

Abyssal A 621

Chapter 621 - 621: New Formula

Crashing down in the Void, Alice panted heavily as she couldn't help but feel nervous when facing two Abyss Lords.

She could feel her legs going soft momentarily before the thought of her reward rejuvenated her.

Lifting her hand, two orbs of blood swirled as she couldn't help but giggle.

'Two! Two samples of Abyss Lord blood! This time it's in reality and not in the Inverted World.' She proudly declared while sitting up.

It wasn't easy to get these two samples as she had to think of an idea on the fly.

A way to bypass a Lord's defences and their focus in the Absolute Zone.

However, attacking a Lord with a large flashy display of force wasn't the only way to withdraw a sample of blood.

A small focused cut would do the same.

In that regard, she used Void Flux – Cleave and had Alyss perform some of her martial arts to massively speed up the launch speed of her skill.

By dispersing her blood mist into the air, and focusing it only on the Lords, she was able to distract them for a brief moment while also disrupting their energy.

Creating the gap she needed.

But the most shocking or rather annoying thing was how little damage they sustained!

With all of her rapid preparation, using her own blood and her strongest slice, it would've been enough to cut anyone beneath a Lord in two!

Yet those two monsters only got a small scratch from it.

Just thinking about it sent a chill down Alice's spine as she shook it off and stored the blood into two separate vials for later use.

'Do you think if I combined my normal resonance + the false one, then the artificial one, use a portion of my new skill that hasn't been finished yet and your martial arts, we'll be able to kill a Lord?' Alice couldn't help but ask.

After tasting the defences of a Lord first hand, she was beginning to doubt.

Which only reinforced the idea of how injured Allura was. Considering Ria's attack was able to make her activate a portion of her first Resonance.

She's a literal walking glass cannon right now. A cracked, barely held together glass cannon.

'Hmm... I think I need to make some adjustments. It was already difficult to defend against that old man with Absolute Zone and your blood disrupting his energy. If he was at full strength, that first grab would've caught us.' Alyss frowned.

She recalled the potential consequences of being captured again and shivered.

Even if it wasn't the Zenia family, there's no telling how far their intelligence network goes. Not only that, but what about Nyer? The man behind their creation?

To them, his movements have been obscure and hidden. Only small signs pointed to his involvement yet he's never taken the front stage despite his powers.

'But in terms of power, we're still lacking a little I think. In both speed and power.' Alyss folded her arms.

She was already beginning to adjust parts of her martial art in order to face someone with an Absolute Zone.

The key to breaking an Absolute Zone was not through deception but rather creating a gap yourself. It's a chess game to see if she could force them to make a mistake before she did.

'Hmm... Do you think it's time for us to consider our sixth Sigil then? Granted, we haven't had much chance to experiment with our fifth considering well... It's nature.' Alice scratched her hair.

The fifth Sigil was both powerful yet very, very dangerous.

Use it too long in its natural form and she gets expelled. Invert it and well... she dies.

It was a hard balance to reach if she wanted to use it at its full potential and not a lot of the fights require that kind of power right now.

But if she was to use it however she wanted, it might become unavailable when she truly needed it.

'Is there even anything for us to kill? Or well... something that can help us bridge the gap without using the power Nyer planted into us if possible.' Alyss questioned.

In the event where Nyer can control the blood in them, they needed a way to fight without relying on her blood.

Replacing Sigils was an ability granted by blood, therefore their sixth Sigil couldn't be chosen at random.

'Hmm... Well, we need to go through our current options first. Hallucination + catalyst for fusion. Passive blood abilities. Blood and metal control, Void powers, level up with a side of exile. Then in terms of Lord

abilities that we use often, we have Tiamat, Severance and Duality. The other Sigils are handy to some extent but we don't use them as often.'

While there are other Sigils, it's gotten to the point where Alice didn't need quantity. Their biggest benefit for a long time has been the sheer variety of abilities they could access. But now, it was time for them to properly fuse, combine and synergise abilities together in order to create a bigger multiplier for power.

A method to truly reach the Lords.

Therefore, they had to cut down what's not needed and streamline their process.

'Well Tiamat and Allura's Sigil act as power. They're our strongest Sigils if we're talking about Sigils on their own with no additional factor. But in terms of strongest combination, it'll be first Sigil + Duality + Tiamat. This formula has been our hardest hitting thus far that we've tested.' Alyss spoke up as Alice was surprised by how vocal she was being.

But considering this was a discussion regarding their survival and method in facing Lords, it was no wonder.

'Speaking of formula, let's stick with that. So we have the foundation, the catalyst and then the force multiplier. Foundation being the basic abilities we work with, catalyst is like Duality that helps us change, fuse or cause a reaction between our powers. And the force multiplier is what we use to release the biggest hit.'

'Sure, but you're forgetting Void Flux is primarily a stand alone ability created through just your second Sigil. It's acting as all three variables of foundation, catalyst and even being the force multiplier.' Alyss reminded as Alice paused.

As Alyss mentioned, her second Sigil, in terms of pure versatility, hasn't even come close to being beaten yet.

'Let's exclude Sigil two for now. We need to think about options and what we can use to substitute each of the factors. For foundation, we have Sigil one, three and four that can work. In terms of catalyst...'

[So far, just duality and potentially Sigil five if you count the level up as a catalyst rather than just an outside enhancement. You've yet to discover other catalysts that work on par with Duality.] Cayla spoke up as Alice nodded in agreement.

Most of her abilities or attacks were simply a formula of foundation + force multiplier. Of course, her second Sigil would count as the best catalyst she has but she's not including it for now.

'Then that just leaves force multipliers. Of which we have an abundance of.' Alice folded her arms.

Tiamat, Severance, Void, Artifact, Sigil five.

'I think that makes it clear then. We need a catalyst as Sigil six in order to broaden our options and combinations.' Alice concluded.

Even if they were to disregard the Sigil swapping abilities of her second Sigil, there was still the Void, Personal Artifact and Sigil five acting as force multipliers. They won't hit as hard as Severance or Tiamat but they're certainly options that Alice can use.

'Now comes the hard question. What the f*ck do we get that can act as the foundation? Something to bring change and fresh inspiration to our Sigil combinations. We also need to be careful since this is our sixth. It's the final piece to achieving a two Sigil resonance, one that is entirely comprised of Anti Hunter Sigils.' Alice sat on the ground with her legs crossed.

Trying to figure out something that can work similar to Duality when it comes to acting as a catalyst was difficult. Especially if she considers the benefits that her second Sigil and Duality brought.

Finding something of that level was going to be hard unless she was satisfied with settling for less.

[I'm not going to say anything since I believe you are well aware of what I want to say.] Cayla rested her head on her hand as she glanced at Alice from behind her table.

'Yes yes, I know. If I didn't ask Kaden to seal you, you would be able to find something for me. But since you brought this up, I'm assuming you have a solution?' Alice rolled her eyes with a sigh.

[Correct. I have some... candidates in mind that should match what you're looking for. But the issue isn't which one you should hunt but rather IF you can find them to begin with. From what I last remember, a lot of these beasts no longer exist.] Cayla shrugged.

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but tilt her head.

'Wait. The f*ck? What do you mean no longer exist? Are people having difficulties finding them?' Alice questioned.

Even if a beast were to die, after a period of time, the Abyss itself will spit out a beast of the same species. Leading to a cycle where types of beasts never truly disappear.

Yet Cayla was now telling her that some of them don't exist anymore?

[This information might be a little outdated, but people aren't struggling to find them. They simply aren't around anymore. Extinct.]

Chapter 622 - 622: Extinct Beasts

[This information might be a little outdated, but people aren't struggling to find them. They simply aren't around anymore. Extinct.]

Hearing this, Alice wasn't sure how to react.

All she could think of was simply, why?

'How did they go extinct?' Alice questioned while Cayla shrugged.

[I don't have the answer for that. It's simply a case of researchers and myself noticing that certain beasts have disappeared altogether. No more Sigils were given, no more bounties, no more appearances. It's as though they were completely wiped out.

[As for their abilities, they were eventually split into smaller variants that appeared in different beasts. So some of the candidates that I think would work as a perfect Catalyst for you can't be hunted anymore.]

'Is this the Will's doing? Is he trying to stifle the growth of Hunters by making these beasts unobtainable?' Alice couldn't help but ask.

The only reason she could think of that would answer why these beasts disappeared would be the Will of the Abyss.

[He hasn't done these kinds of things in the past, even when the Abyss was at its strongest with countless hunters obtaining powerful combinations. I don't see why he would begin cutting back the beasts in the last few hundred years.

[Regardless, it's still a fact that some of these suitable catalysts are no longer around.] Cayla shrugged, handing the list over to Alice.

The abilities that she had drafted up varied, but all of them had potential ways of fusing and enhancing her Sigils.

Just to name a few, there was a Sigil that focused on the realm of life and death. Much like duality, it's able to split powers into the power of life and the power of death. Power of life focused on healing, multiplying and enhancing, while the power of death focused on killing, debuffing and weakening the opponent.

A Sigil that focuses on the viral effects. It's similar to poison yet at the same time, it's not the same. The Sigil itself breaks down the abilities to the fundamental powers and allows the user to merge certain aspects.

Take for example, the power of Severance, which focuses on cutting and isolating through slashes. By using this Sigil, she'll be able to apply the effects of Severance on the blood mist, making it turn into a...

'Wait. Sh*t.' Alice blinked her eyes.

If she was to combine Severance and the Viral Sigil, it would essentially make a mini version of her second Sigil right now! Blood mist that isolates the outside powers and turns whoever is trapped inside into a normal human.

Thinking of this, Alice folded her arms as she couldn't help but theorise at what Nyer had thrown together to create her. All of these combinations, was this what Nyer was doing?

Combining different bloods with pieces of Velouria and all the specimens that he's collected over the years.

The power of Null for example, as mentioned by Tiamat.

The list of potential catalysts didn't stop at Viral either.

Phantom Echoes, Mnemonic Splicing, Entropic Decay and so on.

