

Abyssal A 691

Chapter 691 - 691: Alice's Bombardment

Alice stepped through the portal, appearing beside Suyin.

She was drenched with blood from head to toe, pieces of flesh still dangling off her outfit like grotesque vile ornaments.

Despite not noticing Alice's appearance, the metallic reek of blood hit Suyin a second later, notifying her of a presence beside her.

"ARG!!! F*cking hell!" Suyin stumbled, retching from the stench of fresh blood and guts.

"Could you NOT appear like you got birthed through a meat grinder? A little warning? Maybe throw the strings of flesh off you first?" She cried out, holding onto a railing she installed on the side to not fall off.

"My bad." Alice replied flatly, sparing her a quick glance before turning her attention back on the battlefield.

"How's the situation?"

The lack of the usual flare in her response made Suyin pause briefly. Alice would usually joke, retort or even complain through moments like this. For someone who could even shrug off some of her more disturbing inventions, this was a first for Suyin to witness.

"A little rough. Even for all the manpower we got." Suyin shook her head, switching gears to her more focused self.

"Jin is going crazy but his stamina is bottoming out. There's only so much he can do relying on just the voices in his head or whatever. His swings are getting sluggish and he's taking more hits than before.

"Against this many enemies, wounds will pile up before you know it even with regeneration. Exhaustion is still a thing." Flicking her wrist, she showed Jin's location on the map, dancing around like a wounded firefly on the end of its life.

"Isolde is in a similar situation. She's not showing it but her kill speed has dropped drastically. Still keeping that freaky ass smile while tearing people apart though.

"As for what we've lost, about 30% give or take. Some commanders were included in those numbers. Strength wise eh~. . . Strong on paper, weak in practice. A lot of them aren't ready for taking the lead in these kinds of battles." Suyin admitted with a frown on her face.

In the moment when Alice was gone, the surge of Eldritch beasts had increased drastically with monsters raining down from above and vile spawn digging up from below. It was literal hell on earth.

"I'm thinning out their backlines with my darlings but they've become wary of me. Using flying beasts to intercept my cannons and making my bombardments useless. Of course, destroying one defensive line isn't an issue but that leaves our sides open. I'm stretched thin and focusing too much on one side will do more harm than good." Suyin clicked her tongue.

"You just need a chance right?" Alice asked, looking at the map. Her mind, calculating a plan.

The power of a Lord still burned in her blood, coiled around her bones, waiting to be unleashed.

She wasn't worried about her fight with Kazira, in fact she even welcomed it. But having the army crumble apart while she fought. . . Alice would rather avoid an outcome like that.

"A chance?" Suyin tilted her head to the side with a blink.

"For what?"

"To focus on breaking their defences." Alice clarified, her fingers drawing a line across the enemy defences. "Is our goal to break them here? Or pierce through?"

Their original goal was a crusade to the south. A bold advance. But now, with morale slowly bleeding and casualties piling up, it was practically a suicide run. The weight of that reality hung heavier than the sky, her guilt akin to a guillotine above Suyin's head. The people who died, they'll never see their family ever again.

Furrowing her brows, Suyin processed the implications of each choice.

"Breaking them affords us a moment." She muttered, to herself rather than to Alice.

"Scatter, encircle, pull back, regroup. Clears them enough to expose their flank. . . I'll have a clear line of fire at their rear. I'll erase a lot of the annoyances that I've been dealing with."

Even if the enemy charges ahead without fear of death, it'll be far easier for her to handle it when she doesn't have to worry about their bombardment from the back.

"But piercing through them. . ." Her voice trailed.

Her brows furrowed and her fingers tightened against her arm.

"One way trip. No fall back, no regrouping, keep going till they're dead or we are."

Suyin bit her lip. She was never really suited to be a commander of a big operation like this. She was more of an inventor, her mind thrived on constructing blueprints and bringing them to reality. Not fulfilling the hopes and expectations of soldiers.

This kind of choice, it was better for someone more suitable than her to make. But she understood that right now, she was the one that the soldiers were looking towards for guidance.

For orders.

Be it a death march or retreat.

"So what's it going to be?" Alice asked, waiting for Suyin's answer.

Suyin stared at the map, then to Alice. She looked at the blood slowly drying on her outfit, that empty gaze of hers.

Alice was waiting. Waiting for a choice to set the rules of what she can or can't do.

She was waiting to be unleashed onto the battlefield.

Swallowing her saliva, Suyin revealed a smile.

"It was do or die to begin with. Our fortress can't handle another siege. Better to end the battle away from the people we swore to protect."

"Seems like we're piercing through then." Alice took a step forward as energy crackled from her Sigils.

"Just give me a clear shot of their backline will do, I'll target my weapons on their key targets."

Cracking her neck, Alice gave her body a light stretch.

"They got a lot of defences prepared in front of their backline. If you get a clear shot, how much of the backline can you erase?" She asked, mentally marking down where the heavily defended parts of their formation were.

"Eh? I mean. . . If there's no defences then I can focus on all of it." Suyin hesitated for a moment.

Her mind spun to understand what Alice was implying, only to reach an absurd conclusion.

Surely she didn't mean. . .

"Don't forget it then. Though I'm sure even if you're a little late, you should get a pretty good shot."
Alice finished her stretching routine and took a step from the platform, falling towards the ground.

At that moment, the alarm around Suyin began to light up with an ominous red. Signatures of a monstrously large energy source appearing near her.

"Oi. . . You've got to be joking right?" Suyin's voice trembled as the readings continued to rise.

This level of power, far exceeding even her wildest calculations.

From everything she's gathered from Alice during the past few days, there's no way she could output these numbers. No combination of stimulants or outside influences could explain these numbers.

Suyin couldn't imagine Alice being able to stack enough to bridge the absolute chasm between the two realms of power.

Yet the readings couldn't be wrong. Right now, Alice was outputting the numbers equivalent to an Eight Sigil Abyss Lord!

A level of power that could be considered to be the absolute weapon of a nation!

*BANG!!!

Slamming into the ground, lightning crackled around Alice as her Sigils roared to life!

Resonance!

A garden of red spider lilies and briar thorns rooted her in place.

Artificial Resonance!

Her personal artifact spun around her as a singularity spun to life in her eye.

Physical Resonance! Tiamat!

A pair of ethereal draconic wings unfurled behind her as the ambient energy was drawn towards Alice.

The countless strands connecting to the winds, funnelling their power through her.

Cracks appearing across her skin, revealing the flood of energy surging in her body.

One large attack would drag everyone into it, she needed to split it up and target only her enemies. For that, it was actually relatively simple.

All her frustrations from the previous fight, she'll vent it all here and now!

Gritting her teeth, Alice clasped her hands together as energy converged towards her hand. Her hair whipped back from the force as a singularity spun to life between her palms. Spiralling rings of iridescent flame filtering through a myriad of colours, it hummed with a hungry lethality.

Tearing her hands apart, she released the singularity towards the sky.

*RUMBLE!!!

A pillar of destructive energy ripped the sky in half, severing the realm in two. The earth beneath Alice shattered! Pieces of stone lifting and curling up like petals in blossom.

A moment of silence.

Drawing the attention of everyone on the battlefield, the singularity hovered in the air momentarily before detonating from within.

The sky folded in on itself, the clouds erased by the maelstrom of energy surrounding the spiralling singularity. The realm itself began to warp as the singularity split itself into countless fragments!

What goes up must come down. Falling stars raced towards the enemy defences, leaving a trail of deadly beauty in their wake.

Thousands, fragments of the same attack. Spiralling violet flames signalling the approaching ruin.

***BANG!!!!**

The first impact struck with a thunderous impact, throwing bodies into the air like flowers torn by the gale. The ground gave way as a column of fire and energy erupted into a blazing orb.

Eldritch beasts and cultists alike, vaporised before they could even let out a scream.

But that was only the first comet. Then came the second, and the third, then the fourth.

A constant bombardment of falling stars from above.

Allies beholden to this deadly beauty couldn't help but feel a creeping dread. A realisation that this is what happens when a Lord takes to the battle. Then what about them? Soldiers that have yet to reach that realm of power.

What use were they?

Their comrades that died before them?

As the dust settled, all that remained was a constant ringing in the ear that pierced the mind.

Craters where the enemy defences used to be.

Scattering forces running without even looking back.

Suyin stared at all of this in brief silence before opening her mouth.

She roared the order of advance into the communication as she began her own barrage towards the fleeing targets. But compared to Alice's demonstration, this felt like a child trying to mimic the father.

Chapter 692 - 692: A Nation's Power

After shattering the enemy's defence and wiping out what's left of those retreating, Suyin held her forces back from advancing any further for now. They needed time to breath, time to recuperate.

Rushing forward right now would only lead to more issues that'll cause the collapse of their army.

Setting up a temporary camp beneath her giant serpentine construct, medics darted between clusters of injured soldiers, administering what little aid they could give.

Soldiers that were tainted with Eldritch Energy were given to Alice and Isolde to deal with.

Surprisingly to Alice, Isolde actually agreed to help extract what little Eldritch Energy she could from their bodies.

Even with her contract, it was still considered a poison to her systems.

When questioned on why she was willing to do this, Isolde only had one answer.

"The little ones in the city would cry if soldiers didn't come home. Some brothers, some fathers."

That was the only answer she gave and she didn't elaborate further.

Simple, yet it was a window for Alice to somewhat understand Isolde as a person. Her priorities are. . . simple in a way. She wanted to maintain the smile on children's faces. That was her goal.

As for the method of extracting Eldritch Energy, their methods were completely incompatible.

Isolde accomplished this via Zal-Ka'Rith, allowing him to consume the energy. It was a little rough on the patient's body but achieved the proper result.

On the other hand, Alice's method was similar to what she did back in the North with side effects. Delicate, making sure that the patient was comfortable and reducing the impact on their body.

Using herself as a vessel, she had Alyss 'assimilate' the Eldritch Energy within their body, wrapping it and extracting the corruptive power.

It was at this point did Alice fully understand why this energy was considered a poison to their realm.

She was acting as a temporary vessel for now but 'erasing' this energy was impossible without major costs. If she dies, this energy will explode into her surroundings, corrupting it. If she keeps it contained within herself, it'll eat away at her from the inside, inhibiting certain functions until she dies.

