them to only access their resonance once they reach 5 Sigils.

Alyss wanted to understand why each Sigil was chosen for the task and most importantly, what kind of movement would best suit their current set.

Hell, she could even go for the option of picking her own set of Sigils from everything she could access.

Regardless, it was merely one step in the process of making her own martial arts.

Chapter 589 - 589: Hualing

Sitting in front of a mirror a woman could be seen tidying her hair with an expressionless face.

"Do you resent me?" An old man asked, clearly fatigued.

"Me? Resent you? I wouldn't dare." The woman replied, giving him a side glance before focusing back on her make up.

"Your si-"

"Don't mention her to me." She cut him off sharply as her glare was filled with anger and annoyance.

"She's the one who ran out, she's the one who abandoned the agreement. She's the one who doesn't care about the peace between the two families. She's the one who went chasing after her dreams because some f*ck boy decided to whisper sweet nothings into her ear. And the result of all this is you pushing all of this onto me."

Gritting her teeth, she slammed her hand against the table and stood up.

Facing her father, Chi Hualing glared at him, trying her best to hold herself back.

Her sister was the one who was meant to marry today. She was meant to marry her childhood sweetheart and the two clans accepted it. Joint marriage wasn't uncommon between the two and there shouldn't have been any problems.

But then an outsider interfered.

Instead of talking with the clan, her older sister abandoned everything and left without so much as a word.

With the bride suddenly leaving without a word, it's only natural that the Vermillion clan are angry since they now look like the fool.

Therefore, it was now up to her to amend the mistakes caused by her older sister. To marry in her place and take on the mess that SHE caused.

"I'm s-"

"Don't you even dare say sorry. This is the last thing I do for this family. After this, you can wipe my name from the registry or whatever, I don't care. All you need to know is that we have no more ties. If I could remove your blood from my veins, I would." Chi Hualing glared at her father before spitting on his shoe and walking out.

Watching his daughter's back leave the room, Chi Fan let out a weary sigh.

###

After storming out of the room, Hualing made her way to the garden and sat down.

Leaning back, she looked up at the sky. Despite there being no walls or buildings around her, she felt as though she was locked in a cage.

She didn't want to marry but if she didn't, her family would suffer. Hate them or no, they were still her family in the end. This never would've happened if her sister didn't run out at the last moment.

"You look like someone killed your pet." A voice called out.

Letting out a light chuckle, Hualing shook her head and tilted her head back.

"What? Come to see your future bride early?" She patted the seat next to her.

While her sister and him were childhood sweethearts, the two of them could be considered to be close friends. Not close enough to marry but enough to confide in one another.

"I'm just here to make sure you're feeling alright. If you want, I can try and talk to the elders again." Xiao An asked but Hualing shook her head.

"You're only going to piss them off more if you do. Then they're going to blame my family and after that, they're going to start fighting again."

Looking down, Xiao An was about to apologize when Hualing pinched him on the arm.

"Ouch! What was that for???"

"I swear to the gods if you apologize as well I'm actually going to lose my mind. Do you know how many times I had to listen to the words I'm sorry?" Hualing folded her arms in annoyance.

Just as he was about to apologize again, Xiao An stopped himself.

"We'll just be married in name only. If you want to pursue anyone, I'll help you from the back."

Resting her cheek on her palm, Hualing chuckled.

"What? Am I not good enough to act as a real wife?"

"That's... Not what I meant." He sighed, familiar with her way of bullying him.

"Hahaha, I'm just kidding. If I don't laugh about it I'm just gonna get more annoyed." Hualing waved her hand.

"You know your father didn't want this to happen either."

". . . Tch." Crossing her legs in annoyance, Hualing also understood that. If there was someone to blame, it'll be the old guys in the Vermillion sect. Forcing things to happen even though the people involved didn't want to marry.

Not to mention, her sister.

"Did... Ning leave behind any words?" Xiao An revealed a bitter smile.

"Nope. Nothing for you, nothing for me. Nothing for anyone. She's just disappeared without a care in the world."

Even though he expected this, Xiao An was still a little disappointed by the news.

"Aiya! If you're gonna be sad about it don't ask in the first place. Come on, there's a new restaurant that opened up nearby. Their food is apparently pretty good so stop moping around." Hualing stood up as she tugged on his arm, trying to get him to stand.