All of these were potential catalysts that she could use, yet all of them were dubbed 'extinct' due to the fact that they're no longer around.

However, the one that caught her attention the most was a Sigil called Paradox Factor.

Paradox Factor was a simple ability. Whatever she hits or uses, she mutates to a certain extent. Cuts that heal, explosions that seal space, corruption that actually purifies.

But with this Sigil, she's unable to directly choose the mutation. Simply put, it creates a sense of chaos with her abilities.

Of course, just because she isn't able to directly control the mutation, it doesn't mean she can't indirectly manipulate the mutation path.

Yet with the beast extinct, it was impossible to get this power.

'Back to the drawing board then.' Alice sighed.

[I wouldn't go that far. I can still draft up a list of potential candidates based on what abilities are still available. Oh wait, I can't. Because I can't access the library of knowledge known as the Abyss.] Cayla didn't give up this chance to add another jab in.

Right now, she was working with outdated information. If Alice had warned her of what she wanted to do, Cayla might've gotten more of a chance to collect more information first before the sealing.

'Urggggggg...' Letting out a fatigued groan, Alice sprawled out on the floor.

Letting Cayla sort out the list for now, Alice put her focus back on reality. With her teleporting the two of them into the Void, she's managed to save them from the Lords for now.

However, until they resolve this... misunderstanding that she's part of the cult, things would be a lot more annoying than it is now.

She's fine with fighting a single Lord, might be fun. But more than one? Yeah nah she's not ready to roll over and die yet.

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"I'm back, did you miss me?" The man shouted out as Nyer didn't even glance back.

His focus was entirely placed on the woman inside the container.

"Did you deal with the lake of Outer God's blood?" Nyer asked, noting down some minor changes on the body.

"Done and dusted. Rosalyn wasn't wrong though, it's a bit of a pain. More so than before." The man stretched his body, walking over to the sofa and sprawled out.

"It's only to be expected. Outer God's blood isn't something we of this realm can casually touch without consequences. Though this is a beneficial situation for you as well, is it not?" Nyer spoke calmly.

Even for him, he had to take extra precaution when it comes to dealing with samples related to the Outer Gods.

Their... Energy and blood were highly unstable, corruptive and overall difficult to work with.

Trying to balance it and fuse it with elements of their world would result in failure 98% of the time. The other two percent would turn them into monstrosities that need to be put down.

What he desired was not a ruined world.

"Again you're speaking in riddles. Don't you get tired of that? How hard is it to just speak like a normal person?" The man asked lazily.

Nyer chose not to answer.

"I'm in need of some more materials. Get them for me." He instead chose to give the man some more chores as he let out a groan.

"Why don't you get your followers to do it? They're practically at your beck and call." The man clicked his tongue while reading through the list of what he needed.

All of them were rare samples of blood, flesh, plants and other materials that couldn't be retrieved easily.

And even if they could, the issue was rarity.

"If I give out the command, a lake of blood will follow, regardless of what I desire. It's far easier to have you do it."

"Well if you put it that way, I'm more inclined to help out. But you know how trades between us go." The man smiled a twisted smile as Nyer frowned ever so slightly before nodding.

"This body is reaching the end of its cycle anyways. Do as you please."

Receiving his permission, the man let out a cackle as his body began to break down into a black mist with countless eyes floating within. A corruptive energy began to spread out before black tendrils and maws latched onto Nyer's body, breaking and consuming him.

"Satisfied?" Nyer's voice rang out as the realm trembled.

A tear manifested nearby as another, younger, variant of Nyer stepped out. There was the same fatigued look in his eyes while the man nodded.

"Somewhat. I should've asked a little earlier since the blood and flesh were already beginning to rot away." He picked away at his teeth using his fingers before standing up.

"So how fast do you need these materials?"

"Within a week." Nyer walked over to his table and organised his notes.

There was a single sheet on the table that made him pause. A report regarding a certain individual in the east.

As expected, the hands-off approach was more desirable when it comes to growth of a specimen.

"Yikes a week? Aren't you a slave driver?"

Furrowing his brows, Nyer understood this tone of voice.

"I've given you the payment, it's your turn to respect the exchange and fulfil your side of the deal."

Before the man could even reply, an invisible pressure crashed down on him as cracks appeared across his body.

Divinity began to leak out with the realm crying out in pain.

Trying his best to stand up straight but failing, the man gritted his teeth and held up his hands in surrender.

"Sh*t alright, I got it. Just a joke." He forced a smile as the pressure disappeared.

He thought that Nyer would be a little weaker now that a new vessel took over, but to think he could cultivate another 'Hunter' to such an extent was forever going to be a mystery.

After all, the Abyss creates contracts that modify the soul.

So for Nyer to have so many 'usable bodies' with different Sigils, and power combinations, it was defying the natural order of the Abyss.

Watching the man leave the room, Nyer turned his attention back to organising his notes.

When dealing with someone of his nature, Nyer had to make sure the vessel he uses can kill him. Otherwise, things will begin spiralling out of control. A high risk high reward situation that wasn't of his own doing. But one that he'll take advantage of.

After all...

The man he was talking to...

Is an artificial 'offspring' of an Outer God that humanity created.

One that he picked up and one that he's keeping confined and controlled.

Chapter 623 - 623: Feris's Prank

After a bit of rest, Alice sat up properly and glanced over to Jin who was looking at the Void in awe. His eyes trailed the flying beasts in the distance, the cosmic swirl of the realm itself and the countless floating islands that drifted aimlessly.

"Where are we?" He asked, glancing back and noticing that it was Alice who had taken over for now.

"The Void. Think of it as the Abyss but less dangerous. You can't stay here for long though otherwise you'll turn into one of those things." Alice shrugged, pointing at the Void beasts.

Tilting his head, Jin thought that she was joking but seeing the seriousness in her face, he understood that it was true.

"Shouldn't we leave then?" Jin's smile twitched.

"Nah~ it's fine, we got a bit of time. Plus I know the owner of this place. We're practically best buddies." Alice grinned.

"No the f*ck we aren't. Can you stop coming and going into my realm as you please? It's not a safe shelter for you. If two Lords had jumped after you, do you realise the amount of damage they can do? Plus, I helped you with the Outer God last time." Feris lifted Alice up by the back of her dress, turning her around so that they were eye level.

"You come into my house uninvited and tell me you have guests that can blow up half my house? Absolutely not." She ranted as Alice smiled sheepishly.

She didn't think Feris would still be awake considering she's usually napping and wouldn't bother about what she did with the Void.

"I mean, they didn't follow me in this time?" Alice tried to talk her way out of it.

"This time. What about next time? And the time after that? What if you were to bring f*cking Solaris or Enris over here? Should I keep letting you get away with it? The Void was never meant to be a habitable place. It's the whole damn reason why I took over this realm to begin with.

"I. DON'T. WANT. TO. BE. DISTURBED." She pronounced each word clearly while tapping at Alice's head with her finger, making sure the words went into that empty brain of hers.

"And don't you dare say I can just ignore it. If you're sleeping and some motherf*cker is dancing, jumping and smashing the sh*t in your room, can you still sleep?" Feris interrupted before Alice could reply.

Seeing the expression on Alice's face, Feris realised that's exactly what Alice was going to say and a vein bulged on her neck.

"I woke up for this crap too. Just get the hell out of my realm before I kick you out myself." Feris released Alice in annoyance before disappearing from the place.

Coughing awkwardly, Alice stood up.

"See? Practically best buddies."

"F*ck off." Feris' voice interrupted as a portal manifested next to them.

Understanding that if they didn't leave now, Feris was probably going to toss them away anyway, Alice dragged Jin through the portal.

However, upon stepping through, Alice immediately wanted to turn around and leave, but the portal was closed.

In front of her, Old Man Mo, Sect Leader Jian and Qiu Qiu were around a dinner table, staring at her blankly.

'FERISSSSSS!!!!!!' Alice wanted to strangle the Realm Lord as she was practically sending her to her death!

"WAIT!" Alice shouted, just before they were about to make a move.

But they didn't listen to her as she immediately pushed Jin away.

*BANG!!!

Creating blood chains around her to form a cage, she immediately had Alyss switch out her fourth Sigil for Tiamat and her third for Duality.

In the time she took to create the cage, they already broke through as Alice immediately created a Void Flux using Tiamat's power.

The colour of the world drained into monotony as a single crimson orb fired towards Sect Master Jian who transformed his arm and grabbed the orb.

But the moment he transformed, he felt a sense of suppression from Alice. As though he shouldn't even dare to raise his head!

A strange sensation that caused him to furrow his brows.

Meanwhile, Old Man Mo rushed forward with a palm strike ready.

Duality!

His body controls flipped as Alyss took over.

Mirage Steps!

Her body shifted into three different movement techniques, disrupting the Old Man's focus.

With the Sigil of Duality disrupting his motor functions, his Absolute Zone faltered as he wasn't able to see which one was the real one so he took a gamble.

Aiming for the movement that was closing the gap, he slammed his palm down, breaking the floor but missing his target.

*BANG!!!

Alyss's kick slammed against his jaw but he didn't budge.

'F*ck!' Alyss cursed, allowing Alice to take over once more as she unleashed a pulse of pure power to push them away.

"Can't we have a civil discussion?! What makes you think I'm part of the cult???" Alice questioned, narrowly dodging Qiu Qiu's strike before pushing her away with a jab to the throat.

"I will not be swayed." Old Man Mo replied, closing the gap.

Alice gritted her teeth and debated on whether or not she should drink the blood.

However, before that, she'll see how far she could get with just her power first!

Duality + Tiamat!

A swirl of energy began to grow from within Alice's body. Countless strands coiled around her, pushing the two Lords away as they widened their eyes in shock.

As Lords, this energy was clear as day. It's a power that belongs to a Lord! And not just one at that but two!

'Did she kill a Lord for her Sigils?'

Questions floated around their mind, but they couldn't allow her to finish what she wanted to do.

Without hesitation, Old Man Mo activated his resonance. At that moment, the world lost its light.