Thus far, the only method where she seen proper erasure was Feris' method. Containing it in a space within the Void then deleting that space.

But she doubted Feris would be happy with that kind of solution. It was her home after all.

As night fell, Alice wiped away the sweat that had accumulated due to treating patients infected with Eldritch Energy. The last of the afflicted soldiers had been stabilized for the time being.

Looking at her arm, she could see black veins flowing with this poison threading through her flesh. Though they faded after a few seconds, Alice knew that they were still there, simmering within her body. Waiting.

Letting out a fatigued sigh, Alice made her way out, looking to get some food for the night. As she grabbed her rations, she noticed Suyin gesturing at her from the top of the serpent construct.

Raising an eyebrow, Alice flicked her finger and made a portal to the top.

"How handy." Suyin chuckled seeing Alice emerge from the portal.

"You're not wrong." Alice replied, unwrapping the ration bar as she took a seat beside Suyin.

Taking a bite, her face soured in displeasure from the taste. Dry, tasteless, tough to chew.

"You do realize that I couldn't miss your little wave right? And you'll just be sitting up here waving at nothing." Alice shifted her attention.

"I just figured I'd try my luck. Who knew you'd actually notice me." Suyin shrugged, offering a carton of milk to go with the ration but Alice declined.

Reaching into her pouch, she pulled out some mead.

". . .Do you carry alcohol with you everywhere?" Suyin blinked her eyes. Most people would keep Abyss blood, tools, emergency supplies and clothing in their bags.

But Alice? She has alcohol.

"Want some?" Alice offered as though carrying alcohol was the norm.

It wasn't Ayrian mead. It was too precious to be used here.

Shrugging her shoulders, Suyin nodded her head and accepted a cup.

Drinking the mead, Suyin leaned back and glanced up at the sky. The stars that stretched across the midnight canvas.

"Why do you have the power of a Lord." Suyin was direct. No half joking tone. Her voice was low, serious, wanting to know answers.

Part of it due to her nature as a researcher and inventor, she wanted to know why that was the case. Why Alice suddenly got the boost she did. And the other part was because she was someone scorned by the Abyss.

Someone who can't even get a single bounty for one Sigil.

If she was the one scorned by the Abyss then to her, Alice seemed like someone loved by the Abyss.

Alice froze. She didn't answer immediately.

"We both know that kind of power isn't something you can produce out of nowhere You've seen the numbers of your tests. Even now, you lack the power surging through your veins like you did during that battle." Suyin leaned towards Alice.

"So I ask again, how do you have the power of a Lord? The power of a weapon prized by nations." She asked once more as Alice scratched her chin.

She stared out into the dark. The mead in her cup barely shifted as the howling of the wind filled the silence.

After a moment, she opened her mouth.

"Are you familiar with Extalian storybooks for children?" Alice asked, causing Suyin to frown slightly.

"No, no I'm not. If you changed Extalian to Sikhan then maybe."

"There's a little story about a fairy who had too many questions. Every answer she found gave birth to more questions and she couldn't stop herself. Had to know more, always more."

"A life spent chasing answers, never quite satisfied. Then she got a little too curious. Finding answers to questions she didn't want to ask. In the end, she was found torn apart, wings pinned up on a display. Her pursuit became her death." Alice chuckled, recalling the story she read before everything went south.

"Well isn't that f*cking grim. And you tell that story to children???" Suyin was in disbelief.

"Yep. It's a story that's meant to teach children about not being too curious at times. Some truths aren't worth knowing."

"The same applies here. Learning about certain things means going down a bottomless hole of pursuit. And I'm still falling." Alice smiled, taking a sip of her mead.

Hearing this, Suyin exhaled through her nose and scratched her hair in frustration. She wanted answer. Needed them even. But Alice wasn't wrong.

If Alice told her how she achieved this level of power, she'd want to learn more, to understand the inner workings and how it functions. To perhaps repurpose it for the good of the people.

But putting this kind of power into the hands of the people. . .

It sent a shiver down Suyin's spine, realising what could happen. To put bluntly, doomsday.

The power of a Lord wielded by a fragile ego and weak mentality was a frightening possibility. The kind where they'll make sure to take as many with them if they can't get what they want. Bystanders be damned.

Then again, the Abyss is already like that. A hostile environment where everyone has to be careful of who they're near. Only this time, pissing off a random person could result in an entire city being erased and more rather than just a scuffle between two people.

Letting out a sigh, Suyin relented. She'll simply chalk it up as an anomaly similar to how Alice could withstand having so many conflicting sources of energy in her body.

"I have my own question for you though."

"Are you for real?" Suyin's smile twitched.

First Alice denies Suyin of the answers that she wants and now she's asking her own questions.

"Haha, sorry sorry." Alice apologized with a chuckle.

"Tsk, fine, ask away. I'll see if it's something I can answer." Suyin rolled her eyes.

"Why aren't the Lords of Sikha helping in this battle? If even one showed up, that last battle could've gone far smoother with less casualties as well."

"The age old question huh?" Suyin was a little surprised.

Considering the power that Alice held, she thought the girl would be informed about this kind of thing. But clearly that wasn't the case.

"Let me change the perspective of it quickly. What happens when two Lords fight? Destruction right? They are beings with a level of power that far surpass even the most experienced Hunters. Chosen of the Abyss granted titles yes?" Suyin asked as Alice nodded her head.

"And the number of Lords ties to a Nation's power yes? Religions included."

Once more, Alice nodded her head.

"Now imagine what happens when a Lord enters a battlefield. It's no longer a skirmish, a battle. It's an escalation to full on destruction." Suyin narrowed her gaze. "The kind that invites an equal response from the opposition. Turning what would be a war to a calamity."

"Now, with you showcasing that level of power to the enemy, don't you think the enemy might consider you to be a Lord?" She turned to Alice.

This was another reason why she didn't want to push forward without a plan. She had already sent a request for reinforcement. With Alice performing a Lord level feat of power, the enemy will respond in kind.

They needed their own Lord to prevent that.

Either that or they needed more Lords than the opposition.

"When Lords fight, both sides suffer without exception. The only ones to benefit are Lords themselves." Suyin sighed.

There's no doubt that the next few battles will be more bloody than the last.

Meanwhile, Alice had a different realisation.

If Lords were being held at bay by other Lords. . .

Then what about Apostles? What if an Apostle was to disappear completely? Killed?

Then Alice realised.

Killing Kazira meant that there was a chance for the Sun and Moon to fight against the Eclipse, seeking to wipe them out and take the territory for themselves.

A tip of the scales, a fissure in the delicate balance kept between the three.

Chapter 693 - 693: Escalation

Holding a bag of groceries in her hand, a girl hummed to stepped off the public transport and hummed to herself as though she didn't have a care in the world.

Travelling through the south wasn't as bad as it may initially seem. But that's only true if you had enough power to make people think twice with a glance.

That said, anyone stuck in the south without power to back themselves up were in for a rough time.

Digging into the bag, she grabbed some fruit and decided to eat some ahead of time. It held a rather pleasant sunset colouration and sweetness to match that brought a smile to her face.

"Not bad." She muttered, chewing slowly and enjoying the flavour.

From the corner of her peripherals, she noticed a few unsightly fellows punching a man in the alleyway while a kid watched, trying to get them to stop.

Holding the fruit in her mouth for a moment, she raised her finger towards the assailants.

*FBZT!

A thin arc of lightning whipped from her finger, causing them to drop like sacks of meat, twitching and paralysed from the attack.

"If you're going to punch someone, do it where kids can't see." Ria chewed her fruit nonchalantly while staring at the three glaring daggers at her.

Shrugging her shoulders, she glanced to the side and saw that this run-down building looked like it's been abandoned for quite a while.

To make a point, she pulled her leg back and kicked the wall.

*BANG!!!

The stone wall cracked apart down the middle as dust rained down in thick waves. The men stared, silent, speechless as panic filled their eyes. Without hesitation, they scrambled the moment they could move their legs.

Watching this, Ria shrugged her shoulders and left the alley.

After the fight with Nyzel, the three of them continued their journey north while occasionally stopping to deal with Eldritch contamination and taking apart Eclipse Rituals.

Though compared to the stuff they saw in the far south, the Rituals held closer to the north were more tame in comparison. Even for the places supposedly dominated by the Eclipse, things were surprisingly quiet.

For bystanders, life was relatively normal unless they were unfortunate enough to get dragged into these rituals.

If Ria had to describe it, it would be a living condition similar to that of the Abyss.

Of course, she didn't spend this time just travelling either.

Nyzel's final technique was still fresh on her mind. The six fold lightning was not a Sigil power but rather a technique. One that amplified the power of her lightning over and over, creating after images. And once it collided with the main weapon, the generated energy would explode in an instant.

A lot of this was merely Ria's own interpretation of the power. Whether or not it matched the actual technique was still up for debate but as it stands, two fold was the most that she could accomplish. A far cry from the six fold that Nyzel demonstrated.

The main reason was that she couldn't contain the power properly. If she became greedy and aimed for more, the power would dissipate instead, turning it from an attack to a wasted effort.

"Two fold lightning." She muttered, waving her finger. A single afterimage manifested behind it before catching up with the movement.

In essence, this attack was similar to a firearm.

The afterimages were the hammer hitting the firing pin, discharging the attack.

'I suppose it's similar to what Kaden told me to do in the past.' She mused to herself.

Kaden had wanted her to explore ranged options before, turning her lightning into bullets and firing them from afar.

With that in mind, perhaps using Nyzel's technique could accomplish this vision that Kaden had.

Though that was practice for another time.

"I'm ba-"

"MOTHERF*CKER!!!"

Her sentence was swallowed by a distant, furious scream from Rosalyn, causing Ria to jolt up for a moment.

Luke was standing in the living room, just as surprised as he was about to welcome Ria back.

The two heard sounds of Rosalyn storming around in her room and came to a silent conclusion. They wanted to see what was going on.

On the way up, they heard a colourful set of curse words being fired out without stop, some of which they never even heard of before.

Carefully pushing open the door, Ria's mouth twitched seeing Rosalyn's chair embedded deep into the wall.

That wasn't the only thing either. Aside from the chair, the table was half sticking out of the ceiling. Honestly, it was rather impressive that it managed to hold its shape despite being tossed with such force.