Thinking about it for a moment, Xiao An nodded his head and stood up.

"Alright."

Even though this wasn't the ideal marriage or situation, he'll still do everything he could to make Hualing happy. Not as a 'husband' but rather simply as a friend.

He too understood the difficulties she was facing. Despite wanting to join the Demon Extermination Squad like Qiu Qiu, she was now forced to be a wife.

"I'll pay for this one." Xiao An chuckled as Hualing rolled her eyes.

"No sh*t. If you don't pay for this one who will? Or what? Are you asking me to pay for this?" Hualing shrugged with a smirk.

Fake marriage or not, she'd rather be with someone she knew than someone completely random. Out of everyone within the Vermillion family, Xiao An was definitely the best choice.

Making their way through the city of Yan'An, Hualing's mood was quickly soured as she saw the countless banners talking about their marriage that was being held later today.

In the end, the two decided to get a little disguise so that they could go and eat without being bothered.

Hualing decided to cross-dress and disguise herself as a man while Xiao An bought a wig and had Hualing do some makeup on his face to change his features.

It wasn't a great disguise, comical at best but none of the civilians disturbed them.

As they approached the newly opened restaurant, the two couldn't help but blink their eyes in surprise.

They could see the staff rushing back and forth through the store carrying dishes of varying sizes and laughter in the back.

She knew the food was good but it was just opened like... two days ago. Wasn't this a bit... ridiculous???

"Should we come back another day?" Xiao An's smile twitched.

"It should be fine. Let's take a look and see who's ordering this much." Hualing rubbed her hands together as she wanted to see what kind of rich person appeared in Yan'An.

Making their way through the front door, the two of them saw the disguised Alice eating without a single instance of grace.

Next to her, Jin was also doing the same.

For the first time, Hualing saw a woman not care about how others saw her. She simply just... ate.

She ate and she enjoyed herself in her own little world with no care.

No care, no attachments, no burdens.

'Ah... How liberating it must feel to act like this.' Hualing couldn't help but smile sadly as she wished she could be the same.

But instead, it felt like every move of hers was restrained by an unshakable shackle.

"Can I help you?" Alice called out with a raised eyebrow.

Realising that she was staring too long, Hualing coughed awkwardly. But before she could explain herself, Alice swallowed her food and pointed at a table not far away from her.

"If you're hungry there's a spare table over there to use."

Blinking her eyes, Hualing couldn't help but laugh.

"Thank you, may I know your name? I don't believe I've seen someone like you around these parts." Hualing smiled while Xiao An simply allowed her to do whatever she wanted.

After all, after today, she'll be bound to the Vermillion family.

"Mine? It's Ecila. I'm from overseas." Even though she was wearing eastern clothing, her speech patterns, mannerisms and habits made it clear that she was not from this place.

"Overseas you say? It's not often that I see someone like that. They usually stay by the ports or the major cities. So how have you been enjoying the east?"

The two immediately hit it off as Hualing made herself comfortable nearby.

Taking a seat by the window, Xiao An simply watched as Hualing enjoyed herself.

After all, after today, she'll be bound to the Vermillion family.

In the days leading up to this moment, she hadn't smiled properly once yet. All the smiles she's shown had been fronts to not worry those around her. To make herself seem stronger.

As someone who's been her friend since they were children, it was obvious to him what was a smile and what wasn't.

Therefore, he wanted her to indulge a little.

"You like alcohol too?! Have you tried the local speciality? It's my favourite. It's called the Nine Sun's Liquor."

Upon hearing these words escape Hualing's mouth, Xiao An paled and so did the servers in the place.

There was only one person in this city who enjoyed the Nine Sun's Liquor and that was Hualing!

If one lived in Yan'An for any period of time, they would understand that hearing her say these words were akin to an evacuation order.

After all...

In this city that stood for generations...

She was the reason they had so many new buildings!

Chapter 590 - 590: Noodle Shop

"Hua! I mean Ling Er, I don't think you should indulge in drink right now. Especially not the Nine Sun's Liquor." Xiao An's smile twitched while had the same reaction after hearing Alice wanted to drink.

