

Abyssal A 591

Chapter 591 - 591: Wedding Ceremony

That night, the clamours of guests coming from the wedding could be heard from afar as Hualing looked out her window at the city.

Red lanterns and red silk could be seen hanging on the walls while fireworks were being let off in the distance.

Guests were greeted by members of both families, exchanging pleasantries with a smile on their faces.

The venue was naturally the Vermillion clan compound as it's the biggest in the city. Plus, she was marrying into the family so it's only natural that the wedding was being held here.

Looking at her own reflection in the mirror, Hualing took a deep breath and tried the best smile she could muster.

Right now, maids were sorting out her hair and the wedding dress was placed by the side.

In mere moments, she would be wed to Xiao An.

'Should I run?' Hualing couldn't help but think to herself but shook her head.

Running would only cause more trouble. Not to mention the fact that it'll implicate Xiao An.

Regardless, she's already made peace with it now so what use is it to worry about it?

After her make up was done, she received help to put on the crimson wedding dress as a veil was draped over her head.

Taking one last deep breath, she made her way towards the venue. The path towards the altar was sprinkled with flowers and countless eyes were focused on her.

Hualing felt her skin crawl. It was akin to being a flower on display, no use other than to look pretty.

Clenching her teeth, she stepped up and saw Xiao An waiting next to the officiator of the wedding with her father nearby.

With slow and steady steps, Hualing approached Xiao An against the alter. Despite coming to terms with everything, she could still feel her heart hammering against her chest. The ringing in her ears.

Each second felt more dreadful than the last.

The guest's murmuring became blurred, serving as nothing but white noise in her ears. Even the words of the officiator were drowned out by the ringing in her ear.

Xiao An was clearly worried about her well being as he leaned down to check if she was alright. But Hualing simply smiled and shook her head, reassuring him despite her own anxiety and nervousness. Her hands clenched around the bouquet, mustering up all her effort just to stay still without running away.

"Today, under the blessings of the heavens, we gather to witness the union of these two souls. May their fates intertwine as husband and wife, may their bond be unbreakable and their love eternal."

Hualing's lips trembled beneath her veil. Each of the words felt like cuts against her body.

"You may lift the veil."

Turning to Xiao An, Hualing watched as he lifted the veil over her head.

Despite them knowing that this was arranged and that neither of them wanted to marry, he was still stunned by her beauty.

"What? Surprised by how pretty I look?" Hualing teased, trying to calm her nerves as Xiao An nodded his head with a soft smile.

"I am."

As the officiator began the final part of the ceremony, Hualing felt her world darken. Suffocation overwhelmed her as she glanced down at the floor.

She only had one thought in her mind.

Someone save me please...

As though the heavens had heard her plea, an eerie stillness washed over the venue. The air turned frigid and no one dared to take a single breath.

Many guests couldn't stop the instinctive panic that filled their minds as a wave of killing intent erupted by the front gates.

Sensing this killing intent, Xiao An immediately stepped in front of Hualing to protect her as energy surged around his body.

*BANG!!!!

The doors were kicked open and flung into the air, crashing against the ground as a single woman could be seen.

"Hi~ good evening~ I hope I'm not interrupting anything important. Ohya? Aiyo!!! It's a wedding." Alice's voice could be heard as she walked into the venue with a guard unconscious in her hands.

Narrowing her eye with a grin, she twisted her body and threw the guard towards the elders before slamming down with her hands.

*BANG!!!

A wave of blood immediately erupted, forming a swirling defensive wall that warded against the sudden attacks of the Vermillion family guards.

Upon seeing the distinctive split hair, the elders understood who this was.

"Demoness! You dare interrupt Vermillion clan's business! Pay with your life!" One of the Vermillion clan elders shouted out as crimson energy burst out from his body.

Activating his resonance, armour wrapped around his arm as he took a single step towards her.

Yet that step was enough to cover the distance between them.

Energy converged towards his fist as the elder held his breath. He believed that one punch was all he needed.

Dominating Fist!

*BANG!!!!

An explosion erupted but the target that got hit wasn't Alice!

A portal had opened up in front of her at the last moment and redirected the fist back at the elder!

"Pft, why are you punching yourself? Uwahhh~ That looks like it hurt too. And you were thinking of hiding a pretty girl like me with that brutish fist of yours. Tsk tsk tsk." Alice mocked, kicking the body of the unconscious elder who wasn't prepared for the sudden attack.

Not only that, but his attack was actually amplified thanks to Alice accelerating his punch through the portal!

Seeing the elder get taken out in an instant, the guests immediately started to scramble away, racing each other to leave the premises but there was no need to. After all, Alice only wanted to fight the clan members with martial arts and not the civilians.

Granted, she wasn't even planning on attacking today. She saw that it was a wedding and merely wanted to check things out. What she didn't expect was to see Hualing by the alter, clearly looking distressed and panicked.

Since that was the case, she might as well push up her plans a little.

"Protect the guests! I'll deal with the demoness!" The clan head of the Vermillion clan shouted out as an oppressive aura burst out from his body.

"Hou~ Are you going to fight first? You seem pretty strong." Alice asked while sauntering over to the table and grabbing a jug of wine.

Smelling the fragrance of the alcohol, she couldn't help but lick her lips and took a drink.

*BANG!!!

Phoenix Step + Dominating Fist!

Despite launching a sneak attack the moment Alice took her eyes off him, his punch was caught by her with 'ease'.

"So rude. When someone takes a drink, you should let them finish you know? And that punch of yours... If I f*ck with the space you have to throw it, you can't generate enough power can you?" Alice rolled her eye with a smile before adjusting her grip on his hand.

Blood converged into a single blade as she activated her Zone.

Instant Draw – Killing Arc!

*CLANG!!!

Just as her attack was about to land, Hualing's father intercepted.

Willow Step – Drifting Leaf!

Losing all power in her sword slash, Alice couldn't help but raise her eyebrows as she watched her blade her pushed to the side.

One focused on defence and the other focused on offence!

Not letting this chance be wasted, the Vermillion clan head activated his resonance as black and red armour wrapped around his body.

Molten Strike – Shattering Avalanche!

Just as his punch was about to connect, portals opened up once more but he was prepared.

Transforming his punch into a grab, he had the Chi family head redirect his palm downwards to avoid the portal.

Phantom Swallow Steps – Veil!

Alice's body blurred backwards as her arm whipped into a counter.

Rippling Palm – Ebbing Current!

Her attack brushed past the Vermillion Clan head as he continued his strike.

'Ah screw it, martial arts aren't my forte in the first place.' Alice shrugged as energy coursed through her body.

Void Flux!

*BANG!!!!

Firing a Void Flux at her feet, the explosion of energy sent both clan heads crashing backwards as they didn't expect her to cast a spell with such speed and power!

Neither of them had a chance to react.

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Watching both clan heads get taken out in such a manner, both Xiao An and Hualing were shocked as neither were taking it easy. Rather, it was the nature of the martial arts that they were using that caused the weakness.

The Vermillion Clan's marital art needed time to 'ramp up'. With each hit, energy would build up in their body preparing for one final strike.

On the other hand, the Chi Clan's martial art needed high perception to execute.

Yet one attack grasped both the weaknesses and took out the practitioners before they could fight back!

It wasn't like the clan head's defences were weak either. The Resonance directly addresses the issue of long charge time by increasing the defence.

But despite that, it was futile.

"You should run. Use this confusion to escape." Xiao An suggested as Hualing glanced up in confusion.

"If you go missing during this confusion, they can't pin it on your family can they?" He chuckled, understanding that she truly didn't want this marriage.

Pausing momentarily, Hualing glanced down with a soft smile.

"That may be so. But do you know what else is better?" Hualing asked as she began to tear off pieces of her wedding dress. It was too restrictive and didn't help with movement.

"Using this as an excuse to join the Demon Extermination Squad. I've always wanted to join you know? Just never got the chance." Hualing grinned.

"Have you been drinking?" Xiao An raised an eyebrow.

This side of Hualing only showed when she was drunk since it was a stark contrast to the mentality needed for the Chi Clan martial arts. It's also the personality that caused the destruction in the city.

"Simply drunk off the atmosphere." Hualing chuckled.

Seeing that she was determined, Xiao An shook his head with a smile as he was reminded of the past.

"You were always the one who got injured first. Seems like that tomboy flare hasn't disappeared yet. Should I cover for you or are you covering for me?" Xiao An asked as red markings appeared across his body.

"We'll switch if the situation calls for it!"

Stomping down, a blue halo appeared above Hualing's head as she rushed towards Alice.

Chapter 592 - 592: Alice Vs Hualing And Xiao An

Seeing Hualing suddenly charging towards her, Alice was a little surprised but decided to go along with it. She was here to see how the Vermillion clan generated power in their punches while also interrupting the wedding.

After all, her new would-be drinking buddy seemed distressed so it's only natural for her to crash it.

Taking a single step, Alice gave up on the unfamiliar martial arts that Alyss had learned and instead went with her own style.

A mix of palm strikes and kicks to either neutralise or divert attacks.

*BANG!!!

Palm striking Hualing's wrist to send the punch off to the side, Alice went in for a neck chop only to see the blue halo above her head radiate a luminescent energy.

At that moment, an invisible force crashed back into Alice's body, pushing her palm back and breaking open her guard.

"There!"

Seeing a gap, Hualing grabbed Alice's wrist and went in for a punch against the chest.

"Close but not close enough. What is this thing anyway? That was my own force sent back at me right?" Alice smiled, going into a handstand and using Hualing's arm as a platform.

Tapping the halo with her finger, Alice analysed the flow of energy connecting the two together while Xiao An ambushed her from the side.

Sundering Strike!

Looking to block it with her palm mixed with Void energy, Alice paused in mild surprise before diving into a portal instead.

Exiting the Void not far away from the two, Alice clenched her fist before snapping her fingers.

