

Abyssal A 681

Chapter 681 - 681: Suyin's Experiments

Day 1 – Night.

Jin stared at the contraption in front of him.

He understood it was an object, he understood that it was meant to be part of an experiment. But his brain couldn't comprehend why it looked. . . the way it did.

To him, this looked like a death trap.

"Suyin, why does it look like it'll shred me apart like what you did to the Hybrid?" Alice asked with a twitching smile.

The amalgamation of hooks, limbs, wires and pipes sent a chill down Alice's back.

"I had to make something that can actually resist you short circuiting my crap. Do you want this lab to go up in flames the moment you touch anything?" Suyin retorted.

In order to compensate for Alice's. . . Unique physique while also continuing with their experiments to figure out the secrets of Eldritch Energy, Suyin had to redesign some of her tech from the foundations.

The safety precautions that she put in place were instead transformed into bombs thanks to Alice so she had to remove it.

Not that she needed to tell Alice of course. They can simply toss the contraption away if it showed signs of blowing up.

As grotesque as it was, the machine had biological parts connected to some places, causing it to look like a half dissected beast carcass welded onto a metal skeletal frame. Parts of the metal even showing rust and corrosion.

Mismatches pistons, jutted out from the sides, the uneven beats that sounded like heart?

Housed in the centre seemed to be a glass container holding blood that swirled with a strange darkness.

Countless exposed wiring, some wrapped some on full display.

Hell, she even scribbled a DO NOT TOUCH! On one of the parts near the back that was barely connected!

"Please clarify how this ISN'T a safety hazard and how this WOULDN'T kill us on touch?" Alice pointed at the contraption.

"Huh? When did I say that? I simply said it won't go up in flames the moment you touch it and that I had to make something that can actually work. I don't believe I said anything about safety and lethality." Suyin replied as Alice paused.

Recalling what she said, it did seem like that was the case.

"But what kind of advancement isn't made without risks? Did you know when I was designing my own prosthetics, I accidentally blew my arm off in a test?" Suyin laughed while Alice couldn't help but think if she had lost some of her brain during that experiment.

For Alice, losing limbs was 'fine' to some extent since she had regeneration. But to a normal human, losing an arm was a very big deal!

"Let's ignore that for now. I have put in. . . Well, I wouldn't call it a safety precaution since it's far from safe but it's more like a silver lining. The machine will destroy itself the moment it senses signs of short-circuiting rather than exploding." Suyin reassured with a wave of her hand.

". . ." Without saying anything else, Alice began to set up the parameters for a Triggered Cast.

The moment anything looks like it'll go wrong, it'll automatically use the power of the Void to teleport them away from the machine and isolate it in a barrier.

That way, even if it were to blow up, at least it'll be contained.

"Huehehehehe~ Now my dear subje- I mean my dear friends, would you like to take a seat so that we may unlock the secrets of the Eldritch?" Suyin grinned a goofy smile as Alice scrunched her brows.

Researchers, as proven by the cases in the past, especially genius ones, are bat sh*t insane.

Letting out a deep groan, Alice scratched her hair and relented.

Giving Jin a glance, Alice made the first move and sat down on one of the chairs.

"!!!" Widening her eye, Alice shivered.

"Ew ew ew ew! Why is this thing f*cking moist!?!?" She shouted towards Suyin.

She wanted to get up but she was already buckled in.

"Don't mind it, probably condensation or some blood that hasn't dried up yet. But silver lining, it's not blowing up right?" Suyin stuck out her tongue and gave Alice two thumbs ups.

Making Jin sit down on his seat, Suyin walked over to the wall and grabbed a lever.

"This machine will be focused on recording data about the energy. Make sure to circulate it okay?" She called out.

For Jin, it was the only thing he could circulate so it was easy.

But for Alice, it meant switching to Alyss, thus disabling the triggered cast.

They had to react quickly if anything was to happen.

*KRR!

Tugging the lever, Suyin watched as sparks crackled across the machine.

From both Alyss and Jin, Eldritch energy flowed out, latching onto the pieces of flesh that she welded into place.

*KRKKRKK!!!

A strange gurgling sound that sounded like a mix of clicking and hissing echoed out with some of the flesh tendrils beginning to move on their own.

The machine next to Suyin frantically scribbled down markings and graphs while her eyes were focused on the experiment at hand.

*TZZ!!!

Widening her eye, Alyss noticed a spark above their heads.

'Alice!'

'I know!'

Swapping controls, Alice quickly activated her triggered cast, teleporting the two of them away from the machine.

A barrier of Void energy wrapped around it but before it could explode, the ceiling suddenly opened up.

*BANG!!!!

A giant trebuchet of sorts grabbed the machine and tossed it away from the labs.

*BOOM!!!!!!

Looking at the giant explosion in the sky, Alice's smile twitched.

*Whistle~

"Honestly if you didn't do that, the ejection system would've tossed you away before it flung you. Since you got your own safety, I can save some space and use it for other parts." Suyin grinned as she planned the next prototype. Since Alice can save herself, there's no need for the ejection system.

Forcing the two to leave her lab, Suyin waved her hand and several mechanical limbs dropped down to assist her, preparing to craft the next item.

###

Day 2 – Afternoon.

"..."

"..."

Alice said nothing.

Jin said nothing.

They both stood at the entrance of the lab, staring at the thing that Suyin spent the entire night and day building.

First of all, it was clear that this was far bigger than what she originally made. Twice as big even.

Instead of just occupying the first floor of her lab, this contraption now spanned two floors. Several long mechanical extensions crawling up the walls and hanging off the ceiling. Some parts even needed pillars to support its weight.

If the machine that she made yesterday looked like a half dead mechanical beast thrown into a shredder, this one looked like it had WON against the shredder and ate it in the process.

An unholy amalgamation of flesh and machine, a manifestation of Suyin's mind.

"I thought most of your. . . creations were fully made from machine? Why the hell are your prototypes made of flesh?" Alice's massaged the bridge of her nose.

"Why not? From the data I gathered yesterday, Eldritch energy is scarily compatible with living tissue. On the other end, if it comes into contact with my babies, it's like a very strong acid.

"So if I mix the two, it allows the energy to flow through the device while I can still get accurate readings." Suyin shrugged.

"Don't sweat the details, it's not like I'm killing people of the city for the materials anyways. I had someone helpful give me the foundation." Suyin reassured with a grin.

Just as Alice was about to question her on what that meant, she noticed a familiar. . . portion of the machine.

[Yikes.]

'F*cking hell.'

Both Cayla and Alyss realised what it was and froze up.

The Hybrid that Suyin dragged into the snake pit to have everything harvested.

She was now partially fused into this machine. Portions of her bestial bones were used as catalysts and her scales used as cover.

Even Alice shivered seeing such. . . Dedicated? Use of materials and samples.

Perhaps if Isolde was interested in these experiments, she might've found a certain kinship with Suyin.

"Seems like you found what's different with this one. Yep turns out the weird b*tch I harvested showed even better compatibility than I thought. Her body has been modified to be a merge of both human and beast tissue. But not the kind that's seen in side effects.

"Rather, it seems like she was 'born' that way to some extent. Or maybe even modified at an early age. Regardless, her flesh and bones are far more durable than the other samples I had access to so this machine should last a bit longer than yesterday.

"I even upgraded the seats for you." Suyin gave Alice a thumbs up.

"A moist chair is the least of my concerns." Alice's smile twitched seeing this monstrosity of a machine.

"Yeah but at least it's comfortable now right?"

". . ."

Letting out a begrudging sigh, Alice sat down and froze.

Seat may not be moist, she felt as though she heard a whimper.

A streak of what seemed to be water leaking from the side.

"Suyin, is this thing alive???" Alice snapped her gaze towards Suyin.

"Alive is stretching it a bit but it's not dead. I need living tissue for the Eldritch energy to latch onto. It's what caused the machine yesterday to blow up a lot earlier than expected. Just ignore the tears and think of it as condensation." She dismissed with a wave.

"I said nothing about tears!"

"Blah blah blah. Let's begin!" Suyin flipped the switch with a maniacal grin.

Alice was now truly doubting whether or not it was a good idea to have Suyin help.

Chapter 682 - 682: Research About Eldritch Energy

Day 3 – Morning.

Two sleepless nights.

It reminded Suyin of her time as a student. The countless days where she surrounded herself with research and study.

The tedious nature of recording the results and organising them.

Of course, she can always reference it in her mind. But for moments like this, having a physical copy in front of her was always better.

It allowed her to zoom out in another sense and look at it as an overall rather than small compartments that make up a whole.

But even for Suyin, keeping herself awake for two nights with this much research was going to be difficult.

Reaching over for a new vial of blood, she injected it into her leg, giving herself another boost of energy.

Shivering momentarily, she tossed the empty vial away.

An experimental product not given to the general public.

Something that she made herself, for herself.

Not everyone had a body like her, one that was rejected by the Abyss.

She had to graft foreign tissue onto a metal frame in order for these to work.

Therefore, this method which causes side effects to occur rapidly, can't be used for others. At least she can replace limbs that are affected.

Now that she was rejuvenated, Suyin began to write a new document, summarizing her findings.

[Confidential Research Log – Eldritch Energy]

Subject: Preliminary observations and tests on Eldritch Energy

Classification: High Risk

Eldritch Energy, henceforth referred to as EE, is not a traditional energy in the sense of Abyss, Holy or Void. It's a strangely sentient and corrosive phenomenon. A state of power that exists between the form of a parasitic entity and a source of power.

Unlike Holy, Abyss or Void, EE does not simply 'grant' or become a source of power. It reconstructs and modifies anything and everything it touches.

Subject: Foundational Nature of EE

1 – Corruptive Nature.

EE does not flow in the traditional sense. Despite having the properties of having the weaker source become 'assimilated' to the larger one, making it so that a conflict between two sources are usually clear cut, there are exceptions. A weaker source can become a net to wrap and consume the larger source.

EE spreads. Like ink in water, rot in meat, it disperses through the flesh via contact and rewrites internal structure, making the 'host' compatible with the power.

This host is not strictly limited to living tissue but it has the most compatibility. It allows the parasitic nature of this energy to thrive and live.

EE converts tissue to something I dub pseudo-organic. Corruptive flesh in other works.

EE reconfigures even memory and cognition to be more 'receptive' towards its influences. Parasitic whispering, hallucinations, visions of an alter ego.

EE alters and possibly replaces the laws of our realm within bounded zones, changing the fundamental nature of how things interact with one another.

2 – State of Madness.