"Al- Ecila, have you forgotten what we're here to do???" Jin asked, dropping the food in his hands.

Hearing both of their companions being concerned about the same thing, Hualing and Alice blinked at one another before letting out hearty laughs.

"Look at these two. They're acting like it's gonna be the end of the world if we drink." Alice smirked, pointing at the two.

"Pft, you're right. But I suppose they're not wrong either since today is pretty important for me." Hualing let out a sigh.

Noticing her new friend's expression, Alice couldn't help but pat her on the shoulder.

"Seems like it's both important and pretty difficult for you. I won't ask about it since we've just met but if you ever want to go for a drink, you can use this to contact me." Alice created a small blood bead.

"Just put some energy into it and crush it." She instructed, handing the bead over to Hualing.

"Eh? Why don't you just use the talismans?" Hualing asked curiously since talismans made communication so much easier.

However, Alice simply scratched her cheek before gesturing for Jin.

"Seriously? This is going to be the eighth one you break. I can't keep buying more you know?" Jin frowned.

"I mean it's easier to show than actually trying to explain it. Aren't I paying for the food? You can just count it as that." Alice waved her hand dismissively.

Rolling his eyes, he tossed over a talisman before holding up a plate to be used as cover.

Just as Alice's hand touched the talisman, the energy within began to destabilise as both Hualing and Xiao An could see an absurd amount of energy on the verge of running rampant.

Flicking it away, she wrapped the talisman in Void energy and watched as it exploded.

"Tada~ Anything I touch that's made by Suyin results in explosions. Flying swords, carriages, anything that she had a hand in I blow up for some reason." Alice chuckled while Hualing couldn't believe that someone like her even existed.

As a member of the Chi family, she was familiar with the inventions of Suyin. In fact, she even had the pleasure of meeting her in the past.

There were doubts regarding the safety which is why even the sect leaders of the three Sovereign sects attempted to destabilise the tools but to no avail. The foundations of her inventions were too difficult to overload!

Yet with a single touch, Alice was able to overload and blow it up! Not by choice either!

"Are you sure you're just a traveller? Even the sect leaders of the Sovereign sects couldn't destroy it." Hualing asked with doubt in her eyes.

Someone like this couldn't be normal.

"Of course. I came from the north wanting to explore the east. Food, clothing, martial arts, I wanted to take a look at it all. Then I got blown up by one of Suyin's inventions so now I'm making my way south to find her." Alice admitted truthfully.

"Hmm... I haven't met her often but I know she's rather eccentric. I can only imagine that she must've tried to contact you personally once she realised that you blew up her invention." Hualing chuckled.

Suyin could be considered arrogant. She didn't bother with people who couldn't keep up with her nor did she care about those that didn't interest her.

But if someone was to catch her attention, she'd go out of her way to satisfy this curiosity of hers. Even if it meant doing illegal activities and so on.

Thankfully, nothing she's done has been... heretical in nature. Yet.

Shaking her head, Hualing wanted to change the subject when she noticed a few figures approaching from down the street.

Elders of the Vermillion family.

"I want to talk more but seems like I've run out of time. If you're still in the city after today or the day after, let's go out for a drink okay?" Hualing grinned as Alice nodded her head.

Standing up, Hualing nodded to Xiao An as the two of them left the store before the Elders could arrive.

'She's a nice girl.' Alice thought to herself while leaning back and enjoying the rest of her meal.

'Seems pretty strong too.' Alyss added.

They noticed her flow of energy while they were talking. Completely stable and ready to pounce at a moment's notice in case anyone was to try and attack her.

A clear sign that she's been trained.

However, it wasn't the kind where she was prepared for Alice to attack. Rather, it was for an unseen assassin or something along those lines. There was no hostility from her towards Alice.

'She must've had quite a tough childhood if she's this on guard. Think she's part of a large family?' Alice asked curiously while Alyss shrugged.

'I don't know about her but the man with her was definitely a trained martial artist. He was keeping guard for her and was even scrutinising our movements to make sure we're not suspicious.' Alyss narrowed her eyes.

If they weren't friendly and weren't simply there for a chat, Alyss was tempted to switch out with Alice and have a go against Xiao An.

