

Abyssal A 601

Chapter 601 - 601: The Legend Of Jiang Xuanyin

Sizzling meat, the smell of sea salt lingering in the air, cries of the birds and the countless dragon lanterns being flown in the sky.

Marital artists activating their Sigils in tandem to form the illusion of a great golden dragon circling around the airspace of the city.

The Dragon Descent Festival, a tradition held within the coastal city of Baichuan that celebrates the slaughtering of the first Dragon Lord within this part of the abyss.

A celebration for the first Ascension of the original master of the Empyrean Dragon sect master.

The name, Dragon Descent, was a play on two sides. One side is the dragon falling from grace. The other is the Sect leader becoming a dragon amongst men, returning from battle in glory.

"Come one come all, sit and enjoy a cup of tea. This is no short tale, this is no fairy tale. This! This is a legendary feat of the great Jian Xuanyin, the dragon slayer and the great founder of the Empyrean Dragon sect!

"A story of defiance, blood and fate written into the stars and reflected upon the depths of the Abyss itself!."

As the storyteller stood up on the stage, several travellers paused and sat down, wanting to hear the tale of the legendary figure of the Empyrean Dragon sect.

Children who were raised in the city sat down with eagerness, holding toys and books that documented the feat as music began to play.

In the back, a pair of master and disciple sat down with interest.

"Long before the city of Baichuan was built, before the formation of the Empyrean Dragon sect, this was a land of no return. The shores of death, river styx the lair of the dragons.

"The lands were charred and withered, the skies were blocked by ash and the waters ran dark with blood of anyone unfortunate enough to approach. Within the heart of the shores of death, a maelstrom whirled with the Abyssal gate as its centre.

"Waves upon waves of beasts, the scourge of the dark below poured into reality seeking to end humanity. Many died and many fought back. But humanity was on the losing side.

"We have already lost our lands, our brethren! What more do you wish to lose before you finally find the spirit to fight back!? If you believe that no man can slay the tyrant beast down below, then I will go beyond mere mortality! I will peel its scales, wear its wings, feast upon the blood of that you call the tyrant beast. I will rip out its heart and offer it as the sacrifice to revitalize our lands!' The founder Jian Xuanyin shouted as he roused the spirits of his fellow warriors.

"For he knew, that in order to bring freedom to his people, to bring liberation to this land, he had to slay the beast himself. To crush its heart and inherit the power of a dragon for man to use. And so, with only his trusted warriors by his side, Jain Xuanyin dove down into the Abyss."

As the storyteller spoke up to this point, the music began to pick up as actors appeared behind him.

Each with a different outfit with a handsome man in the middle.

"Seven days and seven nights did they travel through the scorching deserts. Light was swallowed whole and even the very air was polluted with malic from the tyrant beast. A false moon lurked above with an ominous crimson while beasts clawed at them from beneath the sands.

"Yet Jiang Xuanyin did not falter. He could NOT falter for the hopes of his people rest on his shoulders. He cut through the hordes, strikes swift and firm as tides and his will unyielding. No matter what beast tried to stop his advance, the general cut them down with overwhelming might!

"A river of fallen lined his path as he finally stood before it. The tyrant beast, the dragon commander that ordered the beasts to spill into our realm. A beast of black and gold. Twisted horns coiling from its

skull, its wings blocking out the sky! Each step caused the ground beneath them to tremble as the colossal beast loomed over our heroes!

"Its eyes, burning with the malice of a thousand beasts bore down on Jiang Xuanyin, dripping with hatred against humankind as a whole. With a bellowing voice, the beast roared!

"Putrid invader! You will become the nourishment of my brethren!

"Yet the tyrant beast's words only served to fuel the anger within Jiang Xuanyin's chest. Invader? Him? He has watched his family perish, his brothers and sisters torn apart by beasts. How dare this monster claim that he was the invader? And so the battle began.

"The tyrant beast struck first and fast! Its claws tore through space itself, its breath scorching the very air they breathe but Jiang Xuanyin would not be defeated so easily! Weaving between life and death, his blades carved through scale flesh and bone!

"Their battle shook the earth and the ground split with each attack. Unlike the beast, Jiang Xuanyin was still just a mortal. Each wound he sustained would slow down his movements, each misstep could mean his demise. But he pushed on!

"His body may be weaker, his powers may not break the lands like the dragon but his will burned brighter than any flame the beast could produce! Even if his flesh was turned to ash, even if his body could not fight, his spirit would push on! For his brothers, for his sisters, for humanity!

"Three days and three nights did their battle rage. Jiang Xuanyin fought desperately despite being the last man remaining. As the cry of the dragon marked the fourth day of their battle, Jiang Xuanyin leapt.

"His body was on the verge of breaking, his sword was broken but his eyes burned with intensity. Even after three days of constant fighting, his will had not diminished even in the slightest! With one final strike, Jiang Xuanyin pierced the scales of the dragon with his dulled blade!

"He knew this was his final chance! To end things once and for all!"

The music picked up with the actor fighting the puppet of a dragon. Tearing away his outfit, he revealed a bruised and battered body thanks to make up. Letting out a shout of pain, anger and determination, the actor tore through the puppet and hid himself from within.

The music slowly faded out as the listeners held their breath. Even those familiar with the story couldn't help but wait in anticipation.

With a loud trumpet, a pillar of light erupted from within the puppet!

"Jiang Xuanyin won! With his own hands, he crushed the dragon's heart! The tyrant beast fell and the Abyss trembled! A lord has fallen and in its place, a new Lord emerged!!! Jiang Xuanyin! The Empyrean Dragon!" The storyteller announced as the actor stepped out of the puppet adorned with a new outfit.

On top of the black and gold outfit, there was black plated armour that made him look like a dragon with a pair of wings unfurled behind him.

With the story reaching the apex, the crowd began to clap as the actors and storyteller performed a bow to all those who were watching.

Alice, who was drinking some alcohol while listening to the tale, couldn't help but clap as well.

If the story was to be taken at face value, then indeed it was a feat of human will and determination. For this kind of fight, praise was needed.

"Didn't you say you were going to mock the ancestor? How come you're clapping your hands now?" Jin asked, enjoying a bit of tea rather than alcohol.

"That was before, this is now. I know how to praise someone when they deserve it." Alice chuckled elegantly as the two of them were still in disguise.

[I don't recall there being a unique title like the Empyrean Dragon. Maybe it's something recent.] Cayla frowned.

She knew that unique titles were possible if the feat was recognized by the Abyss. Theron being called the Slayer was evident of that.

However, just killing an Abyss Lord wasn't enough to bestow a unique title. He either had a true title following the usual outline or there was more to this story than what the storyteller was revealing.

'I'm sure the tale was embellished a little since he's seen as the hero of this city after all. Plus, he's the founder of the sect so I'm sure they want his story to sound more impressive than it already is.' Alyss was a little skeptical of certain details.

Before they could continue their conversation, the sounds of ceremonial drums echoed out in the distance, signaling the beginning of a different event during the festival.

In order to honor the will power and legacy of Jiang Xuanyin, an open tournament was held every time the festival began. Anyone could join in whether they be from the sect or not. Even outsiders were allowed to join in.

A battle to prove their strength and 'carry on' Jiang Xuanyin's legacy.

Should you win or rank high up in this tournament, you'll be allowed to enter the Abyss or make a request to the sect. Beasts that can't be hunted usually would be allowed, weapons, equipment and even the treasures of the sect is given as a reward.

As the fireworks lit up the sky, Alice smiled and stood up.

Since they were currently acting out the role of a wandering master and disciple, it was only natural for them to participate in this tournament.

"Come on, it's time for us to go. If you dare let yourself be eliminated early, I'll be forced to modify the training a little." Alice chuckled with an ominous smile as Jin felt a chill down his spine.

Nodding his head furiously, he was ready to face any kind of opponent!

Chapter 602 - 602: Martial Tournament

As they approached the main arena situated near the headquarters of the sect, Alice saw some information posted on some pamphlets regarding the layout of the tournament.

There were three categories for the tournament with two of them being held near the start.

The first was as expected, Sigil combat. To test who is the strongest based off raw power.

You either take a test to prove the effectiveness of your Sigils or showcase your unique strength to the judges. If you pass, you'll be entered into the brackets where you fight different fighters.

A standard tournament.

But the next drew Alyss's attention.

Zero powers marital arts only combat.

"Apparently, they create a barrier over the arena that helps isolate the powers from reaching you. After entering, your body will go back to what would be considered their 'usual' physical state without the help of Abyss Blood or Sigils." Jin explained after gathering some information.

Folding her arms, Alice couldn't help but feel as though this reminded her of Severance to a certain degree or even her own powers.

She's able to isolate the powers of the Abyss from reaching a user thanks to Cayla's power and using her personal artifact to cut off the strands momentarily.

But the Emphyrean Dragon sect was able to do this without Cayla or the power of Severance?

Alice wanted to find out how they do it.

'Seems like we'll be signing up for the Zero powers combat then.' Alyss chuckled.

'Seems so. You wanted to put your martial arts to the test anyway right? This sounds like the perfect chance. Plus, if we figure out how their barrier isolates the Abyss from reaching us, I'll be able to cook up a countermeasure in case we do fight them.' Alice nodded her head.

With a powerful barrier like this, Alice didn't want to risk the potential chance of them using it against her in a fight.

As for the final tournament, it was a selection of talented people from the new generation along with the top three from Sigil combat and Zero powers combat.

"Which one do you want to compete in? Since it's top three, even if I join in, it won't change much." Alice asked, surprising Jin.

"Wait, you're planning to join in as well?" He thought that she'll simply be watching him and judging his progress rather than joining in as well. After all, that's the usual script then it's a wandering master and disciple.

Yet she wanted to join in on the fun and compete as well.

What if they meet each other round one???