Unlike Void, which operates as a bridge between realms, EE creates a new zone. A localized area of influence separate from the Void or our Realm where it dictates the properties of that zone as the sole defining logic.

These Zones can duplicate and spread, becoming cancers in this realm and transforming the laws one by one.

To resolve this issue, 'erasure' is required.

Source: Subject Alice's observations are based on the actions performed by the entity known as a Realm Ruler. In order to resolve the corruption caused by a Minion of the Outer God in the Void Realm, the Realm Ruler 'erased' the space it occupied, permanently causing damage to the realm but preventing the spread of corruption.

Subject: Interactions and Impact of EE with other sources of energy.

Energy type – Abyss.

Effect of Energy - Alterations of the Soul/Spiritual Heart to allow the usage of bestial powers.
Contractual in Nature.

Reaction when exposed to EE – Hostile

EE often overrides, devours, and mutates Abyssal contracts, while the reverse is the same. More often than not, Abyssal powers are slightly weaker to EE unless the source of Abyssal power is in the realm of Lords.

Energy type – Holy.

Effect of Energy – A blessing granted to the subject via belief, trust and favour of a Divine being. Gods. It allows the user to use some aspect of their divine authority.

Reaction when exposed to EE – Violent Rejection/Corruption

The moment EE comes into contact with Holy energy, the two will clash no matter what. EE seeks to override the divine laws the Holy energy presides over while Holy energy seeks to maintain its state. If Holy wins this metaphorical tug of war, EE is eliminated.

If EE wins, Holy is corrupted into a state of fallen divinity. EE 'inherits' the laws that the energy governed over.

Energy type – Void.

Effect of Energy – A catalyst for change. This energy focuses on the manipulation of Space rather than power as a whole.

Reaction when exposed to EE – Symbiosis? Unsure, requires more observation.

When the two come into contact, a strange occurrence manifests. As both are powers that relate to the space they occupy, there is a strange harmonization of the powers. Strangely compatible yet at the same time, the sources reject one another.

Currently, Void seems to be the best choice when it comes to the containment and redirection of EE. However, results are unpredictable and require more observation.

Subject – Observation of the Subjects Alice and Jin.

1 – How and why is Alice still functional?

Unlike Jin, who seems to be a fully modified individual for the sole purpose of wielding Eldritch Energy, Alice remains 'partially incompatible'.

Somehow, she is keeping the energy contained within her body despite having all the sources. Holy, Abyss, Void and Eldritch.

Theoretically, there should be a battle for dominance between the four yet they exist in paradoxical harmony.

Usually, EE comes from a source. Outer Gods.

Like Abyssal energy, it's similar to a contractual relationship.

Therefore, where does Alice's EE come from? For Jin, he is the source per say. A storage rather than a being to receive power. He assimilates and stores without needing a patron.

But Alice is not modified for the sole purpose of EE.

Personal Theory – Alice is a highly modified individual. Artificial?

It is my personal belief that there is a high chance of Alice being a fully modified or rather, artificial individual like Jin. But unlike Jin who is modified to be a container for EE, Alice seems to be a container for power as a whole. An empty vessel that can hold numerous sources.

If I view her 'soul' not as a whole but as a fragmented spiral with 'links' attached to shape the overall look of a 'soul', it becomes plausible for the harmony within her body. Each energy is divided into its own source based on priority.

The highest on the link holds the most power while EE is at the very bottom, forming a foundation of sorts.

All three sources of energy exist above EE to suppress it, to keep it contained while allowing its powers to be directed via Void.

However, whenever she showcases this power, golden chains manifest that hold the energy of Holy. Erasing, limiting, and sealing it back.

Perhaps the hierarchy is closer in power than expected? Perhaps the balance can shift and another source becomes the highest link in this chain.

Should this theory be true, that brings a new question.

How was this state achieved?

Or maybe the answer was in front all along.

EE, with its properties of being parasitic in nature, is akin to a glue. Highly corruptive but shows signs of adaptability with multiple sources. Perhaps if I were to zoom out further, the reason why this chain works is because EE is holding it together.

Conclusion.

To wield EE requires a symbiosis with the source. To direct the flow of corruption rather than forcefully wrangling it. As it is a 'parasite' it has a will of its own. Forceful usage may cause it to fight back and even seek to become the dominating 'mind' of the host.

Much like how EE can triumph over a larger source by turning into a web, the host must be careful when manipulating EE. To ensure that they are always the larger source while also being the net.

'Refilling' EE requires the conversion of living tissue, to assimilate more fuel. Alternatively, 'consuming' foreign sources of EE work but serves to enhance EE rather than the host. Dangerous if left unchecked.

[Written by Bai Suyin.]

Finishing the final line, Suyin leaned back and stared at the portion that she wrote about Alice.

As a researcher, her body is of great interest.

She simply couldn't wrap her mind around how it functioned.

The chain theory was simply a way for her to theorise and comprehend so that she wasn't hung up on it. But fundamentally, it could be all wrong.

After all, it's the musings of a human trying to comprehend the abnormal.

But there is one thing that was clear.

Whoever created Alice was ambitious.

Turning her into a vessel for all sources is akin to an empty world, waiting to be filled. While she showcases exceptional adaptability, it also means that whatever she becomes in the end is shaped by what she allows into this world.

Tapping her finger, Suyin closed her eyes.

If she had one line for Alice, it would be the fact that she had the potential to become something far worse than what EE can do to their realm.

Just the thought of this caused her to tremble.

When people are about to die, some say they see the visage of death. A reaper of the underworld coming to take their soul.

But Suyin? She saw the death of their realm in the shape of a little girl. Should she try to eliminate this potential?

One often finds their destiny on the road they take to avoid it.

If she is hung up on Alice's 'potential' of becoming the death of their realm, she might become the very reason it happens. The catalyst for all of it to change.

Thinking up to this point, Suyin made a choice.

Scrunching up the page about Alice and burning it away, she simply kept the paper focused on EE as a whole rather than including Alice in it.

Chapter 683 - 683: Fruits Of Suyin's Research

Day 3 – Night.

Standing in front of Suyin, Alice couldn't help but furrow her brows.

Unlike the previous experiments, there were no large contraptions. No dubious screams or even moist seats.

Suyin simply led them to a nearby cliff overlooking the battlefield.

"Are you curious? Huhu~ I bet you are. What is the great Suyin going to show you today? No darling machines, no secure labs, just us four out in the wild." Suyin chuckled, jabbing herself with a vial of blood to stay awake.

At this point, it was similar to a drug and she was chasing the high. The trembling of her body every time she injected the stimulant into herself. She loved it more than she should be.

But for the pursuit of research and what little time they had, she needed to do this. To make use of every passing second.

Isolde was also here. She spent most of her time calming the people in the city and looking after those who had lost their guardians. Since this was the last day before the attack, Alice wanted to follow along for the experiments.

She figured it would be a rather interesting sight for Zal-Ka'Rith. To see how close humans were to the truth of this energy.

"So what experiment is it this time?" Jin asked while scratching his hair. Suyin hasn't called them out without reason. This time was no exception.

"Huhu~ I'm glad you asked. The original purpose of our cooperation was to figure out how Eldritch Energy operates to begin with. As you know, I've already accomplished that to some degree with this research paper." Suyin grinned with a crazed light in her eyes while holding up the paper.

"But I, the genius, the beautiful, the one in a trillion, Bai Suyin, have gone above and beyond." She struck a pose with glee.

Looking at the girl in front of them who was putting on this act, the three stared blankly.

Naturally, Isolde maintained her smile.

"Boo, what a dull crowd. Fine, let me show you something to open your eyes. Well. . . 'eye' in your case." Suyin shrugged, glancing at Alice.

[Strange really, wouldn't you agree.] Cayla smirked.

'Shut it.' Alice pouted.

Seeing the three looking rather uninterested, Suyin rolled her eyes and turned to the battlefield.

Pulling her hair back and tying it into a ponytail, she narrowed her gaze.

Taking a deep breath, she clenched her fist as several canisters appeared from her arm.

A strange black veil now covered her limb as all three froze.

"Oh NOW you're interested. I swear you have the attention span of children. I gotta wave something shiny in front of you to get your attention." Suyin rolled her eyes with a grin.

Waving her arm, she slammed it into the ground.

*RUMBLE!!!

Tendrils stabbed into the ground and rushed towards the battlefield.

Several corpses began to stir. But it wasn't necromancy.

No, she wasn't desecrating the dead but rather, in a strange aspect, purifying them. From their cold dead bodies, rolling black mist began to emerge through the gaps, converging towards the tendrils that Suyin sent out.

Veins bulged on her neck as sweat rolled down her cheek but there was an excited smile on her face.

Opening her mechanical hand, a clear crystal began to form as all of the dark energy surged towards her location, condensing around this crystal and turning it black like the endless Abyss.

"A little snack for you. A reward for your troubles these past days." Suyin chuckled, tossing the crystal to Jin who caught it with surprise.

"Think of it as some Eldritch candy. Eat it and you shouldn't feel 'hungry'." Hesitating for a moment, Jin reluctantly threw it into his mouth and chewed.

"!!!"

His pupils trembled for a moment before he continued to chew.

"How is it?" Alice asked curiously.

"It's good. . . I. . . I can taste it. It's sweet."

"Sweet?"

She knew that Jin couldn't taste normal food anymore. Hell, even when he 'consumes' Eldritch energy, it doesn't taste great either.

But the 'candy' that Suyin made was. . . Sweet?

"Hehehe~ Are you surprised? Amazing right? How on earth did the genius, pretty, Bai Suyin make EE sweet?" Suyin puffed up her chest.

Before she could even reveal her secret, Isolde took a step forward as dark energy surrounded her.

"Hope right?" Zal-Ka'Rith interrupted with a sly chuckle.

"I have to say, you surprise me little one. Despite being a normal human despite some. . . oddities, you've manipulated Eldritch Energy and even figured out a way to adjust its properties to some extent. To spark 'hope' of life in their bodies before harvesting the residual energy.

"Say girl, do you wish to form a contract with me?" Zal-Ka'Rith offered.

"A contract with an Outer God, to allow you to study this energy however you want. To become a vessel and control your own destiny. The Abyss may have abandoned thou but I will not."

Before Alice or Jin could say anything, Zal-Ka'Rith waved his hand, isolating the two of them. He wanted to hear Suyin's answer.

The answer of a girl who cracked apart the secrets of Eldritch Energy in a mere 3 days time.

If she could do this in three days? What else could she accomplish if given more time. More resources?