'I mean there's always chances in the future. Plus we've agreed to go out for a drink right?' Alice chuckled while making a drinking motion.

Hearing this, Alyss simply gave her twin a side glance before letting out a sigh.

No matter the situation, no matter the scenario, the moment drinks are mentioned, Alice's mind is focused on alcohol.

'What? The Nine Sun's liquor sounds interesting okay? At least it sounds better than the other stuff I've been drinking since I've been here.' Alice pouted but Alyss simply ignored her.

Looking over to Cayla for validation, Alice simply saw a sign left in the place where Cayla should be with her nowhere in sight.

[Cayla is not available, please check back at a later date.]

'...'

Pouting in annoyance, Alice returned back to reality and began to devour the food in front of her with Jin being surprised by her sudden gusto.

It's almost as though the food was her enemy.

###

After leaving the restaurant, Hualing walked along the street without saying anything while Xiao An kept her company.

Each step was a reminder that time was ticking by without waiting for anyone.

"Honestly, I don't know why I'm being such a drama queen about it. It's not like I'm being enslaved right? I can still do what I want. I can still train, drink and enjoy my life how I want to. It's just that... I guess I'll be bound to the Vermillion family rather than the Chi family." Hualing let out a hollow chuckle while Xiao An looked at the ground.

"Ah, that's not to say I'm blaming you or I'm saying you're not good enough okay?" She quickly corrected herself, realising what she sounded like.

"I'm aware. I suppose it's like a pair of invisible shackles for you right?" Xiao An smiled as Hualing paused before letting out a soft sigh and nodding her head.

"I suppose so. Weird isn't it? It's just a title, just formality. But deep down... I feel like I'm losing my freedom. Getting my wings clipped and my limbs bound. It's pretty suffocating." Hualing forced a smile before giving her body a stretch.

"Uwahhh I spent too long talking to Ecila that I didn't even get a bite from the place. Do you know a place we can get some food from?" Hualing asked with a grin.

"I know of a place. It's where... Never mind. Just know that it's good." Xiao An paused before smiling.

"Oh? So mysterious. Lead the way then dear future husband." Hualing joked, trying to put on a brave front as Xiao An nodded.

Taking the lead, neither of them said anything and soon, they approached a rather worn down alley. Despite the state of this place, Hualing felt a tinge of nostalgia as she remembered their childhood. In the past, the three of them would sneak out of their houses and meet up nearby, playing with the local kids and buying snacks from the vendors.

"Boss Ming, can you get me two bowls of your chicken noodles and some meat buns please." Xiao An called out as an old gentleman behind the counter nodded with a smile.

"I thought you had forgotten all about me. Didn't even visit for a week hahaha." Boss Ming let out a soft laugh while Xiao An sat down and shook his head.

"Forget about you? Never. The... Three of us practically grew up eating your noodles after all." He grinned. Perhaps Hualing was too young to remember but her sister had brought her here often with him. But after a certain point, it was only him and Ningyue visiting this place.

It was a comfortable place for him and her. A place they often visited together and today was probably the first time he came here without her.

Boss Ming, noticing that Chi Ningyue wasn't with him, decided not to pry.

As for Hualing, she found this place familiar yet at the same time, unfamiliar.

Watching the noodles being prepared, Xiao An let out a soft sigh before closing his eyes.

Since Ningyue didn't leave any messages for him, it wasn't right for him to cling to the memories of her.

Once the noodles were done, Boss Ming folded his arms. He could see that the two had different kinds of sadness and simply allowed them to relax. Sometimes, what one needs isn't words of comfort but rather a place to just sit down and contemplate.

For these two, he'll simply give them the place of silence.

As she took a bite of the noodles, Hualing's memories came flooding back as a single tear rolled down her face.

She realised that she had eaten these noodles before and the taste hadn't changed at all.

She remembered the good times and the bad. The smile on her sister's face.

She wasn't angry that her sister pushed this marriage onto her. But rather, she was angry at the fact that she didn't even leave a single message.

Biting her lip, Hualing didn't say anything and simply ate the noodles in silence with tears in her eyes while remembering the good old times.

Xiao An did the same. But for him, it was him moving on from the past. The final meal in remembrance of his love. He simply wished her a good life.