"Aren't you in a cranky mood." Ria muttered, stepping into the room as Rosalyn shot her a glare.

"Shut it lightning chihuahua. Read this and tell me why I wouldn't be livid." Rosalyn dragged the table down from the ceiling, somehow still in one piece, before handing Ria a letter that she got from her brother.

The letter itself wasn't in great detail since it was fresh news. However, it was enough for Caelan to send a message early.

As for the contents, it was simple.

Rumours of a Lord interfering with the battle at the border.

It took only a moment before her pupils to constrict in shock.

"You're joking."

"Does Caelan look like someone who jokes??? F*ck! Is it a new Lord? Who the hell is this stupid?! Why would you interfere with a battle like this?!?!" Rosalyn gritted her teeth.

If one Lord joins the battle, another would appear.

Then another in order to guarantee victory and then the enemy would send one more.

This will keep going until both sides eradicate each other. And the land? Completely uninhabitable.

"If it's just one or two it shouldn't be that bad right?" Ria asked, hoping for a slightly better outcome. Sikha has a handful of Lords in the north, including Sect Masters and so on.

But the south isn't far off either. They had their own assortment of Lords which is why the north and south have kept this border going.

"Something must've happened to tip the balance at the border, something that forced the north to send their forces marching towards the south rather than maintaining the status quo." Rosalyn bit her nails.

With how the north operates, the most likely suspect was naturally the south. But it wasn't as though the south was willing to make the first move. That's why they mostly poked and prodded the borders but never fully sending a large force.

But now a full scale battle has broken out and a Lord got involved.

"Arggg!!!"

*BANG!!!

Watching Rosalyn throw the table once more in frustration, Ria couldn't help but clap seeing it embed itself into a new spot in the ceiling.

"F*ck! I swear if I knew which Lord was STUPID enough to interfere, I would kill them myself!" Rosalyn grabbed her parasol and stormed out of her room.

"Pack your sh*t!" She shouted over her shoulder. "We're moving north. If a battle breaks out we need to mediate that crap before it gets out of hand. The best way to do so is as a third party. And if it fails, you might as well forget Sikha ever existed!"

Even with her mediating the conflict, heads will roll.

There's no changing the fact that a Lord had intervened.

Once more, Rosalyn let out a string of curses directed towards the unknown Lord who made a move.

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"ACHOOO!!!" Alice rubbed her nose in confusion.

"I didn't know you could get a cold." Jin glanced back in surprise only for Alice to flip him off.

"I just felt an itch. And if I do get sick, do you think you'll be unscathed?" Alice rolled her eye.

Arguably, she had the best internal defence out of all of them. If she, by some miraculous feat, got sick, then they would be dead on the floor by now.

Thinking about it for a moment, Jin shivered.

"Please may you never get sick." He offered a prayer.

Rolling her eye, Alice glanced at the soldiers who were still waiting on additional orders.

Suyin seemed hesitant on something as they continued to camp.

However, it didn't take long for her to make a choice.

"We're going to keep going. We're not the aggressor here, whatever f*cked up thing is happening in the south clearly aims to swallow the North in its entirety." Suyin let out a deep sigh, rolling out a map and marking where they were right now.

"Zhenha, that's our next goal. It's a well known bastion for the Eclipse. Even the skies around the place got dyed red thanks to their rituals. We'll take over this fortress and set up a proper camp." Suyin explained.

They needed a base where she could repair some of her inventions and sort out a route between the bases. While Fusha can't withstand another attack, it could still send supplies to the front.

Not only that, but Zhenha was the perfect place to bunker down. A fortress that they can defend while also retreating if the enemy decide to attack Fusha again.

But any further and things might turn messy.

The only good news so far is unironically Alice's involvement in the last battle.

With her showcasing her Lord like powers, eyes have now turned towards this battle. They'll be able to see the f*cked up monsters that the south are unleashing and send the necessary reinforcements.

Hell, perhaps even some of the south might decide to help since this was now clearly beyond how the Eclipse normally operates.

Suyin could only hope that things don't escalate further.

Chapter 694 - 694: Zhenha Fortress

Zhenha, a fortress built atop blackened hills encircled by jagged obsidian spires like the shattered crown of a long dead king. Between the rings lay a chasm veiled in rolling mist, obscuring the bottom from sight.

Etched upon the dark stones of the fortress and the obsidian spikes surrounding it were Eclipse icons. Ritualistic markings that have been worn with age and redrawn countless times.

A blazing red to contrast the material that it's marked upon.

At the heart of this cursed bastion of the Eclipse rose a fortress. A towering monolith crafted from black stone, stretching skyward like a defiant act against the heavens.

Weaved between the gaps of the material were putrid crimson veins that twitched with false life, as if flesh had been fused to stone, pulsing with an unholy vitality. A heretical mockery of life.

Bridges arched between each ring. Narrow, fortified chokepoints suspended over the abyss, preventing the approach of any army unless they're willing to pay the price.

Tattered banners snapped in the wind, bearing the marking of the Eclipse.

*RUMBLE!!!

A bombardment of attacks crashed against the fortress's barrier, shaking the earth. Yet the shield held firm, not a single crack, not a single fluctuation that might show weakness.

After a pause, the fortress countered with a bombardment of its own. A retaliation of fire and lightning surged forth like a wrathful storm. It struck against the makeshift wards that Suyin had her casters weave, the glowing intersections of the barrier flickering, faltering.

Unlike the seemingly impenetrable defence of the enemy, theirs trembled, strained under the pressure of retaliation.

"Tch. Prepare for the second barrage! Casters!" Suyin commanded, her voice cutting through the chaos.
"Focus on hitting the same spot! Drill through if you must! Just make it crack!"

Things weren't going as well as she had hoped. The desperation in her voice was evident of it. The barrier around Zhenha held firm while they were slowly running out of steam.

Thankfully, there were no signs of a Lord making a move so that was something she was grateful for.

"You know, I can break that barrier pretty easily." Alice raised her hand, forming a frame between her thumb and index finger, She peered through the gap, aligning the Zhenha fortress and its barrier within the gap.

"It's nothing special, I can tear it down in a few seconds." She evaluated, summoning her personal artifact.

"If you told me you were going to blow them up with the power of a Lord back then, we wouldn't be in this situation to begin with." Suyin folded her arms, visibly annoyed. "We don't know if they have a Lord or not. The moment anything abnormal appears, namely you, they'll probably make a move."

"I can deal with them-"

"That's not the issue." Suyin interrupted her, scratching her hair in frustration and annoyance. "The main issue comes when you do deal with the opposing Lord. We can't sit still if they appear but things will get so much worse if you intervene and kill them."

To put bluntly, she was trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Turning off her communication device, Suyin decided to have a moment of honesty with Alice.

"To be blunt, we're f*cked. Like royally f*cked without protection." She let out a sigh.

"We can't retreat since the south will keep attacking. We can't brute force things either since a Lord might escalate things beyond control. Win or lose, sh*t's already hit the fan."

Alice was silent. Even if she tried to move as an individual right now, there's no way her actions won't be considered to be the actions of the north. Therefore, anything she does will implicate them to some degree.

Anything she does. . .

"!!!"

Seeing Alice jolt upright, Suyin had a sense of dread fill her chest.

"No."

"I haven't even said anything yet!" Alice frowned, feeling wronged.

"I don't know what you're planning but you're already giving me goosebumps. I can already see more sh*t hitting the fan and flying everywhere." Suyin made a face of disgust, showing Alice her arm.

"Rude! Look just hear me out."

"I don't wanna." Suyin adamantly shook her head.

"The only issue is that it's me right?" Alice grinned. "So what if it's not me?"

"Let me strap a bomb to Jin and have him deliver it to the barrier. I'm sure it'll be fine if it's him."

"The f*ck???" Jin's voice shouted from the side as his head popped up. He had been resting next to the serpent and just so happened to overhear what Alice was saying. That sentence alone was enough to send him into a panic.

Hearing that Alice wanted to strap a bomb to him almost made him run away but he hoped that he had heard wrong.

"Explain." Suyin hesitated. She had to admit, there were two sides in her. One that wanted absolutely nothing to do with whatever Alice had planned. The other was the burning curiosity regarding how Alice intends to destroy the barrier.

"As you said, it only becomes an issue if I'm the one out there. But what if Jin is the 'carrier' for a payload? My artifact has a property that allows me to destabilize the space around it. Be that a Second Resonance or a barrier.

"Therefore, I'll have Jin carry a node for me to teleport my artifact over and shred this barrier for you." Alice winked. Or rather, in her current case, she blinked.

"Can't you just teleport it over without turning me into a suicide pigeon???" Jin's smile twitched.

"No can do. The barrier stops things from going through including teleportation ya know? The space around it can't be targeted. Think of it as a wave of water pushing against a door, preventing me from opening it."

"But if I get you to carry the package directly next to the barrier, I can punch a hole through."

Contemplating in silence, Suyin opened her mouth.

###

Jin wanted to cry.

There he stood, just beyond the bridges leading to the fortress barrier. A dead man's path stretched before him and across the distance, waves upon waves of enemy soldiers watched, waiting for him.

The ballistas aimed on his head.

The air was thick with killing intent. And even if he lost a few screws thanks to interacting with Alice, he was still feeling a slow creeping fear.

He only had on goal, one mission.

A mad dash through the hell in front of him and deliver the payload to the barrier. Once detonated and the space is open to Alice once more, she'll extract him from danger.

There was only one problem, however.

That being everything between him and the target.

Eldritch beasts, cultists and even malformed creatures that looked like a merger between the two. Colossal hulking masses of flesh emitting a vile gurgling sound every time it breathed.

This. . . path.

This sprint.

If he gets too caught up at any part, he'll be surrounded on all sides.

Now, common sense dictates that Alice should drop him as close as she could to reduce the travel and minimize the risk.

But unfortunately, common sense doesn't apply to Alice.

She simply called it training.

"Pain builds character." Was her direct explanation.

To further enhance his usage of Zone, the understanding of his own body and martial arts.

This path was his to walk and his alone.

He'll get supporting fire from their allies but that was all. The rest was all on him.

"How you feelin'?" Alice's voice rang out from the communication crystal.

He could hear the smugness in her voice.

"Terrible."