"Tall one. Does the name Allura ring a bell for you?" Alice called out.

That flow of energy and method of generating power in an instant. It was not part of the Vermillion Clan's martial arts at all!

In fact, it was closer to how Allura punches if anything. Rather than relying on space, it's as though energy was sucked in to reinforce an instant of explosive power.

Not only that, but the way it was stacking... Even if he missed, he would still store the energy within his body. A key sign of the skill that Allura created in the Inverted World. One that Alice wasn't sure if the real one knew or not.

The seven days of execution!

By allowing the target 'seven days' to prepare, Allura is able to unleash a final strike far beyond her maximum power. A ritual that gives the opponent time in exchange for power.

But seeing the confusion in his eyes, Alice figured that was probably not the case. Allura wasn't one to leave the Abyss after all, so it was unlikely for her to visit the east.

Either way, she's already got a rough idea of how the Vermillion clan generates power in the punches. And if she was to be honest, she was a horrible match up for them. Not only could she disperse their power through the use of the Void, but she could also take them out in an instant before they could stack up enough power.

Of course, Xiao An was an exception since his stacking method and generation was weirder than the rest.

Regardless, this kind of fighting style didn't benefit her at all though the stacking function was interesting to an extent.

She had her own idea regarding that though. An idea birthed from the natural phenomenon caused when she was using Duality and Tiamat's power.

The rings of natural energy that acted as amplifiers. If she could manually create one herself, wouldn't that mean she could use amplification without the need for two Abyss Lord Sigils?

However, the main task was still to finish what she came here to do.

Void Steps!

Appearing behind Hualing, Alice was about to go in for a strike when Xiao An appeared in her vision.

*BANG!!!

Catching his fist, Alice tossed him away but a stream of energy acted as a platform for him while Hualing tried to go for a palm strike against Alice's back.

Unfortunately for her, Alice avoided the strike and launched a counter, sending her sliding back several meters before coming to a stop.

The light emanating from the ring was amplified by this strike as Hualing took a sharp breath in from the hit before curling her lips up into a grin.

"Where's the big hit you did against the clan head? Or can you not use that more than once?" She asked, entering an offensive stance while Xiao An tried to ambush from behind.

Tilting her head to the side and grabbing his arm, Alice threw Xiao An over her shoulders before snapping her finger and pointing it above her.

A singularity spun to life, sucking the ambient energy in from around her.

"Who said? I simply wanted to see how you two would fair." Alice chuckled, flicking the half done Void Flux towards Hualing.

Slamming her hand down, Hualing began to control the energy around her before turning it into a guard.

To Alice's surprise, a fully fledged passive zone was spread out from Hualing!

The Void Flux began to destabilize before being shifted off to the side.

Once more, the halo absorbed some of this energy.

It wasn't the state of unity that Jin mentioned but it was still better than most that she's seen. In fact, it was even better than Qiu Qiu!

But despite all this, not much was known about the young lady of the Chi Clan. She wasn't even mentioned as one of the geniuses.

'She probably has her own circumstances.' Alyss theorised as Alice agreed with this sentiment.

"If you can use the next stage of the weapon Domain, how come few know your name?"

"Since when does someone ask so many questions during a fight!?" Hualing shouted back, closing the gap in an instant and went for a grapple.

Opening a portal beneath the girl to destroy her stance, Alice twisted her body and released a kick against Xiao An, pushing him back once more.

"Since the moment I realise I can take it easy against you two. Leisure comes to those that are strong." Alice shrugged with a smirk.

"That and..." Trailing off slightly, Alice slammed her palm down and created a river of blood around the venue!

Both Hualing and Xiao An felt danger and wanted to run but metal chains shot out of the river, holding them in place.

"Why shouldn't I have a quick conversation with a would be drinking buddy? I still haven't tried the Nine Sun's Liquor you know?" Alice modified her voice to match that of her disguise, Ecila.

'Ecila, Alice, really?' Alyss stared at Alice with an are you serious expression.

'What? It worked for the time.'

Hearing about the Nine Sun's Liquor and Alice calling her a would be drinking buddy, Hualing immediately realised who Alice was.

Just as she was about to say something, Alice jumped up into the air before creating a flaming bow.

Pulling her arm back, she curled her lips up into a grin as dark clouds began to gather above.

Resonance!

A white and red dress manifested across her body as the pattern in her eye transformed into that of a spider lily.

Blood converged from below to form a single crimson arrow and she took aim at the sight board of the Vermillion clan.

Flames erupted from the arrow as the convergence of energy caused the tiles in the courtyard to get ripped up from the ground!

Void Flux!

*BANG!!!

Releasing the arrow, a torrent of destruction rushed towards the building. The blinding light caused everyone to avert their gaze while preparing themselves for an explosion.

But everything disappeared as though it never existed.

The killing intent faded away.

The overwhelming surge of energy disappeared and even the earthquake caused by the creation of the arrow ceased.

For a brief moment, they thought that maybe it was a hallucination all along.

But after opening their eyes and turning their gaze to the main compound, they paled upon seeing a scorched earth where the building used to exist.

Miraculously, every worker that was inside found themselves safely transported to the courtyard.

Both Xiao An and Hualing paled when imagining what kind of destruction might've been caused should the arrow be aimed towards them. However, this simply reinforced the fact that the demoness or rather, Alice, never killed anyone during these 'invasions' of sects and clans.

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Standing in front of the restaurant, Hualing was greeted with the... familiar? The sight of rushing employees and dishes being prepared.

In the restaurant, she could see Alice in her disguise with Jin by her side, enjoying the meals.

"Are you sure she's the one?" Xiao An asked curiously as Hualing hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"I know I didn't hear wrong. She clearly mentioned Nine Sun's Liquor and being a drinking buddy. The only one I talked to that could potentially be a drinking buddy would be Ecila." Hualing furrowed her brows before entering the restaurant.

"Over here!" Alice called out with a grin.

Gesturing at the seat near her, she scanned them up and down before nodding in satisfaction.

"Seems like the two of you are unscathed. That's a relief. I was wondering if I might've hit you too hard." Alice chuckled as the two sat down.

"Aiyo! Just relax okay? I'm not here to fight today nor am I here to kill." Alice waved her hand as they were on guard.

There were many questions on her mind but Hualing only had one that she wanted to ask.

"Why? Why did you attack the sects and clans?"

Scratching her chin momentarily, Alice chuckled.

"Well if I attack with killing intent, they're more likely to show everything they've got right? If I just go for a spar, they'll hold stuff back since they're not under the threat of death."

Chapter 593 - 593: Trifecta

Listening to Alice's explanation, Hualing couldn't help but find it unbelievable.

Yet at the same time, she couldn't deny the fact that most sects or clans would then choose to hide their trump cards.

Even though they may be in an alliance on the surface, there were still brewing conflicts where the eyes don't see.

If an enemy family were to find out about their trump card, they could plan against it easily.

A great example was what the families managed to accomplish during the Phoenix Dragon Gathering. They managed to gather information about the current state of the sect disciples, their trump cards and weaknesses.

Using that, they easily swept through the competition.

So while Alice's method was... definitely aggressive in nature, it was probably the best way to get the enemy to show her everything they've got.

"Wait, even if you say that, most of the families already know you don't kill. So wouldn't they hide it anyway?" Hualing asked as Alice swallowed her food.

"Excellent question. But when you have this kind of killing intent targeted at you, do you think you still have the option of holding back?" Alice narrowed her gaze as an overwhelming wave of killing intent locked onto Hualing.

The fight or flight instinct was triggered and her face paled.

During their fight, Alice had actually held back since they knew each other to some extent.

"See? Though I will say the quality of... elders and sect leaders has been disappointing. They can't even compare to some of the random Hunters I've seen in the Abyss." Alice lamented.

Even though there have been a few surprises during her trip on the surface, the overall combat power was far lower than what she expected.

A student with three Sigils in the Abyss could probably take out several adults with four Sigils on the surface. The martial arts was interesting but heavily relied on the mastery of Zones. Without these Zones, the martial arts couldn't even exhibit 60% of their power.

Perception and control were the key components of the fighting style of the East.

And in this regard, Alice was left disappointed.

Hell, she was even considering whether or not it was worth to fight the remaining families or sects.

However, Alyss had an interest in martial arts so Alice would simply tag along.

"I also have a few questions for the two of you though. Out of everyone that I've seen, you're the only one that's shown a proper Passive Zone. Yet I haven't heard anything about you. Why's that?" Alice asked, pointing her chopstick at Hualing who glanced down before letting out a sigh.

"Well... People hate geniuses right? If I show up at the Phoenix Dragon gathering and show that I can do what I can, wouldn't that just put too many targets on my family?" Hualing admitted while scratching her cheek.

Even though the Chi clan was part of the six houses, their power was still relatively low. In fact, it was their alliance with the Vermillion family that helped them tide over the difficult times.

It's also why it was hard for her father to reject their suggestion.

"I mean... I guess. But if it was me- Actually, never mind I get what you mean." Alice was about to deny it but recalled her training within the Inverted World.

She didn't have the power to defend herself nor was she sure of what might happen if she showed her talent. Therefore, she held herself back while learning as much as she could from the Apostles.

In this regard, what Hualing was doing was the same as her.

Thankfully, most of the guests and guards were taken care of during her invasion so only Xiao An saw Hualing's Zone.

"Now onto you tall lad. Your fighting style, where did you learn it? It's different to what I've seen from your family members. The way of generating power and stacking charges is different." Alice asked, glancing at Xiao An.

Allura's method of using energy was too uncommon for it to be a simple coincidence.

There must be a connection.

Xiao An was about to say something when he saw Alice's gaze. He understood that she must have some kind of idea and recalling her strength, it wouldn't do him good to hide.