Darkness expanded while Sect Leader Jian did the same. But instead of his first resonance, he activated his second.

"I don't think so!"

Slamming her palms down, her personal artifact spun to life as the space around them destabilized, preventing the activation of the second resonance!

*RUMBLE!!!

Jumping back, Alice created a veil of blood mist that disrupted Old Man Mo's attack while ethereal wings unfurled behind her.

At this point, both Lords were confused. The amount of abilities she's displayed should be enough for her to become a Lord. Yet she wasn't one? Not only that, but she had the powers of a Lord.

What was going on?

Regardless, they couldn't let her unleash this attack.

Dragon's Gaze!

Sect Master Jian closed his eyes for a moment before opening them again.

His pupils turned draconic as an invisible pressure locked Alice in place, preventing her from moving.

Even energy refused to flow properly, disrupting the charging of her attack!

"Tsk!" Bending her body back, Alice narrowly dodged Old Man Mo's attack before using the Shard of Kara to create a foothold for herself.

*Ding~

The jingle of a bell rang out as Alice noticed Old Man Mo bringing out a sword with bells attached to the back of the blade.

Demon Summoning!

Spiritual figures appeared wearing demonic armour as they lunged towards Alice!

Widening her eyes, Alice created an orb of blood above her finger and channelled the energy of Tiamat and Duality into her.

Aiming towards the demons, she snapped her finger.

*BANG!!!!

Despite being shredded apart, the spirits soon reformed with Alice being forced to continuously retreat.

Creating a blood blade, she let Alyss take over.

Void Flux – Cleave!!!

Violet flames burned bright against the face of her blade as the Spirits stopped reforming.

But her joy was brief with Sect Leader Jian appearing next to her.

"!!!"

Before Alice could even defend herself, a spectral dragon's head manifested and clamped its maw around Alice's left arm.

*CRUNCH!!!

Gritting her teeth, Alice pulled her body away, ripping her arm off as blood surged towards her wound.

While her left arm was reconstructing itself, she had Alyss take over, using her footwork to dodge Old Man Mo's relentless strike.

*Ding~

Summoning more demons to block her path of escape, Old Man Mo narrowed his gaze and aimed her blade for a stab.

'Now!'

*BANG!!!

Shooting forward in an instant, he stabbed the blade into Alyss's stomach as she gritted her teeth in anger.

Lifting her head back momentarily, she grabbed Old Man Mo's head with both her hands before slamming her head into his nose, causing him to stumble back.

Prying the blade from her stomach, the wound began to regenerate once more as veins bulged around Alyss's neck.

'I'm done with this. Since they don't want to talk they can die.'

Marking appeared around her body as violet flames burst out, wrapping around her arms.

"Feast." Alyss commanded as energy surged within her body.

Golden chains dug into her flesh but she didn't care.

*BANG!!!

Phantom Shift!

Her body lunged forward, intercepting Old Man Mo who was still in the midst of recovering. Her fist were pulled back as she readied a punch.

"DUCK!!!" Sect Master Jian shouted.

Without hesitation, Old Man Mo dropped his centre of gravity and stayed close to the ground.

"!!!"

Quickly raising her guard, it was a little too late for Alyss as a draconic claw dug into her body, slamming her against the wall and pinning her there.

Coughing up a mouthful of blood, Alyss wanted to pry the claw from her body but it refused to budge. Even when she tried to sacrifice her own flesh, claws continued to cage around her.

Seeing the two Lords walking towards her, Alyss wanted to try and drink the blood but Alice shook her head.

She took over her body as she had an idea in her mind.

Now that she was using Duality and Tiamat, if she was to combine it with her second Sigil...

Violet Flames erupted from her body, burning parts of the claw.

While it was regenerating and keeping her sealed, burning her way out wasn't her goal.

"I haven't tested this so don't blame me. You two are the ones that didn't want to talk." Alice forced a grin as she created an orb of energy in front of her.

Rather than firing it in one direction, she had another plan.

Crush it!

*BANG!!!

Chapter 624 - 624: Strange Energy Of The Cult

What did it feel like to be deprived of the energy that flowed through your veins for so long?

Emptiness.

Like a long companion that suddenly disappeared. A presence no longer besides you.

The coldness that followed was akin to sleeping without covers in the dead of night.

That cold, lonely solitude.

That's what Mo Xincheng felt after the explosion. The blinding light followed by the intense heat.

Once it collided with his body, the feeling of emptiness overwhelmed his consciousness.

"Urg..." Letting out a groan, his entire body felt weak. A strange set of chains wrapped around him, burning and crackling with a violet flame, yet it didn't harm his body.

Instead, it continuously siphoned and extinguished what little energy he could gather.

Forcing himself to open his eyes, he noticed that he was tied up with his old friend along with his disciple.

In front of him, the demoness could be seen sitting languidly on a chair while talking to her disciple.

"Hm? Seems like one of you is awake." Alice noticed the small movements as she greeted him with a wave of her hand.

Glancing around them, Old Man Mo could see the destruction caused by the explosion.

Pillars were shattered, cracks upon the walls and broken glass.

To put it bluntly, how were they alive? That hit should've taken them all out, especially the lad and Qiu Qiu.

Yet both of them were alive and well. At most, they had a few scratches and burns on their body but it was mostly healed up.

'Healing Blood?' Old Man Mo wondered.

However, Alice soon squatted in front of him.

"A little rude no? Ignoring me like that. Now, how does a civil discussion sound?" Alice asked while Old Man Mo simply glared at her.

"I have nothing to say to you. If you want to kill me, do so. But know this, once I get out of these chains, I will personally mount your head on a spear."

Hearing this, Alice couldn't help but roll her eyes.

"Are you stupid? Were you dropped as a child? Did you get kicked in the head by a beast when you became a Lord? Old man? Alcohol Thief? If you haven't noticed, all three of you are still alive and kicking. I can kill you, oh I can kill you so easily.

"But I haven't. I wonder why? Maybe, just maybe, if you consider the idea in that thick skull of yours, I'm NOT an enemy. You know? Did that ever occur to you?" Alice asked, manifesting a blood knife and pressing it against his throat.

She didn't know why he was so insistent that she was an enemy when they barely even met.

"You know nothing about me yet you're just going to assume I'm an enemy? Should I do the same? Oh let me just deprive this region of its two Lords. But not before I go around f*cking up everything you'd

done. Should I do that? Because I'm a vengeful motherf*cker." Alice narrowed her gaze in anger as her form started to shift.

Glass fractures spread across her body, transforming her into Mo Xincheng before changing once more.

This time, it was Jian Luoyan.

"I can easily cause some havoc in your name. If anything, I might just hand this place over on a platter to the south. Because as far as I can tell, they're doing one thing better than you guys. And that's not killing me thinking I'm someone I'm not." Alice spoke in Jian Luoyan's voice as Old Man Mo felt his anger rising.

"You wouldn't."

"Try me." Alice didn't waver in front of this stubborn old man as she glared at him, eyes full of seriousness.

"This just proves you're one of them." He hissed back, refusing to back down.

'Should I just kill him?' Alice's chest heaved in anger.

However, before she could do anything, Jian Luoyan slammed his head back, hitting Old Man Mo.

"Please ignore him. He's stubborn to a fault."

"Stubborn? You mean stupid? How did a dumb f*ck like this even become a Lord in the first place?" Alice retorted, pointing at the old man.

He wanted to defend himself but before he could say anything, Alice shoved some burnt fabric into his mouth, shutting him up.

If she had to hear another word out of his mouth, she was actually going to just silence him forever.

"He has his good points." Jian Luoyan smiled helplessly. At this current point, even he could see that Alice wasn't trying to kill them.

Otherwise, with them being tied up without energy and helpless, killing them was as easy as snatching candy from a baby. Absolutely effortless.

Though he had to admit, being tied up, feeling helpless and with no energy in his body was a strange sensation. It wasn't... great. But it wasn't bad either.

Jian Luoyan has yet to decide how he felt about the situation.

"Now I hope you have a shred of common sense in you. Do you still think of me as an enemy?" Alice asked, walking around to face the Sect Leader.

"I'm free to reconsider. But may I ask why you've been attacking sects and clans? If you're not from the south, what purpose do you have to attack? And why have you reappeared after a period of disappearance?" Jian Luoyan asked, trying to figure out Alice's motive.

"Because I can't use Bai Suyin's inventions. These sect tests that you guys have, I can't touch them at all. That and also no sect would show their full power if I turned up and asked them to fight. It's much easier to just storm in." Alice explained while gesturing to Jin for another demonstration.

Grumbling under his breath, he tossed over a talisman that Alice held before throwing it behind her.

***BANG!!!**

Seeing the 'stable' talisman explode like a bomb, Jian Luoyan couldn't help but blink his eyes in a mix of confusion and surprise.

He had tested it out himself so he understood just how tough it was for Suyin's inventions to blow up like this. Yet one touch was all it took.

But setting that aside, Alice wasn't wrong. A lot of these lower sects were rather... strict when it comes to performing their martial arts. If they realised that fighting Alice would lead to their martial arts being stolen, all of them would reject her approach.

Therefore, as she mentioned, the easiest way was to just storm in.

"Now that I've answered your questions, can you answer mine? What energy are you guys even talking about. Why did you think I'm part of the cult?"

This was the biggest question on Alice's mind.

If she could figure this out, it'll not only resolve this misunderstanding but also potentially help her infiltrate the cult if needed.

Ria wanted her revenge against them and as her friend, she won't be sitting back for when she does.

"This... I would say my old friend can answer that better than I can. But he's not exactly in the mood for that." Jian Luoyan let out a small chuckle as Old Man Mo was still stubborn.

Therefore, the only one whom she could ask was Qiu Qiu.

Shifting over in front of Qiu Qiu, Alice grabbed a chair and sat down.

"Are you going to be like your master or do you want to tell me what's going on?" Alice asked, folding her arms.

Out of the three of them, only Jian Luoyan was being cooperative.

She hoped Qiu Qiu could follow his lead.

Staring at Alice, Qiu Qiu was contemplating her options. On one end, like her master, she didn't trust people of the cult.