"Hehe~ Good to hear. From my initial observations, there are only three key targets that you should watchout for.

"The fat one on the first bridge, the one gurgling on his own blood, the skinny flying one on the second bridge and the three headed one on the third. All three have significantly higher outputs compared to the rest." Alice explained.

"You'll have to be careful with how you use your Eldritch energy since if you're not careful, they'll assimilate you."

"How pleasant." Jin groaned.

He didn't even need Alice to tell him which ones he needed to watch out for. After all, he could feel their murderous glares even from this distance.

"Oh you'll be fine~" Alice laughed with a wave of her hand. "Just flash them your best smile when you sprint past."

"Am I avoiding them or seducing them???" Jin's smile twitched. "But what if on the off chance that I'm not fine and I'm caught?"

"You don't want to find out what happens if that's the case." She smirked ominously.

As someone personally trained by her to use the Absolute Zone, getting past this bridge should be relatively doable for him.

The only issue lie in Jin's consistency between the two states. If he's not concentrating hard enough, his Absolute Zone will be broken and reverted back to its weaker state. And if that was to happen in a real fight? Death.

Whether she meant to or not, Alice had designed the perfect training course for him to stabilize his understanding of the Absolute Zone.

Seeing that Alice wasn't about to give him an easy way out, Jin let out a sigh and nodded his head.

He shifted his stance, lowering his centre of gravity. His gaze focused and began to capture the world in full clarity.

Eldritch energy rolled off his body in waves before digging deep into his muscles. He could feel the power flowing through his legs, building up, ready to be unleashed.

"Alright, let me know when to go."

As though to announce the start of his race, Suyin roared out her command of attack.

A blazing wave of fire crashed forth as Jin stomped down and sprinted towards the enemy.

Chapter 695 - 695: Crossing The Bridge

When asked about the difference between an Offensive Zone and Absolute Zone, the expected answer would be perception.

It was a technically accurate answer but missed the core difference.

Having high perception was simply the key to opening this realm. Mastering it on the other hand, required foresight and experience.

To fully master the Absolute Zone wasn't just about reacting faster either. That can only take you a portion of the journey.

Knowing the options, knowing the different branching paths that appeared before you, feeling the rhythm of battle naturally like breathing. That was the height of Absolute Zone.

Like a chess player, their minds seek out the countless possibilities, simulating the reactions towards their actions and planning ahead. That was the key to Absolute Zone. The mental calculations that happened at the snap of a finger, the formation of plans when a single variable appears outside of expectation.

For Jin, he had the reaction speed. But when it comes to experience and foresight, he was still lacking.

Therefore, this gauntlet of hell that Alice had prepared for him was the best for him to gather experience!

Only by walking side by side with death can he turn potential into reality. A balancing act on the knife's edge, fall and only darkness awaits. Succeed and glory will rain down from above.

*BANG!!!

Jin's foot slammed against the stone, cracking the ground beneath him. In that moment, dark energy wrapped around his limbs with dozens of eyes locking onto him, filled with malice that could rip the average man apart.

Monsters sensitive to the Eldritch Energy reacted like starving beasts lured by the scent of a fresh meal. Their claws lashed out but Jin was already gone!

As though a path was laid out before him, Jin shifted his centre of gravity to the side and turned his body, avoiding the claws and obstacles in the way. Glancing back momentarily, he could see the attacks ripping through the air where his head had been a moment ago.

He didn't counter, there was no need for him to. Attacking them right now would simply be a waste of his time. He wasn't here to slaughter, he was here to deliver a bomb to the barrier!

Weaving down, he avoided an attack from afar and slid to his right. He was never in the same spot for more than a split instant.

Those perceptive to the boundaries of the Zone would notice a 10 meter radius around Jin. Since he wasn't bothered about countering, he didn't need to find methods to attack. All he needed to focus on was all the attacks entering this domain.

His gaze sharpened, darting from one arrow to another, from one claw to another. He saw the precise path of an incoming fire strike, a twitch of the Eldritch beast's muscles as he prepared to lunge, the vibrations on the water surface as a colossal behemoth stomped towards his location.

Everything was visible for him.

But maintaining this state was the hard part. The waves upon waves of useless information that he had to filter out, the static before the clarity. It felt as though his brain was about to burst apart from the influx of information.

***RUMBLE!!!**

On the far end of the first bridge, Jin's first big obstacle appeared.

A bloated abomination hunched over under its own weight. Its skin was stretched thin, revealing the pulsing organs that should be hidden beneath the surface. An entangled mess of blackened flesh.

Every time it breathed, Jin could see the bubbling blood lodged in its throat as its jaw split wide, revealing rows of misaligned teeth.

Yet despite its size, the abomination was not slow by any means. Each step shook the bridge, building up momentum and flinging its allies over the edge without care.

Its decisively slow movements masked its absolutely horrifying speed as by the time Jin realised it had breached his 10 meter boundary, the abomination was already in front of him.

"!!!"

Widening his eyes, Jin felt panic rising in his chest as the edge of his Zone flickered.

Gritting his teeth, he slammed his heel into the ground mid run, adjusting his rhythm and ducked to the left.

*BANG!!!

The abomination's arm slammed against the path, causing cracks to spread to the edge as its flesh wobbled from the impact.

Even though he dodged the main hit, the shockwave generated by its attack sent Jin sliding backwards as waves upon waves of attacks rushed towards him.

"F*ck off!" Jin cursed, pushing his arms out to the side and unleashing a dome of Eldritch Energy to ward off the attacks.

He didn't need to block everything, it wasn't a battle of his defences either.

He just needed to block those that would land on him and push them off to the side.

As his defensive dome pushed aside the lethal attacks, the Abomination was in front of him once more.

But this time, its speed and power didn't catch Jin off guard!

*BANG!!!

Blocking the beast's horizontal strike, Jin used the momentum to climb onto the beast's body.

Slapping its face with a backhand, he gave it a taunting smirk reminiscent of Alice.

He could practically see the blood boiling beneath the surface as the beast punched towards him.

Turning his energy into a shield once more, he used the Abomination's punch to propel himself towards the second bridge!

This was where they were firing the ranged attacks.

Flying above the arch was the second obstacle.

The stick like beast that looked as though it's been starved for countless years. Its skin bused against the bones and wings made of stretched membrane kept it afloat.

With an ear splitting screech, bones and dark arcs of energy rushed towards Jin who was still in the air.

Twisting his body, Jin narrowed his eyes.

He could see a path.

'Platforms' for him to step on and reach the enemy.

To truly master the Absolute Zone, vertical movement shouldn't be an issue for him!

*BANG!!!

Stepping on the first bone spear, Jin detonated an orb of Eldritch Energy beneath his feet, propelling him towards the target while dodging what he couldn't step on. Zigzagging through the barrage of ranged attacks, never staying in one spot.

The beast tried to fly backwards to avoid Jin but he was faster!

Compiling several motes of energy behind him, he dove towards the beast with speed far exceeding what he was doing earlier. This time, he had the help of gravity!

*KRK!!!!

Plunging the bone spikes into the beast's back and securing himself, Jin forcefully pushed the beast to fly towards the final bridge.

The three headed beast that guarded the barrier.

There was no other defensive force here aside from the guardian. The air was thick with Eldritch energy that sent chills down his spine.

Each of the three heads were slightly different. One was draconic, one was bestial and the last was almost. . . human like. It had a body similar to that of a lion while corrupted armour plating fused against its skin. Seething veins of Eldritch Energy threaded through its flesh, hardening it beyond normal levels.

Before Jin could even formulate any plans, the draconic head cracked its jaws open and an overwhelming sense of death filled Jin's mind.

"!!!"

Making the split decision to abandon the second beast, Jin watched as a torrent of violet and red energy erase the second beast.

Cold sweat filled his back as he quickly adjusted his body.

Landing on the ground, he had half expected the beast to charge towards him, giving him the chance to run towards the barrier.

But that wasn't the case at all.

The beast was not mindlessly charging in. It stood, it watched, it waited.

It knew that Jin's goal was the barrier and nothing else. Not to fight, not to kill.

Therefore, there was no reason for it to step away from where he's at.

Behind Jin, the wave of beasts was slowly pouring in. The longer he waited, the worse it would be for him.

And soon, he'll be surrounded.

Taking a deep breath, Jin began to walk towards the monster.

Each step a calculation of the possibilities, each breath a countdown to the moment simulation becomes reality.

He saw the countless paths that were laid out before him, the options spawned from each twitch of the muscle, the way the draconic head stared at him. Even the way its body would shift ever so slightly.

*BANG!!!

Jin dashed.

Reacting to his movement, the humanoid head snapped its eyes open as crimson chains erupted from the beast's body, whipping forward towards Jin.

Sliding across the ground and narrowly avoiding the chains, Jin's eyes darted towards the beast, capturing all of its movements.

Behind the chains, the second head was already preparing the next attack. He could feel the slight hint of wind tracking him, slowly picking up and eventually, it'll form a cyclone and drag him into the air.

In that instant, Jin saw five paths that he could possibly take.

Four led to a dead end and one with an unknown potential.

He'll gamble with it!

Grabbing the chains with his bare hands, he wrapped it around his arm and pulled himself towards the beast.

With Jin now stuck in its chains, the draconic head snapped open, preparing to fire an attack towards Jin.

In response, Jin smiled.

The chains were part of the martial arts that he was taught when he was destined to become a vessel of Kazira!

Flicking his arm, the chain created a loop around the draconic head's neck, strangling it as he swung himself to the side.

The bestial head tried to target Jin with a cyclone but he was already beneath the beast!

Adjusting his footwork, he grabbed the chains with his spare hand, tangling it through the beast's legs before letting go.

At last, he saw it. The radiant barrier defending this cursed fortress. A pulsing wall of energy, humming with an obstructive energy that prevented anything from approaching.

Grabbing the package from his bag, he threw it without hesitation while the three headed beast lunged from behind him.

*BANG!!!

Alice's personal artifact spun to life, firing a Void Flux at the beast, erasing its upper half.

"Good job, I knew you had it in you. And now, it's my time to shine." Alice's voice rang out as the Artifact began to transform.

Fractured Form!

*CRACK!!!

In an instant, fissures spread across the surface of the barrier, shattering it into a rain of splinters!

Watching this in the distance, there was only one word that Suyin could shout.

