

Abyssal A 761

Chapter 761: Secret Family Technique

Resonance!

A golden flare burst outwards with Guinevere in the epicentre of this blazing glory. A brilliant shockwave, the ignition of one self rippling through the air around her.

She choked on her own breath and released a gasp as fire surged through every single nerve, every single vessel, a divine fire that could no longer be caged.

It roared out, an all consuming inferno demanding to be released!

The black markings on the edge of her face leading down to her neck lit up like molten veins, tearing her body apart with holy fire. Cracks spread across her body like shattered porcelain, glowing with a golden brilliance as luminescent blood seeped through her wounds.

Energy coiled around her right arm, converging and shaping itself into a set of golden armour. Plates that wrapped around her shoulder and arm, forged from celestial light.

While her right side was covered by armour, her left side erupted into a stellar fire. Her flesh charred an obsidian black as it engulfed her left arm, torso and portions of her stomach.

From the death of her flesh came ever so radiant fire, a rebirth of sacred wrath. Flames that clung onto her charred flesh, coiling along her ribs and back.

A black and gold sleeveless dress wrapped around her body, emboldened by the purifying flames around her as its flame seared radiant patterns along the dress.

Behind her, the icon of Solaris shone bright, illuminating her surroundings as a false sun.

From the roots of her hair, flames coiled around each strand, dying it in radiant white fire while a golden laurel hovered around the sides.

A blindfold was draped over her eyes as golden patterns weaved through the material.

Within this form, Gwen's Vision was unleashed at full power!

Every single movement, every single anomaly, no matter if its above ground or below, she saw it all.

However, the Ashcoil wasn't afraid. In fact, it seemed delighted at the fact that Gwen was willing to fight!

"Good. . . Good! Yes, fight till your last breath. Burn, struggle, entertain me as I savour the culmination of your life. This! This is the presentation of food!" Ashcoil cackled as its everchanging body sent forth three tails to strike at Gwen.

"!!!" Gritting her teeth, Gwen moved to parry the attacks.

Even though her Vision was at full strength, even though she could see the movement of its body, the shifting of its mass, she couldn't keep up!

*CLANG!!!

An upward sweep of the tail barely parried at the last second using her spear.

The second was restrained by flaming chains that burst out from the ground as she took this chance to jump into the air.

From her back, a pair of wings unfurled as she aimed her spear!

The third tried to intercept but the flames that she left behind shifting into that of a bird, colliding with the tail and knocking it aside.

"HA!!!!"

Her spear was thrown as it transformed into a beam of light that zipped towards the Ashcoil with blistering speeds!

"Heh~" The Ashcoil grinned.

Face of a Hundred Beasts – Mirror Miko.

In that instant, a fragment of space inverted itself, taking the form of a mirror and swallowing the spear.

"!!!"

Pausing in shock, Gwen instinctively turned her body to the side.

*BANG!!!

Narrowly dodging her own spear, she grabbed it before it could escape her range.

Just as she turned around, the Ashcoil was now face to face with her.

Face of a Hundred Beasts – Tenebris.

At that moment, every single eye that was scattered across Ashcoil's body constricted.

Gwen's vision was dyed crimson, faceless shadows hanging on her periphery. Laughter echoing in her ears.

She found herself standing alone in a room. No matter where she spread the light, there was no one.

No whisper, no sound. Just pure, uninterrupted silence.

She tried to punch the walls, ignite her surroundings, create a false sun but nothing worked.

Time. . . how long as it been? An infinity that stretched on endlessly. No fatigue, no hunger. Just everlasting solitude.

She tried to count the seconds, minutes, hours and days but kept losing track.

Was. . . she swallowed by the beast? Was this her purgatory? An endless solitude where neither life or death existed?

No. . . She didn't want this.

If this was the fate she'll be subjected to she'd rather-

"SNAP OUT OF IT! AREN'T YOU A CARDINAL?!?!"

*RUMBLE!!!

The vision was broken by a wave of freezing cold mist.

Gwen shook her head and saw frozen arrows colliding with the Ashcoil who blocked it with its arms.

Her instincts screamed out in panic as she immediately surrounded herself with a purifying flame!

Transforming her flames into a set of gauntlets, Gwen gritted her teeth pulled back her arm.

*CRACK!!!

Landing a punch against the beast, Gwen winced for a moment.

"You. . . How?" The Ashcoil narrowed its eyes. Even if it was interrupted by the blue haired girl, the Cardinal shouldn't have been able to easily break out of Tenebris' sanity drain.

However, even if she did break out, so what?

Before Gwen could land another hit, one of its ribs shot out in an attempt to stab her but she managed to weave to the side.

Trapping the rib under her arm, she slammed her elbow into it, shattering it into pieces!

From behind, ice arrows shot out once more with the Ashcoil waving it to the side with its tail.

It wanted to track Kaia down but she simply grinned and flipped the Lord off.

Little by little, her body faded away, camouflaging with her surroundings.

Face of a Hundred Beasts – Demonos.

The Ashcoil's body began to shift once more, turning more wolf like as elongated spines protruded from his back.

Stabbing it into the ground, a forest of bones erupted out.

"F*cking hell!" Kaia yelled out in surprise, barely managing to dodge the spines.

"Found you." Ashcoil grinned.

Noticing this, Gwen shot into action.

Conjuring a false sun, radiant rays shot down from the sky, scorching the Ashcoil who blocked using one of its tails.

The Ashcoil was beginning to lose its patience. It had wanted to enjoy and savour the meal slowly but they weren't making it easy. If it goes for Gwen, ice would block it.

Usually this wouldn't matter but this ice was different, it felt restrictive in a sense.

And if it tried to go for the blue haired one, Gwen would intercept using purifying flames that belonged to Solaris.

However, if the presentation of the meal was taking too long, it's only natural for the consumer to drop the formalities and simply enjoy the meal.

Face of a Hundred Beasts – False Idol.

The Ashcoil's body began to shift as his flesh peeled away to reveal not bone or flesh. Countless coils of black lightning and writhing black mass filled the gaps as though it was sentient smoke.

Its spine arched backwards unnaturally, the segments erupted into jagged edges. A human like skull was mounted on its elongated neck with a layer of mummified flesh stretched tightly over the surface.

A pair of hollow voids where the eyes would be.

Cracking its jaw open, an unnatural hiss escaped its mouth. A strange mixture of sizzling and crackling.

A primordial storm made manifest.

"Err. . . Gwen! Since you're the daughter of Arax surely you have a form of defence right?!?" Kaia shouted out as the presence of this beast was giving her warning signs.

"Yeah I got one!" Gwen shouted back, dismissing her spear.

Kaia's eyes lit up.

"For real? What is it?"

"It's a secret technique that my dad taught me if anything bad was to happen. Clearly, it's charging something big up so it gives me enough time." Gwen took a deep breath.

Energy surged through her body, cracking the ground beneath her.

Kaia prepared herself.

Gwen has already proved herself to be capable of summoning the mythos of Solaris.

Could it be true? Could she be able to summon the power of an Apostle as well?

She was able to do so because of the strange composition of her body.

But Gwen? She's not the same.

If she could summon the power of an Apostle, then she is truly-

"F*cking run!"

"Huh???"

Kaia couldn't even react as Gwen hoisted her over the shoulder and made a mad dash away from the area.

"I thought you said you had a technique?!?!" Kaia screamed, trying not to fall.

"Yeah! This is the technique! It's called running and requires the use of both legs!" Gwen replied, jumping through the air.

She didn't even need to turn around to feel the raging storm behind her.

Turning around would simply slow her down!

Unfortunately, as Kaia was hoisted over the shoulders, she had full view of the demon behind them.

A thunderous cloud with countless limbs whipping around, destroying anything and everything. The unnatural way it crawled towards them, tens of arms working in tandem to drag itself across the ground.

"F*cking hell!" She cried out, pulling out her bow.

***BANG!!!**

Firing an arrow, Kaia watched as her attack phased through the beast's body.

"Not to bring down the mood but my f*cking arrow just went through its body!"

Gwen didn't reply, she focused on running as fast as she could. She couldn't go back to the city, doing so would mean the civilians would be dragged in as unnecessary collateral. She needed to take the long way around towards the sea!

"Don't tire yourself out, if there's too much sweat, it's too salty."

Gwen froze. The Ashcoil's humanoid skull was next to her face, whispering into her ear.

A chill shot through her spine as she barely managed to put up a flaming barrier at the last second.

*BANG!!!

Both Kaia and Gwen were sent crashing across the ground, gouging up the earth and breaking trees in their path.

Coughing up a mouthful of blood, Gwen gritted her teeth and forced herself to stand up.

She looked at the clump of malevolence in front of her. But after a brief pause, her lips curved up into a grin.

"Yeah, this is why you don't play around with your food, no matter how bored you are."

*KRK!!!!

Tearing through space, an arc of raw energy slashed towards the Ashcoil who whipped its skull towards the sky.

Just as the beast wanted to jump away from danger, spectral shields crashed into him from all directions. Gravity amplified to the point that the beast couldn't move as the earth sank down!

Looking up, Kaia saw them.

Apostles of Solaris!

Chapter 762: Old Habits

The Ashcoil was no fool.

It knew it had played around too much and now death was knocking at its doorstep.

To an Old Lord that's been sealed for aeons, the title of an Apostle was still something rather new to them.

But what little information it did have was that the Apostles are the left and right hands of the divine!

Retainers of the divine throne!

Now that the Apostle was here, the Ashcoil decided to accept this defeat and cut its losses.

It would rather miss out on a meal than its life!

Face of a Hundred Beasts – Undead Lycoris.

Despite the gravity bearing down on the beast, tubes erupted from its body, spraying out a red cloud that hid its form.

*BANG!!! Even so, Shiera's sword slash struck true! Bisecting the body of the Ashcoil in an instant.

However, Shiera only frowned.

"This one's an annoying one." She could tell that her strike didn't kill the beast. No, whatever it did at the end allowed it to leave with its tail tucked between its legs.

"Arax!"

“No can do. It’s already fled deep underground, scattering itself into countless tiny pieces. Unlike you, I don’t have ‘Vision’ so I can’t tell which one’s the real one.” Arax hoisted his shield onto his back as he crouched near the corpse of the Ashcoil.

Scattered along the ground was a layer of small crimson seeds that birthed a strange withered spider lily.

