

Abyssal A 771

Chapter 771: Syrion

"Care to explain what the hell is going on?" Gwen glared at Elicor. Even though she was still suffering from a slight headache caused by the sponsorship, she couldn't let it show.

Because right now, all she saw was Elicor trying to attack Kaia and Kaia fighting back. She had no context in what was going on.

"As your stray cat what the hell she's doing snooping around! She must've done something!" Elicor shouted.

He wanted to capture Kaia but even he knew he was no match for Gwen in a direct confrontation.

"Kaia?" Gwen glanced back as Kaia shrugged.

"I was snooping around, checking out the layout and he was warning me about doing so. Then, taking his advice, I sat down by the tree, and the island started to shake with him running out and accusing me of doing something.

"AND, after accusing me, he started to ramble about capturing me for interrogation or something along those lines. You know me, doesn't work out well with that kind of request." Kaia chuckled as Gwen let out a fatigued sigh.

"Kaia do you trust me?" Gwen asked as Kaia tilted her head before nodding.

"Then let's do it like this."

Taking her spear, Gwen twirled it in her hands before stabbing it into the ground.

***RUMBLE!!!**

A ring of fire erupted around them as a golden glow appeared in Gwen's eyes.

"Elior, ask your question."

"Tch, fine. Did you or did you not know what is beneath the island coming here?" Elior asked as Kaia had to hold back a laugh.

"Nope, I did not know what's beneath the island."

"Truth." Gwen nodded.

"Did you do something to cause this earthquake then?" Elior frowned.

"Nope, I did not do anything to cause this earthquake." Kaia grinned.

"Truth again. I'll give you one more question Elior." Gwen slowly glared at him.

Elior hesitated.

"Then do you know what's beneath the island now?"

Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"Clever lad. Yep, I do know what's beneath the island now. But it was never my goal." Kaia smirked as Gwen sighed, retrieving her spear.

"Truth again. Elior, am I correct in assuming that you tried to capture and interrogate Kaia without proof?" Gwen asked, massaging her eyes while Elior stammered.

In the end, he clenched his fist and nodded.

*BANG!!!

Without warning, his body was flung into a nearby pillar with a nasty crash and Gwen could be seen with her leg kicking out. A vein was bulging on her neck as she glared at the bleeding man slumped against the pillar.

"Phew, that felt good." Gwen stretched her neck while Kaia's smile twitched.

"Are you sure that's okay??? It's one thing if I do it but you. . ."

"What about me? It's his fault for trying to force things without evidence in the first place. And. . . He can only blame himself for trying to hurt you." Gwen stuck out her tongue as Kaia peeked over her shoulders at the twitching body of Elier.

"Maybe I shouldn't have stabbed his eye if you were going to kick him into the next life."

"Hmm. . . I guess I was a bit harsh." Snapping her finger, a green flame manifested above Gwen's palm as she sent it over to Elier.

With that done, she gestured for Kaia to follow her to the boats.

Now that she had received her sponsorship, it was time to prepare for the Hunt.

"By the way, if you don't mind me asking, how come there is a. . ." Kaia hesitated.

"How come there's an Abyss Lord beneath the island?" Gwen finished her sentence.

"Yeah, that. You sound wayyy too casual for something that should be shocking."

"It's not the first time I've seen something like that. I saw it back at the main branch too. They're seeing how compatible Holy and Abyssal energy are I believe. Well I'm not familiar with the details." Gwen shrugged.

She could still remember the first time she saw the sealed Lords beneath the surface.

The fear and awe that filled her body. . . then the realisation of how strong her dad was if he's keeping people safe from beings with their level of power.

Thinking back to this memory, a smile crept up on Gwen's face.

"Sigh~ I'm exhausted. Let me borrow your back for a bit~"

"Huh? Hey wait!" Kaia widened her eyes as Gwen jumped onto her back.

With Gwen being the taller one between them, the sight was rather. . . comical.

"Thank you~" Gwen chuckled while Kaia's smile twitched.

"I never accepted!"

"Aww but why not? I almost died you know?" Gwen sighed.

Hearing this, Kaia froze mid step.

"You what?"