"There was an incident in the past. The... Three of us, me, Hualing and Huaning fell into the Abyss. It was a pretty deep layer since a fight must've broken out and pierced the boundaries between the two worlds.

"We encountered a tall woman who seemed injured at the time but she still protected us from the beasts that tried to take our life. I took inspiration from the way she fought since I believed it to be better than my family's current style of martial arts and incorporated it into the way I fight." Xiao An explained as Alice scratched her chin.

A tall woman, injured, took inspiration. It was pretty clear that the one they met was most definitely Allura.

Knowing how she's injured thanks to the battle in the past, she must've exerted herself at that time.

"I see... the one you met is my mentor/mother. No wonder your fighting style reminded me of her."
Alice waved her hand while Xiao An paused before fully digesting what she just said.

"Meh, if you met her in the past then so be it." Alice changed subjects before pulling out a sheet of paper and drawing something on it.

Left speechless by the fact that Alice brushed over something that would usually be important, the duo were about to say something when they saw what she was drawing.

Three eyes in a flame.

"Are you two perhaps familiar with this symbol?" Alice asked, showing them the drawing.

Furrowing her brows, Hualing examined the icon before nodding her head.

"It's a branch of the cult. Though apparently a coup was launched. This was the news a month or so ago. The old name is..."

"Trifecta." Jin cut in surprising the three of them.

Blinking her eyes, Hualing nodded her head.

"Yeah, it's called the Trifecta. Though originally, we all thought it was just a combat squad of sorts."
Hualing explained.

Setting aside the fact that Jin knew them, Alice stretched her neck before standing up.

"Interesting... I'm guessing if I want to know information about this Trifecta, I'll have to meet the sovereign sects right?" Alice asked.

Just as Hualing was about to nod, she paused as she realised that if she says yes, there's no doubt that Alice would attack the Sovereign sects to get what she wants.

"Are you going to attack the Sovereign sects too?" Hualing asked as Alice nodded her head as though it's the most natural thing in the world.

"2 comes after 1 and 3 comes after 2. 1, 2, 3 no? So if I take out the sects and clans, what makes you think I won't go after the Sovereign sects? Plus, there's a higher chance that their martial arts is more interesting than the rest." Alice chuckled.

She understood that her battle junkie twin wouldn't pass up this chance.

'Who the f*ck are you calling a battle junkie??? You realise that I've been staying put for most of the journey until now right? If anything, you're the combat sexual between the two of us.' Alyss spat out in annoyance, feeling slandered by Alice's description.

With how Alice experiments with her own body, spells and such, it's clear that she has more screws loose than her.

She wasn't as bad as her and that's something she didn't want to change.

'Combat sexual??? Me??? If you're gonna call me a name at least make it accurate!' Alice pouted in annoyance.

Anyone who spent any form of time with her would understand that she loved alcohol far more than she loved fighting!

While Alice was arguing with herself in her mind, both Hualing and Xiao An were just... staring at her in full confusion.

She just kind of stopped mid conversation and blanked out, staring into space.

"Is... Is she alright?" Hualing hesitated before waving her hand in front of Alice's face. Seeing that she wasn't even blinking, Hualing couldn't help but shiver from how freaky it was.

"She gets like this sometimes. Talking to the voices in her head. Give her a few moments and she'll be back to normal." Jin shrugged as he was long used to this.

There was... a serious air around him at this moment. A sharp glint that wasn't there before.

"While Alice speaks to the voices in her head, I have a question for you. Does the name Chen Sen ring a bell?" Jin asked.

Unlike Alice's killing intent, his intent wasn't tyrannical or abrupt.

Instead, it felt like a creeping serpent, slowly surrounding the two like a rolling mist, encroaching and sealing them in a boundary of killing intent.

Fighting back with his own killing intent, Xiao An glared at Jin who didn't back down at all.

Before a fight could break out, Hualing tapped Xiao An on the shoulder before shaking her head.

"No. If that's a member of the Trifecta, then unfortunately we don't have any information about them. You should know that news rarely escape the south. The fact that we know a coup even happened is already surprising." Hualing explained as Jin glanced down and sighed.

The killing intent disappeared as though it never existed and he sat down, eating his food without saying anything else.

###

"Welcome to the east ya little sh*ts. We only have one goal here and that's to find out whoever the f*ck has been contacting the outer gods. Any questions?" Rosalyn asked while folding her arms.

"Yeah, just one." Ria held up her arm.

"Shoot."

"Are you actually coming with us when you say 'we' or are you just throwing your chores to us again?"

"That's a mighty fine question hahahaaa... No." Rosalyn replied bluntly before disappearing in a swarm of blood bats that evaporated in an instant.

". . ."

"You really should be expecting how she'll reac-"

"Shut up Luke."

Chapter 594 - 594: Jin's Background

After talking with Hualing and Xiao An a little longer, Alice wanted to try the Nine Sun's Liquor but both Jin and Xiao An advised her against it. At least for now since the city was still on guard thanks to her stunt.

"Urg... that's the main reason I stayed another day though." Alice complained, slouching over the table.

"But fine, I guess I did crash a wedding. While we're on the topic, why did you look like you were about to die? I thought the two of you got along pretty well." Alice asked curiously.

"Erm..." Scratching her cheek awkwardly, Hualing glanced up at Xiao An.

"It's not that I have anything against Xiao An but rather just the families involved." Hualing admitted as Alice raised an eyebrow before nodding.

"So what's your plan now then? I crashed your wedding and put a halt to things. Are they going to try again or leave things be?" Alice asked as Xiao An stepped up.

"The family won't be looking at the wedding for the time being. If they try again after both clan heads got knocked down flat by you, it'll be a little tone-deaf. Instead, they'll be putting their focus on the Demon Extermination Squad.

"They... Hmm... They say you might be a spy from the cult because you hold a unique energy from the Cult. But from what I've seen, I don't believe that's the case." Xiao An paused briefly before deciding to reveal some information on their end.

"That so? I've had some interactions with them before. Well, if they're who I think they are. But I wouldn't say I'm on their side." Alice was rather surprised.

She wasn't sure what he meant by the distinct energy of the cult.

But at least in her own body, there were four types. Abyss, Void, Holy and Eldritch. Considering Enris's nature... the likelihood of the energy being Holy was high. Even if they are bloodthirsty brutes.

However, if that was the case, then there should be plenty that have this form of energy.

So maybe it was something more distinct and easier to categorise.

And if that was the case, then what was it?

The more she understood about energy, the better she could utilize it. Thanks to the special nature of Cayla, perceiving energy was akin to cooking.

She could see the composition, texture and behaviour. All that was left was to understand and use it.

"That's a relief then. If you're not part of the Cult then there's no need for them to keep sending people to track you down." Hualing sighed in relief.

She wasn't scared for Alice but rather the alliance of Sects and houses at this point!

Seeing her power, even just momentarily, she understood what kind of monster stood in front of them.

If she wanted to, she could wipe out this city with a single flick of her hand.

Perhaps if it was in the Abyss, there might be someone to defend against her.

But a vast majority of people in the East focus on human to human combat rather than city scale attacks.

With such power at her disposal, there's no need for Alice to lie about who she's affiliated with.

"Huh? Why would I want that? I WANT them to come to me." Alice blinked her eyes.

Hualing's smile twitched as she understood what kind of person Alice is now.

"But what about you? Now that the wedding's on halt, are you going to be working with the family to get revenge on me?" Alice asked with a grin.

Hualing was the first to showcase something beyond a weapon domain and it would be quite a waste for her not to fully train in it.

"I'm thinking of using this as an excuse to leave the family and go to the Demon Extermination Squad. At least it's a good justification so the Vermillion Clan won't blame my father." Hualing smiled awkwardly, not wanting to fight Alice since there was no need to.

"I'm also going to sign up for the Demon Extermination Squad. If the two of us go, they'll have no grounds to blame or force the wedding to go through." Xiao An added.

"This... Demon Extermination Squad. It's where that Qiu Qiu girl is right? What is the Squad even around for?"

To the public, the Demon Extermination Squad was simply made to keep the borders safe from the south. But Alice understood that this was just what they said to the civilians.

As members of the six houses, there's no doubt that Hualing and Xiao An knew more than the average person.

"Well... The Squad was made with three purposes in mind. First, a separate force from the Sects and houses. Two, to keep the Cult at bay while also acting as a defence against outsiders from overseas. And lastly... To act as a deterrent force for the three Sovereign sects.

"But that's kind of my own theory based what my impressions." Hualing shrugged.

As a member of the six houses, Hualing was familiar with how the three Sovereign sects acted. Each one has its own doctrine but in recent years, they've been exhibiting... habits that tie back to the Gods that interact with this world.

Therefore, the next generation needed to be able to keep up against the Sovereign Sects should they decide to try and offer the entirety of the East to the Gods.

'Jin did mention that each of the sect leaders belonging to the Sovereign sects could use the Absolute Zone with the fourth being unaffiliated. So it's safe to assume that the fourth is probably the creator of this Demon Extermination Squad.' Alyss spoke up as Alice paused before nodding her head.

Indeed, if the leader of the Squad wasn't as strong as the Sovereign sects, this unaffiliated party would've been taken over by now.

Exchanging information for a bit longer, Alice eventually bid farewell to the two for now, hoping to catch up and have a drink in the future.

Leaving the city, Alice noticed that Jin was quieter than usual. He would occasionally space out for a brief moment.

"Worried about the cult?" Alice asked out of the blue, surprising Jin.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Why else? You're spacing out after Hualing mentioned the Cult and coup. Then you went and released your killing intent. No matter how I'm talking to the voices in my head, it's not hard to detect what goes on around me. And third, I have some connections to it myself.

"I wouldn't say good connections but regardless, they're connections. And the philosophy behind your martial arts matches my thoughts and ideas on one of Enris's Apostles. With all of this, what makes you think I wouldn't form a connection between you and the cult?" Alice rolled her eyes as the lad in front of her was a little too naïve for someone who belonged to the Cult.