All of this could be a farce to make them drop their guard.

But on the other end, if she wanted to kill them, she could've done so many times over by now.

On top of that, when she attacks the sects, she doesn't kill. Only outside of her attacks, when people are hunting her down does she kill.

An act of self defence.

All of the evidence points that she wasn't part of the cult.

After a long period of silence, Qiu Qiu finally relented and let out a sigh.

"Every member of the Demon Extermination squad is taught to perceive a unique type of energy. One that's used by most of the people in the sect. Should we sense this energy, it's clear that they're a member of the Cult.

"Even if they try their best to hide it, there will be some lingering hints." Qiu Qiu admitted while Old Man Mo tried to break out of his bindings.

However, Alice simply increased the intensity of the flames around him before focusing back on Qiu Qiu.

"This... energy. It's always on my body right?" Alice asked as Qiu Qiu nodded her head.

'So it's not Abyssal since that only appears when I use Sigils. It's not Void either nor is it divinity from when I use the relics of the Abyss. Then that leaves only one possibility...' Alice thought to herself with a frown.

Eldrich.

The same energy that is used by the Outer Gods.

"I think I know what you're talking about now. You see, my birth is not a natural one. Artificial and orchestrated. Let's just say this energy is a byproduct of that. But if it's what I think it is, the cult is tampering with things far more dangerous than you can imagine." Alice stood up with a frown.

She needed to send this information to Darrow since he was looking for hints of the triple eyes in a flame.

If the cult in the south was messing with Outer Gods, then the likelihood of them being the same people trying to ship Outer Gods blood across the world was high.

Chapter 625 - 625: Mo Xincheng's Fixations

Scratching her hair in annoyance, Alice let out a sigh as things were getting annoying. Movement of the cult from the south has already infiltrated the festival from what Jin had mentioned earlier.

Hell, even his old ritual mate appeared.

This was two sets of bad news in one. First, they know that Jin is still alive now. Second, there was a chance that they're still creating the vessel for War.

'I should've asked Darrow to give me a hawk. That way I can send him some information if I have to.' Alice lamented. Hindsight was 20/20, no point crying over spilled milk.

Organising the information in her mind, Alice turned around to face the three.

What she should do here is to free them.

But considering how Old Man Mo was still giving her death stares, that might not be the smartest choice.

Regardless, Alice freed both Qiu Qiu and Jian Luoyan.

"How did you even seal our energy? I don't think I've felt this way in a long long time." Sect Master Jian asked while massaging his wrists.

They may be free but their energy hasn't returned yet.

"A girl's gotta have her secrets." Alice dismissed, but there was one thing that was clear.

Jian Luoyan knew that the key was these flames and the blood mist that she spread during their first interaction.

Recalling that interaction, he remembered that she also wanted samples of their blood, which she managed to take in the end.

'Is it contract based? Does taking our blood seal our powers?' He theorised.

Standing in front of Mo Xincheng, Alice folded her arms.

"If I free you, will you be civil? It's clear we're not enemies here." Alice asked while Mo Xincheng simply glared at her.

"Yeah I think you can stay bound a little longer."

"Now then, I believe that's everything cleared up. No more bounties on me and trying to kill me yeah?" She glanced back at Sect Master Jian who shrugged.

"I can't guarantee it."

The decision to place a bounty on her was agreed upon by all of the sects and clans. At least those who were at the meeting.

Therefore, to revoke the bounty. It required another meeting. One that he doubted those who suffered Alice's attacks would be happy to accept.

"Tsk, at least make sure they don't come with the intent to kill. Otherwise don't blame me if there are a few extra graves by the road." Alice scratched her hair in annoyance.

"Again, I can't guarantee it. But I will let them know." Sect Leader Jian smiled helplessly.

Staring at him blankly for a moment, Alice sighed.

"Whatever, I told you what I wanted to tell you. Also, if you're dealing with the Cult, on the off chance that they're using what I think they're using, be careful it doesn't get into your body. That corruptive energy will turn you into a monster far worse than the beasts you see in the Abyss." Alice reminded.

"I'll keep that in mind." Sect Leader Jian nodded.

Just as Alice was about to leave with Jin, Qiu Qiu stopped them.

"Wait. Can... Can you tell me how you achieved the State of Unity? What must I do?"

Raising her eyebrow, Alice glanced back.

"Don't you have a master that can teach you that?" She gestured to Old Man Mo who was annoyed, choosing not to resist or speak at this point.

"I do. But I want to know more. This pursuit of knowledge cannot be limited to just one person. What must I do to achieve the next level? What must I do to achieve the state of Unity?" Qiu Qiu asked.

Alice noticed a hint of desperation in her eyes.

She was chasing after something. Something that she needed strength to accomplish.

"Look, achieving the state of Unity is both easy and difficult. You look like you already achieved most of the foundations needed. You're just impatient." Alice decided to be honest with her.

She watched her fight, Alyss also experienced that final attack back at the Inn.

If this girl was less impatient and took the time to focus, calming her mind and taking things one step at a time, she'll be able to tap into the state of Unity.

She was literally at the cusp of achieving the enlightenment needed.

Though perhaps this final step is what stumped many people in the past. A step that's easy for some but far harder for others.

"If you ever want to spar, just find me. As long as you're not there to try and kill me, I'm always open for a spar, hell you can even spar against Jin if you want. The two of you are around the same level and whoever wins is based on luck to a certain degree."

Hearing her response, Qiu Qiu glanced down at the ground before sighing. It was basically the same advice that her master gave her.

She thought that she was already patient. How does she become more patient?

"Ah actually, there's another thing I wanted to ask. A friend of mine was looking for an old acquaintance. She used to be called Hua, how not sure what she's called now. Wears a pendant like this one, know anything? Apparently she's pretty famous." Alice paused, pulling out the jade pendant with red rope.

Minerva had asked her for this favour back in Caethis and since she has the chance, she might as well ask the sect leader.

"Hmm..." Observing the pendant, Sect Leader Jian felt like he'd seen it before but couldn't quite recall where he'd seen it.

Which shouldn't be the case considering the fact that as a Lord, his memory should be rather good.

"Leave it with me, I'll ask around."

Nodding her head, both Alice and Jin left as the Violet flames soon disappeared.

*BANG!!!

An explosion echoed out as Old Man Mo broke out of his bindings.

There was an anger in his eyes as he glared at both Sect Leader Jian and Qiu Qiu.

"Look-"

*BOOM!!!

Before Jian Luoyan could even finish a word in his sentence, Old Man Mo struck out with Jian Luoyan catching the fist in front of his face.

"Why must you be like this old friend? Hasn't she proved herself?" Jian Luoyan asked with a sigh.

Gritting his teeth, Old Man Mo adjusted his footwork and fist technique, breaking Jian Luoyan's guard and aimed for a punch from the side.

Noticing this, Jian Luoyan ducked under the punch and jabbed up with his thumb, numbing Old Man Mo's arm.

"You know! You know what they did! What they all did!" Old Man Mo gritted his teeth.

Letting out a sigh, Jian Luoyan nodded his head before punching Old Man Mo in the stomach.

"Of course I know. But we can't let that blind us to the truth. She's not part of the Cult and in fact, she even gave us some advice. Information that we didn't know about. Do you know how many died from this strange corruption? You should be very clear about that.

"After all, you were there, you saw it all happen. You saw the black mist turning friends and foe into these twisted monstrosities." Jian Luoyan glared at his friend.

This was the reason why they went their separate ways.

When the two of them were on the frontline fighting the southern front, they watched countless allies fall to this strange energy.

He wanted to go back and cultivate disciples and researchers to figure out the source of this energy.

On the other hand, Mo Xincheng wanted to push forward. To kill them before they could develop a stronger variant of this energy.

He was a madman running into the pits of hell with no care for his own safety.

Why would he? Everything he was living for was lost to this dark energy.

The only thing pushing him forward was the thought of revenge, to put the damn cult into the ground.

"That's why we should grab her while we can! Open her up, figure out her secrets! Do you know how much progress we can make if we were to drag that information out of the demoness?!" Mo Xincheng shouted back, preparing to activate his resonance.

But before he could, Jian Luoyan stomped down, causing obsidian chains to rush out from the pillars around them, whipping around Old Man Mo's body and restraining him.

"Do you even hear yourself old friend? Do you know what you are suggesting?" Jian Luoyan looked at his friend in disappointment.

Between them, Mo Xincheng was always the calm, composed and patient one. He preached about how patience was key and dropping fixations.

But when it comes to the Cult, he lost all patience and composure.

"Look at your disciple? Is this what you want her to learn?" Jian Luoyan pointed to Qiu Qiu who was shocked by how her master was acting.

But Mo Xincheng didn't even look towards her.

"She collaborated with the Vermin. To me, she's n-" Before he could even finish, Jian Luoyan punched him across the face, cutting him off.

"That's enough of that. Please, take this moment to calm yourself." Jian Luoyan frowned before gesturing to Qiu Qiu to follow him.

Following Sect Leader Jian out of the hall, Qiu Qiu couldn't help but glance back at her master.

"Don't mind him. He lost everything to the cult. I don't blame him for acting this way. But I don't know how to help him out of it either." Jian Luoyan smiled bitterly as Qiu Qiu understood her master's anger.

After all, she was the same. She lost her family to the cult.

Chapter 626 - 626: Apostle Of War

Checking around him, a robed figure made sure that no one was around before entering a cave a little distance away from the Emyrean Dragon Sect.

A cave that offered them a good view of the city in its entirety and the surrounding landscape.

Immediately, he could feel a dark presence wrapping around his body and sending chills down his spine.

No matter how many times he has experienced this, he has never gotten used to it.

Once the feeling disappeared, there was a strange marking around his eyes as his vision of the world shifted.

What was unseen could now be seen.

Lurking within the cave, a twisted amalgamation of eyes, eye sockets, jutting bones and hallowed flesh.

Upon sensing the robed man's gaze upon its figure, all of the pupils across the creature's body constricted, focusing on the man, scrutinising his every detail.