Zal-Ka'Rith wanted to see what else that brain of hers could bring to this realm.

"Nah, I'll pass." Suyin gave a mocking smirk and waved her hand dismissively.

"Oh?"

"Why would I want a contract with an Outer God? I know what EE is like. Doing that is just shooting myself in the foot. All the benefits you told me I can already accomplish with my babies. Why do I need your help?

"I can study this energy with Alice and Jin. I don't need new sources. After all, Jin's stuck like this. And controlling my destiny? B*tch please I've had to fight against that since day one. I made peace with that fact and created my own path. I don't need crap like that.

"And lastly, who the f*ck cares about the fact that Abyss doesn't want me? If anything, it's their loss." Suyin grinned as her arm began to flash with energy.

Cannisters extended before slamming back into her arm. Around her, the barrier began to crack and melt, surprising Zal-Ka'Rith.

Erasing the barrier around them, Suyin ejected a corrupted canister out from her arm before replacing it with a new one.

"Pft! Alright, I'll admit this loss." Zal-Ka'Rith laughed before leaving Isolde's body.

Indeed, following Alice and observing the people around her was the right choice after all. If he didn't, he wouldn't have found the girl known as Bai Suyin.

"Tsk, coming and going as he pleases. Annoying b*stard." Alice clicked her tongue.

When Suyin destroyed the barrier, Alice was going to target Zal-Ka'Rith but he left before Alice could even make a move.

"But what was it that he said about Hope?" Alice glanced to Suyin who picked up the corrupted canister and held it up to the sky.

"Well you see, as I have written in my research, EE acts similar to a parasitic existence. It reshapes the living tissue it's in contact with. I basically injected it with some Abyss blood, giving it hope that it could survive before harvesting it.

"I had an inkling that the 'taste' would change based on what the EE goes through. Of course, changing the flavour profile of the energy is going to be annoying since it's far easier to just harvest it outright. Here, give this one a taste." Suyin tossed the canister to Jin.

"What am I? Trash disposal?" Jin's smile twitched.

The EE candy might've been alright but this was literally a corrupting piece of tech that she expected him to eat.

"I meant the energy, not the scrap it's latching onto. I want to see if I can reuse the thing." Suyin rolled her eyes.

"And you're not trash disposal, you're a test subject." She clarified.

Jin wanted to retort but she wasn't exactly wrong.

Between the four of them, he was probably the most suited for this kind of test.

Extracting the Eldritch Energy, he threw it into his mouth and immediately tasted a wave of bitterness.

"Disgusting." Jin spat out while tossing the canister back to Suyin.

"Give me a flavour profile. Sweet? Sour? Spicy?" She requested while looking at the rusted canister.

Coming to the conclusion that these would be one time use items, she threw it back into her bag.

"Bitter and sour."

"Probably because there wasn't any living tissue for the EE to latch onto. Alright, setting aside the taste of the energy, I believe this should be rather satisfactory right?" Suyin smiled, glancing towards Alice who nodded her head.

Glancing down at her hand, Alice closed her eye and recalled everything she read on that research document.

To wield EE requires a symbiosis with the source. To direct the flow rather than wrangle it. And most importantly, Void was the best when it comes to containment!

'Contain, guide. Let it do what it wants but show a path that benefits the two of us.'

Personal artifact!

A singularity spun to life above Alice's hand as she snapped her finger. Her shadow began to twitch as golden lights manifested around Alice's limbs.

It was restricting it but it wasn't burning like before!

However, she could still feel quite a lot of resistance from the Eldritch energy. While it acted as her foundation, her mastery over the other sources seems to cause friction with EE.

If she can't use it to its full potential then there's only one option.

"At the end of the day, I suppose it's my time to shine yeah?" Alyss chuckled as the chains fully manifested.

Clenching her fist, her shadow erupted with countless darkened limbs stretching around her.

She was already making use of it to some degree when fighting against the icon.

But now? They felt like an extension of herself.

Looking at the dark tendrils that were listening to her every command, Alyss glanced down at the chains around her wrist.

As long as she keeps it contained and controlled, the chains won't burn her either. While the regeneration may be far slower, it was a good trade off for mastery over Eldritch Energy!

Chapter 684 - 684: Zal-Ka'Rith's Expectations

With control now not being an issue, the main question is usage. What can she possibly do with this power?

Thus far, the powers of Eldritch Energy have largely been similar to how divinity work.

Like the Icons that Alyss had fought before, the usage of Eldritch Energy was mostly seen in enforcing their laws, their authority, onto the world.

Direct usage of the energy seemed to be restricted to just the action of assimilation.

For Isolde, her usage of the energy was simplistic. It was fuel for her to unravel her body in a way and attack her enemies using the multiple limbs that she can control with lethal precision along with the poison she injects into them.

Paralysing them yet making sure they could feel everything.

On the other hand, Jin was more. . . Instinctual. Like Isolde, his Eldritch Energy is used to create darkened limbs behind him, helping him rip and tear away at whatever he wants to kill.

These were all simplistic in terms of mastery. Basic enhancements and manifestations of power, the level of which even one Sigil or two Sigil Hunters could muster.

Therefore, there must be something beyond.

'There are levels to everything. Masteries and powers that are unlocked with higher proficiency. So what possible levels are there for Eldritch?' Alice mused to herself.

Since Alyss was showing more compatibility with Eldritch Energy, it was clear that she was the one to use it between the two of them.

If Alice was responsible for Abyss, Holy and Void, then Alyss will be Eldritch.

'Laws, authority. . . Merge?' Alice folded her arms as she began to pace back and forth.

Seeing this, Jin wanted to say something but Suyin was faster. She held her finger over his lips.

"Shh, don't disturb an inquisitive mind when they're deep in thought. Allow them to have this moment."

If she was in Alice's place and someone disturbed her mid thought, causing her to forget what she was on the verge of discovering, let's just say they might be her next test subject.

While Suyin was stopping Jin from interfering, Isolde stood off by the side.

'What do you think?' Zal-Ka'Rith asked with a light chuckle.

'Of what my Lord?'

'About the research and how they plan to control this source of energy. What is your perception of their efforts right now?' He rephrased his question.

'I'm. . . Unsure. Apologies but I don't see how my perception of them is of use to you my Lord.' Isolde tilted her head in confusion.

Ever since meeting Alice, her Lord had been more vocal than in the past. Of course, he still spoke to her but not as much as now nor did he borrow her body often.

'Entertain me for now. Understanding your companions right now holds a degree of merit for you as well.'

Scratching her chin, Isolde contemplated her words.

'I think it's a waste of their focus. If I recall, Alice is looking to take revenge or rather, stop whatever the cult is planning yes? I feel like having her expend her efforts in making appropriate plans are better than using three days on these experiments. She is plenty strong already and the chains around her body are a good counter. Any more seems unnecessary.' Isolde replied truthfully.

'Huhu~ Indeed. To some people, this same seems like a waste. But I think of it as rather fascinating. You don't know this but Alice was actually on the verge of killing an Apostle.' Zal-Ka'Rith grinned, causing Isolde to paused in shock.

Apostles.

Beings beyond Abyss Lords, the right and left hand of God.

Beings chosen to inherit a portion of the Divine Throne's authority.

Yet her Lord was saying that Alice was about to kill one?

'She reduced the Apostle of War to a child begging for her life. Scrambling at every opportunity to escape. Even to the point of abandoning her mortal vessel. For beings of great power, our vessels hold a different kind of importance. With so many modifications done the soul, only our own body can withstand that kind of change.

'But by abandoning the vessel, we experience something that's no different from death. To push the Apostle to this level, it was clear that she had no other way of surviving.

'No chance to fight back.'

'But despite all that, she failed to kill the Apostle right?' Isolde asked as Zal-Ka'Rith nodded his head.

'An Outer God interfered. The fight was not a short one and by the end, most of Alice's energy was tainted by Eldritch Energy. Without sufficient understanding of this power, she lost her chance at claiming the Apostle's soul. Therefore, her current preparations are to avoid the interference of us Outer Gods in the future. Something that you should take note of.' He chuckled.

'Lumiria of the Moon. Goddess presiding over Immortality and Spirituality. To put bluntly, a pervert obsessed with longevity. She fears death more than anyone yet she toys with the souls of many. To kill her, you must understand souls on a deeper level. To understand how divinity functions. Like Alice, you must study the energy of your enemy and turn that knowledge into a blade that can pierce the veil of immortality.' Zal-Ka'Rith explained as Isolde glanced down.

To understand divinity. . . the foundation of Gods. . .

Isolde didn't know where she should start.

But if she had to guess. . .

Alice was probably the best shot.

Staying silent, Zal-Ka'Rith watched the minute changes within Isolde and a smile appeared on his face.

While she may not be as much of an anomaly as Alice, there were always things that he could do to change that.

Slight shifts in mentality, to understand the perspectives of the irregular and irrational.

Yes, to normal people, thinking of ways to master and manipulate Eldritch Energy is impossible. This corruptive source was something that should be isolated and erased.

But to the irregulars, this was potential. A chance, a seed waiting for its moment to sprout.

But the bridge from normal to irregular wasn't something that many could walk.

If he had to describe Isolde, it would be that she was still in the process of walking this bridge.

There were parts of her that was still normal. Parts of her that can't imagine herself beating the divine throne.

He wanted to change that.

Step by step, he'll have her adjust her method of thinking.

That was the path of the Writhing Script, the path she started to walk down the moment she accepted his contract.

Observe, study, understand, absorb. Observe, study, understand, absorb.

'I have high expectations of you Isolde. Observe your surroundings well.'

###

In the end, Alice didn't stay by the battlefield for long as the group made their way back to what remained of the city.

Now that the three days were up and the soldiers had plenty of rest, it was time for the counterattack.

Suyin already had scouts track some of the cultist but they still couldn't find where the main base was.

Instead, they were going to take their fortresses one by one. To put it bluntly, it was going to be a crusade against everything they have prepared.

"Brothers! Sisters! The time is now! You've been given time to rest, you've been given time to prepare. And now! It's time to act!

"You've endured the cold nights! You've buried comrades who died for this life! That ends today!

"Look to your left, look to your right! Memorise the faces of those that will enter battle with you!

"These are the faces of those that will have your back! These are the souls that will pull you from a fire! The hand that will help you in your time of need! These are comrades that will bleed alongside you!

"Remember what you fight for! Through our sacrifice will safety be given! We will not cower! We will not falter! We are children of Sikha! Do not let these heretics take our homeland!