"Who do you think I am? Of course I'm going to join in. You forget that I was attacking other sects because Alyss wanted to learn their martial arts." Alice rolled her eyes.

Sometimes she couldn't help but wonder if this disciple of her's was a little slow in the head.

After all, it should be rather obvious that she wanted to join in.

Speechless, Jin could only pray that he wasn't put into the same bracket as Alice. As long as he can make it to top three, he should be able to avoid harsh training.

"Ah speaking of which, Alyss mentioned that if you don't make it to top two and lose to us, we'll be increasing your training." Alice gave him a grin as Jin stared at her blankly.

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"Shouldn't I be training at the training grounds? Why are we here to enjoy a festival?" Qiu Qiu asked with a frown.

She was currently following the leader of the Demon Extermination squad to browse the stalls in Baichuan.

"The better question is why not? Cutting yourself from the world to master martial arts while effective, will also cloud your understanding of the world. Only through a balance between both can you reach your desired strength.

"The Empyrean Dragon sect is hosting their annual Dragon Descent festival so why not take this chance to relax? There's also a tournament later for you to enjoy." The old man chuckled while Qiu Qiu shook her head.

"What's the point of fighting these vagrants who never had a proper fight in their life? Fighting them won't benefit me at all."

"That's where you're wrong little Qiu, sometimes even the weakest fighter may give you a surprise you didn't expect. Perhaps you should join the Zero powers category if you wish to experience this for yourself." The old man tapped the pamphlet while Qiu Qiu simply sighed.

If that's what the Leader was going to suggest then so be it.

"And don't you think it's a good chance for you to learn more about your six realms five desires? For it being your second resonance, you've only managed to tap into half of it. The Deva path with Form is still out of your reach despite having touched upon it with your fight against the demoness." He reminded as Qiu Qiu glanced down.

The six realms five desires was a state that's meant to enhance every aspect of her body with the right combination.

The hell realm grants resistances and enhanced defence.

Hungry ghost realm lets her devour energy to fuel herself.

Animal realm was still beyond her as of right now but it's supposed to enhance her instincts to the next level.

Human realm increases her comprehension and adaptability. To seek opportunity through danger and to learn the movements of her opponents.

Asura realm, the path of war. One that enhances all physical traits in order to best optimise her body for battle. It's the most violent realm yet also the strongest that she can access.

And finally, the Deva realm. The path that she barely touched upon thanks to her fight with Alyss yet wasn't something she struggled to understand.

The details of this realm was largely unknown even to her predecessors who had the same resonance.

After the paths were the states of desire.

Desire of touch helps her dull the sense of pain while also making her more sensitive to incoming dangers.

Desire for taste enhances her absorption of energy and even stealing a portion of her enemy's strength.

Desire for smell and sounds were both used to dispel illusions that mess with the senses. Outside of this, sound can help pinpoint her enemy's movements through vibrations.

Lastly, forms. Once again, like the Deva realm, it's unknown even for her predecessors.

Closing her eyes, Qiu Qiu tried to recall everything from that fight but the ending was blurred for her.

The only thing she could still remember was the sense of death. The fine boundary between life and death, the eternity of limbo.

But no matter how hard she pushed herself, no matter how dangerous the training, she wasn't able to tap into the same state. Maybe if she could, she would be able to unlock the key to her Deva Realm.

"And you think that someone in the Zero powers category can push me to the brink of death?" Qiu Qiu asked but the old man shook his head.

"I don't think they can push you to the brink of death. But I do believe that they might show you something interesting. Of course, you can choose between accepting the invitation or participating as one of the contestants in the Zero power category. I'll leave that decision to you.

"For now, simply enjoy the festival, I'm going to meet up with a few old friends of mine since they invited me for a drink." The old man laughed while Qiu Qiu only sighed.

As the leader of the Demon Extermination squad, he was serious and respectable most of the time.

But after he became her master, Qiu Qiu realised what kind of man he was and her previous understanding of what he was like was shattered in an instant.

Setting aside his identity as a leader, he was simply an old man with a foul mouth who liked to drink. Shaking her head, Qiu Qiu decided to buy a disguise for herself. At least then, people won't quit too early once they realise who she was.

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"Are you sure Alice will come to this place?" Hualing asked doubtfully as she was on an outing with Xiao An. After they parted ways with Alice, they expected to hear some news about her from the alliance.

It felt as though she just vanished into thin air.

No more sects or clans were attacked nor did anyone find a trace of her.

"Even if she doesn't come, we still need to show up and pay our respects as members of our clans." Xiao An chuckled.

"Urg... Don't remind me. I thought they would've given up after the wedding went to sh*t thanks to Alice but instead they kept the engagement alive." Hualing groaned as the old fodgey in the vermilion clan were truly tenacious f*ckers.

Refusing to let her go even after all the things that had happened.

"At least they didn't force it this time. They're letting us take our time to decide what happens." Xiao An comforted as Hualing let out a sigh.

They used the excuse of wanting to broaden their horizons and join the Demon Extermination squad temporarily to get away. But if Alice doesn't show up then the clan would probably send them news to go back.

Regardless, there was another reason why Hualing wanted to come. That being the invitation only tournament with the winners of the other two categories joining in.

She wanted to see how far she could get without showing too much.

Enough so that others wouldn't take advantage of her and use it as a leverage over her family but not enough so that a target is painted on her back.

"Shall we go for a quick drink before paying respects to the sect?" Hualing grinned while making a drinking motion.

However, Xiao An simply chopped down on her head.

"No, we're here as guests not to cause a havoc because you decided to drink."

Pouting a little, Hualing sighed and followed Xiao An to the sect headquarters.

Chapter 603 - 603: Past Records

While the Zero powers category was free for everyone to enter, there were still tests conducted in order to test the eligibility of each contestant. After all, it wouldn't be good if unqualified fighters were to be allowed into the most glorious arena of the city.

The tests were split into three sections, each to test a different type of martial art a fighter was good at.

There's defensive capability, footwork then offensive capability.

Defensive was a simple case of avoiding or parrying ranged attacks thrown at them for as long as possible without the use of Sigils. Footwork had you do a speed trial to see how fast you could bypass the hazards and finally, the offensive capability had you spar against a trainer to determine your offensive strength.

The spar wasn't going to be a serious one. Instead, it revolved around a gimmick. That being to retrieve/touch a flower on the instructor's body.

With these sets of rules, whoever could pass these three or receive a good evaluation would be allowed to compete in the final brackets of the Zero power category.

Listening to the rules being briefed to them while standing in what seemed to be the waiting room of the large arena, Alice couldn't help but fold her arms in amusement.

With so many spectators watching the testing period, she couldn't help but feel as though she'd returned to the same coliseum where Allura rescued her from.

The atmosphere, the theatrics and the announcer.

All nostalgic yet also sad.

Alice knew that if Lilia was still here, she would be joking about how this is almost exactly like when they met one another.

Shaking her head, Alice dismissed the thoughts for now and focused on the task at hand.

Due to the significant number of contestants, they are to draw lots and be split into several groups to make things more manageable and to speed up the process.

Not only that but by splitting into groups, they can also arrange the tournament brackets later.

There were several instructors with boxes in hand and approached each of the contestants with a smile, gesturing for them to pull from the box.

Alyss took this chance to observe the instructors.

Hints of one's marital prowess reveal itself through daily habits. The way they breathe, control their muscles, how they walk. Everything could give her a clue.

In order to perfect the martial arts she wanted to create, she needed as much knowledge as possible.

Most of the instructors didn't exhibit signs of using the passive zone or having the knowledge of it much to Alyss's disappointment. They weren't prepared for a sudden attack in case one of the contestants wanted to kill them nor did they seem ready to react at a moment's notice.

'I've noticed this but it's especially obvious in the East. But why is the strength distribution... so crap? The strongest are praiseworthy but anyone who isn't the top percentile just seems... lacking?' Alyss couldn't help but ask.

[Compared to the Abyss, the dangers on the surface are negligible. Most of the beasts that slip through the dimensional gap between realms often do so by mistake or simply due to an excess. Most of the powerful beasts would choose to reside in the Abyss in order to hone their strength further.] Cayla explained while flipping through a few notes.

[Do note that the Abyss, to the people of the surface, is basically hell. No sane person would voluntarily go there. Those who spend their time in the Abyss are either insane or due to circumstances where they can't leave easily.]

'To be fair, I doubt the people trying to get there manually would have an easy time. The road down should be littered with pretty strong beasts after all. Even what Allura considered to be 'relatively safe' for when we first started out could've killed us with a single wave of its hand if we weren't careful.' Alice added.

The more she thought about it, the more miraculous it seemed to her that she actually managed to survive in the Abyss for so long.

Compared to the relaxing and calm surface, it is definitely much scarier.

Letting out a shrug, Alyss reached into the box and pulled out a number.

Next in line was Jin, pulling a number 8 while Alyss got a number 5.

"Seems like we're in different zones." Alyss smirked while Jin sighed in relief.

If Alice wanted him to get into the top 3, having them enter the same zone would most definitely guarantee a harsh training session.

Her usual training was already difficult as it was, he didn't need more.

With the numbers now assigned, each of them followed a different instructor in order to reach the group they were supposed to be part of.

To Alyss's surprise, there was even a ranking board on previous records and clear speeds.

'Do you think they have Jiang Xuanyin's record? Or did someone of the new generation break it?' Alice asked curiously while looking through the names.

Surprisingly, there was indeed Jiang Xuanyin.

However, he wasn't first. Above him, there were two more names. In second place, Jiang Luoyan, seemingly one of Jiang Xuanyin's descendants.

And in first, a person with the name of Mo Xincheng.

Looking at their records, Alyss couldn't help but narrow her eyes.