"Ahaha, it was a little too obvious huh?" Jin smiled awkwardly while scratching his hair.

"You don't say, so care to explain? I enjoyed having you as a travel companion..." Alice trailed off before her figure faded away.

"I'd rather not change that by making you the next victim." She whispered behind his ear as a blood needle was placed on his cheek, pointing directly at his eye.

Her spare hand was aiming at his lower back, ready to rip out his spine if he did anything funny.

Once again, Jin was reminded simply how ruthless Alice could be despite her lax attitude.

She could joke, drink and even drop her guard. But at the end of the day, she will still kill you without batting an eye in the most gruesome manner if you're her enemy.

Raising his hands slowly in surrender, Jin tried his best to keep his calm.

"You mentioned that you wanted to be my disciple when you first met me. I don't suppose that has anything to do with your relation to the Cult and this Trifecta coup?" Alice asked, narrowing her gaze at Jin who trembled under her scrutiny.

"It's the same answer as before. It's to defend myself. I wanted to be able to protect myself if anyone from the Trifecta was to come across me."

"And your parents?" Alice asked.

The last time she asked this question, he mentioned that they were dead without any emotion.

But now...

"They were killed by the Trifecta during the coup. I managed to escape the South thanks to their sacrifice." Jin replied.

Despite it supposedly being his 'parents' who died, he didn't show any kind of mournful emotion.

"Are you sure they're your parents? No rage? No sadness? I might as well call them strangers." Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, they're my parents."

[Ask him if they're his birth parents or people assigned to raise him.] Cayla suddenly spoke up.

Finding it a little strange, Alice asked Jin Cayla's question word for word.

Hearing this question, Jin was clearly surprised.

"I didn't think you were familiar with the traditions of the Cult. They're people assigned to me. I don't know my birth parents." Jin replied honestly.

He wasn't lying to her, he was simply answering her questions exactly as she asked them.

Therefore, if she asked if they're his parents, technically they are. But whether or not he felt a connection to them... then he could only say no. At most, he saw them as retainers rather than a familial connection. So, even if they're dead, he felt no pain.

[So that old tradition still lives. . . Alice, I believe this kid is part of an. . . Old ritual. Similar to the one that Ria was part of but more brutal.]

Chapter 595 - 595: Eclipse Cult's Old Ritual

[So that old tradition still lives. . . Alice, I believe this kid is part of an. . . Old ritual. Similar to the one that Ria was part of but more brutal.]

'More brutal??? Than Ria's???' Alice paused in surprise.

While she didn't know the full details of the ritual that Ria was involved in, what little information she had was enough to tell her of the brutality of the Eclipse.

How they treat lives as nothing but material for their next ritual.

Yet despite knowing what Ria had gone through, Cayla still said that what Jin was a part of was even more brutal!

[The purpose of this old tradition was to cultivate vessels that could act as anchors for the Apostle's power. Mediums for them to channel and use. In short, it turns whoever 'survives' the Ritual into a one time use expendable item.

[During this ritual, the candidates are... reshaped to become perfect vessels for the Apostle. Anything that doesn't sync up is eliminated. Emotions, ideologies, hobbies and so on. The details are largely unknown but I do know that the success rate is low. The requirements of a vessel is very stringent and if they do succeed, the product becomes highly valuable and looked after by the Apostle personally.

[If I recall, in history, I know of only two successful completions. Each success was essentially akin to a fake Apostle. Stronger than a Lord, weaker than a true Apostle. With that in mind, even a slight benefit could turn the tides of battle in an instant.

[Back then... Even Nyer struggled a little against the fake Apostle.]

Hearing this, Alice frowned. She knew full well how strong Nyer was. And if he struggled in the past, then the person beside her was essentially a ticking time bomb.

'So he has no control over his life? Any moment he can just flip sh*t and become the fake Apostle of War?'

[Much like Ria, it seems like the ritual wasn't finished properly. Right now, he's in an incomplete state. He still has his own thoughts, hobbies and personality. Otherwise, you'd feel the power of an Apostle from him and he'd be a much different Jin to the one you know now.]

Scratching her chin, Alice couldn't help but praise the Trifecta for beginning the Coup.

If the Ritual succeeded, then there's a high chance that Enris would have two and a half Apostles at her disposal.

Not a great sign considering they might need to deal with Famine if they want to help Allura.

'So should I take care of him early or not?' Alice narrowed her gaze.

Now that she knows that Jin was a potential vessel for War, even if she enjoyed his presence, this was not a risk she was willing to take.

[He's already incompatible. If anything, it's more valuable to keep him alive. He's still a product of the ritual. Therefore, so long as he exists, they can't conduct more rituals of the same nature without a significant setback unless they kill him. He essentially acts as a floodgate right now.] Cayla clarified.

As concerning as it was that Jin was a potential vessel, he had far more benefits alive than dead.

'So as long as he's alive, it's harder for the Eclipse to get a fake vessel?'

[That is the case yes. At least if the ritual hasn't changed since the time I got the information.]

Scratching her hair, Alice sighed in frustration before giving Jin a slight push and retrieving her killing intent.

"You're not going to kill me?" Jin asked curiously, wondering why Alice spared him.

If she knew the ritual that he was part of, she must understand what the Cult was trying to do. What they were looking to accomplish.

"And what would killing you accomplish other than saving the Cult some effort? This ritual that you're part of, as long as you're alive you can delay their next ritual right?" Alice asked as Jin paused before shrugging.

"The ritual never concluded since the Coup interrupted. But enough time has passed and I doubt my instructor would be happy with what I've become." Jin scratched his cheek awkwardly.

"And is your instructor the Apostle of War?"

"Pft, if he was, I wouldn't have escaped from the South." Jin admitted with a laugh.

"Becoming a disciple of the Apostle is the final step to the ritual. It's where he overlooks the final steps to ensure the vessel was made properly. Once it reaches that stage, there's no going back. My instructor was someone familiar with the philosophy of the Apostles.

"To hammer it into my body and prepare me to accept the teachings fully." He sat down, waiting for Alice to decide his fate.

If she decides to kill him, there's nothing he could do. If she spares him, he'll wander the region as was his original plan.

Looking at the lad who resolved himself to his fate, Alice felt a vein bulge on her neck.

No matter what the context was, seeing him give up in such a manner annoyed her. She hated the fact that he didn't want to fight back, she hated the fact that he was letting someone else control his life.

Granted, she was no different when Kaden found her.

She couldn't take her own life, she couldn't escape. All she could do was hope that the prison blew up or something, taking her along with it.

Looking at him felt like looking at her own ugly reflection.

She hated it.

"You wanted to defend yourself right? So that you don't become the same as the Apostle and get your body stolen from you." Alice asked as Jin wasn't sure where Alice was going with this.

Regardless, he nodded his head.

He wanted to protect himself so that he could fend off those who might be seeking to finish the ritual. Or perhaps those who wanted to eliminate him so that the ritual could be restarted.

Without sufficient power, he could forget about trying to survive any of it.

"I don't know sh*t about your traditions and the whatnot. But what I do know is that you're better off alive than dead. Every day you're alive is another day that the Eclipse is held back from doing another one of these rituals.

"So you're going to make a contract with me. In return for me teaching you how to fight, you'll try your best to survive. And not just survive either. You have to live.

"Find hobbies, make friends explore the world. As long as the Eclipse doesn't get to you, that's fine. And in return, if you ever find yourself in a situation where the Eclipse will take you away or turn you into a vessel, your soul becomes mine." Alice needled down in front of Jin as the seriousness in her eye gave him quite the shock.

However, this was a far better option than just dying. And if he's captured by the Eclipse, his fate is already sealed. Therefore, so what if Alice takes his soul? It's better than giving it to the Apostle of War.

"Alright."

Hearing his confirmation, Alice placed her hand against the ground as blood began to expand with them in the centre.

Golden ritualistic symbols appeared, woven by fine threads of energy.

Little by little, the nature of the contract is transferred to Jin's mind, letting him know what the clauses are.

A binding contract reinforced by the strange violet flames that spawn from Alice's blood.

A Law of Agreement that takes his life the moment the requirements are fulfilled.

To sign his soul away to the Eclipse or to sign it away to Alice.

This was the question posed to him right now. With that in mind, he might as well give it to the girl in front of him. The one that wanted him to survive, no, to live a proper life.

As he accepted the contract, Jin flinched in pain as cuts appeared on his arm.

His own blood filtered out of his body before turning into a dark red thread that weaved itself with the ritualistic symbols that Alice summoned.

An acceptance of the contract and a link connecting to two together.

Alice could see faint fine threads linking them with the world acting as the catalyst needed for this contract.

While Alice was seeing the connection, Jin felt a connection form between them.

In an instant, he was sent to a world of darkness with nothing around him. Little by little, chains start to manifest as the wailing of souls went from a quiet whisper to a roaring screech.

He felt as though he was merely one in a mass of countless, a speck in the ocean. It wasn't that he was transported into a realm of nothingness but rather there were too many souls around him!

Was this... his new fate?

Jin couldn't help but wonder if he made a mistake when Alice tapped him on the forehead, snapping him out of it.

"Now that the contract is sorted, we'll begin the proper training. You will tell me all the Sigils you have and I will draft up a plan. I will be teaching you casting and how to properly expand your zone.

"Alyss will be teaching you how to fight and she'll also be responsible for refining your instincts. Try not to die." Alice narrowed her gaze with a grin as Jin shivered.

He could feel the grip she had on his shoulder.

Firm, unyielding and refusing to even budge.

He couldn't run.

###

Sitting with her legs crossed, a cloaked woman could be seen scratching her chin before a wide grin appeared on her face.

It was a mix of both anger and amusement.

A sixth sense knowing that someone touched what belongs to her.