Apostles they may be but this beast was truly a slippery one, splitting itself into countless pieces and making it difficult to track down completely without just tearing their surroundings to oblivion.

“Give some of the samples to Lisa, she’ll be able to track it down.” Shiera sighed, sheathing her blade.

Turning to Gwen, she was about to say something when her eyes drifted over to Kaia.

“Eh?” Blinking her eyes, the Apostle froze.

When?

How long as she been here?

The moment she arrived, her Vision encompassed the entire area, making sure there were no one hiding while watching the scene.

And yet, there was a girl in front of her. Blatantly obvious through normal sight yet her Vision didn’t pick up on the girl at all.

How was this. . . possible?

*CLANG!!!

Shiera unsheathed her blade in an instant and slashed horizontally! Yet at the final moment, Kaia created a pillar of ice, protecting her neck.

“Aunty!” Gwen shouted out in shock but Shiera didn’t respond.

Pivoting on her ankle, she slammed her foot into Kaia’s stomach, sending her body crashing through several trees.

“Gwen, please be a dear and step back.” Shiera furrowed her brows.

Suspicious. Too suspicious.

Never in her life has she seen anyone capable of dodging the detection of her Vision and yet this anomaly was standing before her. Next to her darling niece as well.

She needed to find out the truth. How was this girl capable of doing such a thing.

“Oi. . . Oi! Do you just attack people out of nowhere?! What the f*ck did I do?!” Kaia’s voice shouted back as she pulled herself from the rubble.

Blood poured from her wounds as she glared at the Apostle.

“Hou~ A sturdy one. Let’s see if you can keep evading my Vision.”

Taking a step forward, her Vision expanded, locking onto the area around Kaia as goosebumps appeared all over her arm.

“So we’re doing this then!?” Gritting her teeth, blood converged before solidifying into a frozen arrow.

Jumping back, Kaia’s figure began to blur but Shiera was faster.

She appeared in front of her and grabbed her by the arm.

*BANG!!!

Throwing Kaia over her shoulders and into the ground, Shiera lifted her heel, preparing to stomp down when Kaia's body began to fade away with a smirk.

"Illusions." Expanding the boundaries of her Vision, Shiera's eye twitched slightly upon realising she couldn't find Kaia.

Vision, the strongest perception technique she created to augment her martial arts. A perception technique that allowed her to capture every single detail within an area without issue.

Every lifeform, every anomaly. Yet she couldn't find Kaia?

"Dad! Stop aunty please!" Gwen panicked.

"Is she the stray cat I heard so much about?" Arax ignored her plea for the moment while keeping his eyes on Shiera.

"Yes! Why is aunty attacking Kaia?!" Gwen was confused.

Suspicious Kaia may be, it shouldn't warrant such a reaction from Shiera.

"You don't understand Gwenny. Vision should be able to detect anything and everything. I've tested this extensively through the many years I've been around- There!" Noticing a shift in movement near the trees, Shiera unleashed a slash that tore the land in half.

"How strange is it really for the next generation to surpass the old?!" Kaia shouted back, firing an arrow that Shiera parried with ease.

Now that Kaia was fighting back, her presence was beginning to solidify itself once more. And more than that, she could sense Kaia's boundary, the Absolute Zone.

A foundational technique required to master the Vision.

But this was no ordinary Absolute Zone.

No, it was something far. . . older. A prototype of sorts.

When teaching her techniques to people, Shiera noticed an issue. The burden it placed upon the user's mind. Prolonged use of the Zone revealed flaws that couldn't be avoided unless they had superior regeneration.

Each deployment was akin to a brutal session of abuse, thus she decided to modify it. To change the way the technique was done in order to make it safer for the user.

And yet! The way the boundary was deployed, the way it scanned the surroundings, the small difference in the Absolute Zone of the past and the Absolute Zone of today.

Difference that only the original creator would know! The same one that made the modification to make it safe.

"I'll give you one chance. On account of the fact that you're friends with Gwenny. How the hell do you know the pre modified version of the Absolute Zone. Something that should only be known by me. Everyone who knew this version died long ago." Shiera asked as golden lightning crackled around her blade.

Dark clouds loomed overhead as a thick killing intent filled the area.

Gwen wanted to say something but froze.

Her aunty had talked about the old Zone when they were training but didn't go into the details. Only that she had indeed modified the technique.

So now only one question remained.

How did Kaia know the old version?

"Don't you think it's possible that I figured out whatever this old version was and made it myself?" Kaia forced a smile.

"Bullsh*t. I might've believed you if your movements weren't full of the habits that I developed when making the old version. Habits that I identified and removed for future versions." Shiera cut Kaia off with a glare.

Her figure flickered as she appeared next to Kaia, slamming her foot against Kaia's stomach as she crashed into a boulder that broke on impact.

"These habits aren't something you can just gain from the development of this technique. They're mine and mine alone to compensate for certain movements. You didn't develop this technique at all."

Wiping the blood away from the corner of her lips, Kaia glared at the Apostle. Her mind was turning as fast as it could, trying to find a way out.

"Don't bother, now that I've got a lock on you, my Vision won't miss the tiny shifts in your movement." Shiera appeared in front of Kaia, lifting her up by the collar.

Kaia tried to fight back but golden lightning pulsed through Kaia's body, paralysing her momentarily.

"One last chance before I silence you forever." Shiera warned, conjuring a spear that aimed towards Kaia's head.

If the answer wasn't satisfactory, she'll turn into a headless corpse.

Shiera would rather be sorry to Gwen than allow someone suspicious next to her!

“Three. . .” She started to count down.

Kaia glared back at Shiera. The golden flames in Shiera’s pupil burned bright as Kaia felt as though her lies would be seen through the moment she spoke them.

“Two. . .”

The spear started to rotate as energy crackled around its surface.

“One!” Clenching her fist, the spear shot towards Kaia’s head!

“OKAY I’M SORRY MASTER!!!”

*BANG!!!

The spear narrowly missed Kaia’s head, leaving behind a cut as a single scorching line could be seen behind her from the spear’s path.

“What?” Shiera blinked her eyes.

“I said I’m sorry master!” Kaia relented as tears began to form around her eyes. She gave up on resisting as she subjected herself to Shiera’s mercy.

Both Arax and Gwen froze hearing Kaia’s proclamation.

“I don’t remember taking a student like you.” Shiera frowned deeply but. . . Kaia wasn’t lying?

“Wha! How could you! You taught me in the past! You even attacked me first thing like you did before, saying something like I’m lacking a lot!” Kaia threw a tantrum, flailing her limbs around but Shiera’s grip didn’t loosen.

“Impossible.”

“I can prove it!” Kaia pouted in annoyance.

“Let me go and I’ll show you exactly what you did when we met! Hmph!”

Seeing the confidence in Kaia’s eyes, Shiera frowned and let her go.

“I’ll show you! How could you treat your disciple like this!” Kaia bit her lip as she created an ice blade.

Adjusting its shape a little, she closed her eyes and recalled the details on the blade.

Watching the ice blade slowly change its shape, Shiera felt a chill down her spine. Reaching into her personal vault, she pulled out an old broken weapon with the blade snapped in half.

But the guard. . . It’s exactly the same!

Opening her eyes, Kaia’s aura shifted. Sharper, lethal.

The border of her boundary expanded as she adjusted her posture and stance.

Imagining a shadow of herself in front of her, Kaia took aim. Her spare hand guided her blade-wielding hand as her figure flickered for a moment and appeared in front of the shadow that only she could see.

Adjusting her wrist, Kaia released a wave of slashes, shallow cuts that would expose the defences of her opponent.

After the slashes, she tripped the shadow up with a leg sweep before aiming the sword at where the throat would be.

“That’s what you did to me when we first met! And you said I was lacking a lot at this moment! How could you forget about me!?” Kaia pursed her lips tearfully.

Arax folded his arms. He was familiar with Shiera’s movements and that definitely felt like an abnormally accurate one to one copy.

Meanwhile, Shiera was silent.

‘Did I take a disciple?!?! Since when?!?! Did I forget her???’

Chapter 763: Gaslighting 101

Shiera wanted to deny it. Every fibre of her body was denying the possibility that she took on a disciple, especially one where she even taught the original Absolute Zone.

That was centuries ago!

Yet she couldn’t deny the habits that Kaia was showcasing.

Was there a gap in her memories? Why can’t she remember anything?

"Wuu~ Master forgot me~" Kaia pretended to cry as a vein bulged on Shiera’s neck.

She felt annoyed by her antics but. . . But. . . Was she REALLY her disciple???

"Tell me the lesson I taught you, I don’t believe we ever met before!" Shiera was running low on patience.

"You asked me what I wanted to learn after kicking my ass. All Guard Stance, Evasion Stance and the Zone Stance that I eventually picked." Kaia recounted as she crossed her arms.

"You mentioned that out of the three, Zone Stance was considered the hybrid since it can be used for offence and defence. After that, you expanded your boundary and showed me how you can adjust the range of it." She demonstrated by expanding her Zone.

Seeing the old habits, Shiera cringed internally.

It felt like a professional artist looking back at their drawings 10 years ago and seeing the giant gap in skill.

"I don't know if I can copy what you do but I'll try."

"Gwen, can you fire a small fireball at me?" Kaia asked as Gwen blinked her eyes and nodded her head.

Condensing her boundary to a 20 meter radius around her, Kaia focused her gaze and released her sword wielding hand.

As the fireball approached her, Kaia gritted her teeth as energy flooded her body.

She couldn't replicate the exact power of Shiera's body but the motion she can emulate to some degree!

As the fireball came into contact with the edge of the boundary, it began to disintegrate! Flickers of fire managed to get through a few small gaps but a majority was erased!

". . ." Shiera didn't say a word.

Arax glanced towards her.

"F*ck off!" Shiera gritted her teeth.

"Pft ahahaha! That was your favourite trick to use when training newbies way back when. I think she's telling the truth, you definitely taught her before." Arax laughed, patting Shiera's back with his heavy palms while Shiera massaged her forehead.

Was the passage of time affecting her so soon? She occasionally wipes the unneeded information while keeping important ones documented. But a disciple. . . One where she showed so much to was something she wouldn't forget.

Right?

But. . . That doesn't explain her lack of memories.