What if she was to try and break them? The times of the top three were far ahead of the person who placed fourth. With such a gap, she couldn't help but wonder if the records were truly impressive or if it was simply a case where the other contestants were weak.

For defensive capabilities, their record was set as the distance they could parry the arrows and what level rather than the time.

For Jiang Xuanyin, he could parry countless arrows around the 15 meter mark just using his own physical powers without any Sigils.

Jian Luoyan reached 17 meters while Mo Xincheng had 17.5 meters.

In fourth place, their record was simply stated as a time and 'wave' of arrows rather than distance.

'I assume that's probably because the top three all had zones. Once that happens, it's no longer a case of how long you can last but rather how far you can defend.'

A few people could be seen checking out the records similar to Alyss while the instructor simply laughed.

"Lord Xuanyin set his record before reaching the state of unity. After many years of people being unable to clear it, he gave up on setting more records. As for the Sect Leader, he set this record during a duel with his Friend. Both of them had reached the state of Unity when they were only 26!" The instructor boasted while Alyss paused.

She could understand the top two holding the record using range instead of time due to the usage of a Zone. But Jiang Xuanyin reached 15 meters without one???

'At that point, it's probably just instinct and experience. The more I hear about him, the more monstrous he seems.' Alice couldn't help but chuckle while Cayla nodded in agreement.

People who are able to get a unique title from the Abyss are far from normal. In fact, they could be called geniuses amongst geniuses.

If Allura and Kaden hadn't been connected to Velouria as her Apostles and had powers linked to their authority, they would've gotten a unique title as well instead of a simple Lordship.

The portion of the arena where they entered was filled with circular domes spread throughout the entire floor space.

Each of the groups occupied one while the instructor called out names and had them enter the dome to commence the test. There were windows to observe how the fighters performed as Alyss watched nonchalantly before pausing.

'Slight issue that I just noticed.' She called out as Alice tilted her head.

'What's up?'

'This is the Zero powers category right?

'Yeah, why?'

'They have an unknown method to isolate the fighters and stop Abyss power from reaching them right?'

'I believe so- . . . Oh.' Alice realised the issue.

'Yeah, it's not great is it?' Alyss folded her arms.

Depending on how the barrier worked, it could easily dispel her disguise the moment she enters the dome.

While her body may not be able to accept the changes brought forth by Abyss Blood permanently, she was still receiving passive reinforcement from her Sigils.

'So even if I manage to defend my disguise, my physical power will still look abnormal. . . Is there a way to just protect the disguise?' Alice couldn't help but ask while Alyss simply shrugged.

'Don't look at me, I'm not the one who's proficient in casting.'

With Alyss being unable to help, there was only one person to turn to.

Pulling out a table and chair, Cayla leaned back and crossed her legs before tending to her nails, making sure they were looked after.

[I suppose, I, the great Eye of the Abyss, Cayla, sealed wrongfully by her master, pushed to resolve any issues regarding energy and abilities despite BEING SEALED, will reluctantly give you the help you so

desire. All while I'm still SEALED by the way. A difficult task considering I can't access my main powers because I'm SEALED.

[Truly what kind of person would SEAL someone without discussing it before hand? A little rude don't you agree?] Cayla blew her nails gently while giving Alice the side eye.

Alice's smile twitched as she let out a sigh and nodded her head.

'Pretty please~?'

[Why are you asking me? It's not like you asked me when you SEALED me before? But I suppose since you asked so nicely I'll take a look and see what I can do.] Cayla waved her hand before beginning her analysis on the barrier placed around the domes.

Meanwhile, Alice could only hope that the seal breaks soon otherwise Cayla will keep holding this over her head.

Chapter 604 - 604: Jin's Test

Waves upon waves of arrows were fired. Most used a spear to block but after a certain wave, the arrows were timed precisely for the gaps between spins.

If one were to blindly spin the spear in order to block, they'll 'die' before they even realise what's going on.

One had to observe the incoming arrows carefully. It wasn't enough to see their initial speed either, some of them changed trajectories and speeds through the flight, disrupting the defences.

'Whoever is controlling the arrows is pretty observant.' Alyss summarised.

At first, it may seem like these arrows were automated since there wasn't any space for people to sit and fire the arrows.

But the more Alyss observed, the more she realised that there was human intent behind each arrow.

As more and more people stepped up to the testing chambers, the records from other zones were being updated in real time.

No one was even able to come close to the top three, which was to be expected since they didn't have a zone of their own.

She hadn't seen Jin's name appear yet so she doubted that he had taken his turn yet. If he was smart, which she believed him to be, he'd take this chance to try and refine his Zone.

[I think I got it.] Cayla suddenly spoke up, surprising the two as she worked rather fast.

[The way they achieved this... supposed zero powers situation is a little scuffed but if it works it works. I'm not going to complain too much about the logistics about it since I wouldn't have thought of doing so. Just know that it's held together by hopes and dreams pretty much. If they were to use it in a real fight, it would break apart pretty quickly.] She sighed, writing down some notes before dismissing it.

[In summary, this chamber is like a contract in and of itself. By entering it, you enter several contracts with the chamber, all working in unison to fulfil countless conditions in order to render you 'powerless'. Contracts such as physical reinforcement reduction, energy reduction, Sigil resonance reduction and so on.

[I see about... 38? No 39 contracts within one chamber alone.]

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but blink her eye before furrowing her brow.

'Don't tell me we have to break all of them in order to keep up this disguise.'

[Thankfully, you don't have to. You see, removing or completely severing the ties to the Abyss is dangerous and frankly has a chance to just kill you immediately, as you are well aware thanks to your experiments in the north. The disguise isn't empowering your body so even though the Abyssal energy flows through your body in order to maintain the disguise, it won't be dispelled.

[Of course, if you get hit then try to reapply it, it won't work since it prevents Sigils from activating.] Cayla clarified.

'I see... we should probably let Jin know then.' Alice nodded.

With the issue of their disguises now resolved, it's simply a matter of being able to clear this exam without being hit.

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Folding her arms, Qiu Qiu glanced at the test takers with a neutral expression.

Most of them were simply doing whatever they could to survive the rain of arrows. There was a clear lack of preparation or plan.

Closing her eyes, she recalled the fight with Alyss. That demoness... If she was here, these arrows would be dealt with in an instant. The way she moved her body after observing the surroundings, her senses and instinct, everything was far superior to the people here.

She simply couldn't understand why her master told her to check this place out.

There was nothing of interest for her.

"Yan Lixing, you're up next." The instructor called out as a tall male stepped up.

Qiu Qiu had noticed that he was looking nervous a moment ago but seemed to have calmed down somewhat.

But what caught her attention was the weapon that he was using. A pair of chain blades wrapped around his arms.

She couldn't quite recall if there was a martial art that was well known for the chain blades except for those in the south. Narrowing her gaze, Qiu Qiu tried to see if the Cult's energy was present in his body but there was nothing.

'Nothing? Then he's probably someone who likes the weapon then.' She summarised.

However, she was somewhat familiar with the martial arts used by the cult. Even if he didn't showcase the energy belonging to the cult, if he were to showcase the martial art, then she'd have some questions for him.

Stepping through the doorway, the man seemed nervous for a moment as each of his steps was slow.

But soon, he calmed down and allowed the blades to dangle next to him.

Compared to before, there was now an air of seriousness around him. It felt as though he was a blade that had just been unsheathed in battle, sending a chill down Qiu Qiu's spine.

This focus, this lethality, even though she wasn't facing him, she could already see that he was strong!

*CLANG!!!

As the first arrow was fired, his blade whipped towards the arrow at maximum range!

'Fast!'

Even without the usage of Sigils to empower the body, he was able to send the blades whipping towards his target accurately using just pure momentum!

Modified Eclipse Reaver second form + third form!

A hybrid of both speed and momentum.

Since it was just arrows, Jin didn't need the power to destroy them.

'Much like casting, martial arts work in threes. What you decide to increase causes one to decrease. Speed and efficiency cause power to decrease and so on. Alyss's modified Eclipse Reaver is one where all three forms are interchangeable. Change it based on your requirements.' Jin recalled Alice's lesson as he stomped down and whipped both blades around him, blocking three more arrows.

False Fangs + Falling Shadow!

*BANG!!!

Using misdirection to change the course of the arrows, Jin destroyed them all using Falling Shadow.

Even though his Zone was still incomplete, doing something like this was possible!

However, there was something that he noticed while parrying these arrows.

They're slow!

Compared to Alice's needles, blade attacks and arrows, these were easy to see! Not only that, but there wasn't a risk of death!

A confident smile appeared on Jin's face. What he can understand he didn't need to fear.

'Feel their gaze, sense the trajectory and intercept!'

*CLANG!!!

Twisting his body, Jin twirled the chain blades around the arena, creating a maelstrom of arrows that failed to even reach him!

But without his Sigils, he could already feel the exhaustion approaching. His muscles couldn't handle the continuous movements of the modified marital arts without the reinforcement of Abyss Blood.

Therefore, he needed more efficiency to last as long as possible.

Right now, he was exhausting himself to expand his range to the max but that wasn't necessary.

'Condense the boundary, figure out my reaction range, don't think just act. Trust in my understanding of the martial arts. The principle behind each move, the prickle on my skin as the arrows approach.'

Tilting his head to the side, Jin dodged an arrow as he parried two more with a wave of his blade.

Taking a deep breath, he calmed his mind.

Without the fear of death brought forth by Alice, he was able to fully focus on the trajectory. Though facing the fear of death wasn't bad by any means.

After all, these arrows that would've made him panic in the past seemed like child's play after Alice's training!

2 meters.

A boundary was slowly being established around him. Chains and blades met every arrow that approached the two meter radius with Jin making sure to conserve as much stamina as possible.

Dodge what could be dodged, parry what couldn't be dodged.