After a period of silence, it cracked open its eye-filled head, unleashing a horrific screech like that of chalk against a blackboard. Its body contorted, lunging towards the man like a rabid beast before lifting him up in the air and shoved the robed figure into its stomach.

Closing his eyes momentarily, the robed figure was soon overwhelmed by a sense of weightlessness before things turned back to normal.

"It's good to see you dear boy. How was it? Seeing your old friend?" A woman's voice rang out as the man opened his eyes and saw her perched upon a twisted throne within this secret realm.

A cosmic swirl of stars and galaxies was painted across the skies with fragments of land circling in an arc around the location. Broken pillars, ritual sites and a broken statue decorated this desolate realm.

And in the middle, a single woman.

Her form ever shrouded by blackened mist, hiding her appearance from the world.

"He's changed." Was all Ye Shen could say.

It was no longer the Jin Yusheng that he knew of the past. His martial arts were different, his gaze was different.

Everything had changed yet he was still the same. Still a candidate, still under someone's control.

A small yet bitter smile appeared on his face, different from the theatrical grin he had when messing around with Jin during their encounter.

"Oh hou hou~ Let's hope he hasn't changed that much. I still need him after all." The woman laughed, gesturing for Ye Shen to step up.

Following her instructions, he closed his eyes as she placed her palm against his forehead.

After a brief moment of silence, she nodded.

"The foundation is still there. There will be no issues. However..." The woman trailed off with a slight frown.

"There's an anomaly with him."

She couldn't help but wonder if this woman next to Jin was sent by Enris. She knew exactly how Enris operated. If it brought more chaos and entertainment, even if its to her own detriment, Enris would allow it.

It's why she's been given the freedom to do whatever she wanted. Enris neither cared nor bothered so long as it was entertaining.

But this woman that's next to Jin...

She had polarising sources of energy within her body. One that she was familiar with, divinity, and one that she's recently grown accustomed to.

Eldrich.

'Those at the Sun and Moon wouldn't cooperate with the Outer Gods. Famine isn't someone to do something like this. She's more preoccupied with her own issue right now.' The woman thought to herself while tapping her fingers against her throne.

Not long ago, an old... acquaintance of Famine appeared and she's been busy ever since.

Right now, the only one active within the faction of the Eclipse was her.

War.

Therefore, if the chances of it being Famine were practically non-existent.

'It must be the Goddess then.' War furrowed her brows.

If Enris sent this woman with a clear indication of Eldrich and Holy energy within her body, then was it a sign that she knew what's going on? A warning perhaps? Or was it permission?

Knowing her Goddess, the chances of it being permission were high. If it was a warning, Enris wouldn't do something round about like this. She'd intervene directly.

Something like this would be considered 'interesting'.

Coming to this conclusion, a grin appeared on War's face.

"Prepare the candidates. This... festival celebrating the Emphyrean Dragon Sect will soon turn into a theatre of blood."

Nodding his head, Ye Shen turned around and left the private realm while War closed her eyes once more.

Around her, the energy twisted as though it was alive.

A faint tether connecting her vessel to an invisible space above her.

She could easily make a move herself but she was acting as an anchor for the Outer Gods.

Straining herself would stress the connection that she's barely able to establish.

However, she doubted she needed to make a move. If she did, why did she recruit these people to begin with? Why did she train them?

It was all for this day.

Once she was done, a new conflict will grace this world. A beautiful, everlasting era of conflict.

And within this, she'll rise up as a new divinity. She'll usurp the divine throne of the Eclipse and become the God of War.

###

After leaving the main hall, Alice and Jin made their way to a restaurant as Alice slumped down in a chair and practically melted.

"What a pain." She grumbled.

Now that both Sect Leader Jian and Old Man Mo knew of her identity, fighting them properly on the stage to steal their martial arts was probably going to be impossible.

Especially in the case of that Old Man.

Even if she was to try and dodge everything, she'll probably lose in an extended fight.

Of course, there was the option of using her new... 'bomb' that she created.

But there were several glaring flaws for this attack.

Flaw number one, she's not excluded by the attack.

When detonating, not even she could access her Abyssal energy. Had it not been for the Void helping out, she would've suffered heavy damages.

Number two, if someone is prepared, it can be easily countered.

Both Qiu Qiu and Jin were behind rubble and pillars when it detonated, allowing them to avoid the main blast. With energy still reinforcing their bodies, they were able to survive basically without a scratch with the exception of a few minor burns. Naturally, these could be healed pretty easily with Healing Vials.

The bomb itself was good at erasing energy but bad at dealing damage.

If she was to use this attack mid fight and it fails, it'll put her in a state of weakness, exposing herself to the enemy.

And that was the last thing she wanted.

Plus, after experiencing a fight against two Lords, it reinforced Alice's belief that fast casting and hand to hand were the most important aspects.

Even if she was to create distance, there wasn't enough of a chance for her to use her stronger skills aside from Void Flux and its different variants.

Her new skill was incomplete so she didn't have a full image in her mind. Not only that, but the attack she used back in Caethis at the beach took too long to charge.

Had she tried to use that attack, she would've been found dead and buried before her attack even went off.

'Sect Leader Jian was holding back too.' Alyss spoke up.

It was clear that he could've easily subdued them had he used his full power but he was holding back. Perhaps it was to not cause chaos at the festival or perhaps it's because they didn't show signs of wanting to kill them.

Regardless, they couldn't underestimate Lords.

[That's true to some extent but at the same time, it would've made the fight easier for you two. It seems like his main power is Anti Beast. A transformative one at that. Against you two who focus on Anti Hunter and fighting one on one, the benefits it gives him are outweighed by the negatives.] Cayla spoke up.

'I see... but in the end, it's still an issue of speed and power is it not?' Alice shrugged.

Without enough speed, they can only rely on hand to hand and barely being able to react to stuff.

Even with her newly created martial arts, Alyss was only able to even the playing field momentarily at best. She was still being pushed back by Old Man Mo through pure strength.

'I think we need to change something fundamental regarding my way of casting.' Alice contemplated as ideas started to appear in her mind.

A way of spell casting to allow for the fastest attacks while maintaining the power and efficiency.

And most importantly, a way to properly harness the energy within her body.

Right now, she was a walking miracle.

A somehow harmonic merge of four polarising energies all existing within one container.

Abyss, Void, Holy and Eldrich.

The first three she has some experiences in controlling.

Holy energy being one that required the use of her relics. Crown, eye and heart.

Eldrich was something that Alice didn't want to think about just yet considering its nature.

She then recalled how Ria fought when they were still travelling around.

Little by little, the foundations of a new casting method began to appear in her mind.

It's all theory right now. She simply needed a good chance to test it out.

Even though her identity might be exposed to the Sect Leader and Old Man Mo, Alice doubted they'll make a move on the main stage.

Not after proving that she's not an enemy.

Therefore, she'll rejoin the competition. But not as her disguise.

No, this time she'll crash it and challenge anyone who wanted to fight.

Not only to improve Alyss's martial art but to also put her theories to the test. If it succeeds, this new casting method could potentially overturn everything that Kaden taught her in the past.

Chapter 627 - 627: Water Lotus Heart

Qiu Qiu stood in the waiting room in silence.

With Alice and Jin withdrawing due to... the battle by the main hall, she was now automatically the winner of the zero powers category.

But without Alice and Jin being here, it felt a little pointless.

The other contestants didn't interest her at all. She recalled Alice's words when she asked about the state of Unity.

According to Alice, she has already developed the foundations needed, all that's left is patience.

Once again, she was confused by this. Her master said the same.

She was impatient.

But how?

In a fight, she rarely loses her focus.

Granted, she wasn't able to keep her composure against Jin. However, looking back, she could probably keep her composure now. Even if he does better than her, so what?

Yet, Qiu Qiu felt as though this wasn't enough. There was still something else she was missing. Something that's stopping her heart from becoming 'calm'.

'What am I missing?' Qiu Qiu let out a sigh.

She didn't know.

Closing her eyes, she sat in a meditative position and reflected on her actions.

Water Lotus Heart.

It was a basic technique taught to most of the people within the Demon Extermination Squad. A mental technique that the Squad Leader used when he was training in the past.

This method was a way for the user to reflect on themselves, a way to regain their calm. At best, it helped a person calm themselves before a big moment. It wasn't a superb or secret mental technique.

Old Man Mo didn't say much about it either. Simply put, if you wanted to use it, use it. If you don't, then so be it.

With all the recent talks of her not having patience, Qiu Qiu felt the need to use it once more.

To regain her calm and figure out why they thought that she was impatient.

A way to observe herself from an outside perspective and see what they see.

Beneath her, the battle between her and Jin was reflected upon the water's surface.

When did she lose her composure?

'At the thought of losing.'

Why?

'Because. . .' Qiu Qiu hesitated.

The answer to that question seemed unbefitting of her. An answer that brought her shame.

Why?

The water surface began to ripple as her own twisted expression came into view. The way her eyes glared in disbelief, that anger, that arrogance.

'I looked down on him. I thought myself as better, more talented, more hard working. I dismissed everything about him, thinking he was a nameless bum.' Qiu Qiu admitted, unable to deny the expression of arrogance on her face.

The moment victory came into question, her arrogance took over.

Why were you arrogant? You were taught to treat every fighter the same on the battlefield. Even a rabbit will bite when it is cornered. So why?

Why did she, who was taught not to be arrogant, become someone that easily looked down on others?

'I thought myself on the path of glorious purpose. I thought... that I was special. I thought that... I was talented. And that only the Cult could defeat me through heinous methods. I thought myself as the best.' Qiu Qiu glanced down in shame.

As her master said, she was too fixated on winning or losing.

Why? What does a victory bring her? Does winning in this festival bring her closer to ending the cult? Did the recognition of others bring her closer to closure? Did the cheers of the crowd really matter that much?

Do not lose focus Qiu Qiu.

There is only one goal you need to focus on. Discard your distractions, discard your fixation on fame.