Chapter 596 - 596: Training Jin

"Focus! You're not sensing you're just scrambling!" Alyss shouted as she stomped in front of Jin.

Giving herself a low centre of gravity, she jammed her palm into his stomach, causing him to buckle over before following up with an uppercut.

As his body was flying through the air, Alyss grabbed his ankles, slamming him into the ground. The recoil caused his body to hover momentarily.

Taking this chance, Alyss twisted her body and hit him with a round house kick, sending his body crashing into a boulder, cracking it in the process.

"Don't panic, don't fear. Simply observe and keep observing. React not out of fear but out of calculation. Calmness of the mind, survival of the body." Alyss instructed, rushing forward.

Panicking for a moment, Jin gritted his teeth and jumped over the boulder to dodge her punch.

Phantom Swallow Steps – Shift!

Alyss's body blurred, appearing behind Jin as she went in for a punch.

Just as he tried to use his martial arts to counter, Alyss grabbed him by the wrist and threw him against the ground.

"Have you forgotten my words? Every time you try to use the marital arts of the Eclipse Cult, I will increase the intensity. The further you are from the war Apostle's teachings, the better!"

Raising her heel above her head, Alyss dropped down.

*BANG!!!!

The ground shattered apart as a spider web of cracks expanded out but Jin managed to roll out of the way.

Instead of being allowed to use the Eclipse Reaver style of martial arts, Alyss had been teaching him the theories of the marital arts that she'd stolen thus far. The philosophies and movements involved within each of them. To filter out the bad and keep only the good.

Skybound Swallow being exceptionally good for footwork and quick counters. Instant Draw for the lethality of the opening move. Scorching Tyrant Arts from the Blazing Sun sect for the intensity of their attacks.

Unyielding Colossus from the Titan sect for their stability and unshakable foundation in each movement. Chi clan for their soft parries and the ability to fight against people with higher power and finally, the Vermillion clan for taking advantage of space to generate power and stacking up momentum.

Of course, there are certain stances, moves and even forms that can't be replicated just through theory and understanding. They require certain powers to achieve the desired effects to the maximum potential. However, for those techniques, Alyss ignored them since Jin couldn't switch out his Sigils.

All of the core philosophies were hammered into him through Alyss's own understanding. To replace the teachings of the Cult and to remove the connections he has towards the martial arts.

Stepping down, energy flowed through his body as Jin activated the movement technique and approached Alyss with the intention of a rapid counterattack.

However, before he could take the final step to generate the power needed, Alyss intercepted, grabbing him by the neck.

"You took too long! What are you going to do if they interrupt that last step like I did?" Lifting him up, Alyss let go before twisting her body with superb flexibility, raising her heel above him and dropping it down onto his shoulders.

*BANG!!!

###

"Urg..." Feeling pain all over his body, Jin found himself on a bed of metal covered in bandages. He could feel some of the wounds already in the process of healing with Alice holding her hand over him.

"You should be a bit more careful when training with Alyss. Her standards are rather high you know?" Alice chuckled as Jin let out a sigh and tried to relax his body.

"In order to open your Zone, perception is a must. But there are moments when the eyes can betray you. Whether that's through deception, abilities or even footwork to confuse the gaze.

"A friend of mine was able to do just that. You see, my eye is quite special. It's more perceptive than the rest, allowing me to see things they cannot see. Thus my friend created a technique that could manipulate the perception of those she fights.

"To draw out the moment when they're focused and force them to 'space' out." Alice chuckled, recalling Selen's technique the first time she showed it.

Alice had to admit, if Selen never told her the gimmick behind it, Alice wouldn't have been able to beat her at all. The power to manipulate perception through time was truly a feat that even Allura would praise if she knew about it.

"How do you beat someone like that then?" Jin raised an eyebrow in confusion.

If the skill was truly as Alice had described, it's impossible to defeat!

"I'll be honest, you don't. Before she told me the secret of her skill, I lost to her convincingly. No matter how much I tried to break it, it always failed. She even gave me a hint at one point, letting me see if I could figure it out. It was only after she told me did I force a draw to happen." Alice admitted with a shrug.

Indeed with Selen's skill, she was practically unbeatable in a one on one situation. Any amount of focus could be drawn out to forcefully open a gap in the opponent's guard.

"But she's an anomaly. In order to fight someone like her, you need high control over your own senses. To be able to force yourself to turn your attention away and keep calm, no matter how dangerous it may be.

"Basically, you need to get used to using all of your senses during a battle. To control them as you would with your eyes. Feel the wind and vibrations across your body, the prickle of your skin from your sixth sense and even taste the air. Taste how it changes based on what skill they use. Everything can be used to hone the boundaries of your Zone." Alice explained, taking her hand away.

Jin doesn't have regeneration like they do so his training needed to take regular breaks.

The Sigil she was using to heal him essentially put the body into a 'debt' state. As long as she didn't overdo the healing, this debt can be cleared up after some sleep.

"Anyways come on, you're finished with Alyss's training but you're only beginning with mine."

###

While Alyss's training pushed his body to the limit, Alice's training pushed his senses as far as possible.

Training under waterfalls to pick up the distinct sounds of rocks flying towards him. Blind folding his eyes and ears to push his sense of smell to the limit and even making it so that the sense of touch was the only thing he could access.

Flaming arrows that brushed past his skin, the static in the air.

If it wasn't for the fact that it was meant to heighten his senses, this would be no different to torture. In fact, this was indeed torture. No one in the right mind would go through this kind of training.

Those without a keen sense at birth cannot open the gates to open a Zone. But through this, through life and death training, Alice will forcefully make Jin open the gates.

"Not enough! You're taking too much time to think. Familiarise yourself with the options open to you. The martial arts and movements. Once you're familiar, they become instinct. Once they become instinct, it eliminates the time needed for thinking." Alyss would shout while linking up four forms of martial arts and unleashing a tsunami of attacks against his body.

"Feel the prickling on your skin. Your body warning you of the danger to come. Feel the grasp of death and evade its touch. Dance on the edge, teasing the reaper yet never allowing him to control you." Alice would instruct while surrounding him with a hailstorm of needles and flaming arrows.

The tingle on the skin as her killing intent focuses on his limbs.

"Keep your lower body stable but know when to flow like the tide. Switch between the forms to adapt to the ebb and flow. Never fight against the current, embrace it, use it to your advantage. Embolden the might of the offence with the raging current.

"If you require its help yet it refuses to turn in your favour, manipulate it. Change its course, redirect and redistribute. Use everything that I've told you to make it happen. If there is no path ahead, sometimes it simply takes a single step back to see the full picture."

Their training continued throughout the entire day. 8 hours spent with Alyss to train the body, the other 8 to train the senses and casting.

"There are three foundations to casting. Power, speed and efficiency. Heighten two and the other will fall. For greater power and speed, you lose efficiency. For greater efficiency and speed, you lose power. However, the form of casting can drastically change this foundation.

"Speed and efficiency with the power of rotational forces heightens piercing potential despite the drop in power."

Jin didn't have any Sigils to help him cast. Right now, he possessed four Sigils, two Anti Beast two Anti Hunter.

All of his Sigils are those that help him prolong the fight, to savour the feeling of war and destruction.

Therefore, Alice wanted him to find something more suitable for his fifth and Sixth Sigils, something that'll suit the new style of fighting he wanted to go for. Right now, the best she could do was teach him theory.

###

Standing guard by the gate, several clan heads and the last two remaining sect leaders couldn't help but stare blankly.

"Are you sure she was enroute here?" One of them couldn't help but ask.

After all, the demoness attacked the Vermillion and Chi clan. Going off of her predicted route, she should've arrived at this place a day or so ago.

Yet she was nowhere in sight.

They couldn't expect the reason as to why Alice wasn't here yet was because she was busy training Jin.

Chapter 597 - 597: Modified Eclipse Reaver

Sitting on a rock with his eyes closed, Jin pushed his senses to the limit.

The rustling of leaves, the howling of winds and the waving of the grass. He pushed his senses of hearing and touch to the absolute limit so that he could perceive the world around him without the use of sight.

A step.

The sounds of the grass had changed. Something was in the way.

Curling his lips up into a confident smile, Jin snapped his eyes open and turned around.

"There!"

"Wrong." Chopping down with her hand against his head from the left, Alice sighed as Jin wasn't able to open the Zone at all.

Even though he was refining his senses, it still fell short of a Zone. It was akin to a swordsman who knew how to use a sword but didn't have a weapon.

Of course, his senses could be refined further in order to grasp the Zone but the issue was that there was not even the slightest sign of it opening.

Completely sealed shut.

She tried killing intent, she tried to have him single out his senses and even had Alyss spar with him regularly while holding back. Strong enough to kick his ass but held back enough so the fight wasn't ended in an instant.

Hell, he couldn't even open a weapon domain never mind the next stage up being the Zone.

Getting Jin to sit back down on the rock, Alice manipulated a blood needle through the grass in order for him to refine his senses.

'Maybe I'm approaching this the wrong way.' Alice thought to herself.

She tried her best to recall everything that she learned from the Apostle.

Rather than teaching her Offensive or Absolute Zone right off the bat, they worked on the foundation of the Passive Zone.

And in order to create the Passive Zone, Alice needed to understand her own limits. Detection Range, Reaction Range and Counter Range.

How fast can she detect the attack? How fast can she choose a course of action and what is her optimal range of counter?

She had to figure out these three in order to formulate the Passive Zone.

For Jin, Alice had already helped him figure out his Detection Range. Now was simply a case of reaction and counter. But herein lies the issue. Whenever he tries to react or counter, his Detection fluctuates and even weakens.

For that brief instance where he attacks, he'll lose track of his opponents.

A deadly mistake that shouldn't be allowed to continue.

However, Alice had another theory.