He reduced the usage of throwing his blades out as much as possible since it put a strain on his arms. Instead, he wielded them as simple blades while the chains would assist in creating a formless boundary around him.

3 meters.

Jin could feel a slight change in the movement of the arrows.

Some would try to breach his defences by changing paths at the last moment, forcing him to dodge.

Layered defence, that's what he needed. An alternating layer of chains and blades to block the arrows. Better yet, he could redirect the arrows back to reduce their numbers but that was not the goal of this test nor was it the goal of his own training.

4 meters.

Sweat dripped down Jin's face as his stamina approached the bottom. Yet a smile could be seen on his face.

He was beginning to refine his efficiency. Rather than one move to deal with one arrow, he was now focusing on his own blade path.

What kind of slash does he need to take out as many arrows as possible? There were times when he even allowed certain arrows to get closer so that he could wipe them out in one go!

3 meters.

His range was being suppressed as the arrows were now stronger than before. He needed more power in order to parry them thus causing his range to decrease.

*BANG!!!

Quickly tilting his head, an arrow flew past him from behind and embedded itself deep into the ground.

An annoyed smile appeared on Jin's face as he narrowed his gaze.

They were finally using power in their attacks! However...

Compared to Alice...

It was still weak!

*CLANG!!!!

Twisting his body, Jin cleaved towards the next arrow as the two attacks collided, pushing each other back.

This gap in his defence proved to be brutal as Jin's eyes widened.

Time seemed to stop as there were two arrows already in front of him with three on their way behind him.

He recalled what Alice said before.

How he thought too much before each movement. Trust in his senses, trust in his knowledge. As his experience increases, this should become second nature for him.

Closing his eyes, Jin decided to trust in the training that Alice put him through.

*BANG!!!

Grabbing the first arrow, Jin slashed up, cutting up the second arrow.

Twisting his body to avoid the third, he threw the arrow that he caught towards the fourth. And as the fifth arrow approached, he opened his eyes and caught the arrow before it could hit his shoulder.

It was weak but for a split moment, Jin felt a change in his zone. As though everything within a 3 meter boundary was clear as day for him.

Passive Zone!

Chapter 605 - 605: Alyss's Test

After blocking that last arrow, Jin didn't hesitate to raise his hands in surrender.

Any further and it risked his disguise breaking while he was already satisfied with what he experienced. All that was left for him to do was to fully digest this feeling that he got and unlock his Zone fully.

It wasn't quite the 'state of Unity' that Alice could do, namely the Absolute Zone, but it was already far better than a weapon domain.

With him raising his hand in surrender, the examiner snapped out of it as Jin performed far better than the other contestants and noted down his score.

Unfortunately, since his range decreased at the end, he was marked down for time rather than distance covered.

'How the hell did the top three get more than 10 meters??' Jin couldn't help but wonder as this was far harder than what he initially expected. Not that he felt like it was easy but more so what was required of him to accomplish it.

Since his body was reset back to its 'default', every move of his exhausted a lot of stamina.

It felt impossible for him to maintain the frequency of his attacks beyond a four meter range without the help of Abyss Blood or his Sigils reinforcing his physique.

As he stepped out of the circular arena, he noticed quite a few stares focused on him. One in particular was trying to figure out his secrets as she walked up and stared at him silently.

There was a sheathed blade by her waist as Jin wasn't sure how to respond.

The two simply stared at each other before she frowned and walked away.

'Weird.' Jin thought to himself, stepping away from the location.

With his examination now complete, he wanted to find Alice again.

###

He didn't have the energy of the cult nor did he use the marital arts of the cult.

However, the philosophies of his attacks held some resemblance.

Was I being paranoid? Perhaps the meeting with the demoness has set my nerves on high alert. I can still remember the foul sight of the countless souls latching onto her, screaming, crying, begging for liberation.

As I took a deep breath to try and calm my nerves, I couldn't help but tighten my grip around the handle of my blade.

What was I lacking? There's no doubt that the man just now had achieved something I couldn't.

A realm beyond a simple weapon domain. A realm close to the state of Unity.

Was it discipline? Perhaps he was more focused, trained harder than I ever did.

Or was I simply using the wrong methods? Master has mentioned it as well but his words are cryptic.

No matter what he said, I simply couldn't understand what was required of me to enter this state of Unity. To tap into the power of the Deva realm.

I couldn't understand yet I managed to tap into the power last time.

One time was enough to feel the difference between having the state and not having it.

Each of my movements felt cumbersome, disjointed, inefficient. It lacked the refinement I had during that final strike.

During the moment I used Instant Draw – Transcendent Samsara, an attack that can only be unleashed when the conditions align.

Even if I were to redo the movements, without the Deva Realm, Desire of Form and the state of Unity, it would be no different from a normal slash.

Lacking in the speed and power that managed to beat the demoness even for just a moment.

. . . No! I refuse to believe I can't accomplish the same. If that man can do it then so can I!

###

'Aiyo~ Seems like Jin managed to get a pretty decent record. He's the new fourth place.' Alice grinned, feeling a little proud of her disciple.

However, Alyss was stone faced as usual.

'He should've been able to set a record using distance rather than just time. Seems like I'll have to increase the difficulty of his training some more when we get the time.' Alyss narrowed her eye.

'Twinnie, I know our standards are high but we need to praise the lad every now and then don't you think? Give him a bit of motivation rather than kicking him down at every turn.'

'That's because you're soft on him. It's enough that you're giving him rest when he's training with you, I don't need to go easy on him.' Alyss shook her head as she observed the movements within the chamber.

Parrying the arrows didn't seem that difficult, even when they added power to it. The issue lies in the physical body and the ability to keep up.

Alyss had to be honest.

Their physical strength was not the greatest on its own. They never trained in their body either as they had Sigils to compensate.

With this in mind, even if she could use the Zone and martial arts to try and compensate for the loss of power, swinging the weapon constantly was still a concern. Therefore, she had to go with a different approach rather than using a sword to parry.

'Needles? No, that doesn't have enough power to parry the arrows. Threads? That requires blood after Sigurd's modification, they won't allow it.' Alyss was stuck.

In the end, there was only one option left.

Her fists.

She'll have to parry the arrows by punching and potentially redirecting them by throwing it back. There wasn't any other option for her.

However, this runs the risk of injuring her hand and causing her disguise to dispel.

'I'll need to use soft force.'

Martial arts like the Skybound Swallow would be suitable for this.

'They probably had great physical strength combined with marital arts and Zone to reach that state don't you think? Since their supposed state of Unity won't be enough if the body can't keep up.' Alice spoke as she was resting on Alyss's bed.

She could see why her twin rested on this often before since the softness could be modified. This was her mental scape after all.

Recalling a few memories, a smile appeared on her face as she modified it to match the tail of the Governor in the North.

'Ahhh~' Letting out a sigh of satisfaction, Alice closed her eye.

Seeing her twin laze around like this, Alyss couldn't help but roll her eye before focusing on the chamber.

As the fighter inside stepped out, she was called up next.

Alyss made sure to carefully step inside in fear of having her disguise dispelled. However, seeing that nothing changed, she smiled and closed her eye.

Immediately, she expanded an Absolute Zone and estimated her optimal range using her fists and redirection.

'8 meters...' She frowned as this was a lot smaller than she expected.

As the first arrow was fired, Alyss caught it without even looking and dropped it onto the ground.

She glanced down at her hand which was trembling somewhat and let out an annoyed sigh.

Indeed, her physical strength couldn't keep up.

If she were to force herself to catch all of the arrows, she'd run out of stamina before they breach her defence.

Two more arrows were fired as Alyss decided to change up her tactics.

Soft guard!

Striking the shaft of the arrow with a palm strike, she curved it out of the way as it clashed with the second arrow.

Compared to catching it directly, this was far better in terms of stamina consumption.

'Three more.'

The moment the arrows fired, Alyss could sense them.

Right now, her Absolute Zone covered the entire chamber!

Twisting her body, she redirected an arrow to crash into another before kicking the third into the ground.

Seeing that she was able to handle herself, the arrows began to pick up in speed while Alyss refined her guarding tactics.

She knew that things would get out of hand soon with her lacking stamina so she needed a better way to guard.

A three layer defensive movement. The second layer focuses on redirecting while the first layer are the targets that she'll hit with the redirection.

The third layer is using her own body to dodge or parry.

However, soon the main issue appeared.

Every time she redirected an arrow, it would only hit one at most. Having it hit another was near impossible without it just breaking.

'I'll add a fourth layer. Once it gets beyond what I can handle, I'll use the Vermillion clan's martial arts to push the arrows back.'

Despite the waves upon waves of arrows being fired towards her, Alyss didn't move from her spot.

It looked as though a dome was being formed around her, preventing the arrows from approaching.

Watching the composed Alyss parry these arrows, the instructor overseeing the test couldn't help but wonder if she'd achieved the state of Unity.

###

I failed.

I failed, I failed, I failed, I failed, I failed.

I... Failed.

I couldn't match up to what the young man performed before me. My current domain was able to prevent the arrows from approaching near the start. But even with the domain and the instant draw, I still wasn't able to block the waves of arrows near the end.

The power behind each shot became too much for me to parry and I saw them too late.

How did he single out those arrows? How did he pick it out through the waves of weak arrows?

I could feel the anger and frustration rising in my chest.

Master was right, there were indeed surprises to be found here. But I couldn't understand it.

What was the difference between us? How was he able to tap into that state?

With his performance, he should be allowed into the main tournament. I'll be able to figure out his secrets if I draw his name for the fight.

No matter what, I'll learn the secrets to this new domain.

Chapter 606 - 606: Alyss Vs Unknown Controller

The sound of arrows being parried rang out as Alyss stood in the centre, unphased and even a little bored.

She could see everything coming at her yet had to resort to forceful means to deal with them.