You are not special, you are not chosen by the heavens. You are simply someone on the path of revenge. A dirty desire of murder for relief.

Do not feel shame but do not feel yourself superior.

Do not lose sight of your goal.

Feel the path that leads you closer to your goal.

'The path that leads me closer...'

Even if she attains the state of Unity, what then? Will she continue to drown herself in the pleasure of fame? Just achieving the state doesn't bring her closer.

'Did I waste my time?' Qiu Qiu smiled bitterly.

But she knew that it wasn't as simple as that.

As her master said, to lose is to learn. To learn is to take a step forward towards her goal.

If so, what has she learned? What did this loss bring for her?

It could be summarised as one word to Qiu Qiu.

Clarity.

She felt her mind becoming clear. All her fixations, all her arrogance and all of her greed. She could see all of it and understood what was unneeded.

'Discard your distractions. Focus only on the goal.'

Taking a deep breath, Qiu Qiu slowly opened her eyes as a smile appeared on her face.

Looking back, it was almost funny how addicted she had been to the feeling of victory.

The feeling of being special.

It was a drug that couldn't be given up until she suffered a loss.

In that regard, she felt grateful to Alice and Jin.

They opened her eyes to the truth.

In the same extent, she felt sorry for her Master. A sense of pity.

Despite telling her to drop her fixations, he was ensnared by his own. His own hatred of the Cult blinded him to the possibilities that were open to him.

The benefits that Alice brought and how to best utilize them.

'It's as they say, I've been impatient.' Qiu Qiu breathed calmly through her nose as her heart felt calm.

Like the calm surface of a lake, it was a clear reflection of her thoughts and mental state.

Standing up, she made her way to the main arena as she was going to fight the first round in the overall tournament composed of people from all categories. A sparring contest to put it bluntly.

This time, she won't look down on her opponent.

Every fight is an opportunity to grow, a chance for her to understand her martial arts better.

An opportunity for her to take a step towards her goal of becoming someone capable of toppling the Cult.

As she stepped towards the arena, she paused momentarily, unable to comprehend what she was seeing in front of her.

Standing in the middle of the arena, Alice crashed down from above as she revealed her real form to everyone in the crowd.

After seeing the bounties placed everywhere, they understood that she was the demoness.

What was she aiming for?

The crowd began to murmur amongst themselves as Jian Luoyan stood up with a twitching smile.

Now that they finally cleared up the misunderstanding, why was she here to crash the festival???

"Yo~ Didja miss me? You know what I want, you know why I'm here. Bring me your strongest fighters!" Alice declared as Jian Luoyan face palmed immediately.

Meanwhile, Hualing and Xiao An couldn't help but chuckle seeing Alice challenge the sect so openly like this.

The disciples of the Emyrean Dragon Sect felt anger and annoyance rising after seeing Alice declare her intentions so boldly.

'What is she doing???' Jian Luoyan wanted to shout at Alice but couldn't. He couldn't lose his composure in front of so many.

But what she was doing now was essentially putting them at a lose lose situation.

He knew that all of the disciples were no match for her. But if he was to accept this proposal and lose, the honour of the Emyrean Dragon Sect would be harmed.

Alternatively, if he was to face off against her, it'll look like bullying.

Granted, he knows that she wasn't easy to take care of.

No matter what he chose, the outcome wasn't looking good!

Alice didn't seem like the kind to lose on purpose either.

Before Alice could say anything else, she noticed Qiu Qiu walking up to the stage with a sword by her side.

"Ohya?" Seeing something different with her gaze, a smile appeared on Alice's face.

Golden chains manifested as Alyss took over.

"You look a little different from before." Alyss smiled at her as Qiu Qiu nodded her head.

"I did a little reflection. Sorted out my priorities and figured out what truly mattered to me." Qiu Qiu admitted.

Nodding her head in appreciation, Alyss couldn't help but praise the girl in her heart.

After all, this kind of change and reflection wasn't something anyone could do. It was hard to admit one's faults, especially when it comes to the ugliness of certain human emotions.

For Qiu Qiu to have such a drastic change in her disposition, Alyss understood that she must've reflected upon herself deeply. To look back at everything she's done and her performance.

"You mentioned that I can always ask you for a spar. Since you desire someone to challenge, may I volunteer to take the place as your sparring partner? I may not be the strongest fighter here so I hope you can bear with me." Qiu Qiu chuckled, entering the sword drawing stance.

Nodding her head, Alyss had Alice create a sword of blood and steel. Holding it in the same drawing stance, Alyss unleashed her Absolute Zone.

"!!!" A shiver trembled through Qiu Qiu's body as she could feel her grip shaking.

This sense of threat. . .

She was scared.

However, she wanted to understand it.

The path that she wanted to walk, the path towards her goal...

There were no short cuts.

Therefore, she'll face the respect that Alyss was giving her head on.

Taking a deep breath, Qiu Qiu calmed her mind. A task far easier to do than what she had expected and expanded her own Offensive Zone.

Instant Draw – Killing Arc!

Instant Draw – Perfected Killing Arc!

Chapter 628 - 628: State Of Unity

Alyss could see the minute changes within Qiu Qiu's attack.

That arrogance had disappeared and in return, there was a newfound calmness within her attack.

A smile appeared on her face as Alyss replied in kind.

*CLANG!!!!

As their swords clashed, both fighters were sent sliding back.

"Not bad!" Alyss laughed.

Now that they had their Sigils returned, their strength had multiplied significantly!

Just a single clash caused the ground beneath them to crack apart as Qiu Qiu immediately followed up with the next attack.

She was not overjoyed by the praise. In fact, she didn't feel anything.

Her mind was entirely focused on the next attack, the next gap in the defence.

She could see exactly how strong Alyss was.

The countless false openings, the way she shifted her foot in order to anticipate the next move.

How Alyss's eye scanned her body, observing the muscle movements.

'She's stronger than I thought.' Qiu Qiu thought to herself, following up with Soul Chaser.

Since Alyss wasn't showing a proper opening, she had to create one herself.

Seeing the focus in Qiu Qiu's eyes, Alyss didn't banter any longer.

Mirage Steps!

Her body flickered into three movements.

"!!!" Qiu Qiu's eyes darted across the after images, she had to find the real one and soon!

"Took too long." Alyss's voice rang out behind her.

*BANG!!!!

Quickly raising her guard, she was barely able to block a kick before rolling across the ground.

Recovering her stance, she tried to reactive her offensive Zone but it was a tad too late.

The biggest downside with this all offensive zone was defence!

Once the offence is broken, it was hard to recover.

'Don't panic, observe.' Qiu Qiu forced herself to calm down.

Win or lose, it didn't matter.

What mattered was the next move, the next attack.

How can she apply herself to create the biggest annoyance for Alyss? How can she attack in a way that causes her opponent to lose their footing?

'There!'

Just as Alyss was about to release a stab move, Qiu Qiu immediately dropped her centre of gravity to the point she was practically laying on the floor.

However, her posture wasn't broken!

This instant drop was anticipated by Alyss thanks to the Absolute Zone but it was still surprising to see.

The speed of which Qiu Qiu was able to relax her entire body deserved praise as Alyss adjusted her attack.

***BANG!!!**

Kicking up with her foot, Qiu Qiu was barely able to fend off the attack as the two jumped back, created some distance between them and returning the state of the battle to zero.

Seeing this rapid intense exchange, the crowd was now less worried about Alyss's identity and more enraptured by the battle itself.

Some of them even recognised Qiu Qiu's fighting style and discovered who she was.

Once Qiu Qiu's identity came to light, they started to think that this was more of a performance for the festival rather than a wanted person crashing the event.

However, their cheers didn't effected Qiu Qiu.

Taking a deep breath, she calmed her breathing and entered an offensive stance once more.

Meanwhile, Alyss decided to take this a little more seriously. Right now, Qiu Qiu was in a state of extreme focus.

All of the outside noise was simply ignored.

The perfect state to learn and make adjustments. And the best way to do that was to force Qiu Qiu to trust her instincts!

Break apart her Zone, expose the weakness and make her aware. Force her to understand the gaps and make her amend it!

Only then, would it become a passive Zone, granting her defensive movement.

Phantom Shift!

Activating her fastest movement, Alyss immediately closed the gap, causing Qiu Qiu to widen her eyes in shock.

Now that her Sigils have been returned, her perception was boosted greatly. Yet it was still unable to fully capture Alyss's movements.

*CLANG!!!

An upward cleave to break the guard, forcing Qiu Qiu to take a step back in an attempt to recover.

*CLANG!!!

Forcing another step back, Alyss released a horizontal sweep to break her guard once more.

Gritting her teeth, Qiu Qiu needed to adjust her grip on the sword.

Right now, the guard was being broken too easily. With the gap in power, the offensive Zone was actually causing a detriment to her!

Discard what you don't need!

Deactivating the offensive Zone, Qiu Qiu decided to fight back using Killing Arc.

*BANG!!!

But in doing so, Qiu Qiu's attention was too focused on Alyss's weapon and forgot to take into account of her footwork.

A leg sweep from behind broke Qiu Qiu's stance.

As she was falling back, Alyss grabbed her arm, giving her a smile before tossing her over the head, allowing her to recover.

Resonance!

She needed to bridge this gap between them.

Her form shifted to one that Alyss was familiar with.

Ghostly flames manifested next to her while bandages appeared around her body.

Soul Chaser!!!

Qiu Qiu's body turned into a blur but Alyss was unphased.

There was a glaring gap in this charge.

*BANG!!!

"!!!"

Widening her eyes in pain, Qiu Qiu's slash was cut short as Alyss interrupted her attack, kicking her in the stomach.

"Not every attack needs to be fully carried out. Adjust and adapt, make changes depending on your situation." Alyss smiled, twisting her body and performing a round house kick to push Qiu Qiu back.

Sliding across the arena, Qiu Qiu took the lesson to heart as she sheathed her blade.

Taking a heavy step forward, her energy burst out as she activated her second Resonance!

She didn't care that all of her trump cards were being shown to the people around her right now.