To begin with, the Zone was a unique boundary for each person. It changes based on their own habits and methods of counter.

Alice's Zone was large due to her wide detection thanks to Cayla. Not only that, but she could condense it down into a 5 meter radius around herself for the most optimal counter.

Naturally, this couldn't be applied to Jin since he'll have his own habits and methods. Trying to force him to follow her example wouldn't really work.

Furrowing her brows, Alice flicked her finger as the needle shot towards Jin.

Reacting to the sudden change, Jin turned to his left in an attempt to counter. But by the time he turned around, the needle was now approaching from behind.

"Anddd you're dead." Alice sighed while retrieving the needle.

Scratching his hair, Jin was a little disappointed himself as he slumped on the rock.

"When you detect the needle, you lose focus at the last moment. That split moment can be exploited if you don't prepare yourself properly. Are you not used to the counterattack or martial arts?" Alice asked while twirling the needle.

She needed to figure out why Jin was struggling so that she could help him resolve the issue.

Folding his arm, Jin thought about it for a moment before opening his mouth.

"I think it's because I'm still fighting my habits from the Cult. My first instinct is to use the Eclipse Reaver so it takes a moment for me to reign it in and use what Alyss taught me." Jin theorised.

[That would make sense as the ritual that he's part of is a brutal one. One moment of hesitation and it means death. There's no doubt that the people involved must've hammered in the Eclipse Reavers into his mind, ensuring that he'll default to it the moment his life is in danger.] Cayla added.

'So basically unless he uses the Eclipse Reaver, he won't be able to open a Zone?'

[There could be a high likelihood of that yes.]

Scratching her hair, Alice wondered what she could do to offset this. What could she do to remove what's been hammered into his instincts?

'I don't think he necessarily has to forget about using the chain blades. Eclipse Reaver doesn't have a set pattern to begin with. It's a series of movements that's entirely up to the user's decisions.

'Taking that into account, what if we just change the movements but keep the weapon? We'll meet up half way to resolve the instinct issue.' Alyss suggested.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice agreed, giving control to Alyss so that she could help Jin create a new set of movements for the renewed Eclipse Reaver.

The key to the new set of movements is preserving Jin's instinct with the chained blades but directing them to a new goal.

What used to be the desire for unrestricted destruction will be control. What breaks will now constrict.

To slowly eliminate the paths of retreat until there is only one path left and that's directly into the maw of the beast.

That night, Alyss stayed up longer than usual, referencing between the Sigils that Jin has and his habits. What his first instinct to danger would be and so on.

She needed to know as much as she could so that she could arrange a compatible set of movements for him.

'Berserker, area of effect, unrestricted power and momentum...' Alyss tapped her finger as she summarised the philosophy of the Eclipse Reaver. Everything was set up to cause as much havoc as possible in the midst of battle.

Instead of being a berserker, they wanted Jin to be a conductor. Someone who can control the battle with his chains.

In the Eclipse Reaver, the chains are merely a means to extend the range of the blades. There are only one or two movements that actually make use of it.

'Control. He can use the chains to bind, drag, manipulate and even restrict potential paths of movement.

'Precision. If he uses his body as an anchor, he can throw out the blades with the precision of rope darts. There must be a clear intent with every move to prevent wasted movement.

'Hunt. Like a beast, he must be relentless in his pursuit. Once engaged, only one can leave unless he chooses to give up.'

Creating a framework of what she wanted to teach, Alyss began to fuse different movements from each martial art using the modified Eclipse Reaver as a base.

Control: Chains and restriction.

Precision: Deception to create a gap for a precise strike. Every strike must have intent behind it. Efficiency and accuracy are key.

Hunt: Unrelenting. Each move is set up to exhaust the target so that he can unleash the final strike to end their life. Once bitten, the prey will not escape.

'For control, a merger between the Chi clan's soft parry and the Titan sect's stability will be good. Precision should be a mix between Skybound Swallow, Vermillion and traces from the Instant Draw.

'And finally, Hunt should involve the Blazing Sun sect's intensity, lethality from the Instant Draw and hints of the brutal nature from the Eclipse Reaver.'

With the theory now crafted, all that's left was to create the movements.

Once a clear goal was in mind, she just needed to create a bridge to reach that destination.

Seeing Alyss so focused, Alice couldn't help but chuckle as she decided not to interrupt her twin. She'll give her control of the body for as long as possible so that she can remain in this state of focus.

###

Waking up the next morning, Jin yawned before looking around him.

During their camping, he had gotten used to sleeping in trees much like Alice.

However, this morning was a little... different. He couldn't help but feel as though the height of the tree had shrunk a little.

Glancing down, he saw that he was basically at ground level as a majority of the tree has been cut away.

"The f*ck???"

Furrowing his brows, he jumped off and looked around him in confusion.

If the tree was damaged to this extent, how come he was still sleeping soundly?

There were hints of destruction all around him. Slashes against the rocks, chunks of the ground being torn up and even grooves where boulders used to be.

But there was one thing that was missing.

Alyss.

Alice wasn't the kind to wake up early so Jin couldn't help but feel as though something was wrong.

Packing his things, he looked around for her only to see a tree flying through the sky.

Quickly running towards where the tree was thrown from, he was shocked to find a large crater with the earth dug out and Alyss standing in the middle.

In her hands, she held a pair of chain blades created from blood and metal.

"You're up earlier than expected. Did I wake you up?" Alyss yawned, glancing over to Jin.

She spaced out momentarily and forgot to catch the tree she had thrown.

"No, no you didn't." Jin shook his head in disbelief. He simply couldn't figure out how she managed to create all this destruction without waking him up.

"That's good, you should be fully awake then. Come here, I'll teach you the new martial arts that I made."

". . . ??????????" Questions filled Jin's mind.

But most importantly, how the hell did she make a new martial art in one night????

Chapter 598 - 598: Teaching The Modified Eclipse Reaver

"I want you to use everything you know to try and beat me. In return, I'll use the new form that I've modified. No zone, no Sigils, just pure martial arts." Alyss instructed as she stood opposite him with chain blades in hand.

She had modified them to be a little longer than the blades that Jin had to suit the new fighting style.

Hearing her instructions, Jin understood that Alyss wanted to demonstrate it rather than just teach it through words.

Without any questions, he entered an offensive stance while Alyss did the same.

There wasn't any killing intent or threat of death. Instead, Jin could feel a looming presence. A shadow in the back of the mind, always present yet never in sight. A constricting aura that coiled around the arena, slowly encroaching with him in the centre.

'Unshackled, Unpredictable, Unstoppable.' Jin chanted the mantra of the Chaos Fang stance as he lunged forward.

Hooking the blades into the ground, he tossed a chunk of the earth towards Alyss, blocking her sight before entering Blade Tempest.

Twisting his body, a maelstrom of blades and chains rushed towards Alyss but she was unphased.

Coiling Serpent!

The blood chains connected to Alyss's chain blades whipped to life as they wrapped around the pieces of earth, breaking it apart in an instant.

Lashing out at Jin, the chains breached his stance and wrapped around his limbs!

Devouring Lock!

Pulling Jin towards her, Alyss stabbed toward his stomach as he gritted his teeth and twisted his body to the side with the help of the Skybound Swallow.

However, to his shock, the stab was not the real attack.

A net of chains appeared in the sky, blocking out his path of retreat as Alyss jumped back and tugged on her chains.

*SNAP!!!

All of the chains collapsed at once, wrapping around Jin and holding him in place.

"First form of the modified Eclipse Reaver. Focuses on control through chains and deception for the final strike. It may seem like the complete opposite to your Eclipse Reaver but it actually uses a lot of the movements from Chaos Fang." Alyss flicked her wrist as the chains loosened up and freed Jin.

Massaging his arms, Jin stood up.

"Now attack again." Alyss instructed.

Taking a deep breath, Jin nodded as he stomped down.

Ember Steps!

Rushing towards Alyss, he adjusted his grip on the Chain Blades.

Guillotine!

*CLANG!!!

Instead of hitting Alyss, the blades missed their target, causing it to clash against the chains!

Flicker Strike!

*KSH!!!!

Sparks flew as Alyss's blades clashed against Jin's chains, breaking his guard.

False Fangs!

Stabbing one of the blades into the ground with a step, Alyss used it as a pivot point to swing herself behind Jin, with a blade aiming for his neck.

After all his training, even if he doesn't have a Zone, he could still dodge something like this!

Phantom Swallow Steps – Veil!

Flicking forward momentarily, Jin went in for the counter but saw a smile on Alyss's face.

Falling Shadow!

*BANG!!!!

Inches away from his face, a blade crashed down from the sky, breaking his chains in half as cold sweat filled his back.

Had Alyss waited even a moment, his life would've been forfeit!

"Flicker Strike, a merge between the Ember Step and 'Swift' from the Phantom Swallow Steps. Focuses on speed and sudden changes by using a blade as an anchor. If done right, you'll look as though you're flickering through reality by exploiting blind spots.

"False Fangs, focuses on misdirection. By drawing their attention entirely on yourself, your second blade is allowed to do whatever you want. In this case, I linked it up to Falling Shadow.

"Similar to Guillotine, it's an attack from above. However, unlike Guillotine, this includes the principle of power and speed from other martial arts. Taking advantage of the space and momentum generated for one quick silent strike from above." Alyss explained the second form before repairing the chains that she broke with some metal.

For the modified Eclipse Reaver, there were four forms to choose from in battle.

First form, as explained, was one that focused on control and deception.

Second form focused on speed and assassination.

Third form was used if the second failed. A form based on power and momentum, taking advantage of their reach thanks to the chains and generating power from rotation.

Fourth was aimed at ending a fight. Of course, that's not to say the others didn't aim for the same thing. But rather, the fourth was one that locked you into that decision.

A self destructive form that focuses everything to kill your enemy at the expense of yourself.

A form that ensures absolute destruction by using the wielder as fuel.