At this point, she couldn't help but wonder if she should start doing some physical training in order to keep up.

Leaning her body to the side, she punched one of the arrows away while maintaining a boundary of 5 meters around herself.

Roughly 95% of the arrows were blocked but few managed to slip through the gaps.

'Whoever is controlling the arrows has quite the eye.' Alyss frowned.

She has adjusted her defences countless times now. If they were the average person, they wouldn't have been able to breach it time and time again, no matter how weakened she may be.

Yet they were able to find a gap each time at the perfect moment. It wasn't a simple matter of them finding a flaw in her movements either.

No, it was them taking advantage of the way she was parrying. Their own arrows would collide in mid air, changing directions at the last moment and avoiding her parry.

But even with this, Alyss could handle it.

'I think I held on for long enough. I'm pretty sure they can see the five meter boundary around me.'

Adjusting her movements one last time, Alyss created some distance and was about to surrender.

*BANG!!!

"!!!"

Quickly tilting her head to the side, she narrowly avoided an arrow much faster than before.

If it wasn't for her instincts and Absolute Zone, that arrow would've no doubt hit her cheek.

A vein bulged on Alyss's neck as she felt as though this was a challenge to her.

They didn't want her to surrender.

"Motherf*cker." Alyss cursed under her breath as she crouched down to avoid the next arrow before going into a handstand to avoid three more.

The frequency of the arrows has decreased but the power and speed increased significantly!

Leaning backwards, she avoided another arrow and grabbed it before throwing it towards the next one.

Sensing something wrong beneath her, she quickly jumped to the side, narrowly avoiding a spear aiming for her foot!

Annoyance filled Alyss's chest as she twisted her body, slamming her heels into the shaft of the spear and breaking it in half.

Using it as a weapon, she parried two arrows before using the momentum to destroy two more.

'Seems like this motherf*cker wants to play around. That should be a green light for me to destroy this chamber right? Can't blame me since they made the first move.'

Twisting her body, Alyss slammed the spear into the ground, vaulting herself into the air to avoid the arrows.

Little by little, spears began to appear within the wave with Alyss replacing her weapon every so often.

'Two behind, one below, four above!'

Creating a path in her mind, her weapon destroyed the arrows and spears in one swift motion.

Just as her movement ended, another spear shot towards her head.

"!!!"

Quickly turning her head to the side, Alyss managed to catch it with her teeth before spitting it out.

There was clear anger in her eyes as she grabbed two spears and threw it towards the spawn point of the arrows before they could even appear, disrupting the flow of energy.

'Let me give you some help.' Alice smirked.

Since the person controlling the arrows and spears wanted to play dirty, she might as well help out.

Catching two more spears, Alyss rounded up some arrows as Alice pinpointed the next 'spawns.'

'I'm going to simulate the spawn points in the mental space using nodes. The lighter the colour, the closer they are to spawning okay?' Alice explained, placing her hands against the ground.

Little by little, nodes manifested around her with Alyss taking occasional glances before throwing the arrows accurately towards the locations, disrupting the flow of the attacks.

Two spears shot out from before as Alyss kicked one away before catching the other behind her knee. Flicking it up with her foot, she twisted her body and slammed her foot against the back, shooting the spear towards the exit door and piercing a hole through it.

Doing a horizontal flip, Alyss avoided the next arrows before disrupting the new spawns.

Another spear shot from behind. This time, a cyan energy coiled around the spear and shot towards her!

"Keep playing these games! Go on, I f*cking dare you." Alyss warned.

Bending her body back to avoid the spear, she gritted her teeth and applied her knowledge of martial arts into a single hit.

*BANG!!!!

She could feel her knuckles shattering from the hit but the pain could be ignored. Parrying the spear, Alyss glared at the opening that she created.

Since the person didn't want to let her surrender, she had a different idea.

*BANG!!!

Throwing the spear towards the opening once more, the door was forced apart as the contracts within the chamber were halted.

Spectators quickly evacuated as energy flowed back into Alyss's body.

Switching out one of her Sigils into Tiamat's, black and red energy converged into a spear as the personal artifact manifested next to her.

Ruinous Void – Lance Form!

Wrapping the spear with the Ruinous Void, Alyss glared at the strands of energy that was threading together with the arrows and spears.

Since they wanted to play rough, they can't blame her for doing the same. After all, they were the ones that stopped her from surrendering!

Combining the principles of several martial arts, Alyss focused on generating the most amount of power and speed in the shortest possible time.

A physical attack to propel the cast of the Ruinous Void as fast as possible!

*BANG!!!

Throwing the spear like a javelin, it transformed into a streak of black and white lightning that crashed into one of the nodes.

After a brief pause, Alyss could see that the spears stopped as she spat out against the floor in anger.

"If you dare pin the blame on me I'll snap your spine in half. Go ask the f*cker controlling this thing why he stopped me from surrendering first." Alyss spoke first before the instructor could even say anything.

Feeling her glare, the instructor shirked back before mustering up some false courage.

He was part of the Empyrean Dragon sect! Who dares to- !!!

". . ."

Her cold gaze bore into him.

He understood that if he was to try to use this against her, he'd suffer the same fate as that door.

"I-I understand. My apologies for how the test proceeded." He apologised as cold sweat filled his back.

Walking past him without saying anything, Alyss could see the other test takers avoiding her and stepping away.

Some even laughed, thinking the sect would disqualify her and how a strong contender was dealt with.

Naturally, Alyss ignored this and went to find Jin.

Since her record was already marked down as 10 meters, there was nothing else she needed to bother herself with.

If anything, it might be better for her to be eliminated.

If she is, she'll just crash the tournament and fight them all. If there was indeed a Lord then so be it. It's not like she hasn't fought Lord level beings in the past.

###

Sitting in a private spectator deck overlooking the entire testing arena, a man could be seen with his head tilted to the side.

Next to him, a spear of black and red energy was sticking out of the wall behind him with a mark on his cheek.

If he didn't move his head in time, he might've lost an eye or maybe even his life.

Though perhaps that was simply her revenge.

Rubbing his fingers against his cheeks, he could see the blood flowing from his wound containing traces of gold.

After a brief pause, it flew back into his body and healed his wound.

"I suppose I did take it a little far. A joke is only funny if both sides laugh." He rested his head on his arm while the spear slowly disappeared.

He had simply wanted to test this genius that appeared out of nowhere. To see what she was capable of.

While her physical powers were... lacking to say the least, her senses and control were far above what he had expected.

She was even able to pinpoint where the spears were going to appear!

At first, he had simply continued the test as intended. But the more she revealed, the more he wanted to see. He wanted to see how far he could push her, how much he could force her to show.

If she had trained her physical power, breaking the record of the top three would be an easy feat for her.

Especially at the end. That flow of power... She was strong! Absurdly so!

Not only that, but she also had the state of Unity!

"State of Unity and strong powers to match. Her martial arts seem a little strange though." He muttered, recalling the principles she used during that last attack.

He had traces of martial arts from other clans and sects.

"!!!" As he theorised to this point, a smile appeared on his face.

But if his theory was indeed correct, then how was she able to maintain her disguise? Or was this her true face? Was the split haired appearance her true disguise?

Regardless, the possibility of her being the Demoness was high. If so, did she come to the Emphyrean Dragon to steal the martial arts as well?

He wanted to see how she'll go about in accomplishing this.

For this festival, he'll get more involved than before.

Chapter 607 - 607: Eclipse Cycle

"Master!" Jin called out after noticing Alyss making her way through the crowd.

But just as he was about to say something else, he noticed the stormy expression on her face and froze up.

He recognised that expression anywhere.

'She's pissed!'

Wanting to sneak away, Jin turned around and felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Where do you think you're going?" Alyss asked as Jin shivered.

"I was just looking for you." Jin made an excuse but seeing Alyss's glare, he gave up.

"I wanted to run." He admitted.

"Run? Why, I don't believe there's something that's scary. Or is it because you saw me? Am I scary? And what about your results? Did you even use that chance to practice your Zone?" Alyss asked, slowly leaning closer while Jin tried to back off.

"We're going to up the difficulty of the training when we get a chance." Alyss huffed in annoyance while Alice took over.

After all, Alyss was in a pretty bad mood thanks to the mysterious person controlling the test.

"Don't let what she said bother you. She's a little annoyed by her test. If anything, I think you did pretty well." Alice reassured with a grin.

Hearing this, Jin felt a strange warmth in his chest.

"If anything, I'm more happy with the fact that you didn't let your disguise get dispelled. If that happened, I'll annoyed too." Alice whispered with a firm grip on his shoulders.

While Alyss may be displeased that he wasn't able to reach the level of having distance measured rather than time, she'll be harsh about it upfront.

But annoying Alice meant getting hit out of nowhere without even expecting it!

He suddenly recalled their first spar. When he asked that forbidden question.

The speed of which she hit him into the lake still gave him nightmares to this day.

Swallowing his saliva, Jin nodded his head as the two of them left the testing venue for some food.

###

"You look like someone just kicked your pet. Why the long face?" The leader of the Demon Extermination Squad asked with a grin as he held a gourd of alcohol in his hands.

Staring at her master with a frown, Qiu Qiu gritted her teeth before snatching a gourd for herself and sitting down.

Tilting her head back, she gulped down several mouthfuls, surprising the old man.

"BLERGGGG! How do you even enjoy this sh*t? It's disgusting!" Qiu Qiu spat out in disgust as the old man snatched the gourd back.

"Youngin's like you don't understand the joy of drinking. Now tell me, what happened? I can only assume you lost to someone." He grinned, wiping the lip of the gourd with his sleeve before taking a drink.

"I lost. Decisively. Not to one person either, I lost to two people." Qiu Qiu glanced down at the table in frustration.

She had thought that Jin was the only one in there that would showcase a state beyond the weapon domain. But then another name appeared. They were able to set a record in distance rather than time.