"Through steel, fire and unyielding will! We will show them our wrath!"

Watching Suyin give a rallying speech to the city, Alice leaned against the walls while looking towards the southern battlefield.

Three days.

For three days, the enemy didn't attack.

They sent the occasional scouting beast flying through the sky but it was dealt with rather quickly.

Such. . . Silence. It was uncanny.

While these three days may have afforded them a moment of peace and time to prepare, inversely, it also felt like it was the time that the enemy needed.

To get the reinforcements they desire and adjust for the anomaly that is herself.

After all, when fighting against the hybrids, they said that the priority was retrieval of family assets.

Thinking of this, Alice couldn't help but clench her fist.

Had the Hybrids shown compassion and distaste for the Zenia family, she would've been happy to help them like she did with Selen.

But if they stand against her, they will burn like the rest of the family.

###

Watching Suyin's speech, a woman chuckled and gave it a small clap.

"I have to hand it to her, she sure knows how to rally her soldiers when they need. But sadly they should've taken this chance to attack us before we got our shipment.

"Kaine, Mira, have you given the collars to the Soldiers?"

"Everyone is ready Alana." Kaine replied with a slight bow.

There was a hatred in her eyes as she glanced at the image of Alice.

"Good. Since the enemy is giving us such a warm welcome, it'll be a shame not to reply in kind. Remember the main objective, retrieval of family assets." Alana ordered as the twins bowed and left the room.

"I do hope you enjoy the sacrifices that are delivering themselves to your front doorstep." She glanced back at the Outer God who was standing next to Kazira.

Without waiting for his reply, she left the room as well.

Kazira stared in silence. A vein bulging on the back of her hand.

Chapter 685 - 685: Crusade To The South

I've seen war. I've seen death.

But. . .

The world isn't supposed to 'move' like this.

The sky split open like a lacerated wound. Red, violet. . . a darkness that stretched on forever. Different hues bleeding into one another, all foreign to what should be a clear blue sky.

Screams that echoed across the battlefield.

It wasn't just the cries of the soldiers. It felt like the land itself was crying. The howling of the wind, the tearing and rumbling of earth.

I couldn't tell what's dirt and what's blood anymore. The only thing keeping me going was the adrenaline that pumped through my veins.

Luo was next to me.

At least he was a moment ago.

I had tripped over the weapon of one of our comrades and he helped me up to my feet. Before I could even utter words of gratitude, I watched a fleeting black shadow tear off his head.

His body wasn't even dragged away by the beast. It just slumped over, lifeless. The separation of the head and body was fast, clean, brutal.

I caught a glimpse of that beast. Just a glimpse but it was enough to imprint itself into my mind.

Even calling it a beast may be a stretch. It simply reached out from the ground, as though it was always part of it, waiting. When Luo was close enough, it whipped itself against Luo's head, removing it then consuming it.

I didn't look away. I couldn't.

Blood dripped into my eyes, sweat and dirt causing a burning sensation. But I didn't want to blink. If I flinch, if I look away, only darkness will greet me.

Everlasting darkness that will never go away.

In other words.

Death.

I let the emotions of the speech carry me with false bravado. I felt like my death could be part of something greater maybe. Heck, I might even be a hero.

I've survived this long. Maybe. . .

Maybe. . .

This word.

This. . . maybe. I let it delude me with false hope. I knew that the battlefield had no place for heroes. I knew the brutality of it. I've seen what happened during the first ambush.

And yet I still let a distant dream carry my legs to this hell on earth.

I took a deep breath. My trembling fingers clattered against the handle of my blade.

These. . . malformed insults to life itself. They learn. They observe. They mimic what they see, the techniques that people have spent years honing.

They copy formations that our commanders have drilled into us. The rhythm of battle.

A constant war cry that echoed in the distance- no. this battlefield. The presence of a higher being, calling for bloodshed.

But that wasn't all. The call for war, the rally for battle. Beneath all of that, there is this. . .

Sickening whisper.

This. . . voice deep in your ear, your mind. The whispers of the devil, corroding your thoughts, making you doubt, dread and want to flee.

Should I flee? Should I turn my back and run to safety? Hope that someone else will die in my place?

No!

I will hold this line! I will fight to my last breath! Not because I am brave, not because I have a unique power. No, I will fight because it is my duty!

A soldier's law!

I repeat these words like a prayer. Or perhaps a curse.

Hold the line, stand, fight, die if you must but do not cower!

The smile of my younger brother, the taste of my mother's soup. Even the sh*tty geezers running stalls telling lecherous jokes. I fight so this way of life can remain.

"I see you beast." I utter these words while scanning the strange beast from top to bottom.

There was only one visible weapon, the whip like tendril that can kill with a single hit.

*Fuuu~

Letting out a deep breath, I rushed forward.

Now!

My instincts as a soldier, my instinct for survival. I felt the flicker of death greeting me from the side and relaxed my knees.

*KRK!!!!

Sliding across the dirt ground, I watched the whip like appendage narrowly miss me. This gap, this miracle. . .

Even if I die, I'll slash! One more slash from me is one less from the next person!

This is how soldiers fight! This is how we die!

"ARGGGG!!!"

Swinging my blade towards the beast, I watched as a portion of its body transformed into a maw.

Ah. . .

So that's how it is in the end.

I couldn't even land a singl-

"Don't make that face soldier. You did good."

*BANG!!!

In front of me, a pillar of flames erupted from the ground while darkened limbs burst out from my shadow.

They stretched towards the malformed beast, twisting it and tearing it in half.

I'm saved.

###

Landing on the corpse of the beast, Alyss closed her eye for a moment before placing her palm against its body.

After a brief pause, the body disintegrated, turning into a mist that was absorbed into a crystal.

'It really worked.' Alyss was surprised.

By applying the method that Suyin showed them, Alyss was able to condense Eldritch Energy into crystals like this for future use.

That way, she didn't need to store it inside her own body, causing the chains to harm her.

"Of course it works! Who do you think I am? I am the genius, the beauty, the peerless inventor, the forever 17 Bai Suyin. Feel free to praise me more. In fact, why don't you give me a thunderous applause and bow so that I don't hit you." Suyin grinned over the communication crystal as Alyss glanced up and her pupils constricted in shock.

She watched as Suyin rode a mechanical serpent into battle with cannons mounted on each of its segments. Standing fearlessly on the head, Suyin struck a pose and all the cannons fired simultaneously!

*RUMBLE!!!

A wave of brilliant blaze rushed towards the battlefield as distant explosions ignited the night sky. Consecutive blasts of fire and thunder lashed against the enemy, a constant volley paired with the maniacal laugh of a certain inventor.

"Yahoo! That's what I'm talking about! You like that huh?! Did you enjoy attacking my city huh?! Go f*ck yourself!" Suyin roared as a swarm of her inventions disembarked the main body of the serpent.

"Commander Bai, your communications are not muted. All the soldiers can hear your cursing." One of her subordinates laughed.

"What? Can't stand a little vulgar speak? Or do you think cursing doesn't match my beauty?" Suyin smirked while unfolding her arms.

"Alyss, there's a swarm of Eldritch beasts coming in from the east. I doubt the army can fight against that so I'll leave it to you. Jin can deal with the beasts in the front. I'll cover the sides and give you the support you need. If you need a refill for crystals let me know m'kay?" Suyin transferred some map details to Alyss's crystal.

"Roger roger~" Alyss shrugged.

She had to admit, having Suyin take the helm was efficient. She was able to capture details about the map that would be troublesome to get otherwise and even record it down.

Hell, even now, she was giving orders to the different companies in the army, telling them where to go. She was playing a game and this entire battlefield was her board.

Jumping into the sky, Alyss saw the wave of malformed beasts and licked her lips.

*BANG!!!

Creating a veil of shadows behind her, Alyss narrowed her gaze and locked onto every beast that was in range. For a moment, the world began to lose its colour as she could see the exact spot of their weakness. A glowing red point waiting to be stabbed.

Destruction Point!

*KRK!!!

In an instant, tens of malformed beasts died with Eldritch Energy overwhelming their system. Converting them all to crystals for later use, Alyss glanced at the map.

Before she could read the details, however, Alice took over and stomped down.

Snapping her finger, Void Fluxes erupted overhead, blocking the ranged attacks that were flying her way.

'You should keep an eye out for stuff ya know? You don't have the regeneration I do.' Alice sighed seeing Alyss's carelessness.

'It's fine~ I knew you would cover for me anyway.' Alyss dismissed with a light chuckle.

Looking down at the map, Alice could see Jin going crazy on the frontlines with his node rushing through the enemy. Anyone he passed would be eliminated as he used a mix of his own martial arts and Eldritch energy.

By transforming the energy into limbs that he could control freely behind him, the modified martial art gained a new level of adaptability!

It now covered his defences, allowing him to run as wild.

However. . .

'These are just fodder.' Alyss narrowed her eye as Alice nodded her head in agreement.

These were simply repurposed corpses or weak beasts that they corrupted. It was far from what the main army should be capable of. Especially since Alice didn't see any Hybrids out here.

At that moment, a crimson aura covered the sky, dying it in tainted hues. An unholy mix of divinity and eldritch descended with a silhouette covered by the clouds.

"Break them! Burn them! Brand them with fear! Fight! Dedicate yourselves to War! If they kneel, strike harder! March my soldiers!" A thunderous voice echoed out as crimson markings manifested on the bodies of the enemy. All of them gained a boost in strength as they rushed forward with fearlessness.

"Kazira." Alice narrowed her gaze.

If Kazira was commanding the army then she was watching this fight.

'Cayla.'

[Yes?]

'Can you do me a favour?'

[If you're asking me to track where the energy is coming from and find Kazira, I'm already on it.]

Curling her lips up into a grin, Alice clenched her fist.

'Perfect.'

This time, she won't let anything get in her way of claiming Kazira's soul.

Chapter 686 - 686: Zenia's Involvement

Creating a platform for herself in the air, Alice glanced over the battlefield with a slight frown.

Again, it was just mutated beasts and some cultists. A distinct lack of Zenia intervention. Hell, even with Kazira helping out with their charge, this attack force was far too weak. It was weaker than the army they made to attack the city.

"Something's off." Suyin was the first to speak as Alice glanced over to her.

Standing atop her serpent, there was a deep frown on Suyin's face.

"The EE readings are far below what's predicted. They're all just cannon fodder, barely stronger than the average soldier. If it wasn't for them not being used to fighting these things, they wouldn't be struggling so hard." Suyin bit her nail as she began to scan the different corners of the battlefield.