No escape, no surrender, no retreat. A dance of life and death at the precipice.

Mutually assured destruction.

This form was actually a coincidence. Alyss only intended to make three forms with branching stances. But as she continued to develop this martial art, movements began to link up and she realised a potential fourth form.

Ironically, despite wanting to step away from the Eclipse Reaver, this fourth form might be the most similar.

The final desperate struggle of a cornered beast.

Therefore, Alyss didn't explain this fourth form. If Jin was talented and fully mastered the other three, he may discover this on his own. But before that moment, she'll only show him three forms.

###

Walking through the desert, a duo could be seen with tattered robes fluttering in the wind.

Neither of them looked like they were from the east but none dared to approach.

Their gaze sent shivers down the spines of those who made eye contact as they scrambled to hide from the duo.

"Why do they keep running..." One of them sighed, sitting down on an empty bench to get a break.

"Maybe because we've been lost for about a week now. Unfortunately, all of my tools are fried by this heat." The other shielded his eyes while glancing up at the sky.

Despite the temperature, they had to cover themselves with a tattered cloak.

If it was the normal sun, they wouldn't have to worry.

But the Sun in this region was one that's been... 'tampered' with by the Sun God himself.

Well, tampered wasn't the right word. Instead, it's better to call it a consequence of the past.

Regardless, thanks to that incident, if one were to walk exposed under the sun for a prolonged period of time, their bodies would begin slowly mummifying under the intense heat and concentrated rays.

"I don't look that scary do I??? I'm a charming pretty girl dammit." Ria complained, sprawling herself out on the table before sitting up in annoyance.

After being exposed to the sun, this table was not a comfortable place to rest on. In fact, it felt like she was lying down on a frying pan.

"Usually yes. But we don't exactly look healthy right now do we?" Luke forced a smile.

The Sun wasn't the only 'curse' on this place. The 'Moon' or rather shade, was also dangerous.

Hiding in the shade for too long causes phantoms to manifest, 'haunting' you and sucking away your life force, making one look haggard and withered. These 'phantoms' couldn't exactly be killed as they were more akin to spiritual parasites.

As it stands, neither Ria nor Luke had a way to deal with them.

The best they could do was alternate between exposing themselves to the Sun or hiding in the shade to keep themselves safe. A region of constant flux between Sun and Moon.

But the worst part of all, this region didn't have to suffer this kind of torment if the Gods decided to make a move.

According to Rosalyn, the creation of these curses was indeed an accident. But when the Gods found out that this could be turned into a different form of Myth or Legend to further enhance their powers, they left it be.

And now, this region was no different to a 'farm', maintained for the sake of their power.

Most found it difficult to escape and subjected themselves to this torment as death was the only other option.

Having gotten used to this form of living, they do the best they can to get through daily life.

Just thinking about it annoyed Ria as the Gods were all the same. All of them only doing things that benefit their agenda or greed without a care.

"And to think the Eclipse is worshipped in this f*cking place because both the Sun and Moon are assholes." Ria groaned in annoyance.

"It can't be helped. Only when the Eclipse appears in the sky are both curses balanced out, giving the people a well deserved break. It's only natural that they worship the Cult." Luke shook his head helplessly.

"Apparently the next Eclipse cycle is only two weeks from now. Rather than walking around aimlessly and... getting lost again, why don't we stay here for a bit?" He suggested.

Ever since arriving in this place, they've gotten lost for the entire week, unable to find a way out of this place.

Despite feeling as though they were walking in a straight line, they would always appear back where they began.

Therefore, Luke wanted to take his chances with the date of Eclipse.

Even if Ria's directional sense was bad, it didn't make sense for them to return where they began despite walking in a straight line.

"Fine..."

While Ria and Luke were suffering, Rosalyn was actually not far away from them and relaxing in the shade. She had a pair of sunglasses on and wearing a bikini while pinching the phantoms with her fingers.

To someone like her, these phantoms were no different from snacks.

Compared to Ria and Luke's suffering, she was practically on holiday.

Chapter 599 - 599: Jin's Incomplete Zone

She found herself in a river of blood. The iron on her tongue, the stench of death lingering in the air.

"W...why...." A soft voice trembled but the girl didn't listen.

She raised her fist.

*CRACK!!! CRACK!!! CRACK!!!

Repeated blows after blow. She held the young boy in front of her by the neck, punching without stop. Every punch with the desire to kill.

Even when her hands became bloodied, even when the bones protruded out of his face, she didn't stop.

Such was the ritual.

Either she died or he died.

Therefore, she could only ask one thing of him.

"Die for me."

Strangling the last breath of life out of him personally, the girl stood up in the river of blood.

She glanced around her coldly and glanced down at her hands.

Despite the wounds and damage she sustained, she found herself feeling the urge to laugh.

Jumping out from the river of blood, another girl lunged onto her back, biting down hard against her neck and tearing off a piece of flesh.

"Die! DIE!!! WHY DID YOU KILL HIM?!" The young girl shouted with bloodied tears in her eyes.

However, she didn't flinch. Ignoring the wound on her neck, she threw the young girl over her shoulders. Clawing down with her hands, she began to tear the girl apart.

Hunger... An overwhelming sense of hunger dominated her mind.

Hunger for battle, hunger for war, hunger for food.

Food...

Ah... That's right, wasn't there food in front of her? She's been starving for almost a week now. Left to fight for her life in this river of blood.

So what if she takes one, simple, bite.

"Ria!"

"Huh?!" Sitting up in a daze, Ria could see Luke shaking her shoulders while helping her get rid of her cloak.

"You were in the shade for too long." He explained as Ria shielded her eyes and sat in the sun.

Looking up at the sky, she couldn't help but sigh.

"Were you remembering the past?" Luke asked, sitting down near her.

Both of them were saved from the Eclipse thanks to Gin. But between the two of them, it was clear that the incident left a stronger impression on Ria.

"A little. Probably because we're where the Eclipse has influence." Ria sighed, covering her eyes.

"I see..." Luke didn't know what else to say as the past was a sensitive time for Ria.

She always put on a happy and energetic but that was only a mask to hide the past. Granted, that's not to say she wasn't a happy person in general. But every time she thought back to that time, she always lost the smile that usually appeared on her face.

"Don't worry about it. It's only for a moment anyways, I'm sure I'll stop being like this once I leave this place." Ria turned onto her side and chuckled.

"It's not like I'm complaining." Luke shook his head.

It's not exactly something that Ria could disclose to others. And even if she did, she could never fully explain the agony that she had to go through.

The morality that she had to kill within herself at the time in order to survive.

Even if she picked it back up, it was never the same. She can't deny the fact that she did what she did.

How many that she killed.

How many that she... consumed.

Thinking of this, Ria suddenly stood up and ran to the side before throwing up.

Luke patted her back, simply letting her know that someone was beside her.

Someone who understood what she had to go through.

Wiping her mouth with her sleeves, Ria stumbled back and found a spot to sit down.

Looking at the sand, she couldn't help but run her hands through it.

"Do you think... No, it's not even a question. They definitely resent me ahaha..." Ria let out a hollow chuckle as she leaned on Luke.

"Then it's all the more reason for you to dismantle the Eclipse. At least then, there won't be any more like them right?"

Closing her eyes, Ria nodded her head.

Resting for a little while, Ria stood up.

"Alright, that's enough moping around. Can't dismantle the Eclipse if I'm just depressed about what happened in the past right? We still have a week or so before the Eclipse period. Since we keep looping back to this place, let's map out the terrain a little." Ria put on a brave front as Luke simply smiled.

"Alright. But I'll take the lead this time. At least then, it'll be easier for us to keep track of our footsteps."

Standing up, Luke pulled out a strange tool from his pouch. A product of Abyssal Engineering that helps with making maps and marking out their footsteps.

One that is usually used for escaping a forest or a labyrinth.

Following behind Luke, Ria tried her best to distract herself from her thoughts of the past.

###

Sitting not far from a waterfall, Jin could be seen with his legs crossed.

He had his eyes closed while a pair of chain blades rested on his lap.

'Focus...'

He could feel the wind brushing past his skin, the floral scent of flowers and tree leaves, the sounds of the waterfall colliding against the river.

The world was a tangled mess of the senses. Countless sounds in conflict for dominance, a myriad of smells fighting for supremacy.

He only had one job.

That one job being to spot the anomaly within this array of inputs. Even the slightest disturbance needed to be focused on and analysed.

The movement of bugs, swaying of the grass.

Anything that disturbs this... 'natural' rhythm must be accounted for.

*DING!!!

His arm flinched as a single chain whipped up, colliding against a needle that was aimed at his back.

Despite the successful block, he didn't show a single reaction. He knew that it was far from over.

Thanks to Alyss creating a new set of marital arts that fused pieces of the Eclipse Reaver with other attacks, it was far easier for him to tap into this 'instinct' that has been engraved onto his body.

All that was left now was for him to fully embrace it, to control it.

'There are three steps to establishing the Zone. I've completed the first step of sensory.' Jin thought to himself, trying his best to maintain this calm state.

This stillness of mind.

The second requirement of the Zone was for him to understand his maximum reaction range.

Once an attack has breached his sensory range, how far does it have to travel for him to be able to react to it in time?

What if there were multiple projectiles or attacks? How much time does he have to digest and react to the oncoming danger?

Right now, his detection range was around 8 meters. It wasn't big by any standards nor was it small. But the concern was his reaction range. It kept fluctuating between 4 meters to 7 meters.

Sometimes he'll be too late to react whereas sometimes it just comes to him naturally.

By keeping himself in a focused state, Jin wanted to achieve a state of consistency. He wanted to use his muscle memories to help him establish a range.

The third step, which was probably the easiest step, was the Counter range. How much time he needed to unleash an attack to offset the danger approaching him.