"Charge!!!"

Chapter 696 - 696: Astrelya

Beneath the crumbling glass dome of the barrier, atop the obsidian towers of the Fortress Zhenha, a woman stood alone.

Clad in ivory threads woven with shadow, her long white hair cascaded like a frozen waterfall, pooling at her feet. Delicate strands shimmered with a ghostly luster, highlighted by the array of golden fragments falling from the sky.

White roses decorated her dress and hair, petals preserved in time, a deathless bloom. Some nestled above her ear, some tucked against the folds of her flowing sleeves.

Ribbons framed the roses, contrasting them with a deep blue, cool as dusk light and highlighting the purity of the white roses.

Her skin bore a faint bronze hue, opposite to the ghostly white of her attire. Her ears, slender and elongated, different to the usual ears seen in the east. Instead, they are reminiscent of certain bloodlines in Extalia.

Her eyes matched that of a stormy sea. A deep greyish blue yet at the edges of her iris lay a ring of crimson.

Behind her hair floated a vertical crown of light. Neither flame nor halo. Instead, it was more akin to a thin ring of radiant threads carefully woven into a gold lined arc that shimmered with energy.

"My Lady." A subordinate knelt down at the edge, making sure not to step any closer in fear of disturbing the Abyss Lord.

"I had heard whispers of a Lord intervening in the last battle hence I decided to join. Even going as far as to erect this barrier for you. However. . ." Her voice trailed off like falling petals, soft and delicate.

"I sense not the power of a Lord. The enemy do not have a Lord amongst them yet the Abyss stirs all the same. And to break my barrier at that." Touching one of the falling shards, her lips curved into a curious smile.

"I will not comment on the wretched abominations that guard your doors." She spoke calmly. "A vile pact with the Eclipse or whatever lies beyond is none of my concern. The only thing that stirs my heart within this battle is the method of which they broke my barrier without a Lord.

"So you may drop that haphazard disguise of yours, outsider." She glanced back and pinched her fingers together.

Stars and light crackled into existence around the subordinate as dark energy dismissed his disguise.

"I played along despite knowing that you tried to take advantage of my appearance in this region. But now I find myself lacking a worthy adversary, are you here to take its place?" She questioned.

Voruth'Zal simply adjusted his outfit and smiled.

"I dare not. However, your desired foe has not yet disappeared. Alice, the split haired girl that took down your barrier. You could say her power is. . . transcendent." He played with his cuffs before his smile began to twist.

"She will fulfil your heart's desire. She will be the fire to your wood, the stars for your sky, the whisper to your silence, the ruin to your yearning."

The woman was silent. Her gaze tender and longing for a distant dream.

Holding her hands over her heart, she felt each pulse life carefully.

"If that is to be so, then I will fulfil your desire. Let not a single interruption disturb my utopia and my corpse will be yours for the taking." She closed her eyes in bliss.

"However." Her voice snapped with an icy coldness that sent shivers down Voruth'Zal soul.

"If she is not the one, if she is found wanting, you will pay the price for deception."

The entire world seemed to suddenly shrink around them, folding into a silent sphere devoid of outside connections. No escape, no retreat.

"Of course, you have my word." Voruth'Zal promised with a bow. "If there is anyone in the world that can satisfy this longing in your heart, it is her."

Astrelya, Abyss Lord of Stars.

To gaze upon her was to witness the embodiment of the cosmos. The elegant yet out of reach. Yet to know her, one realises that she is not the aloof being her title suggests.

She is no observer, she is no witness. She did not crave for the truth of fates.

What she is, what she wants, is to be the author of her own tale. Astrelya craved battle like no other. She did not want conquest, not the bloodshed of masses. But a sacred, transcendent moment of two individuals locked in battle.

No distractions, no plots in the dark. She desires the ignition of their two souls as they met in combat.

The intense struggle to live another day, to extinguish the light in the opponent. A struggle so intense that it marked, no, SEARED itself into the memory of the victor. A scar not on the body but on the spirit.

A respect for a strong opponent.

A clash so radiant that it would leave even the stars blinded.

A grand symphony of will.

She had tasted how it felt to end another's life in this clash. She has felt the glory of victory. But now she desired the other half. She desired to experience what it was like to be the fallen in this situation.

She wanted to taste the bitterness of a close defeat after giving everything she's got, knowing that her opponent did the same.

A one sided battle was not what she wanted. She wanted something closer, something raw. An end to a battle where both are left punching with everything they got left, hoping, praying that the next hit would end their opponent. To exterminate what little stamina and adrenaline that kept them on their feet.

THAT was the end that Astrelya desired. A destructive, blinding desire of violence, so very pure yet chaotic.

She wanted to FEEL alive for that moment before death.

And Voruth'Zal knew that well.

With Astrelya now interested in the battle once more, Voruth'Zal took his leave.

###

"Charge!!!" Suyin's command rang across the battlefield as a sky of flames followed her shout.

Lightning crashed down from above, shattering the defensive lines of the enemy. Her soldiers surged forth, tearing through the outer ranks. Jin was pulled back by Alice, he needed time to fully digest this experience.

However, Suyin was fine with that. He already destroyed the biggest road block, all that's left was for her and her soldiers to finish the charge.

*KSSSS!!!

Suyin's machinery hissed as they led the charge.

"Push through! Kill all that stands in your way! You are not doing this for yourself! On your shoulder is the hopes of all those waiting for your safe return! On your shoulder is the hope that the north remains safe! On your shoulders are the lives of your brothers and sisters! Stand firm! Stand tall! Do not falter!"

""""RAHHH!!!!""""

Her soldiers roared as one, charging forth with renewed vigour.

Each action, each attack, backed up by the adrenaline that shouted through their veins.

Alice had to give an appreciative clap. Despite their grotesque enemies, the soldiers charged with an indomitable spirit.

"Fascinating the human spirit is, don't you agree?" Isolde stood next to Alice with a smile.

However, this manner of speaking, Alice understood that Zal-Ka'Rith took over once more.

"You do realise that every time you take over, Isolde is inching closer and closer to death right? Your existence pollutes her body, even with your so called blessings." Alice gave him a side glance.

"Is that concern I hear for this girl?" Zal-Ka'Rith smiled, raising his arm and watching the flesh tremble.

"Just curiosity on why you keep taking over for the smallest of things despite being an observer." Alice shrugged. "For an observer, you are awfully involved."

"There are times when even an observer feels compelled to ask questions. That artifact of yours. . ." His voice trailed off.

"It's not a natural creation is it? A modification of. . . another being. One that lives. One that grows."

Summoning her artifact above her hand, Alice stared at it in silence.

"It's made by the Zenia family. The material is. . . humans." Alice's gaze was filled with pity for the artifact. "But not just any human, one that hasn't had its soul modified yet. Children that are yet to be born, extracted and transformed into cores."

"Once synchronised with the Hunter, this. . . Artifact, this unborn child, adapts to the powers of the wielder, transforming themselves into something that assists the Hunter. A personal tool." Alice dismissed the artifact and clenched her fist.

"Fascinating. . ." Zal-Ka'Rith muttered, causing Alice to glare at him.

"Ah, allow me to correct myself. I don't find the creation of the weapon fascinating. Rather, the fact that humans are willing to do this to children of their own species, turning them into objects to be exploited. And yet they call us Outer Gods the cancer to their world." He explained with a chuckle.

"Yeah, which is why the Zenia family don't deserve to continue. They need to be wiped out no matter what." Alice turned her gaze away.

Holding his hands behind his back, Zal-Ka'Rith smiled.

"As you know, I work with equivalent exchange. Since you were kind enough to enlighten me with that piece of information, allow me to give you something in exchange."

"Oh? It's not exactly a rare piece of information though. You would've found it out sooner or later." Alice furrowed her brows.

"It's not the details of the information that counts but rather, the implications. An understanding of how low humans can go. Right when I thought I reached the bottom, I feel something knocking from beneath my feet. THAT is what I find fascinating."

"As for something that equals the satisfaction you gave me. . ." His voice trailed off. Contemplating what kind of information he should spill.

Something that has to do with Alice. Something that he knew but Alice didn't.

Pausing for a moment, a smile appeared on his face.

"Shall I tell you. . . how we Outer Gods entered this world?"

Chapter 697 - 697: The Outer God's Backdoor

"Shall I tell you. . . how we Outer Gods entered this world?"

Alice didn't answer, but her gaze and silence spoke volumes.

This was a question that hung heavy above her head. From what she understood and what she was told, the barrier protecting their world was still in place.

The veil created by Velouria with the help of the other Gods hasn't disappeared yet.

Zal-Ka'Rith took this silence as permission to speak.

"We Outer Gods did not enter this world through force." He began. "The barrier put into this place was one that was extremely strong against outside influence. Even if the strongest of us Outer Gods tried, they won't be able to break it."

He smiled a wicked smile. "Instead of force, we came by invitation. A contract between us and a few individuals."

"A contract?" Alice creased her brow.

"Indeed. Two key individuals, one of whom I was unsure of until just recently. A name you're very familiar with. Nyer." Zal-Ka'Rith trailed off, observing Alice's reaction. Seeing that she wasn't as shaken as he had hoped, he shrugged and continued.

"The second is Enris, God of the Eclipse. Though I'm sure you've already made that connection to some degree. Of course, this is something that not even her Apostles know. Otherwise, why do you think Kazira believes that she could usurp the divine throne with just Eldritch Energy?"

"Enris? But why does she want you guys to come into the world? Chaos?" Alice frowned. No matter how much Enris loved chaos, having Outer Gods getting involved was still a step too far.

"She didn't. Enris did not want our collaboration." Zal-Ka'Rith shook his head in agreement. "However. . . She was promised something. By Nyer. All I know is that after a certain point, her perspective shifted and these two agreed to the first contract."

Alice folded her arms.

She somewhat understood why Nyer would want their collaboration. Eldritch energy flowed through her veins after all. But Enris?

The only thing that Alice could think it could be was only one thing. Velouria.

But even so, something felt off. One contract between them shouldn't allow such a large scale invasion. On top of that, the contract must've happened long ago. It wasn't something recent.

"Something else allowed more and more of you to enter this realm, right?"

Zal-Ka'Rith curled his smile upwards. Indeed, it was more entertaining to talk to someone who could put the pieces together.