She could see the morale of the troops rising with each victory, each kill. But all that gave her was a sense of foreboding.

'They're getting carried away with the easy victories, dropping their guard.'

"Second company! You're getting too ahead of yourselves! Drop back and regroup!" Suyin shouted.

Thankfully, even though they were being carried by the momentum, they still trusted Suyin's words over everything.

She's the one who carried them this far. Ignoring commands from her would be suicidal, no matter how much of an opportunity it may seem.

"Fourth company! Drop back as well, cover our flank and form up. Don't let the easy victories get to your head, the enemy shouldn't be this weak." Suyin ordered while trying to guess what the enemy was up to.

"Are you sure you're not overestimating them commander?" The leader of the Fourth company asked curiously while ordering his troops to fall back.

"How long do you think we've been fighting? Aside from the weird sh*t the energy does to us, do you really think this resistance they're putting is as strong as it should be? How many times have we clashed on this border now?" Suyin replied while having some of her contraptions scout ahead of the main army.

Information.

Information was key and that's what she needed right now. There were too many unknown variables at play, too many plans in the dark. She had to bring them up to the surface so that she could plan accordingly.

*RUMBLE!!!

The ground began to tremble as Suyin almost lost her footing atop her serpent.

Glancing down, she frowned but there was no fracture in the earth. Rather. . .

"Above!" Alice shouted, rushing up into the sky.

She could see a single line stretching across the sky. Behind that line, ominous energy flowed out. In a strange sense, it felt like there were thousands of 'Alices' behind that line.

A chimeric fusion of multiple energy sources. Abyss, Holy and even Eldritch.

'Nyer? No, Nyer wouldn't be so callous with his experiments like this. . . Zenia!' Alice widened her eye as the line was torn apart!

From the tear, a gargantuan worm like beast crawled through as though gravity did not exist. It slithered through the airspace with ominous grace. Blackened hide and writhing spikes coated by a layer of a black oil like substance.

A mutated form as a result of both Eldritch and perhaps even the Void.

A gaping maw lined with rings of serrated fangs, each one capable of tearing a hunter in half.

The beast's roar was silent yet it sent chills through all the soldiers. Reality fractured around it, buckling as though it could not tolerate such a being.

Debris began to float up with some soldiers losing their footing. It felt as though reality was inverted.

But most glaring of all. . .

"That damn collar!" Gritting her teeth, veins bulged on Alice's neck as energy erupted from her body.

Resonance!

Artificial Resonance!

Transforming herself into a streak of crimson, Alice rushed towards the beast while flickering through the Void to avoid the debris.

Void Flux – Cleave!

Twisting her body, Alice unleashed a destructive arc of energy only to watch it be 'consumed' by the beast.

Its worm like body cracked open, revealing rotting flesh and bones that wrapped around her strike.

Using its entire body to cushion the blow, the worm revealed a sickening 'grin' of sorts.

"R. . . trieval.

"Of family. . .

"Assets!"

As the beast finished the last work, its back cracked open!

The energy that Alice used was repurposed to fuel its next strike!

*BANG!!!!

From its back, meteors shot into the sky before arcing down.

Alice wanted to stop this but a familiar energy rushed towards her from the side.

*CLANG!!!

Hurriedly parrying the strike, Alice saw Mira, the girl with the red scarf kicking her away.

'If one is here then the other must be as well!'

Immediately deploying her zone, Alice's pupils constricted after noticing a blade stab through her stomach from behind.

"Yeah, I figured you'd sneak through the moment I used my zone. But you know, this zone wasn't meant for you." Alice curved her lips up into a grin.

Triggered cast!

"KAINE!" Mira widened her eyes in shock.

She understood that Alice's zone was to make sure she couldn't intervene!

Around them, the Void was locked as Alice grabbed Kaine's hair without care that she was stabbed.

This kind of wound, she could shrug off!

*KRK!!!

Alice's arm was torn off by an invisible force with Kaine already in her state of limit break.

The collar surrounding her neck was revealing its full form.

"Try again!" Alice slammed her head into Kaine's head, forcing her to stumble back.

Without giving Kaine a chance to rest, Alice grabbed her using the half regenerated arm and threw her towards the ground.

"It's not your turn yet!" Tracking the movement of Mira's scarf using her Zone, Alice snapped her finger and a portal opened before the scarf could reach her, redirecting the attack back to Mira.

Creating a blood mirror, Alice dove in after Kaine.

Between the two of them, Kaine was the one she had to deal with first! The one that could avoid her zone and even control the pathway of objects!

Just as Alice appeared above Kaine, danger overwhelmed her mind.

*CLANG!!!

Protecting her neck with flames and metal, Alice's pupil constricted seeing the fragmented collar that was moments away from solidifying around her.

Cold sweat dripped down her back as she immediately teleported the fragments away from her and jumped back.

"Sharp instincts like the doctor mentioned. Should I call you big sister? You were the reason why we are even made after all." Alana landed next to Kaine with a laugh.

Clapping her hands together, her eyes flashed a deep purple as Alice felt a chill and immediately surrounded herself with Void energy to form a barrier.

*BANG!!!

"!!!" Crashing back, Alice furrowed her brows and understood that it was the same power as Kaine. Only slightly different.

'Cayla.'

[I'M ON IT!] Cayla interrupted before Alice could even finish her request. Trying to track where Kazira was while also analysing what the Hybrids could do was no easy task. Especially since she couldn't access her full power.

Seeing how Cayla was already busy with things, Alice snapped her finger and created a Void portal beneath her.

Jumping down, she grabbed the communication crystal.

"Suyin, I'm going to be a bit busy handling some abnormalities on the battlefield. Three of them so far, not sure how many extras will appear." Alice reported before diving out of the Void to get away from the rest of the army.

If the Hybrids were to fight, collateral damage was unavoidable.

"Alright! Finish it fast if you can! We're struggling right now!" Suyin sounded panicked as Alice furrowed her brows and scanned the battlefield.

To her shock, the things that fell down weren't meteors!

They were soldiers wearing the same collar as the beast in the sky and the hybrids!

No matter the damage they took, their limbs would begin to regenerate and they rushed forward without care. No fear of pain or death.

They were the signatures that Alice was sensing! It wasn't the worm beast!

"Collars! Go for the collars! If you can remove the collars or break them, it should hinder the regeneration I think." Alice shouted, dodging to the side as Kaine tried to attack again but this time Alice used a different tactic to find her.

A thin intertwined net of blood threads around her body. If she could bypass the grid, she can't make Alice forget about her threads!

Triggered Cast!

Void spears mixed with her violet flames stabbed towards Kaine who quickly dodged before attacking Alice with vector manipulation.

Gritting her teeth, Alice tried to stabilize herself using her Void powers but Mira caught up.

Spreading out her scarf, she prevented the proper formation of Alice's powers.

'Let me handle the scarf b*tch.'

Golden chains whipped around her limbs as Alyss clenched her fist.

Destruction Point!

Darkened limbs erupted from her shadow, colliding with the scarf and injected Eldritch energy into it.

Signs of corruption began to appear as Mira quickly retreated before 'purifying' her scarf.

To her side, Kaine tried to intercept, stopping Alyss from harming Mira but Alyss was already prepared.

Mirage Steps!

Alyss's body flickered into three motions with Kaine being forced to pick one.

Tried to use her vector manipulation on one of the clones, she was shocked to see her attack hit nothing.

"Bzz! Wrong choice, try again next time!" Alyss slammed her fist into Kaine's stomach before creating a blade by mixing Eldritch Energy with Abyssal.

Soul Chaser!

Just as her attack was about to land against Kaine, her body was flung back by an invisible force once more thanks to Alana.

Mira who could cancel abilities like Alice, Kaine who could manipulate vectors to a certain degree and finally, Alana the anomaly. Her powers still being unknown but seemingly holding a resemblance to Kaine's powers.

Alyss's smile twitched but her gaze was steady.

If they can't beat something like this, they shouldn't even think about destroying the Zenia family!

Chapter 687 - 687: One Against Three Hybrids

"What's wrong prototype? Feeling the pressure? Don't worry, when we take you back to the family, you'll get to enjoy the experiments once more." Alana narrowed her eyes seeing Alyss being on guard against them.

However, Alyss didn't respond as the golden chains disappeared.

"Hais~ Pressure? Not at all." Alice took over with a grin.

Sweeping her hair back, she gave the three of them a middle finger.

"I'll feel more pressure from joining Suyin's experiment than being captured by you three dipshits. One can control vectors, one uses my blood and you, the third. . . Let's just say we'll figure out as we go.

"What I feel from you three amounts to only a mild annoyance. Nothing more, nothing less. Hmm, I suppose insects would be an apt description for you. So how does it feel insect? Being modelled after me?" Snapping her finger, Alice slammed her foot down as a field of spider lilies began to blossom.

Mira wanted to cancel it out but Alice revealed a twisted grin.

"Gotcha."

Triggered Cast!

The moment Mira tried to cancel out Alice's field, a Void portal appeared next to her!

Alice's arm reached out, grabbing Mira by the face as Kaine wanted to stop her but Alice was always prepared for what Kaine would do.

Triggered Cast!

Two fights. That's all she needed to set up the parameters for these two!

Beneath Kaine's feet, spears of blood and fire pierced up, forcing her to lean back while Alana made the move instead.

Feeling the invisible force wrap around her arm, Alice gave her a side eye.

"You want it? You can have it!" Detonating a Void Flux inside her own arm, she began regenerating a new limb while her spare hand grabbed Mira by the throat, pulling her through the portal.

There were many things that Alice could use right now. Some she would rather save till the moment she has to fight the Outer God and Kazira.

So for these Hybrids, she'll only use three Sigils.

"Let go of my sister!" Kaine shouted as her eyes turned bloodshot.

The space around Alice began to collapse with an invisible force trying to tear her in half. Alice understood that Mira would cancel her the moment she tried to use anything to fight against this. But fortunately for her. . .

"Go on, try and tear me in half. Do it b*tch!" Alice taunted, lifting Mira up and using her as a hostage. If Kaine were to tear her in half, Mira would follow!

"!!!" Freezing up, Kaine was stuck at a crossroad while Alana let out a sigh.

Taking off her glasses, Alice was entirely captured in her gaze as she licked her lips.

In that moment, a portal opened up next to Alice.

Vector Control!

Forcefully separating Alice and Mira away from one another, Alana wanted to throw another collar around Alice but she was prepared!