What she cared about was becoming stronger than before. To pick apart her fighting style with Alyss and discard the unnecessary parts.

Six realms five desires!

Seeing Qiu Qiu using her second Resonance, Alyss smiled as she rested her blade on her shoulder.

If it was before, Qiu Qiu would've thought that Alyss was holding back or mocking her.

But now, she wasn't phased. She knew that Alyss wasn't the kind to drop her guard.

In fact, she could sense the surging energy converging towards her location!

*BANG!!!

Activating her own resonance, Alyss's form shifted.

As two souls sharing one body, her resonance was somewhat different to Alice's resonance that caused the spider lilies to blossom.

A graveyard manifested around her with countless blackened limbs breaking out from the ground, wrapping around her body.

*RUMBLE!!!

Destroying the limbs, Alyss's form came into view. Crackling violet flames soon transformed into a strange pale blue fire.

Qiu Qiu froze up.

The instant Alyss activated her resonance, Qiu Qiu saw death.

Or rather, the overwhelming ways that Alyss could attack her. A net of inescapable attacks blocked her vision, causing her entire body to freeze up.

Fight or flight.

One moment, one decision.

Run away or fight the raging current.

Once again, Qiu Qiu felt a familiar sensation open its doors to her.

The delicate balance and point between life and death.

A smile appeared on her face as she sheathed her blade and tightened her grip around the handle.

Absolute Zone!

The boundary of her Zone expanded in an instant, clashing against Alyss's Zone.

Instant Draw – Transcendent Samsara!

Wheels behind her began to spin before stopping around the Deva path and Desire of Form.

Her figure turned into a blur with Alyss revealing a smirk.

Narrowing her gaze, dismissed her blade and aimed her palm towards Qiu Qiu.

A skill that she created during the arena fight in Caethis.

An attack to destroy the 'core', whether that be in weapons, attacks or the human body. At this moment, all Alyss could see was glaring red where weakness was spotted.

Phantom Shift!

Using her fastest footwork, Alyss appeared before Qiu Qiu and pulled back her arm.

*BANG!!!

The flames roared and condensed into a layer of energy around her as she punched forward directly into Qiu Qiu's blade.

*CRACK SHATTER!!!

Identifying the weak point of the weapon, her punch shattered the blade in an instant, forcefully breaking Qiu Qiu's attack before slamming into her chest.

"!!!"

Widening her eyes, Qiu Qiu's body crashed back into the wall as blood seeped from her mouth.

Her strongest attack in her strongest state was broken but a smile could be seen on her face.

As the last vestiges of her resonance shattered apart, she collapsed on the ground in satisfaction.

After all, she saw it.

Even though her final attack lost the contest of power, it wounded Alyss's arm.

A blade aura so sharp that a cut could be seen travelling up Alyss's arm, bypassing the protective layer of energy.

While it wasn't enough to kill, being able to land a blow against someone as strong as Alyss gave Qiu Qiu a different sense of pride.

But more than that, she gained more ideas on how to modify her strongest move.

The weakness became glaring and it was going to be hard to adjust. However, she could now see the path forward.

Shaking her arm, Alyss watched as the wound regenerated with an impressed smile on her face.

'She'll make a fine rival for Jin.' She concluded with Alice folding her arms in agreement.

But now that Alyss has had her fill, it was her turn to test out her casting.

Swapping positions with Alyss, Alice glanced up at Sect Leader Jian with a knowing smile.

He could see it in her eyes.

She was far from done.

'Dear ancestors what did I even do to deserve this?'

Chapter 629 - 629: Cell Casting Method

Seeing as how Alice was resolved to fight him, Jian Luoyan could only let out a sigh and accept her request.

After all, he was fully aware of how strong she is. Or at least based on what she has shown thus far.

If his disciples were to fight her, it would only bring more shame to the Sect.

At their festival at that.

Standing up, Jian Luoyan jumped down as an oppressive aura began to spread across the arena.

"Since you wanted to fight me, I suppose you have some ideas in mind. Hopefully, there will be ones without much explosive danger to the spectators." Jian Luoyan asked as Alice nodded her head.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to use what you think I'm going to use. It's too dangerous, even for myself. Instead, I have something else I want to test." Alice chuckled.

Her goal here was not to humiliate him or steal his martial arts.

Her goal was to simply test out her theories and make adjustments.

Letting out another sigh, Jian Luoyan felt as though he aged 20 years before nodding his head in agreement.

Very well, I'll allow you to take the first move.

Holding one arm behind his back, Jian Luoyan held his right hand in front of him, gesturing for Alice to begin.

Since Jian Luoyan was being kind as to give her the first move, she wasn't going to disappoint.

***BANG!!!**

Without hesitation, she stomped down and activated her Resonance.

A tattered white and red dress manifested around her as her hair shifted to that of a full white with hues of red, opposite to that of Alyss's in her Resonance state.

Spider lily patterns appeared on her arms, reaching her neck and left cheek.

In order to modify the casting method that was taught to her, Alice had to change it on a fundamental level.

Meaning, she had to understand the act of casting.

Right now, energy was gathered into a pool within her body. A reservoir of power that is passively distributed through the body, enhancing it to some degree.

When she's casting, she's using her body as a conduit. Energy flows through certain channels and is discharged once it completes the 'circuit'.

And to put it simply, the current casting method could be summarised as creating a dam and casting spells is equivalent to opening the dam, allowing the water to flood.

But there was an issue with this.

Alice felt like it was still too slow. It wasn't able to demonstrate its full power during a tense, heated exchange. If she was to fully focus on the speed of the cast, the power drops too much and she may as well not have casted it in the first place.

But if she was to focus on power, she'll be interrupted before her spell can even complete the circuit.

So what could she do?

The answer was simple yet difficult to pull off.

She would turn it into a preset executable set of actions that didn't require conscious thinking or control!

While it would lack the quick adjustment and fine tuning of the old method, it would gain immense efficiency and speed instead without losing power!

Snapping her finger, a network of motes manifested around the arena at a speed far surpassing Jian Luoyan's expectations.

His eyes widened in shock as Alice flicked her finger.

*BANG!!!!

Countless streaks of crimson energy shot towards Jian Luoyan as he activated his state of Unity.

She could see exactly where Alice was trying to target and created a blade of energy using his finger.

*KSHK!!!

Creating a cage of slashes around him, he was able to destroy the attacks before they could reach him.

But Alice wasn't done.

In order to transform her spells into a preset attack, she had to first modify the method of storage.

She couldn't simply use her reservoir as it was since it required too much focus to manipulate.

What she needed was efficiency and clarity.

She could visualise her theory.

In order to achieve her purpose, Alice needed to transform her reservoir into 'cells'. Modulated motes of storage that served a different purpose based on how she compressed and prepared the cell.

Right now, she had three variants.

1: Single Cell Spells

2: Link Cell Spells

3: Triggered Cell Spells

The first variant was the most basic one. A cell that uses the most common form of control to cast her spells. The most versatile as it allows her to use different spells without needing to consciously modify her control.

Void Flux being part of this example and average attack spells.

'Next attack, discharge ten single cells.' Alice thought to herself as she expended the cost of the spell before 'firing'.

Around Jian Luoyan, ten chains manifested into reality, whipping against his limbs in an attempt to bind him.

However, he quickly broke them apart before jumping back and releasing a vertical slash towards Alice.

*BANG!!!

Just as the attack was about to land, Alice clenched her fist as a singularity rapidly spun to life in front of her, absorbing the spell before dishing it back with arcs of Void energy.

Link Cell Spells.

Spells that are on the more difficult side, requiring more 'ammunition/cells' in one activation for a single cast of the spell.

To accomplish this, an array would be adjusted within her body. One that doesn't require her active thought but rather something that is always dormant within. And when needed, all she has to do is inject her cells into the array to activate it immediately.

Weaving through the counter attack, Jian Luoyan reached behind him as a draconic claw wrapped around his arm.

Beneath the scales, a white light was emitted as it started to absorb the energy from the arcs, turning the white into a strange mix of black and gold.

Clenching his fist, vein-like patterns appeared around Jian Luoyan's body.

'So he's gained resistance to Void. He's taking me a little more seriously than before.' Alice chuckled.

However, the conditions are now met.

Her favourite kind of spell theory.

Triggered Cell Spells.

A hybrid between contracts, arrays, rituals and casting all in one.

A unique set of rules and regulations, causing these spells to be inaccessible via normal means unless she wants to take the time in preparing them.

The synergy between Tiamat and Duality for example.

However, through the use of certain contracts... if the situation is suitable and the requirements are met...

These spells are automatically activated!

Her first attack to scatter the blood mist and faint traces of her energy across the arena. The second to apply the web of Void.

With these conditions met, spider lilies began to bloom in the arena as Alice let out a soft chuckle, scaring Jian Luoyan momentarily.

Right now, the world was being manipulated despite Alice not making any motions for casting.

There was no influx of energy, no clear indication of casting. His sixth sense wasn't picking up the danger she posed either. Rather, it simply told him that he was in danger!

He was already within the attack range!

Triggered Cast – Void Flux Cleave!

***RUMBLE!!!**

The space around the arena trembled as slashes erupted towards Jian Luoyan from all directions!

Widening his eyes, he didn't hesitate to activate his full draconification as wings unfurled behind his back.

Slamming his hand down, obsidian pillars erupted from the ground, resonating with one another as a barrier was formed.

But Alice was already prepared.

Condition met!

Triggered Cast – Personal Artifact synergy.

Markings different to the usual Sigil markings and spider lilies lit up on Alice's left arm as she framed Jian Luoyan's defensive barrier between her hands.

Ruinous Void!

*CRACK!!!

Needles stabbed into the barrier from all directions, forming cracks along the surface before shattering the barrier apart.

Just as the barriers shattered, the Void Flux Cleaves breached his boundary.

With no other choice, Jian Luoyan twisted his body as a storm of calamitous energy erupted out, fighting against the slashes that tore apart the Void.

Seeing his defence, Alice had to give him her praise.

But unfortunately, he triggered her condition once more.