There was no doubt that they had the state of Unity or something close to it. And from the rumours that she heard, the test only ended because she managed to break the chambers holding the test.

"Hou? Two? I fully expected one but to think there were two." The old man raised an eyebrow as he recalled the young girl with no martial experience.

She had only moved based on instinct yet was able to showcase the state of Unity.

Contemplating to himself, the old man glanced at Qiu Qiu.

He could tell that the discovery that there were two potential users of the state of Unity unnerved her.

She hadn't lost many times in her life and was hailed as a genius of the next generation. Someone who could grasp one of the hardest martial arts in the East within a year's time.

First, she lost to the demoness who stole her martial arts with a single encounter. And now two rogues that could use a state that she struggled with herself.

As she is still young, he understood that her mental state might be a little fragile when it comes to setbacks like this.

At this point, there were only two paths that she could choose.

Either sink or swim!

Swirling the gourd in his hands, the leader's gaze softened as he recalled how he achieved his own state of Unity.

A pang of pain struck his heart as he took another drink.

"The... state of Unity is one that requires the utmost concentration from the user. A mental state that won't waver. Even if you are surprised, your body still understands what must be done in order to survive. It's both a state that can be reached through hard work and training yet at the same time, simply impossible for others.

"More often than not, there is a... moment where clarity hits you like a hammer. At that moment, the world slows down and your mind opens up to the possibilities. The thin line between life and death. If you are one of the lucky few, the state of Unity will open itself to you and reward your training.

"If not, you'll die. It's as simple as that. It's not something that can be forcefully achieved. I fully believe that you have the foundations to achieve this state. But that mental. . . needs work." The old man pointed at her head as Qiu Qiu glanced up.

Despite drinking, the leader was now showing a side of seriousness as she contemplated his words.

"Then am I supposed to accept my loss without doing anything?" Qiu Qiu asked.

In order to win, she needed the state of Unity to compete. She needed it to be on the same playing field.

She needed it to-

*Clap!

"Stop." The leader stopped her by clapping his hands in front of her face.

He could see the downward spiral that she was about to enter and knew that he had to stop it.

"It's not about winning or losing. It's not about the fictitious titles. Are you really concerned about winning the top spot? If so, why aren't you competing against the Lords out there? The apostles?" He asked with a frown.

Even though Qiu Qiu didn't say anything, it was clear what she was thinking.

"Is it unfair? They have more Sigils, they have more power. You can't compare yourself to them. Right?" He asked as she reluctantly nodded her head.

"You are not them, they are not you. Comparison is the death of joy. You're not achieving the state of Unity in order to hold it over someone else. You're trying to achieve the state of Unity in order to better yourself. To improve on the you of the past.

"Remember that. Win or lose, if you've improved during the fight, you've already gained more than what an easy victory would've given you. A difficult defeat is far better than an easy win. You merely need to observe it from a different angle."

Furrowing her brows, Qiu Qiu let out a sigh.

She understood what he was saying but... It's hard not to compare.

"Just keep an open mind when you challenge them in the next round." He concluded, knowing that saying any more than this would make it annoying for Qiu Qiu.

###

Glancing up at the sky, Ria frowned as she didn't feel a difference yet. Several days had now passed yet the Eclipse cycle still hadn't arrived.

Even though they were strong, Ria had to admit that the two of them were beginning to struggle with this curse.

The longer they stayed here, the hungrier the residents became.

At first, it was just a single pair of eyes staring at them, judging them and gauging their strength.

But later, it was several.

Always staring, never blinking.

They watched, watched and kept watching. Whether they were trying to sleep or keeping guard, there were always eyes watching their movements.

After a certain point, Ria began to wonder if she should just kill them all.

To stop the eyes from watching, to end their fleeting existence.

However, Luke helped her snap back to her senses.

"Freaky f*ckers..." Ria muttered, her voice weak.

Even when they venture out into the desert, there would always be a pair of eyes in the distance.

"The Eclipse cycle should be soon. They're becoming more and more restless. I won't be surprised if they start attacking us after a certain point." Luke sighed.

Not only that, but the strange teleportation was also beginning to fall apart.

They could get closer to others that wound up here. At least close enough to hear a single word before they were teleported away.

"I'm starting to feel like the Eclipse cycle isn't what we think it is." Ria spoke up as she glanced at the eyes staring at them from afar.

She stared back, not fearing their gaze and challenging them to meet hers.

"I feel like this Eclipse cycle is simply them opening the prison doors. To let all the inmates out for the culling."

She recalled her experiences in the ritual. It was a similar structure as to what they were experiencing right now.

A deprivation period in order to enhance the feelings of desire and violence before letting the subjects tear away at each other.

If they hadn't experienced this kind of treatment in the past, the two of them might've begun burning down every village they saw.

But doing so might help the ritual instead.

"Probably. But we can't do much about it. The truth of the matter is that we can't leave." Luke sighed.

Their only chance was during the main ritual. Like how Gin saved them, if this was indeed a ritual like the past, they'll have to disturb it from the heart of the ritual.

As time passed, the sun above began to waver as its light was slowly shielded by the moon.

Chapter 608 - 608: Ria's New Power

"Seems like it's about to begin." Luke narrowed his eyes with a frown.

They could already feel a sinister energy slowly filling the air as the sun was nearing darkness.

As for Ria, she was keeping a close watch on the people who were eyeing them from afar.

The closer the sun got to darkness, the more ravenous their hunger became.

"Seems like they worship Famine." Ria concluded.

*RUMBLE!!!

Lightning crackled through the clouds above as Ria summoned a bolt of lightning to strike down upon herself, supercharging her.

"Already?" Luke was surprised.

"Just preparing. They seem like they'll jump at the first chance they get." Ria gestured with her chin.

Turning his attention to the eyes, Luke felt a chill down his spine seeing their hollowed gazes and saliva dripping from their mouth.

"Since this is a ritual rite with a fake sun and moon, the main altar should be directly beneath it. Once the eclipse sets in, the barriers holding this place together should fall apart based on what we've seen in the past few days."

"Rush it and cause some havoc?" Ria asked as Luke nodded his head.

Their main goal was to get out of this cursed place first before figuring out the rest.

Just as Ria was about to say something else, she felt several hands sliding up her leg as her pupils constricted.

*BANG!!!

Stomping down, lightning struck against the sand as both Ria and Luke jumped back.

To their surprise, a cluster of limbs began to crawl out of the sands below.

"Hungry..." A voice called out from the mass. It sounded as though it was a fusion of countless different voices, all echoing the same sentiment.

Hunger!

A vein bulged on Ria's forehead as her hair crackled with lightning.

Pulling her arm back, she held her breath and punched down.

The instant her fist came into contact with the sand, lightning began to jump between the grains, dispersing across a large area.

But that was fine with Ria. After all, this was the foundation for her next attack!

Creating a blade out of lightning, Ria entered an offensive stance and took aim at the mass of flesh.

Letting Ria focus on her own task, Luke conjured a book as several chess pieces began to manifest in his hands.

Promotion! Triple buffs!

Across Ria's body, the symbol of a Knight, Rook and the Queen piece!

Knight granted an attack buff, Rook for Speed and defence while the Queen piece granted a buff to everything. However, that wasn't the key highlight.

The main benefit to the Queen piece was multi strike! An enhancement buff that essentially duplicated the attacks of the person being buffed!

As Ria felt the enhancements spreading through her body, her body transformed into lightning and rushed forward.

Several circles appeared in front of her as she accelerated in an instant! If Alice had been here, she would have recognised these to be natural enhancements that came from the convergence of a huge amount of energy.

Raikiri!

Stabbing forward, a single bolt of lightning tore into the body of the mass of flesh as countless pillars erupted around them, forming a cage of sorts.

These were merely the lingering effects with the main attack targeting the giant mass beneath them.

However, despite the power of her attack, Ria could already see the flesh reforming.

A strange black energy oozed from their wound.

"Hmm... This isn't the normal Eclipse. It's probably what Allura wanted me to check out."

"F*CK!!!" Rosalyn's voice scared Ria as she jumped to the side out of shock.

She knew the Abyss Lord was with them nearby but to think she'd just show up behind her.

"What's with you Lords and appearing behind people?!" Ria complained in annoyance.

"Don't blame me for your own lack of awareness. And as much as I want to mock you, that black ooze is problematic." Rosalyn gave her a shrug before pointing at the monster beneath the sand.

Waving her hand, blood restrained the mass of flesh as Rosalyn extracted a small sample of the ooze.

Observing it closely, a frown appeared on her face.

Indeed as expected, it was traces of the outer gods.

'Is the barrier breaking?' Rosalyn couldn't help but wonder.

The barrier around their world was one that was established by the collaboration of all four Gods during the previous era.

While they turned their backs on Velouria, the three main Gods still understood that the outer gods were not something they could joke around with.

The moment they allow these foul beings to enter their world, the corruption will continue to spread until this world was completely uninhabitable.

Glancing up at the sky with a frown, her eyes shifted ever so slightly as she peered past the barrier of the ritual site.

With Rosalyn not saying anything and not teasing her, Ria understood that this was a serious issue.

Since that was the case, she'll handle anything that approaches.

Above them, the sun was soon covered by the moon in its entirety. An ominous red spread across the realm as the jubilant howls of the fanatics rang out.

Laughter, cries for salvation and the yearning to fulfil this hunger. The curses that lingered on their bodies began to fade.

Ria could feel the chill of the ritual seeping into her mind. The yearning of hunger, the desire for violence.

Her ritual was never fully finished.

She could hear the call of the Eclipse.

Gritting her teeth, anger surged within her mind.

"Luke, give me everything. I'm going to wipe them all out." Ria requested as Luke nodded his head and opened his booklet.