"It's as you say. The contract between Nyer, Enris and us Outer Gods were a simple one in the grand scheme of things. But what truly allowed us to enter were the contracts we formed later down the line. Contracts between us and mortal humans."

Alie's gaze darkened.

"Any contract that's fulfilled by us rather than the Gods allowed our influence to spread. And after a certain point, our existence could no longer be denied. But that's only if the humans had been truthful with their Gods." Zal-Ka'Rith chuckled.

"Some believed they were the chosen one, fated to overthrow the Gods. Unique in that they could harness this energy we lend to them, drunk on their own power. Some sought to create Outer Gods of their own, some tried to enslave us for their bidding.

"But as you can imagine, it didn't go so well. Now a sort of. . . 'backdoor' exists for us Outer Gods. Just barely wide enough for some of us to get through but not enough for the. . . Older ones."

Alice wanted to know more but Zal-Ka'Rith didn't continue.

"I believe this information should be satisfactory for what you've given me."

Understanding that he wasn't going to say more, Alice nodded her head.

"Thanks."

"A pleasure, I look forward to the next exchange we will do." The thick Eldritch energy around him faded away as Isolde was handed back her own body.

Collapsing on one knee, Isolde clutched her chest with gritted teeth. Despite the pain she was feeling, she maintained her smile and slowly stood up.

"You know, you can tell Zal-Ka'Rith that he can just speak to you and have you tell me what he says."
Alice gave Isolde a side glance.

However, she simply shook her head.

"My Lord has mentioned that for moments like this, he wished to speak personally rather than have someone else speak for him. It's a form of respect given to the one he wishes to exchange information with."

"Even at the cost of your health?" Alice questioned but Isolde didn't answer.

She simply smiled and walked away to rest her body.

Shrugging her shoulders, Alice turned her attention back on the battle.

'What do you think?'

[It does explain why the barrier is still in place even though Outer Gods are now running rampant.] Cayla sighed.

[But I don't know how they can make a backdoor in the barrier. Even if they spread their influence, it shouldn't be enough.]

'Unless someone understood Velouria's methods and helped them from the inside.' Alice added as Cayla nodded her head.

[The Will. They're the only one I can imagine who could even make a backdoor for the Outer Gods. Unless there's someone else with the same understanding of Velouria's barrier or an extreme exception, I can't see how else they'll enter this realm.]

[The Void is being looked after by Feris and you already know her dislike for them.]

Tapping her heel against the ground, Alice had a deep frown on her face.

Kazira made an agreement with Outer Gods to usurp Enris's power.

Enris made a contract in the past to get something unknown.

Nyer probably made a contract to get his hands on this energy and take his research to the next step.

Whether or not the Will was truly involved is unknown.

The Sun and Moon haven't made any major movements yet.

The Zenia's are beginning to speed up their experiments even with their limit resources now that they know she is alive. And on their side is the Doctor that is seemingly unkillable, even with all of her firepower.

In the North, Verona was cultivating a fake divinity with Caera. . .

Pausing for a moment, Alice's pupil constricted.

As her thoughts lingered on Caera, she recalled the first moment they were 'reunited'.

Caera felt like a Lord yet her body lacked Abyssal Energy.

But now that she knew what she knew, now that she had experienced Eldritch Energy, there was only one conclusion that Alice had come to.

Caera filled her body with the corruptive energy!

The demonstrations of her power, her hatred for the Will. It was only natural that she looked for something outside of its power.

'Do you think Caera had something to do with the backdoor?' Alice asked as Cayla fell silent.

She wanted to think to some extent that her old comrade wouldn't do such a thing. But time is a merciless thing.

It can inflict changes in ones personality without them even realising that something was wrong.

However. . .

[Caera revered Velouria. Even if she joined hands with the Outer Gods, I don't think she'll help them make their backdoor. Instead, I think it's more plausible to believe that she learned to harness their power and make it her own.

[While it may inadvertently help the Outer Gods, she shouldn't be doing it with the intent to corrupt the realms. Doing so meant that Ayr wouldn't have a chance to be reconstructed. Plus, this was part of Nyer's plan. You know how much she despises Nyer.] Cayla defended Caera as Alice thought about it for a moment and nodded her head.

However, the fact that Caera was wielding Eldritch energy couldn't be ignored.

'I'll see if I can contact Caera later and ask her about this. Depending on her stance, she might even be able to help Jin.' Alice sighed.

Eldritch energy couldn't be allowed to remain in their realm for long. Doing so would begin a long chain of corruption that would eventually leave them with a desolate wasteland or be forced to carve away pieces of this realm.

Therefore, having a solution to Jin's modified body would be ideal.

'The only question now is how much does the Sun and Moon know. I find it hard to believe that Solaris or Lumiria are clueless about what's happening.'

[Well considering the fact that Solaris should've been relatively clueless until you basically told him that you're from Ayr, I think they're more concerned about their own agenda than Outer Gods. To them, the barrier should hold firm without needing to worry.] Cayla theorised as Alice let out an awkward cough.

Before Alice could respond, a flash of white and gold split the sky.

*RUMBLE!!!

Alice's head snapped towards the source of the explosion and there she saw, a column of raw destruction.

A spire of stars that ascended into the sky. Radiant arcs cut across the battlefield like a drawn blade with Suyin hastily trying to block the attacks in futility. Each slash of the energy cut through the barrier like butter as Suyin's serpent was torn apart.

Alice felt her senses going haywire, alarm bells sounding in her head.

Goosebumps forming across her skin and as cold sweat filled her back.

A Lord has made a move!

As dreaded, in response to her previous actions on the battlefield, a Lord was waiting here. According to Suyin's estimations, they shouldn't have made a move unless she made one first on the level of Lord.

But she didn't! Unless. . .

'Sh*t I should've known!' Alice gritted her teeth.

The barrier was the construct of a Lord!

And because she broke it, it's no wonder a Lord might get involved. Without hesitation, Alice jumped up and ran towards the spire.

Chapter 698 - 698: Astrelya's Declaration

Slashing the space in front of her, Alice tore open a rift and dove through, catching Suyin before her body hit the ground.

Explosions rocked the battlefield with stars and energy cascading down from above.

The serpent that Suyin was riding on, one of their main anchors of this fight, was nothing more than ribbons of scrap metal.

Landing on the ground, Alice stomped her foot as blood mist expanded in an instant. Her gaze flicked across the battlefield.

"I thought you said an enemy Lord wouldn't step in if I didn't?" Alice frowned. Tapping down with her foot, every soldier within range was marked by her blood.

"Yeah well that's what I thought as well until the literal f*cking sun dropped on my head!" Suyin raged seeing her darling inventions get destroyed one by one.

Alice didn't respond, she was focused on opening portals behind each Solider and saving as many of them as she could. Unfortunately, she wasn't able to mark everyone in time as some of them were caught up by the attacks.

'Should we intervene? Depending on how things go, we could even get some blood from her and take her powers.' Alyss asked.

Currently, they still have five vials of Abyss Lord blood, meaning they can fight at the level of Abyss Lords five more times.

With the enemy Lord making a move, if they simply watch and do nothing, too many people will die.

However, there was a clear drawback when it came to fighting directly.

Escalation.

Cayla didn't say anything, she left that decision to Alice.

If she wanted to fight, they will. If she wanted to do something else, she'll follow her lead.

'I don't think she's going to let us go even if I don't want to fight.' Alice frowned.

She noticed the enemy Lord staring at her while throwing attacks towards the army. A provocative gesture.

"Suyin, have people retreat. Isolde and Jin aren't fit for battle right now. This place might turn into a hellhole for a bit but I'll see if a fight is avoidable." Alice spoke seriously as Suyin glanced up and nodded her head.

"You better. If two Lords start to fight, other Lords will join and everything will go to sh*t. But if you can't avoid it, make sure you end the fight fast or take it elsewhere."

Nodding her head, Alice took a step forward as she activated her resonance!

Red spider lily patterns emerged across her skin as a torrent of radiant light crashed down from the heavens above.

Raising her hand towards the sky, black and violet energy converged into a singularity with her personal artifact hovering next to her.

Void Flux!

*RUMBLE!!!

Expanding in an instant, the singularity swallowed the pillar of light, preventing it from unleashing the calamity that was brewing within.

Void Steps!

Taking a step forward, Alice disappeared from her position, traversing the chasm of space in an instant and appeared behind Astrelya.

Surprising Alice, Astrelya's eyes were locked firmly on her body, even during Void Step.

"Esteemed Lord of the Abyss, surely you aren't intending to interfere with a battle between mortal armies now, are you?" Alice asked coldly. "If I recall, the agreement is that Lords do not intervene unless one makes a move first." Her eye, focused on the Lord like a hunter, observing her prey and waiting for even the slightest hint of movement.

Within her sleeves, a vial of Abyss Lord blood was ready.

"And last I checked." She added. "Our side has no Lord present nor was there one during the last battle." Her voice, soft yet firm. Showing respect but not willing to be pushed around just because her enemy is an Abyss Lord.

"There's no Abyss Lord yet you stand before me without fear. You broke my barrier, something even new Lords would struggle with. Am I not to believe that you are confident you will survive an encounter with a Lord?" Astrelya spoke slowly.

"Just a gimmick, nothing more. But that doesn't change the fact that you have now made a move. Are you not afraid of what might happen now that you've made a move?" Alice frowned.

"Afraid? No I am not. I've been a Lord for many years now. Do you know what's the thing that afflicts all long living beings?" She asked with a shake of her head.

Seeing that she was willing to converse, Alice decided to humour her.

"No I don't."

"Erosion of the mind. The numbing of feelings and the boredom that seeps through the flesh and soul. After a certain point in life, without sufficient stimulation, all living beings grow weary." Astrelya looked at her own hand. "They feel the pointlessness of it all. They live yet they are not alive. They regenerate flesh yet they rot from the inside."

"Your point being?" Alice frowned.

Astrelya tapped her chin and thought about it for a moment before smiling.

"Do you wish to drag things out? To avoid a battle? Are you perhaps distracted by the chance that I might turn around and kill those you told to retreat?" She chuckled softly before snapping her fingers.

Before Alice could even activate her personal artifact, she was dragged into an alternate realm.