*RUMBLE!!!

Ambient energy sufficient, Sigil resonance activated.

Field has been prepared, the conditions are met.

Tiamat + Duality!

Rings of power coiled above Jian Luoyan, swallowing the ambient energy that he was exuding to help Alice complete the cast faster!

Strands of energy that were usually invisible to the eye now fully manifested above him. Spiralling into a spear hanging above the arena.

All sound in the world seemed to disappear as light overwhelmed their vision.

*BANG!!!

A pillar of raw energy crashed down, funnelling through the coils of amplification and focusing above Jian Luoyan's body!

With this attack, Alice verified the functionality of her theory as she could feel the strain on her physical body.

The key drawback with the third type of Cell casting was having too many activations.

If she was to overwhelm herself with the number of trigger conditions, they could all activate at once, pushing her body to the limit.

Therefore, she had to be sparing with what she prepared and what kind of spells she wanted to link to the conditions.

Naturally, the ceiling for this third type of casting is entirely focused around how much she knew about her opponent.

If her information was sufficient, she could create new trigger conditions on the fly and deactivate old ones. Granted, her body needed to be able to support the conditions first.

Right now, she could only support four trigger spells.

Triggered Cast – Void Flux Cleave

Triggered Cast – Personal Artifact Synergy

Triggered Cast – Lance of Tiamat

Triggered Cast – Anti Abyss Pulse

The final triggered cast was the bomb she created when fighting the two Lords. If the conditions are met, she'll forcefully activate the Anti Abyss Pulse, rendering the fight to Zero momentarily in order to give herself a chance at survival.

The more she knew, the more specific she could make the conditions and the more powerful she could make the attack thanks to the power of Rituals.

She also had the option of making it simple to activate such as casting a spell the moment she ignites her enemies using her Violet Flames.

But with this, she had now laid the foundation for her new casting method.

Chapter 630 - 630: Eclipse Ritual At The Festival

With this foundation set, it wasn't to say that Alice wasn't going to use the method that Kaden taught her.

After all, it's a tried and trusted method.

Instead, she was going to use these two side by side. By splitting her reservoir of energy into two halves, she can have one side being the standard 'dam' that allows her to cast whatever she wants with any adjustments.

Meanwhile, excess energy would be transformed into cells for her modular casting that allowed her to fire off attacks with minimal preparation and concentration.

With these two working side by side, it's safe to say that she's created a net of spells that will always be active.

Deactivating her T.C spells, Alice waited for the dust to settle. After all, she didn't want to bombard Jian Luoyan with spells after spells. This was merely for her to test her theories out and to see how effective they were against the defences of a Lord. One that had the absolute Zone at that.

*COUGH!!!

Hearing a cough from the smoke, Alice could make out his silhouette through the dust and saw his wings unfurling behind him. He had shielded himself at the last moment, blocking the brunt of her attack but he wasn't without wounds.

She could see his wounds beginning to regenerate as golden blood flowed from the cracks along his body.

"Immortal Dragon Blood. If I didn't have this Sigil, that attack would've been quite dangerous. Are you sure you're not a Lord?" Jian Luoyan whispered to Alice as he appeared next to her.

"!!!" Widening her eyes, Alice's smile twitched.

How?!

He was fast enough to the point where she couldn't even have time to trigger her fight or flight!

This instant burst of speed was far greater than even her Absolute Zone!

If he wanted to, she could've suffered a devastating blow just now.

'As expected, a prepared Lord is no easy target.'

"Second Resonance huh?" Alice glanced back as Jian Luoyan was in the process of deactivating his skills.

"Something that shouldn't even have been activated against an opponent below Lord." Jian Luoyan shrugged.

He had to admit that Alice had now opened his eyes to the talent of the world.

Through the years, he's become complacent, comfortable and lazy having achieved the status of Lord. Not only that, but because he achieved the state of Unity, not many could push him to using even a fraction of his power.

Yet at the hall, she managed to defeat them using a strange bomb. An attack to completely wipe out the Abyssal Energy surrounding them at that moment, rendering him into a normal human.

If he wasn't complacent, if he had focused during that fight, Alice wouldn't have had time to use that attack.

And now?

Even when he was prepared, her firepower and the speed of her casts far surpass his imagination.

If he wanted to kill someone like Alice, he had to treat it as though he was fighting another Lord!

"But I believe this 'performance' should come to a close now right?" He asked as this was a good stopping point. Any more would be pointless.

The crowd was entertained and he didn't go overboard either. Both sides should be satisfied.

However, he felt a chill when he saw Alice's devious smile.

Thankfully, that smile disappeared just as quickly as it appeared and she nodded her head.

"Fine, I'll stop here for today." Alice raised her hand in mock surrender. What she needed to do was to consolidate the information she had gotten today. How she could further improve the composition of her Cells and enhance the power of her modular spells.

Seeing as how Alice was backing off, Jian Luoyan let out a sigh of relief before turning to meet her face on.

However, just as he opened his eyes, his entire body froze up.

In front of him stood a monster with a body full of eyes. Its skeletal form arched over him, as its skin clung to what little flesh it had.

Countless eyes constricted and focused with Jian Luoyan in the centre of it all.

Around him, the world darkened in colour as the many eyes figure wrapped its claws around Jian Luoyan's head.

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Just as Alice turned around, she watched as Jian Luoyan was suddenly phased out of existence and her pupil constricted in shock.

It wasn't the Void, it wasn't shadow nor was it the method that most Lords used to travel around.

It was something else.

She couldn't perceive him at all, like he just suddenly stopped existing.

Above her, the skies tore apart to reveal a calamitous view. The Eclipse hung above her head as countless pillars of ominous energy began to erupt around the city.

Words began to echo out in Alice's ear, confusing her as she wasn't the only one to hear the chant. Most of it couldn't be understood yet Alice could understand a few key words mentioning the Sun and Moon.

Around her, people started to look around in confusion, wondering if this was another performance.

[Not to alarm you but it's best you mark down people you want to save.] Cayla suddenly spoke up while frantically flipping through some notes.

'Huh? What do you mean?'

[What I mean is while you've been fighting Jian Luoyan, it seems like an Eclipse ritual has already begun. These pillars are altars and since they've begun emitting a light, it means the finality of the ritual draws near. These words that you're hearing, they're the final signs of completion.] Cayla explained, filtering out the rituals that she had knowledge of.

Even though questions still lingered on Alice's mind, she didn't hesitate to slam her hand down as her second Sigil activated.

A wave of blood burst out as she closed her eyes and focused on the countless strands of energy around the arena and the city.

Orbs of blood condensed and shot towards the people she knew.

'Can't I use the Void to drag them away?' Alice questioned while Cayla shook her head.

[You can try but it's a waste of energy. Right now, whoever is activating the Ritual is dragging this entire city into a manufactured realm of the Eclipse. In a sense, it's similar to what the Abyss was before it fully integrated itself with reality.] Cayla explained, tossing some documents over her head as they weren't what she needed.

[I found it!] She shouted, jumping up with a document in hand.

Realising what kind of ritual it was, Cayla didn't hesitate to run up to Alice.

[Listen to me now and listen carefully. Do not forget a single word I'm about to say.

[Do not look back, do not run. Do not trust any voices, do not stare. Do not linger, do not talk. No matter what happens or what you see, do not interact with that world. Keep moving forward, steady, resolutely. And whatever you do, do NOT answer any questions.] Cayla warned in a strange turn of seriousness.

Just as Alice was about to reply, she twitched before immediately turning her gaze.

Cayla's face had disappeared.

A faceless entity with a single smile.

Different to the Will yet just as creepy.

She was already in the ritual.

Do not stare.

Do NOT answer any questions.

Had Alice answered, that might've been a trap in and of itself.

A chill ran down her spine as Alice walked past the faceless Cayla.

[AliCe? Do yOu undErstAnd? PleAse cOnFirm it for me.]

Behind her, Cayla's voice started to twist and mutate with Alice sensing countless eyes focusing on her back.

Do not look back, do not run.

Her instincts were telling her to immediately run from the place.

Something... Unnatural was behind her. This creeping darkness...

Do not trust any voices and do not stare.

Alice blurred her own vision and constantly shifted her gaze in front of her.

She didn't linger, she didn't talk.

Little by little, the world around her began to change as her finger twitched.

It was her old prison cell.

Plane white bed, walls of pure white and a heavy iron door.

Do not interact with the world.

Keeping Cayla's words in her mind, Alice continued to walk forward before closing her eye.

She understood that this wasn't reality, she wasn't back at her old prison.

Walking through the 'wall', Alice opened her eye only to come face to face with a monstrosity before her.

Countless eyes focused on her body, capturing her in its gaze.

Do not stare, do not linger.

Alice ignored it and carried on.

Her movements were all captured by the creature in question but it didn't do anything to her.

At that moment, she felt a cold, rotting hand grab her wrist.

"!!!"

"A...lice... Why did you leave me back there?"

A voice called out to her.

One of the first voices that she heard after being freed from her prison. A voice of comfort during her time in the Slaughter Docks.

Do not interact, do not answer, do not falter.

Keeping Cayla's warning in her heart, Alice pushed on as the weight behind her grew.

In front of her, a dark twisted shadow grew, writhing and overshadowing her.

She didn't stare.

"It's unfair! Look at me!"

She didn't look back.

Closing her eye momentarily, Alice continued forward, fighting all of her urges to shake off this twisted, unknown monstrosity behind her.

She chanted Cayla's words in her mind and soon, she felt the presence disappear and opened her eye.

She found herself in a strange realm with countless ruins and altars around her.

Above her, the Eclipse hung with the sun bleeding radiant blood onto the land.

[Alice! You're finally out!] Cayla sighed in relief, scared about what might've happened.

[I was afraid you might've forgotten my words. If you did, you wouldn't have been able to escape from that thing.] She pointed at the thing behind her.

However, Alice continued to walk forward as Cayla's smile froze.

In the next moment, her face appeared next to Alice, practically touching her as her gaze bore into Alice's unflinching expression.

[Clever girl~]