After separating from Alice, both of them went to find their fifth Sigils.

For Luke, he managed to get his sixth through coincidence while Ria was on her fifth.

His first Sigil allowed him the Pawn piece, one that buffs all base stats by a decent margin.

Knight for attack, Bishop for Spell, Rook for speed and defence. Queen was similar to the Pawn but better with the added bonus of multiplicative strikes. As for his sixth piece, it was naturally the King!

Promotion – King!

All piece buffs increased by 30%!

Passive bonus – Resonance enhancement!

All of the pieces manifested on Ria's body, and she could feel the power surging through her limbs.

Taking a deep breath, five Sigils lit up on Ria's body.

Her eyes shifted to an electric blue with a cross pattern in the middle while lightning crackled around her feet.

Resonance!

A pillar of lightning crashed down on Ria's body as armour began to manifest across her body before shattering into particles.

Her original resonance form was one that coated her in armour and granted her a large boost to lightning damage.

However, as she gathered more experience, her fighting style shifted slightly. Now combined with her newly acquired Sigil as well as Luke's King piece buff, her resonance underwent another transformation!

This time, her appearance was less violent than before. Her hair retained its usual colour with the undertone of neon blue. A white gold and blue dress wrapped around her body.

Most of her armour had disappeared except for light armour covering her shoulders, chest, arms and legs.

*RUMBLE!!!

With Ria in the centre, a cage of lightning expanded, covering all of the fanatics that were on their way towards them.

One by one, golden marks appeared above their head.

With one mark, the second soon manifested. Then came the third, fourth, fifth and sixth.

Lightning crackled furiously beside Ria as she transformed it into a single blade.

As she held the blade in her hand, cracks spread across her body as she transformed into a bolt of lightning, jumping into the storm clouds above.

Entering a drawing stance, Ria glared at all the marks that appeared across the desert.

Coils of lightning began to appear above each of the targets as they've now been marked for death!

Gritting her teeth, Ria drew her blade.

Raikiri!

With a blinding flash of light, a myriad of slashes erupted across the desert. The only thing those marked for death could do was raise their hand, welcoming in incoming calamity.

*BANG!!!

Landing on the ground, Ria dismissed her resonance form before making her way over to Rosalyn.

Meanwhile, Luke glanced over to the destruction that she caused with a single attack.

In the place of each target, there was now a ravine. It looked as though countless giant blades cut down from the sky, tearing the earth in half while the sand around the attack was turned to glass.

Yet this was still her fifth Sigil!

Ria was now focusing everything on one lethal strike. The fastest, most powerful strike that she can muster with no need for a second hit.

A strike that abandons all defence and safety in exchange for overwhelming lethality. Just holding the blade was enough for Ria to cause damage to her body.

However, this damage was negligible if her attack landed!

After all, her fifth Sigil was one that siphoned the damage done to her enemies in order to heal herself!

###

After the defensive test, the next part of the tests to see if you're eligible to join the main tournament was the test of footwork.

A speed trial to see how fast you can get past the obstacles in your way. Naturally, both Jin and Alyss had an easy time clearing this.

While they didn't break any records, their placement was high enough that they didn't need to worry at all.

Not only that, but there was no sabotaging this time either, meaning Alyss had a smooth run.

The final test was a simple spar.

Or at least that would've been the case if things went as planned.

In front of Alyss now stood a masked figure. Despite not making a move, it was giving her the creeps. Every part of her body was warning her of the potential danger.

As the match began, Alyss shifted her posture and prepared to attack when she paused in surprise.

The masked figure copied her moves one for one and entered the same posture!

Chapter 609 - 609: Alyss's Martial Arts

Seeing as how her opponent was taking her moves one for one, Alyss wondered if the goal of this test was to see how the examinees react to a mirror match up.

With no powers available to them, Alyss understood that this test was one that would separate the best from the good.

But there was another benefit to this. She could see how she performs the new martial arts from an outside perspective!

By watching her own movements of the unfinished martial arts, she'll be able to pick out key mistakes, issues with combining certain moves and refining it further! She also gets to experience how it feels to be attacked by it, how she can counter and make adjustments.

Without any hesitation, Alyss rushed in with the unfinished footwork.

Her ideal martial arts has three footwork's to choose from. First, a footwork to trick the senses making it appear as though she was teleporting. A merge of the poison sect's footwork, Swallowtail's Veil, and their own Void Steps.

When executing the first one, it'll look as though she simply disappeared from the spot before appearing near her enemies. However, it has the benefit of not creating a burst of energy when she exits the Void Steps. While this can't be perceived normally, she couldn't rule out the possibility of someone sensing the tremblings of the Void.

But there was the issue of compatibility. The Poison Sect's footwork seeks to confuse the opponent through mirages, Swallowtail's footwork seeks a counter with a fake retreat while Void Steps seeks a direct route to the opponent.

Seeing the masked figure execute the same movement, Alyss understood how slow it looked to someone with the state of Unity. All three were executed separately rather than in one fluid movement.

Entering a state of focus, she memorised the issues and key points to adjust.

The next footwork was a short distance burst of speed that surpassed the time needed for Void Steps. Combining the fastest footwork of Swallowtail, the burst of power from the Scorching Tyrant Arts belonging to the Blazing Sun sect and the momentum generated by the Vermillion Clan's martial arts, this footwork should generate the fastest speed possible in the shortest time possible.

When combined with attacks or evasive manoeuvres, it allows her to react late and still dodge perfectly!

Twisting her body, she launched a kick towards the masked figure who did the same and then executed the second form.

'Too much recoil. It'll be hard to counter with a follow up and the signs of activation are too obvious. I should tune down how much I use from the Scorching Tyrant Arts.' Alyss evaluated before jumping back for the third form.

A form of stability. Unlike the previous two forms, it's not a movement that lets Alyss attack her enemies faster. Rather, it's one that allows her to be unmovable during attacks that should be displacing her!

If an enemy was to counter, she'd usually be knocked back before her attack could reach.

But with this, it'll no longer be an issue!

Rushing towards the puppet, she overlaid the form of stability over her steps as she gave herself a stable centre of gravity and rooted herself to the ground.

Pulling her arm back, she punched forward with the Vermillion Clan's martial arts, seeking to push the masked figure back.

*BANG!!!

As their fists clashed with each other, neither of them moved.

'Too much focus on the stability ruins the use of attacking martial arts. I need to accurately judge when to overlap the stability otherwise my attack loses force.'

Twisting her body, she launched a backwards heel kick towards the masked figure. At the last second, before their attacks collided, Alyss activated the footwork.

*BANG!!! CRASH!!!

Seeing the masked figure slide back and tumble across the ground while she stood her ground, a grin appeared on her face.

'So it can't make adjustments like I do. The only thing it knows how to do is the stuff I knew before I entered this chamber.' Massaging her neck, Alyss made the mental adjustments.

Seeing the masked figure get up, Alyss decided to put her adjustments to the test.

Rushing forward, she parried the figure's counter before executing the first form.

Mirage Steps!

Her figure seemed to shift as she looked like she was in the midst of retreating, circling and attacking all at once!

"Which one's the real one?" Alyss's voice rang out, appearing next to the figure and kicked it in the stomach, sending them sliding back.

Phantom Shift!

Lunging forward, she attacked with her palm while the masked figure fought back using the form of stability.

Seeing her palm recoil back, Alyss nodded in approval. The form of stability was something she made entirely for defence. Seeing it match up to the second form, Phantom Shift, proved its usefulness. Even if it's in the incomplete state.

Since the masked figure was now on the defensive, Alyss tested out the next form.

A form based on Tiamat's raw power that she's observed and integrated into the movement.

A set of attacks that focused on breaking defences with raw power!

Pulling her arm back, she watched the masked figure do the same.

*BANG!!!

As their fists collided, Alyss overlayed the improved form of Stability on top of her attack.

The masked figure was pushed back by two steps while Alyss was unmoved.

"Don't break on me too quickly, we still have plenty to test." Alyss chuckled.

With her footwork now complete, she wanted to perfect the rest. The ultimate goal is not for a single form of martial art but rather the foundations for every movement.

Once she familiarises herself with all of the possibilities, it'll become natural movement for her. At that point, every action could be considered to be part of the martial art!

That was the state that Alyss wanted to reach and this masked figure would help her achieve it!

###

"A little change of plans. I want you two to go to the ritual centre and put a stop to it. This is no longer just a ritual of Famine or any other ritual that they're doing." Rosalyn ordered as she snapped her fingers and a pair of vampiric wings expanded behind her.

The barrier hasn't broken which means the Outer Gods don't have a proper way to enter this world. But there were certainly cracks and signs of damage.

The worst part of all of this was that the damage didn't look like it was caused by them either, it looked as though someone had been tampering with it from the inside.

'Tsk, no wonder Allura wanted me to come to the East. F*cking brain damaged idiots don't know what's good for them.' Rosalyn cursed in annoyance.

"What's going on?" Ria asked with a frown.

If this wasn't an Eclipse ritual then what was it? What was the cult doing that had Rosalyn this startled?

"I'll tell you once things are over. For now, don't let the black ooze get into your system. If you do, crush the orb I gave you immediately. Don't hesitate, don't worry about anything, just crush it if the ooze gets into you okay?"

Seeing a rare case of seriousness from Rosalyn, Ria nodded her head as the Abyss Lord shot into the sky before disappearing.

Looking at each other, Luke and Ria nodded before he placed the Rook buff on the two of them, increasing their speed.

Glancing up at the sky while running, Ria could see a strange black liquid dripping from the 'sun', splitting the horizon in half. Not only that, but behind the umbral sphere, flames expanded as though the end times had arrived.

Looking to her right, she noticed in the distance people fighting one another.

Some seem to be travellers while others seem to be residents of this place.