"I. . . I need to sit down for a bit." Shiera let out a sigh, unable to make heads or tails of the situation.

Meanwhile, Gwen let out a sigh of relief and jogged over to Kaia's side.

"You didn't tell me aunty was your master!" She whispered over.

"Do you know how suspicious it would be if I came up to you asking to see an Apostle?!?! Master didn't give me anything else other than these techniques!" Kaia whispered back.

Gwen always knew that Kaia had an objective that she didn't mention and perhaps this was that objective all along.

And as she said, had Kaia mentioned wanting to see an Apostle, her guard would've been raised immediately.

"But why doesn't aunty remember anything?"

"Hell would I know? Master only trained me for a short while, then disappeared. I wasn't even sure it was Master until she started beating my ass! I can mistake a lot of things but that ass whooping is something I can never forget!" Kaia rubbed her wounded ribs.

"Your name was. . . Kaia right?" Shiera called out as Kaia glanced over and nodded her head.

Her guard was up, afraid of another ass whooping.

"How long ago. . . Did I teach you? I don't believe I would've taught the unmodified Zone to anyone." Shiera asked with an apologetic expression.

Misunderstandings and missing memories aside for now, having Kaia use the old Zone was an undeniable fact.

Thus, at least for the moment, she'll give the girl the benefit of the doubt.

"Erm. . . it was only like a few months ago? You didn't look like what you look like now though. Maybe a bit younger?" Kaia tilted her head.

Shiera's eye twitched for a moment.

"Do you think the moon did something? Or maybe it was a leak of memory." Arax suggested as Shiera wasn't sure.

Travelling into a memory of the past wasn't anything uncommon, especially with the Inverted World gateways scattered around certain parts of the Abyss.

But that still doesn't explain why she would go out of her way to teach a youngster like her, especially if it was that long ago.

And yet. . . and yet! She can't deny what she's seeing with her own eyes.

"I'm not recognising you as my disciple. But I'll accept the fact that it seems like I've taught you at some point, even if I don't remember." Shiera sighed before walking towards Kaia.

Holding her hand over Kaia, a healing flame more potent than Gwen's enveloped Kaia as she flinched for a moment but kept herself still.

Soon, her wounds disappeared.

"So. . . Are you going to teach me Vision then?" Kaia asked curiously with Shiera's eyebrow twitching.

"Just because I recognise you as someone I might've taught in the past doesn't mean I'll teach you now. There are more important things than teaching a kid right now." Shiera scratched her hair before turning to the Abyssal Pathway that was created.

"Arax, can you put a seal on that breach for the time being? We'll need to have someone organise an evacuation for the people in the city. Unless they want to risk being destroyed by an outbreak, staying here isn't safe."

"Sure, that should be easy enough." Arax nodded before turning to his daughter. Pausing for a brief moment, he smiled. "And I think we have a bit of extra time right? It's been too long since I've spent some quality time with Gwen, this time she even has a friend with her as well." Arax grinned, patting Gwen's head.

"Dad!" Gwen felt embarrassed. With was phrasing things, it sounded like he just called her friendless in front of Kaia. But at the same time. . . it wasn't exactly far from the truth.

But that wasn't the most important thing.

Shiera was silent, she looked at Arax who was giving her a silent plea before turning to Gwen who looked at her with an expectant light in her eyes.

"I suppose with have a bit of time on our hands." Shiera relented with a helpless smile.

The balance between duty and family was one that even Apostles struggle with. Hence why she decided against starting a family. But she also can't deny that happiness Arax expresses when talking about Gwen and by extension, she felt the same.

They might not be blood-related but she treasured Gwen as her own family.

Gwen felt a beacon of hope in her heart, the joy that surged forth. She. . . She wanted to get her hopes up again.

Running towards Shiera, Gwen lunged forward and hugged her aunt with all her might.

"Thank you thank you thank you!" Gwen found herself unable to hold back her wide smile while Shiera chuckled and patted her head.

Seeing the smiling Gwen, Shiera felt her heartstrings tug and hugged her back.

"If you want to blame anyone, don't blame your dad okay? Blame Solaris for not wanting to do anything. I swear, he is one lazy god." She grumbled while Kaia choked on her saliva.

"Master, aren't you afraid of Solaris being annoyed?" Kaia's smile twitched.

"First off, don't call me that. Second of all, even if he was here, I'd say the same thing and he is fully aware of how much the two of us do for him." Shiera shrugged.

With the two of them agreeing to spend some time with Gwen, Arax quickly set up a ward around the passage, stopping the beasts from escaping while also delegating the task of ordering an evacuation to his subordinates.

On their way back, Gwen talked nonstop, sharing her stories and battles with Arax while he listened patiently.

She talked about how she learned to cook, how he should take some of her meals away with him as lunch boxes since he kept eating rations.

Even if he's an Apostle, he should still eat well.

As for Shiera, she would occasionally quiz Kaia on how they trained. The more she asked, the more undeniable it became and the more confused Shiera was.

She felt as though her world was flipped upside down.

When they arrived back at the city, the sentinels were shocked that the Apostles were visiting and felt fear coursing through their bones.

However, Arax reassured them that they were only here with Gwen and that they can carry on about their day.

But no matter what the Apostles say, the soldiers couldn't relax and Gwen brought them to her apartment.

"I'll make something quick okay? I know you're taking a lot of time out of your schedules. Kaia, can you help me?" Gwen asked as Kaia smiled and nodded her head.

Getting an apron herself, her hands moved swiftly with Gwen's instructions as she helped prepare some veg and some of the meat.

She wanted to make something impressive but simple. It couldn't be something that took too much time to make since she's working on a short timer.

So instead, she'll focus on making her dad's favourite meal that her mom made when she was still around.

Then a flicker of energy appeared in the room and Gwen's movement froze.

"This. . ." Arax look at Shiera who was hesitating as well.

"It's alright dad. People must be getting hurt if you're being called to action already." Gwen forced a smile as Arax let out a sigh.

"I'm sorry Gwen, next time okay?" Arax hugged Gwen from behind before leaving with Shiera.

Slowly, Gwen turned off the fire and sat by the table.

Kaia didn't know what to say.

"I should've expected this you know? Getting my hopes up for something that just can't happen." Gwen sighed.

She looked at the table where her dad had sat just a moment ago. She could feel the beating of her heart, the rushing of blood.

This rising anger in her chest, this blaze of fury that she can't contain. The twitching of her muscles. Everything. . .

"GOD!!! DAMMIT!!! GOD F*CKING DAMMIT!!!"

Gwen cried.

Chapter 764: Sun Church's Issues

After breaking the table, Gwen went back to her own room and locked herself in.

'Sh*t. . .' Alice furrowed her brows.

She was in. . . a conflicting mood right now. On one hand, she's happy at the fact that she managed to gaslight Shiera into thinking that she was her disciple for the time being.

Which technically wasn't wrong but wasn't correct either.

But on the other hand, she just got a glimpse at Gwen's family drama. A lazy God who gives all of his work to his subordinates, even to the point where he doesn't have time to share a meal.

'Well you have to admit that the Sentinels are partially at fault too. Arax seems like a good person and unless absolutely needed, he won't leave his daughter behind like this.

'So the fact that he has to means the danger reached a point where he has to make a move.' Alyss analysed as Cayla paused but eventually agreed with a nod of her head.

[Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you want to look at things, it seems like the current situation of the Sun Church is more dire than I thought. Most of the time, Apostles would rarely make a move unless absolutely needed.] Cayla folded her arms with a frown.

[Kazira moved because she wanted to usurp Enris. Famine is still hiding. Moon keeps Griselda and Nanna by her side and well. . . You know the situation of the Sun now. These tasks should ideally be left to Lords so. . .] Cayla paused.

'The Sun doesn't have many Lords at hand.' Alice narrowed her eyes.

[Indeed. With their Apostles being sent to deal with trouble, both of them at that, it means that there are no Lords in the arena to focus on protecting the people while the Apostles are dealing with the danger.

[So both are deployed to enjoy no casualties. They have to keep up the pretence of being the Church that focuses on protection after all.

[Of course, that's not to say they're easy pickings just because they're stretched thin. Considering the lazy nature of their God, it's also likely that he wants the two to do more so that the people think he cares about them.] Cayla shrugged.

She knew that Solaris was someone who cared about his image so by having Apostles do more work, it could show that he cares more for his people than the other Churches.

But if it was the second option then. . .

'Gwen doesn't need to suffer like this.' Alice frowned, looking at Gwen's door.

'No, she doesn't.' Alyss nodded.

While she wasn't fully aware of her family situation, Alyss still felt pity for the girl.

[I know you two are feeling sorry for her but you still have to remember that at the end of the day, she's the daughter of an Apostle. And that Apostle, even though he's overworked, is still helping Solaris.] Cayla warned.

'I know.' Alice sighed.

Looking at the mess left in the living room, Alice massaged the bridge of her nose.

Shaking her head, she began to clean things up and gathered the broken things off to the side to be thrown out later.

She look at the half cooked meal on the stove and hesitated.

Eventually, she made the choice to simply leave it be for now.

With most of the things cleaned up for now, Alice paused in front of Gwen's door.

She wasn't sure if she should knock or simply leave her be.

Dealing with family. . . Is a matter she wasn't entirely familiar with. She may call Allura her adoptive mother but so far, it's been a mostly one sided proclamation. Alice's desire in other words.

And her other experience with family was the Zenia family.

Scratching her hair, Alice let out a sigh and sat down in front of Gwen's door with her back leaning against it.

"You feeling alright? She asked after a brief pause.

"Sorry. . ." Gwen replied weakly from behind the door.

"What do you have to be sorry about? It's not your fault that things turned out that way." Alice replied honestly.

It was simply a set of unfortunate circumstances rather than Gwen's own actions.

"Do you. . . Do you think it's selfish of me to be like this? To not want my dad to go out and help." Gwen asked from behind the door.

She looked down at her hands and clenched the emblem of Solaris.

"That. . . I'm not sure. I think it's valid that you want your father to spend more time with you. Honestly. . . I'm the same. There's a woman out there. She isn't my mother but I wished she was. I wish that she can spend more time with me instead of going out.

"But I know that she's doing something important." Alice glanced down at the ground.

"You're the same huh?" Gwen muttered.

"How do you deal with it? This burning desire." She asked. Even now, she can feel this raging fire within, the anger at the people taking her dad's time away.