His zone was incomplete but in a 3 meter radius around Jin, there was a faint boundary that could be sensed if one was proficient with the Zone.

If he could sort out the issue with his reaction range, which was simply a case of experience and digesting the knowledge, he would be able to expand his Zone.

But as of now, Jin has yet to succeed.

An incomplete Zone that was above the level of a simple weapon domain.

That was his current level.

Twirling the blades around him, Jin managed to block a few more needles before freezing up.

One of the needles had breached his defences during his counter and embedded itself into his shoulder before turning into a mist, numbing and paralysing his entire body.

"Hmm... You managed to survive 7 waves again. Seems like this is your bottleneck for now." Alice muttered, appearing near Jin as she retrieved the blood mist, freeing him from the paralysis.

"Seven again? You're joking right?" Jin sighed in frustration while Alice shook her head.

"Nope, you can count for yourself. I think there's a limit to how much you can get from me and Alyss since even if we're... Training you thoroughly, a part of us is still holding back.

"We don't want you to die after all, that would only benefit the Eclipse." Alice shrugged while Jin wanted to throw a rock at the girl.

After all, her definition of 'holding back' was simply not killing him. Sending him to a state of near death was perfectly fine by her definition. At this point, he lost count of how many times he almost crossed the bridge of no return.

"So what now then? Do you want me to go kill a bunch of bandits or something?" Jin asked, putting his shirt back on.

After all, his Zone was still incomplete. He needed to maximise the sensory inputs he's receiving in order to reach the requirement for the first step.

Now that he was experiencing this personally, it simply baffles him to no end on how Alice was even able to tap into this state so easily.

"Something along those lines. The Sovereign sects must've been anxious waiting for us to show up. I think we shouldn't keep them waiting, it'll be quite rude after all." Alice grinned as she figured she spent enough time giving Jin some one to one training.

During this time, Alyss had fully digested everything she had learned up to this point. She wanted to test out her findings on a worthy opponent as soon as possible and the best candidates were the leaders of the Sovereign sects or the Demon Extermination Squad leader.

Chapter 600 - 600: Empyrean Dragon Sect

"We're... directly challenging the sects? Wouldn't that be bad? That's practically spreading my face to the entire region." Jin's smile twitched.

Alice's goal was to make sure the Eclipse didn't go after him anymore. But if he was to show his true face to the world while they're challenging the Sovereign sects, wasn't that just broadcasting his survival?

"Well duh, I'm not that stupid. We're going to go using disguises. Let's go as a wandering master and disciple, hoping to broaden our horizons or something. Challenge the sects to a duel and if they don't accept, we'll break a few things, knock out a few people, maybe slander their ancestor or something." Alice shrugged nonchalantly while Jin couldn't help but sigh and facepalm.

When Alice gets like this, no one could stop her troublemaker instincts.

"Anyways just don't worry about the details. I'll sort it out." Alice reassured with a thumbs up.

"You know, somehow that gives me more worry than just straight up attacking them."

"Tch, I'm the master here, why are you doubting so much." Alice frowned, smacking him on the back of the head as glass fragments appeared across his body.

"We also need to find a decent blacksmith to modify your blades a little to suit the new style."

Right now, Jin's blades are akin to cleavers. Short and broad.

But due to the fact that the new style requires using the blades as anchors for certain movements, turning them into standard longswords or curved blades would work better in this regard.

He didn't need something fancy like being hand crafted by a Lord or something, just a good blacksmith would do.

"We can probably find a blacksmith when we make our way to the Empyrean Dragon sect. they're a sect that's located on the coast with trades between them, the Abyss and nations overseas." Jin explained, pulling out the map.

"Wait, they trade with the Abyss?" Alice blinked her eyes as she glanced over in surprise.

After escaping the Abyss thanks to the Inverted World, she hadn't had a chance to go back yet.

She was aware that there were gateways leading back down in all the nations but she simply never got the chance to visit.

"Yea. All three Sovereign Sects are situated over a gateway that lets them train their disciples. For the Empyrean Dragon, I believe their gateway leads to a split land of scorching deserts and blistering cold where dragons reside. Or at least that's what the rumours suggest." Jin explained while marking out the sect on the map.

Considering the martial arts of the Empyrean Dragon, it wasn't surprising that they would choose to hunt down draconic creatures to match their needs.

"It is open to the public for a price. By hiring the disciples of the Empyrean Dragon, they allow certain people to go down for a Hunt. Of course, the disciples can choose to reject your commission."

Hearing this, Alice understood that it was probably similar to a system employed by the Hunter's guild.

'They probably limit what you can Hunt as well. Unless you're a member of the sect, I doubt they'll let you Hunt the stronger beasts since this portion of the Abyss is probably being used as a sort of 'farm' for them.' Alyss spoke up as Alice nodded her head in agreement.

If one could hold a monopoly over a portion of the Abyss, especially one with powerful beasts, they could severely limit the power of those within the same region. An imbalance of power.

Standing in silence, Alice suddenly had a wide troublemaking grin on her face.

"I wanna mess it up."

[I suggest you reign it in. If you try to open that gate further, it'll cause the Abyss to bleed into reality. If you try to close it, you could cause them to lose the powerful foundation they need to keep the Cult at bay in the south.] Cayla warned her against it.

Logic and real consequences were the best methods to stopping Alice when she's in her troublemaker state. Though that only works if the logic and consequences are heavy enough for her to reconsider.

Thankfully, Alice seemed to give up.

One on end, she didn't want the Eclipse to gain a leverage. On the other, having the Abyss bleed into Reality was similar to what the Will wanted so she didn't want that either.

Meanwhile, Jin observed Alice talking to the voices in her mind and noticed that she lost her troublemaker grin.

Sighing out in relief, he began to plan a route to the Empyrean Dragon sect while Alice worked on their disguise.

For Jin, she gave him long black hair with streaks of jade while leaving his golden eyes unchanged. She marked the corner of his eyes with red highlights while also changing his physique to be more muscular and cloud like markings across his arms and chest.

Unfortunately for him, she didn't buy any clothing for males so he could only stay with what he had and put a disguise over it.

A sleeveless black shirt, silver shoulder guards and wrist guards. Green fabric wrapped around his waist while he wore a pair of loose fitting pants and a pair of black shoes.

A simple attire for Jin.

Meanwhile, Alice didn't hold back for herself.

She gave herself long blonde hair that was tied up into a high bun, a pair of golden eyes and elongated ears. Streaks of blonde hair framed her face while yellow flower hair pins were placed above her ear.

She wore a sleeveless Eastern dress made up of primarily orange and yellow hues with hints of black around the edges and details. The high slit skirt reached all the way to her ankles, exposing her legs. Above the shoes, she wore an orange anklet with a small orange flower.

Placing some flower ornaments and orange tassels around her dress, she finished it off with a pair of black silken gloves that reached her bicep with a pair of orange flower bracelets.

Naturally, all of this was an outfit that she bought rather than an illusion.

Creating a blood mirror to admire herself, Alice nodded in satisfaction before adjusting her voice.

"Ah~ Ah ah~ Ahem ahem, testing testing~" She modified her voice so that it was deeper than usual, giving it a sultry feeling.

"Fufu~ perfect, don't you think so dear disciple?" Alice chuckled elegantly while taking out a fan from her pouch.

However, Jin simply stared at her with a blank expression before letting out a mocking sigh.

*PUCHI!!!

Feeling a vein bulge on her forehead, Alice's smile twitched as she couldn't hold herself back and smacked him on the back of the head, dispelling his disguise.

"I didn't even say anything!?" Jin clutched his head.

"The only right answer was to praise me as the perfect beauty I am." Alice folded her arms while gesturing him to lead the way.

Reapplying his disguise for him, Alice created a floating spear before sitting down with her legs crossed.

Seeing that she wasn't about to make a seat for him, Jin sighed and simply walked.

###

Looking at the map that he's made, Luke sat down and folded his arms. This area was both large yet small. A vast majority was simply the desert with countless beasts waiting beneath the sand.

Broken weapons poked out, acting as a grave of sorts for those that have lost their lives within this harsh land.

In terms of 'villages', there were more than ten with all of them spaced out roughly the same distance from one another. But rather than a tradition village, it's more so a handful of houses and people living there.

There were even traces of some villages being destroyed by beasts as a few now occupy where humans should be living.

Despite not being able to leave, people were able to enter.

But like a fleeting mirage, they were sent elsewhere within this vast landscape.

Of course, they have the choice of chasing after them as Ria tried. But the moment they came close, they were shifted away once more.

Not wanting to risk splitting up with one another, Ria and Luke didn't chase after anyone else.

Noticing Ria coming back from the village, Luke glanced up.

"Still not willing to talk to us?" Luke asked as Ria shook her head.

"Parents are shielding their children and running away, not wanting any kind of interaction with me. Even if I offer food or the whatnot, they didn't seem to care even though they're basically withered husks." Ria shrugged helplessly.

She was hoping that she could potentially gather some details from the kids since they were more inclined to speak. But the parents didn't give any chance of that.

They couldn't be called hostile yet they weren't exactly cooperative either.

"Maybe they just don't trust outsiders. I don't know what's the difference between us and the residents since they don't get teleported away." Luke sighed.

He wasn't sure what causes the teleportation phenomenon. But whatever it was, it only occurred when they try to interact with outsiders like them.

"The way they get food is also weird. I don't see them Hunt or anything like that yet there's always food on the table." Ria frowned.

The longer they stayed here, the more eerie it became.

She recalled the stares of the adults. At first, she thought they were simply weary. But now that she thought back to it carefully, that didn't feel like the case at all.

That gaze... judging, contemplating, observing. It felt as though she was...

No.

She IS food on a platter.

Upon coming to this realisation, Ria glanced back at one of the houses with a frown and saw a single eye staring at her from the cracks of the window.

Steady, unblinking, observing her every move.