A single table, a set of chairs beneath an umbrella. Floating above a sea reflecting the countless stars above and the myriad of colours that filled the cosmic sky.

"If you are distracted, I will not receive the fulfilment I desire. Come, sit, and let us converse. Let us lay bare our hearts so that we may clash with no distractions." Astrelya sat down with a smile.

Furrowing her brows, Alice hesitantly sat down. However, she couldn't help but feel unsettled by the fact that the woman in front of her was able to create a realm before she could even react.

"To expect something from someone, one must be willing to do the same. Therefore, introductions are in order. I am Astrelya, Abyss Lord of Stars. Eight Sigils are carved across my body." Astrelya smiled gently, pouring a cup of tea for Alice and pushing it in front of her.

Looking at the cup in front of her, Alice was silent. There was no reason for a Lord to poison it but there was something about this girl that threw Alice off.

Something that she couldn't quite put her finger on.

But since she was the first to extend the bridge, Alice will reply in kind.

"Alice Agnelia. I'm not a Lord. I have five Sigils on my body." Alice introduced herself and took a drink of tea.

A warmth filled her body, soothing any fatigue that might've been built up.

"Oh my~ To break my barrier at only five Sigils." Astrelya blinked her eyes in surprise.

"Is that why the Abyss stirs within you? The self-same feeling I experienced when I was first bestowed with my title." Astrelya leaned forward, pointing at Alice's heart.

"Why did you attack the army?" Alice asked, cutting straight to the point and turning the attention away from her heart.

"Why? Hmm. . . It's obvious is it not? I wanted to judge your intentions. After breaking my barrier, you fell silent. You didn't charge, you didn't intend to act. If I were to attack the army, would you fight back or would you sit back and watch? I got my answer so I am satisfied." Astrelya beamed with joy.

"If you wanted to talk you could've just greeted me." Alice clenched her fist. "There was no need to go this far."

"There is a need. I needed you to only look at me, to make me your highest priority over everything." Astrelya tilted her head, kicking her legs back and forth in amusement.

Taking a deep breath to calm herself, Alice stabilized her mental state and looked at Astrelya once more.

"So what do you want? If you wanted to fight, why go so far as to talk? If you wanted a clash, there's no need to go this far is there?"

"You misunderstand. What I want, what I desire with my entire being is not a barbaric fight. A vile, ugly display of the soul." Astrelya placed her hand over her heart. "No, what I want is something far more beautiful. An understanding between two individuals that extends from an exchange of attacks."

"Had I gone for other Lords or Apostles, I would never have achieved this dream. If I fall in such a battle, my heart will never reach the Elysium I dream of."

"The death I desire, the battle I crave is one where both sides burn every last ounce of energy they have from deep within."

"A battle of purity with nothing else on the mind. No distractions. If we are to clash, I want my entire existence to be stripped bare, living in the moment. I will offer you my everything. A pure, unclouded attention where you see only me and I see only you." Astrelya reached out towards Alice's hand.

"Do you want a love confession or do you want a battle?" Alice furrowed her brows, pulling back her hand.

"Why not both? To fulfil my desire is the greatest most profound declaration of love that I can think of. If you can fulfil it then yes, it would be a declaration of love." Astrelya chuckled with a small blush.

"I've been told that your power is. . . transcendent. That you will be able to fulfil the desires in my heart. And seeing your confidence, I am inclined to agree. However. . . Distraction fills your mind."

"If we fight like this, I will never get the satisfaction I wish to die with. My dreams will wither and fade." Astrelya's voice began to trail off as her realm fractured.

"But I can wait. I've waited so long already. So. . . Alice, the target of my attention.

"Will you show me? Can you prove that you are worthy of the love in my heart?"

Chapter 699 - 699: Astrelya's Lust

As Astrelya finished her sentence, a gale surged between them, scattering the tables and chairs into the air.

Motes of fragmented light began to fall done from above as the realm began to cry out in pain.

Alice's pupil constricted.

She knew that something felt off but now that Astrelya has decided to initiate combat, her senses were screaming at her to run away!

To get out of the location immediately.

Fractured Form!

Summoning her personal artifact, Alice wanted to dispel this realm so that Astrelya wouldn't get an advantage.

To even the playing field as much as she could.

But Astrelya only raised her hand and snapped her fingers. A single Sigil lit up on the back of her hand, pulsing with stellar radiance.

"Do not worry." She reassured with a tone as sweet as candy. "This realm offers me no benefits that a Second Resonance would provide. It is simply a manifestation of my power. A natural phenomenon if you will. So don't overwork that cute lil' head of yours." She chuckled with a slight wink.

Above Alice, a star spun violently with gravity suddenly being inverted for her. She felt her body being dragged into the air and gritted her teeth.

Resonance!

Creating a garden of spider lilies to displace some of the current realm, Alice conjured a singularity above her to combat the sudden shift in gravity.

Behind Astrelya, her halo pulsed with an ethereal light. The celestial canvas above her shimmered with countless stars. Blinking before raining down in a downpour of stellar radiance.

Revealing a gentle smile like that of a mother, Astrelya gathered all the stars into a single mote between her hands.

A miniature cosmos held within the boundary of her palms. She gave it a gentle breath as it floated towards Alice. Slow at first but it began to pick up speed, leaving behind a trail of spectral lights, not unlike a comet burning up the midnight sky.

Alice's senses flared, alarm bells screaming in her mind. There was no escape from this attack.

Even if she used Void Steps, even if she tore through a passage into the Void itself, the space around her was already being destabilized. Her entry would not be permitted.

'I should've expected it. If she could create a barrier that prevents my teleportation, why can't she use it at will?' Alice bit her lip. 'Is it a Sigil power or natural phenomenon?'

Creasing her brows, Alice created a blade of blood and metal.

With Astrelya being the Abyss Lord of Stars, there were a lot of unknown factors about her power.

But what did matter was the fact that she was simply testing Alice right now. Otherwise, it would be a simple case for her to unleash the power of every single Sigil, hoping to end the fight early. But that wasn't what Astrelya desired.

She has already told her desires to Alice. A battle of wills that sets their entire being aflame. A battle of souls.

What Astrelya wants to do right now was to test whether or not she was going to be worth that wait. Whether or not she is worth the time that Astrelya was willing to invest.

If Alice could help it, she wanted to conceal her Sigil swapping and the ability to temporarily become a Lord. If she exposes everything, Astrelya might refuse the desire to wait and go for the battle immediately.

Alice needed to trick Astrelya into thinking that she had the potential to give her the fight that she wants. And that potential needed time.

To reach the threshold and convince Astrelya to drop the fight. That's what Alice needed to achieve!

She needed to fight with what she has on hand right now!

Artificial Resonance!

Recalling her artifact and using it to unleash the false Resonance, a singularity replaced the spider lily pattern in her eye.

Void Flux – Cleave!

Rather than the original method of slashing apart everything in her way, she used the powers of the Void instead. A collapsing rift formed at the centre of her slash, drawing everything into the infinite abyss!

The moment the stars touched the edge of Alice's slash, light began to warp and the essence of Astrelya's attack was dragged towards oblivion.

"If you simply react to what I throw at you, you'll never give me the battle I desire, the battle that will ignite this heart of mine. So please, come at me with the intent to kill. Face me with your fiery passion and set my world ablaze." Astrelya called out as she held out her arms in reverent prayer.

From within the slash, an arc of light broke through as Alice's Void Flux – Cleave was broken apart!

"!!!" Widening her eye, Alyss hijacked the controls and took over!

*BANG!!!

Taking a step forward, Alyss twisted her body as a mixture of energy crackled around her blade.

Destruction point!

Erasing all colour of the world in her sight, she identified the streaks of weakness within Astrelya's attack. The single point where she should gather her strength and pierce through!

*RUMBLE!!!

Creating a gap within the attack, Alyss dashed forward, weaving through the chaotic eruption of light without a single wound.

Seeing the shift in Alice, turning into someone. . . 'Different', the energy that now surrounded her body, Astrelya paused. Her gaze lingering on Alyss as the blush on her face began to deepen.

She wrapped her hands around her own arms as she couldn't control the smile on her face.

This burning fire in her heart, this raging passion!

Biting her finger, Astrelya forced herself to calm down. To not get carried away by one moment of joy.

"What are you giggling at to yourself!?" Alyss shouted with a frown. Pivoting on her right foot, she unleashed a horizontal sweep towards Astrelya, swallowing all light in its path.

"Aah! It's a little embarrassing, please don't look at me~!" She hid her face with a laugh as a trail of stars slammed down from above, destroying Alyss's strike.

As the fragments floated in the air, Alice took over and flicked her finger, turning them all into spears that stabbed towards Astrelya.

On her shoulder, a Sigil lit up looking similar to a constellation that hung in the sky. Around her, stars began to orbit, transforming into a radiant shield that sought to block Alice's attack.

*CRACK!!!

"Eh?" Blinking her eyes, Astrelya saw the cracks ripple across her barrier. After the second spear, it shattered apart!

*Badum!

Astrelya felt her heart pound.

Clenching her chest, she couldn't hold back her laugh as a third Sigil lit up on her neck.

*BANG!!!

The space in front of her collapse into a star, swallowing all the spears that Alice at sent her way.

"Tsk, that's three now." Alice clicked her tongue seeing three Sigils light up on Astrelya's body.

She thought that her spears would be able to take Astrelya by surprise to some extent but her reaction was much faster than she had thought.

The moment Astrelya felt something was off, she erased the space in front of her.

It was a similar method to Feris yet at the same time, very different.

Before Alice could get a chance to organise a new attack plan, stars shimmered around her.

"!!!"

Slamming her hand down, she created a rotational field of crimson, swallowing what it could and diverting what it couldn't cancel/consume.

A curtain of darkness blanketed the battlefield. Not a simple absence of light but rather a suffocating, unnatural darkness.

But Alice wasn't unaccustomed to fighting without sight. All she needed to do was focus her attention on other senses instead!

Absolute Zone!

Compressing her boundary for greater efficiency, Alice sensed countless attacks trained on her body!

Activating her third Sigil, Alice created a grid of defences. She'll slash away at the attacks that she could block and anything that exploits the gap in her movements or blind spots will be swallowed by the grid!

Astrelya watched with her vision dyed in the hue of blooming roses. Each slash, each counter that Alice performed was a cupid's arrow to her heart.