Snapping her fingers, a spear of fire condensed into a single burning white line.

Void Flux! Spear form!

Using Kaden's casting method that she was taught in the Inverted World, Alice modified it for maximum piercing power and speed!

*BANG!!!

Firing the spear through the portal, Alana was forced to pull her arm back and dodge.

Despite the spear missing its main target, Alana glanced down at her arm and saw the line of charred flesh.

Meanwhile, Alice wiped away the blood on her face.

She was beginning to understand Alana's powers now. That last attack, it was no doubt her fourth Sigil.

The more they fight, the more information Alice gets. And the more information she gets, the more triggered casts that she could set. At the end of this, no matter what they do, she'll have an automated counter for it.

*BANG!!!

Blocking a strike from Kaine, Alice could see the anger in her eyes as she tried to tear her in half once more.

Destruction Point!

Taking over, Alyss wrapped herself in a layer of Eldritch Energy before slamming her fist into Kaine's stomach, causing her to cough up blood.

While Vector Manipulation was strong, it had the same weakness as other Abyssal powers. Weak against Eldritch unless at a Lord level!

With this, Alyss could buy enough time for herself to launch a counter.

Kaine's key weakness when using her power is that she couldn't manipulate the Vectors of multiple targets. Doing so causes a great amount of stress to her body.

Meaning, her strongest point was also her weakest!

From above, a cage of blood descended with the intent of trapping Alyss but Alice swapped in and stomped her foot down.

Around her, briar thorns whipped towards the cage, injecting her own blood into the mix. Forcing Mira to sever her connection unless she wanted a raw dose of Alice's blood.

Observing all of this, Alana had her arms folded.

A smile appeared on her face as she was beginning to 'understand' Alice.

"Mira, Kaine, it's time for work. Don't disappoint me now." Alana spoke with a chuckle.

Tapping her heel against the ground, a violet aura appeared around the two girls as their eyes shifted to match Alana.

With a new flood of information in their mind, they rushed to action!

'Watch out!' Alyss warned, realising that their movements had changed.

Adjusting her stance, Alice tried to parry Kaine's strike with the help of her triggered cast but it failed to activate! The conditions weren't met!

Instead of manipulating Alice's vector, she forced her own body to be much faster than before!

***BANG!!!**

Blocking her strike using her arm, Alice slid back by several meters with a frown on her face.

Mira on the other hand, activated her own limit break.

Plunging her finger into her neck, she activated the collar as black stars appeared around her neck.

Opening her hand, a black and red orb appeared.

***RUMBLE!!!**

Energy converged towards Alice as she surrounded herself with a barrier only for it to collapse.

'She's using something similar to blood mist.' Alice analysed before throwing a blood weapon behind her.

Quickly forcing a connection and swapping locations, she watched as the space erupted with a pillar of crimson energy.

Her new landing spot wasn't safe either. Briar thorns, different from her own burst out from the ground, looking to restrain Alice.

Destruction point + Soul Chaser!

Taking over, Alyss unleashed a series of slashes to destroy the thorns before launching her blade towards Alana.

However, before her blade could hit, she flicked her finger up and the blade was tossed into the sky.

Out of the three of them, Alana was the most annoying.

So far, Alice has concluded the girl could 'study' and 'copy' the abilities that she's seen.

Curving her lips up into a grin, Alice began to laugh.

'I'm staring to get it now. How to kill these three frauds.'

Seeing Alice suddenly begin to laugh, Alana couldn't help but tilt her head.

In this kind of situation. . . She was laughing? Why?

Has she lost it?

"Hybrids, let me ask you this. Why do you still work for the Zenia's? Your collar? Brainwashing? Or do you believe what they're doing is the right thing? Do you believe yourself part of the new generation?" Alice asked, focusing entirely on evasion for now.

"Grasping at straws now are we? Trying to plant seeds of doubt into our mind?" Alana asked with a sigh. She thought it was going to be something else but if all she's doing is planting seeds of doubt then she was severely disappointed.

"Nah, you misunderstood." Alice jumped up to avoid Kaine's strike before landing on a platform of blood.

"I'm asking so I can offer you a chance to live. To see if you're as far gone as the Zenia's or if there some hope in you. But your response has already told me everything I need to know. Then what about you two?" Alice turned to Kaine and Mira.

She could see that the two had a connection deeper than most. Siblings that could only rely on one another. If they wanted to-

Before Alice could even finish her thought, Kaine burst into action, trying to throw Alice from the sky.

"A shame." Alice sighed.

She had hoped that maybe the two of them might've been like Selen. But clearly that was wishful thinking.

Since that was the case, there's no longer a need for hesitation.

All that's left was an execution for the three of them!

"You first." Alice grinned towards Mira.

*BANG!!!

Physical Resonance!

Despite not being able to use Sigil swap right now since her body was flooded with Eldritch energy, there was a different Physical Resonance for her to use.

First Sigil + Eldritch Energy + Fourth Sigil!

With her understanding of EE thanks to Suyin's research paper, she understood that it could replace Duality to some extent as a catalyst for change!

Appearing next to Mira while covered head to toe in a dark rolling mist, Alice formed a blade around her hand and plunged it into Mira's back.

"!!!" Blood dripped from her lips as Mira glanced down slowly.

She could see Alice's hand through her chest and holding her heart.

"MIRA!!!" Kaine wanted to interfere but a barrier of Void mixed with Eldritch was keeping her powers out!

Opening her mouth, Mira revealed a bitter smile and wanted to say her farewells.

*BANG!!!

Detonating a Void Flux In Mira's head, Alice tossed her lifeless body aside and crushed the heart in her hands.

"One down. Two more to go~"

###

"What a shame. Seems like there will be some casualties on the side of the Zenia family." Voruth-Zal muttered before curving his lips up into a smile.

"I'm guessing this is what you wanted from the beginning. Rejoice Kazira, you might be getting a new vessel after all." He turned to the Apostle of War.

"Of course, that's only if you can kill her. Though considering her usage of Eldritch energy. . . that seems unlikely in your current state."

"Spit it out, what do you want." Kazira gritted her teeth.

Hearing this, a scheming, twisted grin appeared on Voruth-Zal's face as he spoke his terms.

Chapter 688 - 688: Attempted Retrieval

Kaine felt the entire world turn red. She heard a ringing in her ear as her gaze was locked onto Mira's lifeless body.

That final smile. . .

If she wasn't concerned about her own body, if she wasn't trying to survive, maybe Mira wouldn't be in that state.

Gritting her teeth, the collar around Kaine started to go berserk as obsidian spikes pierced deep into her skin but she didn't care.

Plunging her finger into her neck, she activated the collar once more.

The new collars developed by the Zenia family allowed one to overcharge and limit break their abilities. To enhance it to the next level.

But most are only authorised to use it once since they can't handle subsequent activations without the risk of death. However, without Mira here, what else was there left for her to do?

Even if she dies, she'll take down Mira's killer with her!

Second Limit Break!

Third Limit Break!

Watching this, Alice tilted her head.

She could see the rapid flow of energy going berserk around Kaine. The way they injected themselves into her body via the collar, transforming her, mutating her into a vessel for power.

'So this is the secret behind the collar.' Alice narrowed her gaze.

Like many things, the Collar worked similar to a contract. At least it did for the aspect of Limit Breaking. While Alice didn't know the exact nature of the contract, she could see that it involved three parties. One was Kaine herself, the second was the Abyss. And the third was unknown.

However, Alice had a hunch that the third party was probably the Zenia family or something to do with her blood.

Regardless, since Kaine was now losing herself in anger, it was a prime opportunity for Alice to act!

Bloodline Release!

Her soul state manifested behind Alice as she was about to make a move when Kaine clenched her fist.

*BANG!!!

Immediately, the space around her came crashing down with Alice hastily teleporting herself out of danger.

"Multiple vectors!" Alice widened her eye in surprise as Kaine slashed up with her hand.

An invisible force tossed her into the air.

Struggling to orientate herself, Alice threw a dagger towards Kaine which missed the target but that was fine!

Swapping locations, Alice slashed down.

Void Flux – Cleave!

*BANG!!!

Seeing her strike forcefully shifted off to the side, Alice clicked her tongue in annoyance.

Meanwhile, Kaine glared at her with blood dripping from her eyes.

Her body was breaking apart but she didn't care.

"Kill!" Snapping her finger, Kaine applied two forces onto Alice in an attempt to tear her in half.

Sacrificing one of her arms, Alice summoned briar thorns from beneath Kaine. However, there seemed to be an invisible rotating barrier around her, preventing the attacks from landing at all.

In this kind of situation, Alice had to use a different approach.

One that bypasses this barrier.

At that moment, Alice felt an invisible force punch against her chest but her body didn't move.

Two forces!

From holding her in place while the other one strikes through her!

Coughing up a mouthful of blood, Alice's pupil trembled as she glared at Kaine who revealed a grin.

"Did that feel good? To kill the one who killed your sister?" Alice's voice whispered in Kaine's ear.

Her entire body froze with a dreaded chill.

How was she whispering in her ear? It was clear that she was in front. . . of her. . .

Little by little, Alice's wounded body started to disappear.

*CRACK!

Without giving Kaine a chance to comprehend what was going on, Alice wrapped her arms around her head and twisted it off!

Crushing the head, she burned the body and turned to Alana who was observing the entire ordeal.

From the start of the illusion till the end, she kept watching, not making a single move.

"Aren't you even the slightest bit worried? Your friends just died ya know?" Alice gestured to what remained of the two girls.

"Worried? Why should I be? They gave me the perfect chance to analyse everything I need to know about you. The way your body moves, the way your energy flows. How you activate those strange casting methods of yours along with that hallucination at the end.

"You've shown me your hand so why should I be worried?" Alana dismissed with a wave.

"Our goal is and always will be to retrieve family assets. That's to say, you. If anything, I would've killed Kaine myself had she truly tried to kill you."

Hearing this, Alice furrowed her brows.

If she was planning on 'retrieving' her as she said, surely she didn't mean with just the three of them.

Even with the main army having collars to create near immortal soldiers, it was far too lacking.

So what else is there? Alice had already set up a grid covering almost the entire battlefield. The moment someone abnormally strong approaches her, she would be able to detect it. Yet there was nothing.

What was she missing?

Three days. Three days of silence from the enemy and this is all they came up with?

Something was wrong, dreadfully so.

At this point, a sense of worry began to fill Alice's heart. It felt as though she was now walking atop a palm, everything she did was within the boundaries of their calculations.