But within this fire, there was also a sadness knowing that this was his duty.

"Hmm. . . I try my best." Alice replied after a moment of contemplation.

"I try my best and hope that's enough. To get stronger so that I can relieve her burden. To let her see that I'm strong enough to stand on my own so she wouldn't worry. And to eventually thank her for everything she has done for me."

"Aren't you afraid your hopes will get let down? Your expectations shattered like mine just now?" Gwen sighed.

"Oh of course. I fear that every day. But that's not a reason for me to stop everything and stand still. If. . . If that day comes where my hopes are destroyed. . . Well. . . I hope that day doesn't come." Alice let out a dry chuckle. "At least for now, I don't want to look back and blame myself for not trying harder. So I try my best now and hope that's enough. And if it's not, I'll keep trying until it is."

Gwen was silent.

"Did you know that an Apostle died recently? It's got the Gods spooked." She opened her mouth.

Alice listened silently despite knowing she was the cause.

"Kazira, Apostle of War died in this very nation. Unthinkable is how I would've responded in the past. My dad is strong, strong enough where Lords can't even dream of bringing him down. But. . ." She bit her lip.

"But this has just proved that even Apostles can die. They are not the unbeatable fighters I thought they were. What if. . . What if one day, that person who died wasn't Kazira but instead my dad!

"I've already lost my mum. . . I don't want to lose my dad as well." Gwen gritted her teeth.

"And Solaris. Despite knowing that an Apostle had died, he still sent my dad here! To surround this nation so that he can catch that person! Does he not care if my dad is caught up in the fight?! Why can't the Gods do this themselves?! Why does it have to be my dad of all people!!!" She threw the emblem of Solaris against the wall.

Her eyes were burning with a blazing hatred towards the God.

"I'm scared Kaia. I'm scared that one day I'll see my dad's body in front of me. I'm scared that I'll lose my only family. I'm. . . scared that I'm not strong enough to get revenge if that happens."

". . ." Alice looked down.

Apostles. . . beings that are above the realm of Lord and the left and right hands of the divine. Beings that should be untouchable.

Had it. . . had it not been her that killed Kazira, but someone she didn't know about. . . Alice might feel the same fear.

The same worry for Kaden and Allura.

Now that an Apostle has died, a seed of doubt was planted into the mind.

Alice herself knew that killing an Apostle was no easy feat. In fact, her victory was practically a miracle. Had any of the factors gone wrong, even one, she would have been the one dead on the ground rather than Kazira.

And once again, she is reminded that she is a manufactured anomaly. A byproduct and creation of Nyer.

Hell, even just looking at the Hybrids created by the Zenia family gave her a sense of worry. What happens if they create a Lord level Hybrid? What happens if they find a way to surpass that?

What if she were in Gwen's position and danger was slowly creeping towards Allura and Kaden?

She would feel just as worried.

However. . .

"Even if you're scared, I still think the best way to combat that is to try your best. And if your best isn't possible, just an effort would be fine as well. If a step can't be taken, try a little nudge. Anything is better than nothing. And. . .

"If you keep looking down, you wouldn't even know if you've just walked past something important." Alice chuckled.

It's why she has to keep moving forward. To a better future, a future where Allura isn't plagued by her wounds anymore.

Hearing these words, Gwen couldn't help but let out a soft laugh.

"Aren't you optimistic? I thought you were supposed to be the broody type."

"Hah?! Isn't that a bit rude? I may have gone through a lot of crap but that doesn't mean I'm the brooding type." Alice pursed her lips in annoyance while Gwen simply laughed.

"But you're right. . . Dad's already trying his best. I should work harder so he isn't dragged away because people can't protect themselves." Gwen stood up and wiped away the tears. The corners of her eyes were red and sore but there was a burning passion in her pupils. A renewed will.

"And to do that, I have to reach Lordship. I'm thinking of hunting something for my Seventh Sigil, can I rely on your help?"

"Who do you think I am? I'm still here, aren't I?" Alice smirked.

"Aren't you here because you still need to learn Vision from me or Aunty?"

*COUGH!!!

Choking on her saliva, Alice fell backwards as Gwen opened the door.

"Perv~ Looking up at a lady from below." Gwen teased as Alice rolled her eyes.

"How do you go from being depressed to joking around with a snap of the finger?"

"Fufu~ That's just how I am." Gwen grinned.

She's truly happy that Kaia was here.

Chapter 765: Leaving Yuhai Port

"Since you're looking for a Seventh Sigil to reach Lordship, do you already have a target in mind? A bounty you took before?" Kaia asked, helping Gwen tidy up the rest of the room.

"Not exactly. Since you're not part of the churches, you might not know but a lot of the time, for important members, we can get a . . . sponsorship of sorts from our Gods. They provide a bounty for a beast we want to Hunt along with additional rewards." Gwen explained.

"As much as I dislike Solaris for taking my time away from my dad, I can't deny that having him sponsor is so much easier than simply going through the standard communion or a shaman. There are too many uncertainties involved in that after all."

With her having direct access to her own bounties, Kaia had almost forgotten how difficult it was for a normal person to get the right Sigils.

Perhaps that's why the churches were also popular since they have access to sponsorships if they perform well.

"So does that require you to meet him? Or does he just hand them out?"

"Solaris is a lazy God, do you really think he's willing to meet people for this? He has a system in place that lets him just hand you a sponsor so long as you meet the required contribution levels." Gwen mocked while Kaia couldn't help but laugh.

If both the Apostles and even the Cardinal was mocking the God in this manner, then it simply proves how lazy Solaris truly is.

"Anyways, we should probably take the next ship out of this place. Sentinels are dealing with the gateway as well as the evacuations. There's nothing else we can really do here." Gwen suggested as Kaia's ears perked up.

"Are we going to a Sun Church branch?"

"Yeah, I need to pick up a few things as well before going off to claim my bounty. Unfortunately, one of the Artifacts I was meant to attune to was stolen a while back. It wasn't just me either, a few of our artifacts got stolen and same with the Moon Church.

"Something about a robed thief leaving behind black feathers. Sadly they haven't managed to track down the lost gear so I'll need a replacement."

Hearing this, Kaia almost tripped over hearing the mention of theft and black feathers.

'Kaden?' She asked in her mind.

[Kaden.] Cayla nodded in confirmation.

'Sigh. . . Kaden.'

"Though I suppose it's kind of a silver lining since with my reward being stolen, Solaris promised me something better as replacement." Gwen smiled.

"Must've been something good if it got you smiling like this."

"A fragment of the 'Sun'. That's what he promised me. Rather than a weapon or armour, think of it more as an overall enhancement. My flames will undergo a slight change with increased divinity thanks to the fragment." Gwen explained, leaving her apartment with Kaia.

"However, because he's a lazy prick, it's taken months and it still wasn't ready. This time I'm not leaving without it since I'll be hunting down a Lord level beast after all." Gwen cracked her knuckles.

Kaia let out a small chuckle. The more she heard about Solaris, the more unreliable it seemed.

In fact, having him take the seat of God felt like a rather big waste.

If anything. . .

'Is it possible to replace a God through forceful methods?' She asked.

[Define forceful.]

'Like killing them and taking over their role and their divinity. Or does it have to be passed down like how Velouria did with hers?'

Hearing this, Cayla folded her arms in contemplation.

[It's definitely possible. Think of it this way, Velouria's . . . successor selection could be boiled down to collecting the Abyssal artifacts. By doing so and receiving their acknowledgement, you become the successor of her divinity.

[As for the other successor selection process, I have no idea. After all, the only one to have died was Velouria so I doubt the others are even thinking of doing something like this.] Cayla shook her head.

[Even if they didn't make a move to kill her, Velouria's time was running out so she made a lot of preparations. You also need to remember that she's the only one that ascended, the others were born into divinity.]

Letting out a sigh, Kaia nodded her head.

Indeed, the other gods probably don't think about dying with the exception of Enris.

She's someone who will die for enjoyment rather than spend an eternity in monotony.

Making their way down to the docks, Kaia could see the civilians scrambling to gather their belongings while Sentinels were trying their best to keep everything under control.

The gang leaders were not happy but with Gwen being here, they can't fight back even if they wanted to.

Plus, if not for her, the gateway would be directly inside the city rather than being away from the city.

While Gwen was organising things with the ships exiting the city, Kaia noticed a pair of eyes staring at her.

Cold, powerful and downright creepy.

A stare that felt familiar which sent chills down her spine.

She wanted to ignore it but it was always there in the corner of her perception.

"Gwen." Kaia called out.

"Hm? What's up?"

"I need to step aside for a moment, something's been bugging me." Kaia frowned, looking around and trying to find the source of this stare.

"Do you need my help?"

"Nah it's fine. It shouldn't be anything major. I'll be back in a few mins okay?" Kaia reassured as Gwen nodded.

Stepping aside, Kaia began to speed up as she rushed towards the source of this stare.

Noticing that she was on the move, the source also began to run through the alleys.

Yet despite this, they still kept their eyes on Kaia.

'Are they luring me?' She frowned, gathering an orb of blood between her fingers.

She may be disguised right now but if someone recognised her somehow, she had to deal with it otherwise her plans may fall through!

Taking a deep breath, Kaia crouched down close to the ground.

Energy flooded her body as she expanded the boundaries of her Zone!

Void Step!

Lunging forward, her figure disappeared for a split moment as she crossed the gap to find the source.

Yet to her shock, the moment she closed the distance, the gaze disappeared!

In fact, all that was left in the spot was a single note.

Stopping her pursuit, Kaia frowned deeply and picked up the note.

[Iya~ I'm saddened my dear. Cheating on me with another girl? I thought you would place your focus on me. I'm still waiting for my fight you know? Are you working hard to reach the rank of Lord?

[I hope you don't make me wait that long okay? So I hope your infiltration into the Sun Church proves fruitful my dear.

[Ps: Be careful of Solaris. He will see through your disguise rather easily.

[Love: Astrelya.]

Kaia furrowed her brows.

'So it was Astrelya.' She sighed inwardly, burning the note away.

After she went to stop the Lords, Kaia didn't see her around so she ignored her for now. But now that she's made herself known again, it was clear that she hasn't given up on her desire to fight Kaia yet.

To die in a clash of wills, to burn everything she has for the sake of battle.