Abyss Lords, exalted existences above that of normal Hunters. Some may never reach this level no matter how much they try, no matter how desperate they become. The Abyss is biased.

Yet. . .

How many could make a Lord wonder if they were truly the chosen one?

Astrelya watched Alice break her barrier, shatter her defences and even defend against an onslaught of attacks despite the lack of sight.

The goosebumps on her skin, this pounding excitement. She felt her heart skip a beat.

However. . .

Despite all of this. . .

Alice's attention still wasn't fully focused on her!

There was something else she was worried about, something else that stole away her attention.

She couldn't find the euphoria she wanted here.

But even if that was the case. . .

Even if Alice wouldn't give Astrelya her full attention right now. . .

Astrelya would never forgive herself if she stopped here.

She wanted an extra push, just a taste of the main meal. To satisfy herself even if it's just for a moment, to catch a glimpse of the climax that she wanted. To indulge in this moment of lust.

An infatuated look filled Astrelya's eyes as she clasped her hands together.

She prayed, oh she vehemently prayed that Alice would survive this. That she'd endure what is to come and show the depths of her potential.

And if she does. . .

Astrelya will give Alice her heart.

Her love, her passion, everything.

If she can reach her Elysium, if she can reach the promised the battle, the scorching of their souls, she was willing to give everything.

There was one thing that Astrelya was completely honest towards.

That would be her desires. Her desire carried her through this world, her desires made up the core of her being.

A selfish, violent love that sought to burn every last ember in the blazing heat of passion.

Finally! Finally she felt the pulse of life beat through her heart!

And for that, Alice had her undying gratitude and love.

Energy converged around Astrelya's body, overlaying her in a sheet of radiant gold.

Resonance!

Chapter 700 - 700: A Feeling Of Pure Bliss

Resonance.

As Astrelya stood upon the shattered precipice of her own realm, her Sigils began to shimmer one by one.

Three formed a connection like the constellations themselves, lightning up in a stellar radiance. Motes of light converged around her as the realm above parted in reverence.

Alice felt her entire body freeze from the sudden surge of energy. As though submerged in a viscous pool of liquid, she felt it compressing around her.

The sheer amount of energy far surpassed what she felt from the Sect Leader and Old Man Mo.

'Is she bullsh*tting when she said she had eight Sigils??? This doesn't f*cking feel like eight Sigils.' Alice's smile twitched, having no other choice but to witness Astrelya transform into her Resonance state.

From her feet, radiant constellations spiralled around her. Astrelya looked as though she was the centre of a galaxy. Her hair, shimmering like starlight fluttered behind her. A golden blonde took the place of her previous pristine white with the tips dyed with a celestial blue that glowed at the tips.

It's as though her hair was made partially from energy as stars flickered within the strands.

Her eyes now bound by ethereal white bandages etched with the pattern of Sigils, pulsing with a radiant glow. And from beneath the bandages, golden tears streamed down her cheeks, luminous and reflecting the sea of stars above her.

Unfurling behind her, three pairs of wings bloomed like the eruption of a supernova. Vast and imperial, shining with gold and azure, layered with stardust. The middle pair were sleek, almost blade like. The feathers trailing a cosmic light not unlike an aurora borealis.

The final pair faded into a translucent ghostly sheen, flickering between realms.

Like most resonances, her attire shifted to match. A celestial gown woven from white and gold, Radiant threads weaved the patterns of the constellations upon the fabric as the edges of her dress flowed out, blending into stardust.

Every movement caused her dress to ripple ever so slightly, an ethereal dance without the bindings of gravity.

Her crown of stars shattered before reconstructing itself, with spears of light.

Bringing her hands together, Astrelya opened her mouth. It wasn't a shout yet her voice echoed across the entire realm.

"I am the light at the end of all things. . ."

She carried no malice, no rage, only pure, boundless love and affection.

"I am the memory of the first dawn. . ."

Above her, the sky of her realm began to unravel. From the cracks, starlight tore across the barrier, igniting and forming connections with other stars.

"I am the star that illuminates the all consuming darkness."

[It's a ritual! She's gathering power with a ritual right now!] Cayla shouted.

Golden chains snapped around Alyss's wrist as darkened limbs surged from her shadow!

*RUMBLE!!!!

Signs of corruption began to spread across the realm but it was soon swallowed and prevented from expanding.

"Tch!" Alyss had expected this considering Astrelya probably worked with the Outer Gods. However, corrupting the realm wasn't her main goal!

Her goal was to give them enough space to breathe and react!

'I don't think we can hold back more than this! We have to kill her! Consequences be damned!' Alyss shouted in her mind, preparing to drink the Abyss Lord's blood but Alice stopped her.

'We can do this without Lord's power. It's only a first Resonance no matter how strong it is.' Alice narrowed her gaze.

She could see astral rings forming above them, a circle of celestial power forged from the light of stars. Intersecting constellations moved like clockwork around the ring, shimmering with a stellar fire and runic patterns.

One by one, rings began to form in quick succession before stopping at the twelfth.

Clenching her fist, Alice activated her fifth Sigil!

Halo of Ruin + Crimson Immolation!

'It's not enough.'

Even with her forceful level up, Alice knew that something was still lacking in order to properly counter Astrelya's attack.

She needed something more, something to counter the enormous amount of energy flowing through the attack.

'Do you think Crimson Immolation can level up Eldritch Energy?' Alyss hesitated.

With the enemy doing a ritual to gather energy for this attack, why shouldn't they do the same? It wasn't as if she couldn't do a ritual.

Though Alyss wasn't sure if her new control over Eldritch Energy would be applied to the ritual.

'It's worth a shot.' Closing her eye, Alice unleashed a storm of energy around her.

Before she accepted Alyss's ritual, she needed to make sure she used everything at her disposal. That way, when the ritual is applied, it would cover everything.

Artificial Resonance!

Bloodline Release!

While Alice was gathering power, Astrelya was about to complete her own ritual. She could sense the violent storm of energy, Alice's defiance. Her body trembled with joy.

Her realm groaned in pain as each of the astral rings locked into place. One final ring to direct her power towards a single target.

Parts of the realm began to blur, fading away as the energy was being absorbed by Astrelya's rings. From the constellations, beams of starlight shot towards the receptacles of the rings scattered above the realm.

Filled with energy, the rings now hummed in resonance, a harmonized song of power.

'Are you ready?' Alice asked, sensing that the array above her head had reached its threshold. The attack was coming.

'Right behind you.' Alyss nodded.

Opening her mouth, Alice spoke a single word to establish a contract between them. A single word to begin the ritual, to borrow her twin's power.

"Feast."

*RUMBLE!!!

Despite being in resonance form, Alice's hair returned back to the normal black and white that's split down the middle. From her shadow, dark energy began to surge as golden chains clasped around her arm.

She had done it once before, a physical resonance between her Sigils and Eldritch energy.

First Sigil + Eldritch Energy + Fourth Sigil!

She needed to use the all consuming properties of Eldritch Energy and the space manipulation that the Void granted. To further elevate her powers of 'erasure' or at least, a cheap copy of what Feris did.

But the moment her resonance activated. . .

*KRK!!!!

The Halo of Ruin above her head began to falter. Dark tendrils began to climb around the ring, corrupting it.

Crimson Immolation indeed levelled up her Eldritch Energy! A forceful upgrade!

Akin to a student who suddenly remembered the answers to a test, Alice felt like she was in a trance.

The flow of Eldritch Energy flooding through her body, its properties and how it was threading together with her other sources.

How it changed, mutated the other powers.

Suyin's research, while mostly correct, was missing on certain key details that they couldn't observe before.

Yes, Eldritch Energy devours, yes it mutates, yes it hijacks contracts.

But when it comes to overriding and Abyssal energy being slightly weaker than EE unless it came from an Abyss Lord, that was incorrect.

Beneath all the layers, beneath all the conflict. There was a strange. . . Symbiosis between the two powers.

Like how Void reacts, deep within the layers, there is a harmonization with the power.

But now wasn't the time for Alice to explore the possibilities of her power.

Her only focus right now, was to 'consume' the attack in front of her.

Behind her, Alice's 'soul' began to weep tears of blood as a wide smile formed on her face.

Mutated spider lilies with black petals made from tiny limbs blossomed across her body, the tips of her fingers being dyed the same darkness as Eldritch energy.

Alice could sense the world around her warping. Her vision darkened around the edges, focusing only on the rings filled with power.

*CRACKLE!!!

Energy crackled across Alice's body, surging towards her palms as a singularity spun to life!

*BANG!!!

The realm beneath her cracked as tears in space leading to the Void was formed. To siphon the energy of another realm!

Taking a deep breath, Alice pulled her arm back and compressed the singularity. Overlaying the attack with her blade, she could feel her weapon cracking under the pressure.

Even with Sigurd's forging method, the 'container' was still faltering!

Despite her overwhelming power right now, her weapon couldn't contain it all!

One attack wasn't enough to discharge everything.

Above Alice, the final ring spun into existence, brimming with power.

Astrelya opened her palms and a single spark appeared.

A spark so bright that it drowned out all darkness within her realm, transforming it into a void of pure radiant emptiness.

She allowed the spark to fall.

And as the spark collided with the ring, a deep resonant tune echoed out as all the rings erupted simultaneously!

Countless pillars of light shooting down as though the stars themselves were casting a judgment for destruction!

Yet despite this blinding radiance, Alice stood in defiance. Her body shifted through the realm as a single black blade was held in her hand.

There was no extravagance in her attack. No wasted movement.

A single, simply slash upwards. An arc of three energies. Void, Eldritch, Abyssal!

All woven into one devastating cut with the intent to consume!

***BANG!!!**

The attacks collided, the realm was split in half. One light one dark. Pillars of light raining down from above warped unnaturally, their radiance distorted as Alice's attack continued.

To use the power of space, she bypassed the limitation of distance! To fold the realm so that she might reach her target in an instant!

Alice only swung once.

One swing, one arc.

***KRK!!!!**

Astrelya widened her eyes. A diagonal cut that sent blood splattering through her pristine realm.

Her attack collapsed in on itself, the rings shattered. The fragments of her power scattered like meteorites across her space.

Yet despite this wound, Astrelya felt only one emotion.

Pure bliss.