"Yep. In order to arrange a meeting with Solaris, you have to pass certain trials to prove you're eligible. After all, having everyone meet him whenever they want is a little unrealistic. Not to mention him being lazy." Gwen nodded.

"Unfortunately, I failed the last one where I have to prove my piety. Though can you blame me? It's his fault that he keeps sending my dad away to dangerous places." Gwen groaned with a slight pout.

"I suppose I can't. But. . . You knew there was a risk so why?"

Kaia couldn't understand it.

Gwen knew full well how her faith was faltering yet she still wanted to keep going? Was she suicidal?

"Would you believe me if I said it was partially planned?" Gwen sighed, relaxing herself on Kaia's back.

"My. . . Dad has worked for Solaris for a long, long time. Knowing everything my dad has done for him, I don't believe Solaris would simply allow me to die without my dad giving up. Unless he has a replacement ready, he won't let me die, especially not through the trials he set up himself.

"It's a gamble with my life on the line since I know he won't give me a Sponsor unless I do this. Rather than my faith towards him, I needed to show him my faith towards my dad. Because by extension, I will be faithful to him so long as my dad continues to support this order." She admitted.

"That's. . ." Kaia was speechless.

She thought she was insane but all this time, the insane one was Gwen.

Gambling with your life on the line with a God.

"Stupid? Yeah I know. If dad found out he'd scold me a bunchahaha~" Gwen chuckled.

"But that requires him to spend some time with me. So I guess that's not so bad either."

Unable to hold herself back, Kaia patted Gwen on the head, surprising her.

She didn't say anything as she wasn't good with words for moments like this. But Gwen knew what she wanted to say and smiled.

"Thanks."

"For what? I haven't done anything." Kaia raised an eyebrow.

"Nah, you've done plenty. Thanks for being here, thanks for being my friend."

Facing this kind of upfront appreciation, Kaia couldn't keep her composure as the tips of her ears started to turn red.

"Ohya? Are you feeling embarrassed? Well?" Gwen curved her lips up into a smug grin.

"Hush it! I'll throw you off if you keep going."

"Fine fine~ I'll behave myself~" Gwen chuckled.

"Ah before I forget, did you get the artifact?" Kaia glanced back.

This was their second objective after the sponsorship.

"Of course. During the sponsorship, he's already infused the Fragment of the Sun into my body. But it doesn't manifest unless I will it." Holding her hands out to the front, Gwen narrowed her eyes as a crest flared to life on the back of her hand.

From that crest, golden lines spread across her body and she became a walking reservoir of divinity.

"As mentioned earlier, this enhancement improves all of my abilities. But now, my flames are even more effective on corrupted powers as well as Abyssal energy. Which will be necessary, considering my next target."

Upon accepting the sponsorship, she was given a choice among three options that matched her current fighting style.

And within these choices, there was one specific beast that Gwen found a connection with.

A named beast known as Syrion, the Blade Sovereign.

When accepting the bounty, she was given a bit of information. Not a lot, but enough for her to understand what kind of being she was going to fight.

It stated that Syrion belonged to a species of beasts that could be best described as warrior kings consumed by wrath.

Wanderers who hone their power with the blade.

A body engulfed in molten steel, a husk of vengeance.

But the background wasn't important to Gwen. No, what was important was the rewards of her bounty. The abilities she'll get, the final step as she ascends to Lordship.

And the ability that stood out to her. . .

The Bladeweaver's Arsenal.

With this ability, she'll be able to summon up to six weapons that can be freely merged with any artifacts that she receives, effectively allowing her to have six abilities that she can manipulate at once.

Each of these weapons can be controlled through her mind and intent and the longer she has them 'drawn', the stronger, faster and more deadly they become.

Thus they cover drawn out fights which Gwen didn't excel in. Of course, that's not to say she was weak in long skirmishes but rather her specialties lie in short exchanges of raw power.

However, if it was just this, Gwen wouldn't have chosen it over the other choices.

The real reason she picked The Bladeweaver's Arsenal was the ability to access the 'Crucible' during battle.

As the battle continues, she'll be able to forge a seventh blade. A weapon adapted to her enemy, crafted to counter their powers.

As long as she can hold on long enough, victory is essentially assured.

That was what Gwen wanted to get.

After all. . .

On the off chance she wanted to let's say. . . get rid of a god.