[How did she even see through your disguise? Not even the Apostles noticed that something was up.] Cayla was worried.

While she was in the library, Cayla took the time to search for information on Astrelya. But it was largely empty with only dates of her first sighting and her desire for battle.

Prior to that, there was not a single speck of information that could be gathered.

It was too suspicious, especially for someone with her strength. If she was this powerful as a Lord, she should've been relatively well known before Lordship.

'I'm. . . not sure. But she clearly wasn't happy.' Kaia shook her head, looking around to see if there were any additional traces but it's as though she disappeared into thin air.

However, she was grateful at the fact the Lord didn't expose her identity.

'She even took the time to warn you about Solaris as well.' Alyss added.

[To be fair, even without her warning, I would've told Alice to stay away from him. But. . .] Cayla frowned.

'She's suspicious as f*ck.'

[Indeed.]

Unable to find more traces of Astrelya, she sighed and made her way back to the docks to find Gwen.

"Was everything okay?" Gwen asked curiously. She noticed a slight burst in energy but it didn't last long. She figured it was probably Kaia.

"Yea, just a little trouble but turns out it was nothing." Kaia sighed, scratching her hair.

"Do you want me to check it out? I might be able to find something with my Vision."

"Nah it's fine, anyways, is the ship ready? I haven't seen a Sun church branch before so I'm expecting a giant palace of white and gold considering the uniform." Kaia shrugged with a smile.

"Well you're not far off. But even if you expect it, it's pretty impressive to see it with your own eyes." Gwen laughed.

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Watching Kaia walk away with Gwen, Astrelya sat on the wall while kicking her legs back and forth.

She wasn't smiling at all.

In fact, she only felt a tinge of annoyance in her heart.

Jealousy even.

Was it because Alice needed something from this girl? That she put so much attention on her?

If she were to offer something of value as well, would Alice focus on getting stronger?

Tapping her finger against the wall, she let out a deep sigh.

At least she had a second candidate she could watch for now. But if she was disappointing as well. . .

Letting out a sigh, Astrelya laid on her back and looked up at the sky.

Chapter 766: Sun Church Hierarchy

Kaia stared out to the sea. The rushing waves, the sea life that swam through the waters.

She felt the wind that carried the salty breeze of the ocean and the heat reflected from the surface of the waves.

She leaned against the ship's railing, elbows resting on the wooden frame.

Leaving Yuhai port wasn't difficult. Especially now that she was Gwen's friend. As a Cardinal's guest, it would be crazy for the Sentinels to question her identity.

Especially for someone who's the friend of Guinevere, the daughter of Arax.

Of course, this leisure came with its own risk as the moment her identity was found out. . .

Letting out a dry chuckle, Kaia sighed.

It was. . . a little strength but she felt a pang of guilt whenever she thought about revealing her identity. The moment they inevitably part ways.

There was always a part of her that worried for the girl. Someone who put up a brave front despite being ever so lonely.

Someone starved for familial love.

If she. . . Had she not found friends like Lilia, Ria, Luke, Selen, Egil and so on, perhaps she'll be the same.

She knew how lucky she had been, finding people with whom she could share her thoughts with.

Making friends when starting at the bottom was a lot easier than when you have an identity attached to you.

Rather than seeing Gwen as Gwen, they see the shadow of Arax. A fear of the Apostle.

Thus people who approach her often times were forced to do so rather than of their own volition.

If anything, they'd rather avoid her like a plague than interact, no matter how amiable she may seem.

Purely off of the fact that she's the daughter of an Apostle.

One mistake and bam, you could be dead.

This kind of pressure, this kind of risk, was not something normal people are willing to take.

To be friends, they'll need to be comfortable to be in each other's presence.

If they aren't, there will always be this air of awkwardness.

Kaia was sure that Gwen would notice this whenever she talked to someone.

Regardless, these are the cards they've been dealt in life and they have to find ways to live with that.

On the other hand, while they were travelling, she managed to learn quite a bit about the Sun Church.

With Solaris being as lazy as he is, he doesn't actually have much of a hand in what happens.

To sum up his role, he's simply there as a figurehead. He has a schedule of making an appearance every week or so while his subordinates organise a sermon in his honour. He's simply there to observe and act the part.

Of course, this was information that only the high ups and Cardinals know, as they're all aware of how lazy Solaris is.

But saving that to his face was another matter. The only ones that can lecture him are the Apostles.

If a Cardinal were to say it. . . Well, there will be one less Cardinal in the church.

The only exception is Gwen due to her dad.

With Solaris taking the highest role in the church, the next highest would be the Apostles followed by the Lords under his command.

Solaris never specifies how many Lords they have in the church, only that if things go out of hand, a Lord would be sent out to resolve the issue.

However. . .

To make it seem like he cares more, he has the Apostles dealing with this most of the time while the Lords are responsible for other matters.

Though Gwen theorises that there are probably around nine or so Lords within the church.

Then beneath the Lords are actually two 'factions' in a sense.

The first was the Cardinals. People who have the potential to become a Lord and the executor of Solaris' command.

Then the other half was the Council. Politicians who organise what goes on in the church. They are largely responsible for diplomacy where strength would only give the church a bad image.

Or in Gwen's own words.

"They're pretty much just rat b*stards mixing up words to get what they want while acting like they're doing it for you."

Gwen disliked interacting with them so she rarely stays in the branches and it wasn't one sided either.

The Council puts a heavy emphasis on rules and regulations. How one should follow the rules that are set so that society could function.

And with Gwen being the daughter of an Apostle and someone who could get away with a lot of things, they hated her very existence.

[Not much has changed. Though the Council used to be called something else in the past and Solaris has gotten lazier than before.] Cayla summarised.

[During the period of Ayr, the Council was called Dawnsword and they were actually not half bad, implementing regulations in a time of chaos. Making sure that the average civilian could live without fear.

[Then it was disbanded since a lot of their members were hunted down by. . . Well.] Cayla scratched her cheek.

[There was a period of blood bath where Kaden went to each of their branches, disrupting the entire flow of operations. Apostles tried to catch him but Kaden was slippery.

[Naturally, it wasn't limited to the Sun church either as Kaden hunted all three down without discrimination.

[Then came the second iteration, the Solstice. They were more ambitious, acting as though they wanted to help when in reality, they wanted to usurp the powers of the Apostles and Cardinals.] Cayla explained.

The Solstice behaved themselves at first. But as Solaris became lazier, they started to act bolder. And at a certain point, they crossed the line and the Apostles dealt with them, thus creating the current iteration which is simply called the Council.

Rather than dipping their hands into the . . . super human side of things, the Council focuses on the people.

People with blessings and Sigils should be dealt with by the same kind while human diplomacy should be dealt with by the weak.

They have their own guards but the two sides, Council and Cardinals, largely leave each other be unless needed.

But that doesn't stop them from throwing insults at one another.

To Cardinals, the Council are a bunch of powerless parasites who do nothing but work things from the shadows. The only reason why they live is because Solaris has given them mercy.

To the Council, the Cardinals are a bunch of egotistical psychopaths who use their powers to subject others to their tyranny.

'What a pain. . .' Kaia sighed inwardly.

With Gwen needing to go to a branch for her sponsor as well as her artifact, there's no doubt that she'll probably be dragged into an argument with the Council.

She was simply a bystander.

'Honestly, they might take this chance to use you as a way to get back at the Cardinals you know?' Alyss smiled.

She felt a little bored recently since there wasn't much fighting to be done. And what little that could be done had to be done as 'Kaia'.

'Probably.' Alice nodded in agreement.

"Don't you just look miserable, sea sick?" Gwen called out from behind as Alice glanced back.

She had brought over a drink since she was worried that Kaia might be thirsty.

"Just thinking about what I might have to deal with later." Kaia shrugged, accepting the drink as the two leaned against the railing.

"Oh don't tell me you're a little scared of the parasites? They're all bark and no bite. Honestly, I wouldn't care if all of them just stuck to diplomacy but I swear, the amount of times I have to hear them yap about responsibility and duty makes me go crazy." Gwen laughed, complaining about them with a mocking gesture.

"Like, I know I'm dad's daughter, they don't need to remind me. It's not like I asked for this Cardinal role either. But oh no, if the daughter of the Apostle isn't a Cardinal, it looks bad for the church.

"Make up your damn mind! Right? Do you want me to be a Cardinal or not? If you do, stop b*tching about what I do." Gwen grumbled, causing Kaia to laugh.

"If I so much as breathe in front of them, they'll probably complain it's wrong as well."

"Oh I'm sure it's not that bad." Kaia waved her hand but Gwen shook her head.

"It IS that bad. Lemme tell you, one time I was simply walking with my hands behind my head. I was feelin' a little relaxed. The sun was nice, cool winds and I was in my own zone.

“Next thing I know, I have two old men with one foot in the grave lecturing me about maintaining the dignity of the Cardinals and my dad’s reputation. How I shouldn’t be walking around so ‘loosely’ and instead, should be standing straight and looking serious. Blerg.” Gwen stuck out her tongue in disgust.

“That does seem a little over the top.” Kaia admitted.

If someone was to tell her to stop drinking in order to maintain Allura’s reputation then. . . Well. She’s sure that Allura wouldn’t mind her drinking as long as she ‘looks’ like she’s keeping it under control.

“But it’s fine. Most of them are on the mainland anyway, we’re going to an island branch. At most, there will be like one or two Council lackies but nothing you can’t deal with. After all, you don’t find an issue mocking a Cardinal right?” Gwen grinned, finishing her drink and grabbing Kaia from behind.

“Hey! Ah! I haven’t finished my drink yet! MY DRINK!!!”

Time passed quickly with Gwen messing around with Kaia every chance she got and soon, they arrived at the Sun Church branch located on an island.

Chapter 767: Elinor

The island itself wasn’t large by any means but it loomed over the sea level. Jagged cliffs and arches forming a gateway of sorts.

Even from the distance, Kaia could see a zig zagging stairway leading towards the top of the island that couldn’t be seen while standing on the ship. Foliage flanked either side of the stairs with statues of Solaris holding up the sun carved into the cliff face.

An act to make all those that approach know that this island belonged to the Sun Church.

As the ship neared the island, the water became strangely calm. A narrow stone dock extended from the base of the island allowed them to dock without issue and awaiting them were a group of Sentinels and priests wearing the uniform of the Sun Church.