"You finally feeling the pressure?" Alana smiled ominously.

"You see, my power is to analyse. I observe, analyse, copy and make counters. But the analysis does not end there."

Hearing this, Alice felt a sense of danger from all around her.

As though the entire realm was her enemy.

'I need to leave!' Stomping down, she tried to open a portal out of her location but Alana was faster.

A counterforce crashed into Alice's casting, negating it.

It wasn't the same as cancelling abilities with her blood but rather using energy to neutralise and disrupt the casting process.

Second Resonance.

Curving her lips up into a smile, Alana began to activate her second resonance while Alice's mind spun for a way out.

Personal Artifact!

Disrupting the formation of the personal realm, Alyss took over!

Phantom Shift!

Activating her fastest movement, Alyss rushed into Alana's range as she deployed Zone, capturing everything in her gaze.

Hand to hand combat! Since Alana was countering their casting, the only other way was to brute force things!

*BANG!!!

Unleashing two hooks, Alyss frowned seeing Alana block them with ease.

"Tsk!" Clicking her tongue, Alyss tried to disrupt Alana's footwork with a kick but Alana avoided it by lifting up her leg.

Blocking Alana's follow up kick, Alyss punched towards the knee only for Alana to jump up and use her spare leg to push Alyss away.

'I'm going for the kill!'

Creating two blades using blood, metal and Eldritch energy, Alice spun the blades and threw one towards Alana who blocked it using Kaine's vector control!

With the first strike missing, Alyss followed up with Soul Chaser!

*CLANG!!!

Blocking these strikes with a red scarf, Alana copied Mira's abilities and countered using the power of the Void.

Her punch aimed at Alyss's head phased through a portal and aimed for the neck from behind!

Ducking to the side, Alyss slashed up with her blade in an attempt to stab Alana in the jaw.

Unfortunately, her attack missed with everything being captured in Alana's gaze.

Yet despite missing, there was a smile on Alyss's face.

Void Flux!

Handing control over back to Alice seamlessly, Alice fired a Void Flux from below.

*BANG!!!

Parts of her flesh were charred from the near miss as Alana snapped her finger and threw Alice's body into the sky using Vectors.

Creating a platform above her, Alice swapped out and Alyss rushed forward!

Killing Arc!

*BOOM!!!

Missing the slash, Alyss went in with a hook strike that missed but followed up with a backhand, slapping Alana and causing her to stumble to the right.

Without giving her a chance to recover, Alyss rushed in!

*BANG!!!

A heavy punch from the left followed by an upper cut from below!

Grabbing Alana's head using both her hands, Alyss slammed her knee into her face before kicking her in the stomach.

Tagging in, Alice snapped her finger and a singularity spun to life above her palm.

Void Flux!

Firing a Void Flux, Alice frowned seeing it countered at the last second. But it wasn't any normal counter. Alana fired her own variant of the Void Flux!

However. . .

"I don't suggest you use that attack often. I got pretty lucky the first time I used it ya know? My teacher even scolded me for it." Alice grinned as Alana clenched her wrist.

The attack exploded before she could create a safe distance!

Void Step!

Appearing next to Alana, Alyss took over and tried to punch Alana in the ribs only for it to be blocked.

Dark limbs hooked around Alana's waist while she was distracted, pulling her closer as Alyss followed up with Killing arc!

*KRK!!!

Seeing her own attack being deflected by Vectors, Alyss clicked her tongue but it wasn't all bad. They were beginning to understand the timing of Alana's replication now!

Alice tagged in, landing a chop against Alana's throat then followed up with a palm strike against the ear, disorientating her momentarily.

Void Flux!

Speed and precision was the focus as the miniature Void Flux fired towards Alana's eye.

Blocking it with her palm and moving her head out of the way, Alana gritted her teeth.

"What's wrong? Calculations can't keep up?" Alice grinned.

Hooking her leg behind Alana's knee, Alice broke her stance and tagged Alyss in.

Soul Chaser!

Three slashes dug into Alana's body, tearing off both arms and landing a deep slash across her chest.

"I got you now." Alana's blood transformed into chains, whipping around Alyss.

The realm around them trembled and both of them were thrown into the Void!

Looking at the islands around her, Alyss paused before letting out a laugh.

Atop the islands were the forces of the Zenia family. Hybrids and soldiers, wearing the same collar as the ones Alana and the twins were wearing. They were waiting for her this entire time.

Only. . . They chose the wrong battlefield!

"Feris~ Don't blame me now. They're the ones who invited me to this realm!" Alice grinned.

This time, it wasn't her fault. If she makes a mess of this realm, Feris can only blame the Zenias for dragging her here!

Chapter 689 - 689: Descent Into Madness

When she was extracting blood from Old Man Mo, Alice managed to obtain six vials. Each one a portion potent enough to bring her up to the level of a Lord.

Six chances.

Usually, she would be prudent with these uses. Careful, strategic, weighing up the pros and cons of using it at the moment.

Usually.

But it's not often that someone has the audacity, the courage to drag her into the realm of the Void. Not only that but this time, it's technically not her fault. They're the ones who dragged her here. They're the ones who want to fight her in the Void.

They're the ones who decided that this place was going to be where they die.

Therefore, if she were to. . . shatter this corner of the Void? If she was to, drown it in corruption and fire? In destruction?

That was entirely self-defence, wasn't it?

Reaching into her pouch, Alice grabbed a vial of Old Man Mo's blood and drank it all in an instant.

'Which Sigils do you want?' Alyss asked with a chuckle.

They knew what the Eldritch Energy was doing inside her. What it meant and what it restricted. They couldn't swap Sigils with it still inside.

Therefore, there was only one option.

Purge it.

'Give me the usual three piece combo. Tiamat, Allura and Duality.' Alice grinned.

And then the power hit. The beginning of the end.

Each beat of her heart felt like a heavy drum, echoing the sounds of war!

*BOOM!!!

A pillar of energy erupted from Alice's body as golden chains clasped around her limbs.

"STOP HER!" One of the hybrids shouted, understanding that whatever Alice was trying now was not going to be good for them.

It was too late.

A cyclone of shadow and limbs spiralled out with Alice at the centre.

This sphere of vile energy formed a dome of which none of them could approach. The ground cracked and withered beneath her feet, decaying under the properties of the Eldritch Energy.

Like a dam that suddenly lost all of its barrier, the Eldritch Energy inside Alyss's body exploded outwards!

It wasn't just an outburst. It was more accurate to call it a rupture.

The realm itself began to shudder, almost as though it was recoiling in pure unfiltered disgust for what had been unleashed within its boundaries. Veins of black lightning crackled against the walls of this realm, shifting, mutating, tearing. Oily darkness seeped through the cracks, dripping towards the members of the Zenia family that had gathered around.

From this dark sludge, eyes and mouths began to manifest, numerous in number and all staring unblinkingly at the Hybrids and soldiers. Whispering a codex of their grim future.

*CRACK!!!

Fissures began to manifest across the Void!

One Hybrid tried to charge at her. He never even made it halfway.

The air around Alyss thickened, shimmering with an iridescent oil like glow. His eyes turned bloodshot as he clutched his throat.

He couldn't breathe.

Something was invading his body, filling up his lungs.

He clawed at his neck, stumbling, tears pouring from his eyes, rolling down his cheeks. Desperation, panic, begging for his life.

The veins in her neck turned black, his skin bubbling beneath the surface. He screamed a silent scream, his jaws breaking free from the sockets that held it in place, dangling down and opening far too wide.

Bloodied gurgling escaped his throat as his form began to mutate. Bones twisting, flesh rotting, his arms splitting into vile extremities as the outer layer of his skin began to melt like molten lava, slapping against the ground.

Beneath the fibres of his muscles were countless fingers trying to break free, to tear him apart from the inside out.

He wasn't the only one.

Others began to collapse. One by one, torn apart by the transformation, mutating, shrieking, begging.

Some frantically clung onto the hope that is their collar but it was no use. What manner of regeneration it afforded them only served to make their condition worse and prolong their pain. Their bodies broke, regenerated and shattered once more.

A cycle of pain and repair, an infinite purgatory of misery.

And within this spiral of agony, Alice now stood. Her body purged of Eldritch Energy and eight Sigils shimmering across her body.

"Alana! You hold the power to analyse do you not? Why don't you take a look with those pretty little eyes of yours and tell me what you see?" Alice laughed.

*RUMBLE!!!

Resonance!

Artificial Resonance!

Bloodline Release!

Physical Resonance!

Abyssal Artifact Resonance!

Fifth Sigil! – Halo of Ruin + Crimson Immolation!

As Alice activated her fifth Sigil, a crimson halo spun to life above her head, fusing itself with the manifested Crown of the Abyss.

The space of the Void shifted to a blood red as though welcoming the approaching ruin.

Watching the changes in Alice's body, the forceful level ups, the myriad of energies flowing, running rampant within, Alana's pupils trembled. Horrified.

Stumbling back, she held her hand over her mouth before collapsing over and throwing up.

Just staring into the vile entanglement of power hosted within Alice's vessel was akin to being thrown through a blender. Alana felt her mind spin, unable to make sense of what was up and what was down.

She knew that the Hybrid Protocol was a way for them to understand Alice's power, to replicate it. But this. . . This difference between them. . .

Alana's lips trembled in fear.

They were nothing but cheap knockoffs, insults even, not even close to a shadow of the original.

A man's folly at trying to comprehend the calamity that stood before them. Their hubris.

As a result, this maelstrom of anger and destructive impulses had her blade aimed at the family.

"ALICE!!!" A voice roared out in anger as the Void itself collapsed around the battlefield, preventing the spread of this corruption.

Feris stepped through the rift and entered the arena. Her beloved pipe now crushed in her grip, veins bulging on her neck and her bloodshot eyes glaring at the girl bringing in the vile corruption of Eldritch Energy into her home.

"Not my fault Feris!" Alice grinned. "But don't worry though! I'm going to clean up the cockroaches that brought me here!"

Feris flinched ever so slightly.

What Alice was like couldn't even be considered crazy.

THIS was what she was like when she actually lost her mind.

THIS was Alice unchained, a beast given purpose, a weapon with permission to kill.

She was 'free'.

The idea of being able to slaughter Zenia scum without care or consequence. . . This excitement, this adrenaline pumping through her veins like a drug. . . She was riding the high, drunk on this ecstasy.

"F*ck! OI! All of you f*ckers! Why the hell does it have to be my home!? Why the f*ck did you bring this b*tch here?! Fight it in your own realm! Sh*t!" Feris cursed. If it wasn't for the fact that they were Alice's enemies, she would've tortured them personally for bringing her here!