The residents cared not for the damage done to their bodies as they hacked, tore and chewed away at the bodies of the unfortunate.

They raised the chunks of flesh towards the umbral sun in jubilation, in reverence.

Their laughter, their hollowed eyes and their ecstasy were clear to see.

'Why must you simply watch? What you must do is clear is it not? The ritual is not finished yet, finish the job.' A familiar voice rang out in Ria's head.

Her voice.

Dripping with the same ecstasy, hunger and desire as the fanatics.

Gritting her teeth, she dismissed the voice to the best of her abilities.

How long has it been since she last heard the call of the Eclipse?

"Focus Ria." Luke brought her back to reality as he noticed the changes in her expression.

"I know. Thank you." Ria smiled.

She was glad that Luke was here with her otherwise she might've focused on the voices more than she should.

Taking a deep breath to calm herself, they rushed towards the blackened waterfall pouring out of the sun.

As they arrived at the base of the umbral sun, they saw a river of darkness and flames, expanding with each passing second.

There was no altar, no sign of fanatics nor were there signs of beasts.

It was... empty?

Furrowing her brows, Ria understood that something was wrong.

It was impossible for them to hold such a large ritual without a proper altar and sacrifice.

Yet there was nothing here...

No altar, no sacrifice, no cultists.

Since Rosalyn wanted them to end the ritual, there was only one thing for her to do.

Closing her eyes, Ria focused on the call of the Eclipse. The sensation of desire washed over her body and a hunger stirred from deep within.

'Where is it... Where is it leading me...' Ria gritted her teeth. She wanted to wash this filthy sensation away as soon as possible but it was the only lead for her to find the heart of the ritual.

But... It wasn't leading her anywhere. She could sense it.

She was already at the heart of the ritual...

"!!!"

Opening her eyes, Ria understood where the altar was now.

It was beneath the lake!

Chapter 610 - 610: Call Of The Eclipse

The two of them took a few steps back to avoid the Lake as Ria summoned the lightning blade once more.

Getting Luke to buff her, she narrowed her eyes and aimed her sword at a diagonal angle.

Raikiri!

*BANG!!!

Creating a path down, she made horizontal slashes to create steps to make it easier to escape later.

IF they were to come across any victims like them who are still alive down there.

"Any plans? Or are we just going to destroy everything we see down there?" Luke asked, wanting to evaluate Ria's mental state right now.

The more they interact with the Eclipse, especially during a ritual like this, the more dangerous it gets for.

"We'll deal with the ritual. If there are any survivors down there, we'll deal with them as we see fit. Whether that means to take them out of here or kill them." Ria replied, making more steps.

As they continued down into the bowls of the desert, light began to disappear with Ria having to illuminate their surroundings with her lightning.

The stench of rotting flesh and the smell of iron lingered in the air, causing her expression to twist before composing herself.

Once they were close to the bottom, they could hear the pained groans and screams echoing through the walls, the clashing of chains and the sounds of flesh and bone being torn apart.

However, neither of them rushed into the ritual site rashly.

Crouching near the exit of the tunnel that Ria created, she had Luke grab her ankles before leaning down to scan their surroundings.

"It's clear."

Jumping down, Ria dismissed her sword for now since having electricity crackling in her hands doesn't exactly do well for stealth.

Around them, they could see empty cages and dried blood plastered on the floors and walls.

Whatever was being kept here had been moved elsewhere and the screams echoing in the distance weren't exactly a good sign of their fate.

Closing her eyes once more, Ria wanted to see where the voices led her, where the heart of the ritual was within this maze.

Sensing the call of the Eclipse, she began to make her way right while Luke followed, keeping an eye on their surroundings while making a note of the path they took.

If things go south, they needed a way to escape.

Just as he was walking forward, he suddenly bumped into Ria.

Before he could say anything, he saw the sights she saw and paused.

People hanging upside down from chains over fire. Fanatics gutting and eating.

Families tied down by chains, moving towards metal constructs that scooped everything out before tearing them in two.

But despite all of this, the victims had smiles on their faces.

Even if they scream from the pain, they smile with insanity in their eyes.

But...

Was it a scream or was it a laughter?

The more they listened and the more they watched, the more the two realised it was laughter and not screaming.

Without any hesitation, Ria created a bolt of lightning and threw it towards the fanatics. Before it could hit, she traded places and cut off the man's head in an instant.

Right when they were about to call for intruders, Ria summoned her sword.

Raikiri!

*RUMBLE BANG!!!

Lightning whipped out, striking and slashing every fanatic with deadly precision.

However, as she retrieved her blade, a frown appeared on her face.

These weren't the fanatics she was used to dealing with.

No... All of these fanatics were normal people.

They didn't even notice that they were being attacked before dying.

Looking at the fresh blood leaking out of their charred bodies and onto the floor, Ria's pupil trembled.

Why? Why would they choose this path?

Do they not see what they're doing? The heretical actions? Why?

Why must they choose the Eclipse Cult? Out of all three gods, why this one?

Why are they content with performing these rituals?

Clutching her head, Ria gritted her teeth.

'The same reason why you did everything you did all~ those years ago. Maybe you started for survival...'
Ria's own voice trailed off before echoing in her ear.

'But you started to enjoy it didn't you?'

*BANG!!!

Slashing back out of instinct, Ria panted while Luke managed to grab her arm with the buffs present on his body.

Widening her eyes, Ria realised what had almost happened.

"I'm-"

"It's alright." Luke shook his head before she could apologise.

Reaching forward, he covered her eyes with his palm.

"Focus."

There wasn't anything else he needed to say. She simply needed to focus on her current self.

To not let the past drag her down.

Biting her lip, Ria took this moment to calm down.

"Better?" Luke smiled, removing his hand.

"Mnm, better." Ria nodded with a smile as they began to dismantle the machines one by one.

While dismantling the machines, Luke could feel that Ria was feeling awkward about what happened earlier.

He had to admit, he was surprised as well.

If he didn't react fast enough to buff himself, he might've lost an arm.

However, he didn't blame her.

Even though he wasn't affected as badly as Ria was, he too was beginning to hear the call of the Eclipse. He could only imagine what Ria might be hearing.

Once the machines were dismantled, Ria wanted to go help the people still tied to it yet they didn't say anything.

One by one, their smiles began to fade as tears streamed down their faces.

Before Ria could even try to comfort them, they lashed out, trying to bite and claw away at Ria.

"I was almost there! I was almost there! You took it from me!" They screamed as Ria jumped back, not wanting to hurt them.

However, the insanity in their eyes told her that they were long gone.

Anger rose in Ria's heart.

Not towards these victims but to the Eclipse.

'That's right, you gotta kill them don't you? You're granting them mercy and taking them out aren't you?' Her voice whispered in her ear as Ria's hand hesitated.

But before she could make a move, an armour figure appeared next to her, slashing down with its greatsword and disposing of the victims that tried to lunge at Ria.

"Luke..." Ria muttered, glancing back and seeing Luke with his book open and several chess pieces floating above it.

"Take a break. I'll handle things for a bit, alright?" He gave her a comforting smile as Ria sighed and nodded.

As it stood, she was in no state to deal with this. If she wasn't careful, she might attack Luke without even knowing. Just like how she did earlier...

###

Looking at the stumbling body of the masked figure, Alyss was a little disappointed.

She thought that she would be able to refine more of her martial arts with this opportunity but the durability couldn't keep up.

So far, she was only able to complete the footwork and two martial attacks. An attack to break the defences by crushing their point of stability while the second was a combination of different principles to send a strike through the defence rather than breaking it.

Both had their own uses in different scenarios but perfecting these two led to the severe drop in durability for the masked figure.

It couldn't even execute the footwork with the countless cracks across its body.

"Tsk, I got excited for nothing." Alyss spat out in annoyance as she cracked her neck and entered an offensive stance.

Pulling her arm back, she rushed forward with Phantom Shift and slammed her fist against the figure's chest.

Before it could even be thrown back, cracks appeared across its body as a hole was blown open in its chest.

Collapsing on the ground, the masked figure began to sizzle and smoke, revealing the puppet beneath the clothing.

'Don't be so sour. At least you managed to finish the footwork and two punching methods.' Alice cheered.

'Yeah but how long is the rest going to take?' Alyss was annoyed.

She wanted to finish this as soon as possible.

That way, if danger was to come their way, Alice could deal with the casting part while she dealt with the physical.

That was her way of protecting the two of them.

She didn't want to keep waiting.

'There's still the main tournament. And honestly, if things do get a little out of hand, we could always mess around with the Church of the Sun. They were the ones who taught us about the zone in the first place no?' Alice reassured.

Out of everyone, the Apostles belonging to Solaris had some of the strongest Martial prowess Alice had ever seen and that was hundreds of years ago.

Who knows what they could do now?

Thinking about it for a moment, Alyss let out a sigh and reluctantly nodded her head.

Handing over control to Alice, she left to familiarise herself with the new techniques.

Leaving the chamber, Alice waited for Jin to finish.

With all three tests now complete, it was now onto the main tournament. There were a few surprises in the records but none that really kept her attention. She couldn't get a full understanding from just numbers and words.

She needed to see it herself to understand.

Example being, someone struggling to achieve 1 minute survival and someone giving up at 1 minute because they were bored are very different.

Yet they both say 1 minute.

There was also another thing that Alice was concerned about. The unknown person that controlled the arrows and spears during the first test.

She had a sinking feeling that it was probably the sect master of this place. Otherwise who else would be able to perfectly pinpoint the gaps in their Absolute Zone?

It's not a case of simply being faster either. It was accurate and with clear intension.

If their enemy was indeed the sect leader of a Sovereign sect with the state of Unity then it won't be an easy fight.

But just because it's not an easy fight doesn't mean Alice was willing to back down. If anything, it gave her more motivation.

It all depends on the stance that they want to take.