However, there was one prominent figure amongst the group that Kaia couldn’t help but frown at.

Someone possessing six Sigils with an aura far greater than the people around him.

Tall, slender and his movements were slow. There was an air of . . . refinement with him, the 'ideal' Cardinal presentation that Council tried to lecture Gwen about.

He has short white hair that was swept loosely to the side. A pair of grey eyes and a 'harmless' smile on his face.

He wore a pair of golden Sun church icons as ear rings while the same motif could be seen decorated across his robes. Pure white and adorned with golden accessories.

Beneath the robe, he wore a black collared shirt with golden tassels.

"I hope your journey has been smooth." He greeted as his gloved hands moved for a potential hug but one stare from Gwen dissuaded him from continuing.

"It's the same as every other journey really. Unless you wanted something to happen?" Gwen asked with a raised eyebrow while the man let out a small chuckle.

"Of course not. I would not want anything to happen to a fellow Cardinal. I simply wish that all is well and I am gladdened to hear that it is indeed the case." He shook his head.

"Is this the. . . Pardon my words, the stray cat you picked up?" He asked, looking towards Kaia while Gwen stood between them.

"The nickname stray cat isn't something you can just call her, Elio." Gwen warned.

She disliked Elio considering he's someone that interacts with the Council a bunch. While she wouldn't go as far as to call him a rat or snitch, there's been times in the past where he's done things to benefit the Council at the expense of the Cardinals.

"Ah then it's my mistake Lady Guinevere. Then would you be so kind as to tell me our guest's name? I'd rather not offend you by calling her a Stray Cat again after all." Elinor took a step back after seeing how defensive Gwen was.

"Just Kaia would be fine." Kaia shrugged. She didn't really care what he called her since they'll only be on the island for a short period of time.

"I see. My apologies for the conduct miss Kaia. Now, if you will, may the two of you follow me. We have already been informed of why you have come to this island." Elinor turned around, gesturing for Gwen to follow him as the three of them made their way up the stairway.

"You already heard? So is that why you're here? To see what sponsor I'll get?" Gwen furrowed her brows.

"Is that so strange Lady Guinevere? To see what choice a fellow Cardinal would make as they take their first steps towards Lordship?" Elinor returned the question without turning around.

"Yes. It's real strange when it comes to someone like you. I'm sure you can make your report towards the Council even without being here in person. So why are you really here Elinor?" Gwen frowned.

"I'm saddened by your harsh accusations. But no, I am here for a different reason this time Lady Guinevere. Just like how you are obtaining a sponsorship to reach Lordship, I too am here for a similar reason." Elinor smiled cryptically.

"Similar? Are you going for Lordship too? Are you sure the Council are okay with their pet going beyond their control?" Gwen raised an eyebrow.

"Unfortunately, I am not as blessed as you are. The Abyss has denied my pathway into Lordship. I cannot receive a bounty." Elinor chuckled with a shake of his head.

"Then what are you even here for?" Gwen frowned.

"Curious are we? In normal situations I would've declined to answer Lady Guinevere. But considering we are allies in the grand scheme of things, there is no problem. You see, due to the . . . on going issue of power being granted by only those blessed by the Abyss, even with our Lord Solaris' blessings, the Council has been researching alternative measures." Erior explained with a smile.

"I'm sure you are familiar with the stories regarding a certain girl in the ease. A genius inventor that's been abandoned by the Abyss. She cannot gain Sigils no matter how she tries yet she has been able to augment herself through a mix of technology and Abyss Blood.

"The Council decided to . . . investigate such pathways to power. While the mortal flesh may be weakened without the boon of Sigils, it can be supplemented to a certain extent using the right combination of Abyss Blood. To ensure that we can survive a battle against powerful enemies.

"But power is not so easily obtained. Think of my presence here as. . . an experiment. To see if such pathways are possible."

Hearing all of this, Kaia frowned.

"Power usually come at a price. You've already sold a portion of your soul to the Abyss when you agreed on the contract it gives via bounty. What kind of power are you paying to reach the rank of Lord?" Kaia asked.

At that moment, Erior paused momentarily and shot her a dirty glare. As though it was preposterous for someone who's not a Cardinal to speak so casually with him.

However, a warning glare from Gwen made him stop as he shrugged.

"I'm not privy to such details. But I in our world, power is the foundation of all transactions. Without power, you do not deserve to sit at the negotiating table. With power, you hold the key to standing your ground.

"Without power. . . well. You will only be a subject of scrutiny and tyranny. I'm sure someone with a background such as yourself are well aware of such situations of one without power, am I correct miss Kaia?" He asked.

"Oi, just because you're not saying it directly doesn't mean I appreciate you acting this way Elinor. This is the final warning." Gwen glared, holding her spear against his neck.

"Taking the side of an outsider instead of a fellow Cardinal. Am I to assume this is treachery? Lady Guinevere?" Elinor lost his smile.

Golden chains were wrapped around the spear and Gwen's neck, preventing her from finishing her attack.

"Don't worry about it Gwen. But yes, you're right. Power lets you sit at the negotiation table. But if you only look at power and where you sit, you might not realise the price you pay for sitting on that table." Kaia tapped Gwen's shoulder and stopped next to Elinor.

"Who's to say the chef hasn't poisoned your food while you were so fascinated with power and position?"

Elinor's eye twitched for a moment as he stared at Kaia.

After a brief pause, he regained his smile.

"That's only if you don't have enough power. I'm not sure if a scavenger like yourself have ever heard of the Lord of Poisons, but even someone at the pinnacle of Poison craft can be shut down with cures and powerful rituals of purification.

"And that, is the demonstration of power. With enough power, you simply spit the poison out and kill the chef responsible for such an act?" Elinor continued ahead as Kaia shrugged.

While his words hold some merit, those with power are often times tricked the moment they let down their guard.

What's to say that the goal of the chef was to poison the negotiator? What if they simply wanted them to step away from the table for a moment?

Perhaps when the negotiator returns, a deal has already been finalised with another client.

But that's something she didn't need to say out loud. All she's worried about right now was this. . . alternative path to power they speak of.

With how the world has been shifting under Nyer's influence along with the Outer Gods, this proclamation was now ringing warning bells in her mind.

And if it's true. . .

The Sun Church will become her enemy. Even if. . . Even if Gwen's dad is part of the Apostles.

There may come a time where she will become responsible for Gwen receiving news of her dad's death.

Kaia clenched her fist.

Even though this. . . infiltration was so that she could achieve her own goals, having come to know Gwen, the seed of guilt was growing faster than expected.

She had thought that she would be able to detach herself from these emotions

But clearly, that was not the case.

[If you're feeling like this, it's best to learn what you can then leave. The longer this takes, the harder it'll become. And the more it'll hurt when she comes to know the truth.] Cayla warned.

'I. . . I know.' Alice let out a sigh inwardly.

She can only hope that they part ways on good terms rather than become enemies. And. . . if she does become enemies with Arax, she hopes that it does not become a fight to the death.

Chapter 768: Seeking An Audience

As they finally reached the top of the island, the Sun Church branch finally came into view.

A sanctum that stood tall and amidst the foliage, carved into the very island that it stood upon. White stones shimmered under the midday sun, Every curve, every reflection, seemingly arched to light up the giant statue of Solaris that stood at the very centre.

As though light itself was gracing his presence.

Shielding her eyes from the Sun, Kaia could see three main buildings with one of which was radiating an intense amount of Divinity.

Coincidentally, it was also the building that had Solaris' statue in front of it.

"Do you want to come along while I get my sponsor or do you want to walk around for a bit?" Gwen asked with a smile after seeing Kaia looking around at the architecture.

"Hmm, I'll just walk around for a bit. Are there like any off limit places I shouldn't go to?"

If she could get a heads up about these places, she could make sure to steer clear away from them. . . And use her blood to get a grasp of the layout instead.

"Not that I can think of. Most of it are just rooms for priests to do their thing." Gwen shrugged.

As someone who's seen countless branches, she knew that there wasn't much going on. Just rooms upon rooms, people praying and some Sentinels training if they're free.

"Alright. Good luck with your Sponsor and do tell me what we're going to go kill alright? I don't want to go unprepared." Kaia chuckled, giving the two a wave before walking towards the nearest building.

"Your friend is certainly carefree." Elinor raised an eyebrow.

"That's one way to put it. She's someone who speaks her mind even when the person she's talking to is the daughter of an Apostle." Gwen chuckled, making her way towards the main building.

"And one word of advice. From one Cardinal to another, Kaia's words aren't wrong. Power always comes at a price, I hope whatever you're pursuing is worth that price. And I hope I don't have to turn my blade towards a fellow Cardinal, no matter how much I dislike you." Gwen warned without turning around.

"I'm well aware of that Lady Guinevere. I too hope that we can continue to stand on the same side." Elinor smiled.

Seeing him dismiss her warning, Gwen simply clicked her tongue and made her way towards the main building.

Meeting Solaris for a sponsor requires. . . certain requirements to be met. Even for her, she was not an exception to these requirements.

Four requirements, four steps.

Each must be followed before Solaris could be met.

Biting her lip, Gwen took a deep breath and sighed.

With her current. . . beliefs in Solaris, she wasn't sure if she could fulfil the third and fourth requirement. Her spirit was wavering after all.

Especially with more and more of her dad's time being robbed from him with Solaris not willing to make a move and instead, wanting to keep up appearances.

As she approached the statue of Solaris, a fire of hatred began to manifest in Gwen's eyes.

She. . . Wanted to trust the order that her dad has dedicated so much of his life to.

The order where he wasn't even there when her mother died.

The order where he would not even spend a full day with his daughter.

She wanted to trust the order that promised protection.

She wanted to believe in the Sun that granted a warm embrace, protecting the weak from the evils of this world. A sanctuary in which they could seek refuge and safety.

The Eclipse waged war, the Moon promised false futures of immortality through the abandonment of your mortal shell.

But the Sun. . .

The Sun has always promised protection and preservation.

To withstand the storm of calamity, to defend the people.

Gwen could still remember her dreams when she was younger.

Oh her naïve dreams.

Before she knew of the corruption of this order. The true nature of Solaris.

She wanted to bask in that dream a little longer.

She so desperately wanted to believe, believe that everything was done for a reason.