Gritting her teeth, Feris clenched her fist, isolating this second of the realm from the rest of the Void.

"You better keep it contained within this boundary Alice! If any of that Eldritch Energy even LEAKS into the Void, your ass is mine!"

Just like that, Feris disappeared followed by a silence that only lasted a brief moment.

After that came Alice's laugh. Resounding, echoing. . .

Haunting.

"You hear that?! The ruler of the realm has personally stamped your execution order! Ah~ How does it feel? Hm? Well?

"Knowing that the most powerful entity in this realm has essentially told me not to make a mess of my food?" Alice licked her lips as her eye scanned her surroundings.

So many choices. . . Oh there were so many choices of who to kill.

Who to kill? Who to maim? Who to leave twitching in a pool of their own fear as their organs spilt out? To watch the others around them fall.

The options, they kept flowing through her mind, endless and intoxicating. . . So much so that Alice didn't even know where she should begin.

Her blood sang a hymn of joy, her heart throbbed and pounded with deranged, twisted affection.

"Do you feel it?" Alice whispered like a lover by the bedside. Her voice tender like silk yet laced with a creeping poison. "The dread in your veins. . . The terror crawling up your spine. The twist in your gut when you realise, oh. . . oh no. This isn't how it was supposed to go~"

A giggle bubbled out of Alice.

"The coldness of death creeping ever closer. . . Step by step, breath by breath, little by little. Rotting you from the inside out as it approaches. . . slowly.

"And now it's here, outside your door, calling your name.

"Did you think yourselves the hunter?

"No. . . you were always the prey. You should've hidden, so. . . very. . . quietly. Not a step, not a breath, not a single sound. Not even a heartbeat.

"But you didn't. You called me here, all of you. You summoned death to your side, gathering yourselves like meat on an altar, a sacrifice. So thoughtful." Alice raised her hand in reverent praise.

Had it not been for the context of this situation, one might've even mistaken her smile for that of a saint who had just witnessed a divine miracle.

Such. . .

Pure, radiant, unfiltered gratitude.

"There is only one thing I will say to you." Alice took a step forward as blood unfurled beneath her feet. A sanctuary of crimson blooming with her at the centre. Rippling like a red sea that adored her.

"Pray. . .

"Pray to your God. Pray to whoever you think will keep you safe. Pray to whatever power that might help you, that might save you from me.

"Pray. . .

"That your death is a swift and merciful one."

Chapter 690 - 690: Alana's Liberation

Alana ran. She ran with all of her might.

But where could she even go?

She could see the walls of this place. A cruel prison that Feris had abandoned them in. A cage with no bars, trapped with a beast with no leash.

Yet despite this isolation, it felt as though the island stretched on forever. Or maybe it was her that was slow. No matter how hard she pushed herself to run, she felt sluggish, dreamlike. No, a nightmare. She felt like she was running through sludge, unable to muster the strength that was required to escape.

She could hear the screams, the crushing of bones, the tearing of flesh. Behind her, distant yet so close.

Creeping ever closer. The footsteps of those frantically running away like her.

Those who fought, those who ran, those who stood still in terror, unable to comprehend the monster that they unleashed.

Their fate was the same.

Death.

She didn't look back. She couldn't. If she did, her eyes would analyse the deaths of her allies. The method of which Alice would tear them apart. The image of her own fate appearing in her own mind.

A cruel calculation of her own death that she couldn't stop. Analysing every detail like an equation she could never solve.

If she came face to face with Alice right now, perhaps she'd fall on her knees and beg for a quick death.

*Thunk!

She saw a corpse hurled overhead, twisting through the air like discarded garbage, slapping against the ground with a revolting wet thud.

Their. . . state. Neither Alive nor dead. Injected with both Alice's blood and the ambient Eldritch energy that she had purged earlier.

Alana's foot caught on a limb. She couldn't tell what it belonged to. It was too long for a human limb, too many joints for a beast limb. The texture of the skin was. . . 'wrong'. Overgrown, hardened like carapace, a vile mimicry of skin.

She turned her gaze towards the source.

She shouldn't have.

Bloated with mutations, his flesh pulsed with a sickening dark energy. Bones jutting out of his arms from uneven angles, veins dripping with a black mucus.

In that moment, her mind betrayed her. Her eyes analysed his state, flashing images of herself in his place.

Her flesh bubbling, her eyes melting. Her limbs bending in all the wrong ways and her spine arching until it snapped.

She gagged as nausea hit her like a punch to the stomach.

"Let go of me!" Kicking his arm away, she stumbled back and caught herself on a boulder before collapsing to the ground.

She had to hide!

Maybe! Just maybe! If she hid well enough. . .

Alice couldn't keep this up forever, right? This kind of power, this kind of output. . . There had to be a cost! There HAD to be!

A price, a backlash, there had to be consequences! Even Gods can die!

She won't let herself get taken by fear like this! She is the pride of the Hybrid Protocol! A Hybrid that could copy and counter Abyssal abilities when given enough time!

There was nothing she couldn't solve, no foe she couldn't kill. Time was all she needed!

Right!

Time!

She just needed time to analyse and find the weakness!

Time to think, time to analyse, time to find the flaws. The gaps that she can exploit.

Leaning on the boulder for a moment to catch her breath, a myriad of thoughts flashed through Alana's mind. Flashes of equations, fragmented data that she collected, probabilities of certain plans, every tool, every weapon, every variable that she could use.

. . .

Then there was a single thought. Staring back at her.

A shadow at the end of the corridor. It didn't move, it only watched.

A thought so clear, so cold, it silenced everything else in her mind.

What if there was no drawback?

What if she didn't burn out?

What if this rampage could be sustained indefinitely?

What if this wasn't her last resort but her normal state?

What if she could kill every last one of them before she ever got close to running out?

A chill raced through her spine. Ice water crashing through her veins. Her breath choked in her throat.

Looking down at her hands, Alana's gaze trembled. She couldn't find the strength to pull herself up.

Her mind, collapsed at the weight of her realisation.

Her mental world, built on a lifetime of understanding logic, laws and pattern recognition began to unravel. Tearing apart at the seams.

Everything she knew. . . No, everything she THOUGHT she knew crumbled to dust.

"It's not possible. . ." She whispered, feeling as though she was now standing at the edge of a cliff.

She thought about everything that led up to this point, the choices made, the actions done. The diverging paths that led up to this point.

Alana clutched her head, her nails digging into her scalp, drawing blood. Her vision swimming with the different possibilities that could've played out yet landing on this one.

No escape, no counter, no hope.

Her hands fell limp at her sides, the maelstrom of chaotic thoughts ended. Not because she found a way, not because the threat was gone.

But because she understood it deep down.

Death was inevitable.

Tears streamed down her face, mixing with her blood.

"Ha. . . Ahahahhaahhhhhh!!!" Her laughter slowly turning into a mad cry. A bitterness in her heart.

A realization that the family tampered with something they should've never have touched.

A decision led by hubris.

They should have never tampered with her. They should've left this darkness buried, left this void unexplored with greedy hands, grasping for a power beyond their control.

She was no salvation, she was no gift of the Gods.

She was ruin.

Alana curled up, making herself as small as possible. She covered her ears, closed her eyes, hoping that this nightmare would end swiftly. She felt the vibrations in the ground, the vestiges of battle.

Silence.

A faint tremble. . . rhythmic.

Footsteps.

Alana looked up. . .

There she stood.

Alice.

She stared at the beast that they invited. The destruction that they summoned.

Painted in fresh blood, laced with viscera. A crimson halo burned above her head, bathing her form in red. Her expression was serene, calm. Untouched by the carnage that she had wrought.

Alana stared, empty, hollow. No anger, no fear, devoid of life.

Only resignation.

What stood before her wasn't human, it wasn't a beast. It was demon incarnate.

Her nightmare.

Their nightmare.

Biting her lips, she forced herself to stand on her feet with shaking legs. Her arms hung limp by her side. Staggering to the side, towards a discarded weapon fresh with the blood of its previous owner, her fingers curled around the handle.

One final act.

Not in defiance.

No.

One act to hope for a swift end to end this nightmare.

She turned to Alice with a trembling smile, fragile, broken.

The dried up tears staining her cheeks.

Using what remained of her strength, she raised the blade. . .

And slashed her own throat.

A splatter of red. A crimson arc.

Her world spun sideways, weightless. She saw her own body stumble, fall to its knees and collapse on the ground.

And as the darkness swallowed her, relief filled her head.

Her nightmare, it's finally over.

###

Looking at the headless corpse of Alana in front of her, Alice deactivated her abilities one by one.

A disappointing end.

She thought that Alana would fight. No matter what, no matter the opponent, Alice expected her to fight and go out with a blaze of glory.

But no.

She died ending her own nightmare before Alice could get to her.

Perhaps she expected them to be like the soldiers that she saw, willing to sacrifice themselves for one more hit.

One more hit so that their allies would have a slightly better time.

But this was different. A one sided slaughter.

All of them ran with only thoughts of their own self preservation. A panicked mob of people trying to desperately find a way out of this prison that Feris had constructed.

Her joy cut short by their lack of resistance.

Once they realised who they were up against, strategy disappeared. No sacrifice, no glory, just slaughter.

But. . .

What did she expect from this?

She saw their fear, she saw their panic, she saw their mind crumble. But only emptiness filled her chest.

She wasn't satisfied.

Alice stared at her own reflection in Alana's blood. She felt nothing.

No more thrill, no euphoria, hell. . . not even hate.

To Alice, they felt. . . pathetic. Not even worthy of her scorn.

Her joy was in abundance at the beginning. Realising that she could go wild. But now it was dulled. Blunted by how easily the opposition crumbled apart.

Why?

Was her joy cut short because they broke too easily?

Her eye flickered for a brief moment, filled with an unknown emotion that Alice couldn't quite comprehend. She didn't even know how to put the feeling into words.

Standing in silence, she glanced down at Alana's head and kicked it away.

'Alana's power might be helpful for you Cayla. Do you think you can do anything with it?' Alice asked, gathering Alana's blood into a single orb and swallowed it, stealing what remained of her soul.

[Perhaps. We both work with analysis after all.] Cayla shrugged.

Alana was the only notable ability out of the crowd aside from Kaine which Alice had already extracted before she was dragged away.

'I see.'

Without saying anything else, Alice swept her gaze across the remains of the battlefield one more time before making a portal back to her realm.