Making her way to the side, Gwen entered a bathhouse nestled within the island.

Once again, the statue of Solaris was present in the centre of the baths.

The golden baths shimmered like liquid dawn, golden, radiant and ever so beautiful. The statues of Solaris held a pot that poured celestial gold into the baths, granting it a radiant glow along with infusing divinity into the water.

Surrounding the baths were columns etched with the Sun Church's script, runes that spoke of the requirements needed.

Gwen received a set of ritualistic bathing attire and got changed.

"Thy soul must be cleansed. Let the weight of shadow be washed away in the waters of absolution." She muttered, stepping into the golden water.

A searing pain filled her body but she ignored it.

Continuing into the baths, Gwen submerged her entire body minus the head and closed her eyes.

She could feel the fires of Solaris infusing into her flesh.

Every lie she spoke, every act of rage, every memory that she buried inside her mind felt as though it was attacking her at this moment.

Her muscles tensed and she choked on her own breath, finding it hard to breathe.

But little by little, her body began to relax. Her own fire started to grow from within, a purifying flame. A flame of defiance, a fire that represented her will power.

Then the pain completely disappeared and Gwen felt her body relax in this golden bath of divinity.

With the pain disappeared, Gwen stood up and stepped out of the bath, getting changed into her previous uniform.

Then came the next requirement.

A walk through the fires of purification.

The chamber was located just behind the baths.

A flaming chamber with the script of the sun church etched onto the entrance.

"Thy flesh must be pure. Let no corruption cling to the vessel that enters the light."

This was by far the easiest requirement for Gwen. After all, she has kept her body clean with the purifying flames and even using it during her purification against the sinful.

Walking through the chamber, the flames didn't hurt her at all. In fact, it even felt warm and gentle.

After the chamber, Gwen had to step towards an altar. A sacred pyre that burns with no smoke.

"Thy will must be revealed. Speak thy purpose before the flame and let it judge the truth within." Gwen spoke the script and kneeled in front of the fire.

This was the step that worried her.

The reason for her being here was for the sponsorship.

But this fire didn't care for the current purpose. No, it judged the truth within the one trying to seek an audience with Solaris.

It responds not to words, not to empty promises but the unfiltered truth. If her mind was filled with lies, ambition and. . . false piety, the trial would have failed.

Closing her eyes, Gwen relaxed her body.

*CRACKLE!!!

The fire flickered and grew, looming over Gwen.

The heat that seared against her skin caused her to flinch.

Her purpose. . . Was to receive the sponsorship of Solaris. Her desire was to ease the burden of her father.

And her piety. . . it faltered but it was not false.

Gwen's eyes snapped open as her pupils constricted. She could feel a fire clenching her heart and she buckled over.

She held her chest in pain as sweat dripped down her face. But after a moment, it disappeared but she received no comfort.

She passed, albeit barely.

Pulling herself up slowly, she stumbled towards the fourth trial.

The final requirement. . .

She stood before a mirror located at the top of the altar. The highest point in the main building with sunlight filtering through and illuminating the top.

A worried nun stood by the mirror. In her hands, she held a tray with a single flaming orb.

"Thy spirit must burn with light. Let thine inner flame answer to his or be cast into shadow."

Reaching towards the orb, Gwen's finger flinched for a moment but she resolved herself.

"You can step back now." She smiled towards the nun who bowed and stepped away from the altar.

Holding the flaming orb, Gwen closed her eyes and opened her mouth.

Placing the orb into her mouth, Gwen swallowed without hesitation.

Then she burst into flames.

Gritting her teeth, she collapsed onto her knees as fire began to sear her flesh.

Across her body, the icons of Solaris and ritualistic patterns appeared on her body. Glowing marks that shimmered with the power of divinity.

It was not a matter of endurance, it was not a matter of power. It was a matter of proving oneself to be one of his many retainers.

Only then, would she be worthy to stand in his presence.

The markings burned, it seared and pain filled Gwen's mind.

She collapsed in front of the mirror, her vision blurring. She felt as though she'll lose herself. . . Lose herself in the fire.

*Sigh. . .

"Guinevere o Guinevere. I knew you were rebellious but this. . . This is new even for you. Arax would be sad if he heard that his daughter died while trying to prove her piety." A voice rang out as Gwen glanced up at the mirror.

A flaming figure slowly stepped out from the mirror as white fabric wrapped around his body, leaving the right side of his chest exposed with his arm.

Solaris, God of the Sun.

"Whatever am I to do with you."

Chapter 769: Conditional Sponsor

"Whatever am I to do with you. . ." Solaris looked at Gwen who, despite almost being unconscious, glared at him with a burning anger in her eyes.

He knew of her dislike towards him but that wasn't always the case.

It was only after her mother passed and her father became busy did she begin harbouring this hatred. This hatred that caused her piety to waver and it's only gotten worse recently.

"But on account of Arax, I'll make an exception for you. Just once since you never failed these trials in the past." Solaris snapped his finger.

A green flame enveloped Gwen's body as she was healed in an instant.

Walking past the mirror, Solaris made himself comfortable on his throne and postured himself lazily, resting his head on his hand.

"Now then, Guinevere, for what reason have you sought an audience with me? Even though you risk yourself due to your wavering faith." Solaris stared at Arax's daughter.

He was beginning to grow tired of this song and dance between him and her.

Gwen hated him for making her father work and yet, is that not expected of an Apostle?

Why else would a God even think about splitting off a portion of their authority for a right hand if he were not to make use of it?

And it's not like he was forcing Arax either. As the Apostle of Protection, he takes pride in protecting the masses.

Thus, all Solaris has done was point Arax in the direction where he can be of use. And if he begins to slack on his duty well. . . Solaris didn't mind giving the authority to someone else if someone more capable came along.

But Arax has been too handy. A faithful tool that's continued to prove its worth throughout the ages.

He had hoped his daughter would prove to be a fantastic tool in the making. But. . . This defiance towards the divine. . .

Solaris narrowed his gaze for a moment.

'Should I take care of her?'

The thought flashed through his mind for a brief moment but he shut it down.

Arax was too useful right now. Getting rid of his daughter would simply be shooting himself in the foot. Plus, Arax has given him zero reason to dismiss him. Forcing an. . . early retirement was not necessary.

Therefore, he will give Gwen this exception in hopes that she changes her standing.

"I seek a bounty. A power that will allow me to alleviate my father's burden. I wish to tread upon the path of Lordship." Gwen spoke slowly looking down at the floor and avoiding eye contact with Solaris.

If she continued to stare at him, she fears that her anger may become too obvious and annoy him instead.

She already knows that he's pardoning her on behalf of her dad.

"Oh? I've already done you a favour in forgiving your attitude. But you wish. . . To gain a sponsorship from me? In your current state?" Solaris raised an eyebrow.

It wasn't quite amusement but rather the disbelief that Gwen would have this kind of audacity.

Sponsorships for a God are akin to treasures. Treasures that they 'should' bestow to their most loyal subjects. A reward of sorts where it is not subjected to the randomness of compatibility or luck.

However, it's not as though sponsorships are easy to obtain either.

Specific beasts with specific requirements had to be met. And once they are eligible to become a 'sponsor' bounty, the three Gods will have to fight over who gets it.

Each sponsor is acquired with a great deal of difficulty.

And if the subject who received a sponsor from a god was to change sides, that's essentially wasted effort.

With Gwen's faith wavering, Solaris understood that the chance of her betraying the Church was high. And giving her a sponsor on top of that would be akin to shooting himself in the foot.

But, at the same time, her father's devotion was not to be underestimated.

Arax had already requested for Gwen to receive a sponsor in the past and Solaris had put it off, saying that they should wait for the moment it's important.

One person one sponsor.

That's the unspoken rule.

If he was to invest too much into one subject, the potential losses were too great for him to accept.

In the past, he sponsored one of his disciples with three bounties yet they swapped sides and died.

An absolute waste of resources.

"I just don't want you to keep overworking my father. If I become a Lord, a powerful one at that, I can make his life easier."

Solaris was silent.

Indeed, while her faith towards him have been faltering these last few years, her piety towards her father has remained all the same. No matter how little time he has, no matter when he has to leave, she has always believed in him.

Believed in Arax who took his job as the Apostle seriously even at the expense of his family.

Then, a smile began to appear on his face.

Gwen is someone very capable if she puts her mind to it. But due to her faith, she's been rather lazy when it comes to performing the tasks needed for a cardinal.

Thus, he had another thought in mind.

"Alright, I'll give you a sponsorship." He chuckled as Gwen looked up in surprise.

She was half expecting him to reject this notion and yet. . . he agreed?

"However, it's on a condition. I'm sure you're aware of the person I'm trying to hunt down yes? A Hunter capable of killing Kazira, the Apostle of War." Solaris smiled.

Then, Gwen frowned.

"Seems like an understanding can be achieved between us after all little Guinevere." Solaris nodded.

"I want you to hunt her down, bring her head to me. Of course, if that's not possible, finding her location is good enough as it is. If you find the culprit, crush this orb and I will descend. It seems like this rat has been rather careful due to the presence of your father and Shiera." Solaris created a golden orb and tossed it towards Gwen.

"I'm sure something like this is possible for you right?" Solaris narrowed his gaze as Gwen paused and nodded her head.

That was her intention to begin with, to eliminate the threat towards her father.

And if doing this can give her the sponsorship she needs, then it was killing two birds with one stone.

"Then I will bestow upon you a selection of bounties for you to choose one from. And once you do, know that the conditions are set. Of course, if you never meet the culprit, then nothing can be done about it. But. . ." Solaris trailed off.

"On the off chance that you fail despite finding the culprit, well I don't need to say much else. I sincerely hope our relationship does not sour to that extent or else your father will be both saddened and disappointed. And I will be the same."

Gwen furrowed her brows.

That warning felt like a mockery but she knew how important sponsorships were for the church.

Had he chosen a different condition, Gwen would've been more careful.

But this condition was easy enough as it is.

Plus, she can't deny her wavering faith so something like this was actually far better than killing her should she betray the order.

With Gwen accepting the orb, Solaris wrapped himself in a spiral of flames before disappearing from his throne.

Meanwhile, Gwen felt a headache assault her mind, knocking her out. The markings on the side of her face began to fill with a golden radiance, a divine connection.

###

'Seems like Gwen's meeting with Solaris now.' Alice narrowed her gaze. She could feel the surge of divinity from the very centre of the island. Therefore, the best thing for her to do was to steer clear of that portion of the island.

As Astrelya warned, Solaris would be able to see through her disguise with ease.

And honestly, had she not gaslighted Shiera into thinking they were master and disciple at one point, she would've investigated further and found the gaps in her disguise.

But right now, what Alice wanted to investigate, was whatever was being held in the centre of this island.

There were two suspicious points. One, this branch was being kept away from the mainland.

Two, despite having no off limit locations, Alice could sense a large storage of energy far beneath the ground.

A reservoir of power that's too big to ignore.

Yet, despite spreading her blood through the different buildings, Alice wasn't able to find a path leading down.

[Using your Void powers would be too risky, especially with Solaris being here. There's no doubt that he'll sense something going on.] Cayla reminded.

'Do you want me to force a path through?' Alyss offered but Alice shook her head.

They won't be explain why there's a hole leading to the centre of the island after all.

While Alice was thinking of ideas, she noticed Elio approaching.

It wasn't like he was looking past her either. No, he was staring directly at her.

"Yo~ Do you need me for something?" Alice asked, folding her arms with a smirk.

Instead of saying anything, Elio simply stood in front of her and glared.

*BANG!!!

Grabbing the air to his left, he slowly opened his palm to reveal a set of blood threads that were invisible a moment ago.

"I believe you dropped these, Lady Guinevere has given you the authority to explore the branch. However, I do not believe it would be wise for you to snoop around with these threads. Simply walking around would suffice." He smiled before walking away.

Alice furrowed her brows.

'I suppose a Cardinal is not something to be underestimated after all.'

The fact that he was able to discover her threads. . .

'How dangerous.'

Chapter 770: Agarion

Even if it was dangerous, no, BECAUSE it was dangerous, Alice had no intention of backing down.

Warnings only meant one thing, she simply had to move faster before someone else caught on to what she's doing.

She stepped away from the main path and found a patch of grass with a tree. After a quick glance around to make sure no one was watching her, she sat down and leaned against the trunk.

Placing her palm against the grass, she closed her eyes.

Blood began to converge beneath her palm. She needed something precise. A thread thinner than before. Thinner than a needle's point. This thread didn't need to be strong, it didn't need to cut someone, all it needed to do was reach the heart of this island.

Creating an orb with the blood, she began to compress it.

Smaller, thinner, tighter.

The orb began to spin, with each rotation its size would shrink until a smile appeared on Alice's face.

Perfection.

She launched the thread. It vanished into the earth, tunnelling through the dirt and stone with zero resistance. She guided it, making sure she avoided any rooms that were buried beneath the ground.

After all, the last thing she needed was for someone to notice crumbling dirt dropping from the ceiling and begin to ask questions.

As long as she kept the tunnelling in the dirt, she could cover her tracks.

Attaching a portion of her senses to the thread, she pulsed out small echoes of energy to map her surroundings.

But after a while. . . The earth felt.

Wrong.

So very wrong.

It didn't feel like earth at all.

In fact, it felt similar to flesh yet at the same time, not quite.

A frown deepened on Alice's face as she continued deeper.

She could feel the walls of this 'flesh' pulsing. A heart beat? Weak yet alive.

Just as she was about to continue, she noticed Solaris' divinity disappear.

'Gwen must've finished up by now. I should finish this quickly.'

Tapping her finger, she increased the thread's speed!

Then she broke through the layer surrounding the hidden chamber and the sickening aura of miasma forced its way out.

Alice felt a chill down her spine.

Terminus? No, not quite.

The chamber was much larger than expected so just pulsing out a thin wave of energy wasn't enough.

Overlaying a layer of blood under her eyelid, Alice created a blood mirror on the other side of the thread.

The moment she linked her sight, she held her breath.

Down here, the world was. . . twisted.

People walking on walls and ceilings. Staircases leading horizontally, intersecting pathways that violated the laws of reality.

Gravity bending in unnatural ways and chains that floated through the air.

A chamber swallowed in a red haze surrounded by a maze of constructs.

Flesh walls surrounded this chamber with giant nails hammered into it.

And contained in the centre of all of this, a colossus of iron and flesh stood. Obsidian armour, rusted and burning on the edges. Attached onto his shoulder plates was a long black cloak, tattered and pooling by its feet from the sheer length.

It wore a jagged helmet concealing its face and mounted onto his back was a ring of gold. In one way, it felt similar to a corrupted golden halo like artistic depictions of the sun.

In the titan's hands, held a giant greatsword embedded into the ground. It stood, unmoving.

[Agarion – Unsealed Lord of Radiance ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦]

Nine star sealed Lord of Old. No, that wasn't accurate!

'Cayla. Why does it say Unsealed?' Alice's smile twitched.

[You're asking me that as if I have an answer ready for you. Unfortunately, I'm already scrambling to figure out what the hell is going on!] Cayla retorted.

When she was spending time in Caelan's Library, she wasn't reading through everything carefully. Rather, she was flipping through them and memorising the page as a whole rather than the information that was contained within.

After seeing Agarion, she had already began to filter through the knowledge she has in hopes of finding an answer.

While Cayla was busy, Alice hesitated but continued to scout out the area.

Despite being 'Unsealed' it seemed as though Agarion was not making a move. Something was restraining him.

The only reason why he's considered 'Unsealed' is because the Abyssal bindings were broken. Meaning, like what happened with the White Death, this Abyss Lord of Old could die.

Peeking beneath his cloak, Alice noticed that there were priests harvesting his blood and flesh. Digging away at him while his regeneration gave them new materials to work with.

[They're not harvesting his actual blood and flesh. They're merely containers to hold his life force.] Cayla corrected what Alice was thinking.

[So in essence, they're draining him of whatever power he has in his Spiritual Heart while leaving his body intact.]

Hearing this, Alice frowned.

Lord of Radiance. . . Considering his title is Radiance, a connection could be made between him and the Sun Church.

Was this possibly what Elior was talking about? A different way to gain power.

Alice stared at what the priests were doing.

What kind of energy were they harvesting?

She could feel the puzzle pieces slowly coming together.

Ideas that flowed through her mind.

Connections being formed and new possibilities. She could see another path branching out.

Another possibility.

For Suyin even.

If the Abyss refused to grant her power then perhaps. . .

[Alice.] Cayla grabbed Alice's shoulder.

'Huh? Oh, sorry.' Alice massaged her eyes.

Cayla furrowed her brows.

Alice was getting lost in her own thoughts more and more recently. Not a good sign considering their. . . fears regarding her connection to Yvael.

With Cayla calming her down, Alice decided to give the Unsealed Lord one more look before retracting her gaze.

At that moment, she felt it stir. A pair of eyes swivelling towards her direction.

It was from the Lord.

Then it moved. . .

***RUMBLE!!!**

The entire island shook, the Lord began to shift under its bindings.

The Lord straining and groaning with the sounds of the earth splintering apart. The ring of gold mounted behind its head fluctuating with a radiant glow.

A deep, guttural exhale erupted from the Lord's core as molten gold poured down from the ceiling.

Five radiant spears took aim, piercing the Lord through both its arms, its legs and finally, through its throat.

Chains burst out, latching onto the nails embedded into the wall as the Lord was forced to behave itself once more.

But its gaze, its glare never left the fragment of the blood mirror that Alice sent down.

Quickly retracted her thread and mirror, Alice slowly opened her eyes.

Cold sweat filled her back as she could feel her head pounding against her chest.

In that moment, had it not been for the spears and chains, she felt as though the Lord would've consumed everything in its surroundings. Her included.

Even now, despite retracting her threads, the island was still shaking with priests hurriedly running around to resolve the issue.

Meanwhile, Elior dashed out from his building. His head turning to try and find Kaia before locking onto her.

"What did you do?!"

"What do you mean? I've been sittin-"

*BANG!!!

Elior tried to grab Kaia's throat but she quickly jumped up, kicking him in the chest.

"Aren't you a rude one. You can ask the others, I've been sitting here by the tree minding my own business."

"Tch! Your threads, you must've done something using them." Elior accused but even though he said this, he couldn't sense anything around them.

There were no threads to speak of that's snooping around.

"Just because I snooped around at first doesn't mean all of it's my fault. In fact, isn't this just an earthquake? Or. . . is there an issue that I should know about?" Kaia raised an eyebrow, acting dumb.

Even though she knew that the Lord only stirred because it saw her, she couldn't let him know that.

"By the authority granted to me as a Cardinal, I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you in for some questioning." Elior removed his earring, transforming it into an artifact.

Around Kaia, golden soldiers manifested in an attempt to apprehend her but they were too slow.

Throwing down a smoke bomb beneath her, Kaia jumped back and expanded her Zone.

Locking onto the soldiers immediately, she took aim and fired her body, destroying them before jumping into the air to avoid a sword slash.

However, Elior predicted this and a golden cage was waiting for her in the air.

The moment it wrapped around Kaia, she grinned and stuck out her tongue.

"Huh?"

Furrowing his brows, Elier's pupils constricted as he noticed her figure begin to disintegrate.

An illusion!

*BANG!!!

He felt a kick to the back of his knees, forcing him to fall back as his posture was broken.

Kaia's arm coiled around his neck while a dagger was held above his eye.

"Again, throwing accusations and forcing people to abide by your will. I'm not like that buddy. Now we can talk like civilised people or do you want to lose an eye and we continue to fight?" Kaia asked as Elier gritted his teeth.

*KRK!!!

"ARG!!!" Elier cried out in pain as the dagger plunged into his eye.

She did not hesitate at all!

The moment he didn't give up, she struck!

*BANG!!!

Unleashing a pulse of energy to throw her off, Elier glared at Kaia who simply smirked and licked the blood from her fingers.

Ripping the dagger out, Elier wanted to grab a vial of healing blood when Kaia threw a set of needles towards his throat.

Quickly stepping to the side to avoid them, his pupil constricted seeing Kaia already in range with an arrow on the verge of firing, aiming directly at his head.

"Stop!"

*RUMBLE!!!

A flaming spear crashed down between them, forcing the two to step away as they both turned towards Gwen.

She picked up the spear and turned to Kaia before glaring at Elinor.

"Care to explain what the hell is going on?"