What better ability is there than a weapon that can adapt to her enemy?

Chapter 772: Unlocking Authority

With Gwen's sponsor now obtained, their next step was to actually track down the beast.

Meaning, they needed to visit another branch of the Sun Church.

But unlike this time, it didn't require an extended visit. Rather, Gwen submitted a request, and they would give it to her once they arrived.

While they were on the boat leading to the mainland branch, Alice closed her eyes.

According to Cayla, named sovereign beasts were a different kind of battle altogether.

They were anomalies much like herself, though to a lesser extent.

These beasts that have been granted the title of Sovereigns have the greatest chance of achieving Lordship and it's a way for the Abyss to mark anyone with potential.

Of course, this was a double edged blade as it also meant that others can tell when they have abilities that far surpass those of the same species.

It's akin to hitting a jackpot if you're strong. The moment one is found, information would be passed around and those looking for the Sigil will be scrambling to claim the bounty.

However. . .

These usually result in bloodbaths thus many have begun to avoid these Sovereigns unless they wish to gamble their life.

Once you fight, it's life or death. No running, no in between. You either win or you die.

One such was documented in Caelan's library. Nyzel the Sky Sovereign. Her reign of terror against the Sun Church was one that had been documented. with her even managing to kill a Lord while fleeing.

'And to think Ria managed to hunt that beast down.' Alice couldn't help but smile.

But with this smile, came a sense of foreboding. No matter how impressive the feat may be, their opponents were no slouches.

Achieving this kind of performance simply allowed you to stand at the starting line, not finish the race.

Take Alice for example, her Sixth Sigil belonged to an Apostle. Not only that, but she is able to access a plethora of other powers to help her fight and close the gap between her and the dangers they face.

There's no doubt that they'll be fighting Lords, Apostles, Outer Gods. . . the occupiers of the Divine throne themselves and even potentially the Great Ones of the Outer Gods.

With that kind of threat looming in the future, just performing to this standard was not enough. One had to be an anomaly similar to Alice.

'We're also running low on time. There's no telling when everything would just collapse and all hell breaks loose.' Alice sighed inwardly.

[What's gotten you in such a hurry?] Cayla asked curiously, surprised by Alice's sudden act of reflection.

'Probably the unsealed Lord right?' Alyss yawned before revealing a serious expression.

'Mnm. The stronger we get, the more we see the hidden secrets of this world. Take Yrael for example. . '

Alice glanced down and clenched her fist.

'I know full well that she did some sh*t with Nyer to create me. In fact, I can even put money on the fact that my spacing out are a result of her experiments. Even if I was adaptive in the past and have ideas, they've never been like this.

'Hitting out of no where and even giving me ideas for experiments that would violate everything Allura has taught me. I know you haven't been saying much about it but you know it too right?' Alice sighed, turning to Cayla who nodded after a moment.

[Yeah you're right. As it stands, too many variables are floating around right now. This world is essentially a room filled with explosive gas and it needs just one spark to ignite everything. None of the three churches have been idle.

[Famine is hiding, Kazira is dead. We don't know what the moon are up to yet. The Sun is in turmoil and then there's the unsealed Lord. Tiamat is still out there with her seals partially undone. Then there are the Outer Gods with one stealing Kazira's body. And last of all. . .]

'The Will.' Alice finished Cayla's sentence as she nodded.

[We know that he's preparing you to be a vessel of some sorts. We just don't know the extent of his plans. All of these are happening simultaneously and it's just what we found out thus far. It's not even including everything we don't know about the Zenia family and that Doctor.]

'To face all of this, I don't think any of our friends are ready with the exception of maybe Egil and Selen. Selen has her time stop and perception manipulation, Egil has become a tenacious fighter on the frontlines. Ria and Luke are. . . Still lacking. While Luke can provide great buffs and Ria has speed, it's not enough.' Alyss analysed.

'I think it's time we look towards finding out what we can do for them instead of making ourselves stronger for now. There are too many battles for us to handle alone.' She suggested with Alice folding her arms.

Improving her own strength was one thing but she can't forget about the others. She wasn't arrogant enough to think that she alone will be enough because she's not.

Strong as she may be, abnormal as she is, she hasn't reached the level of strength where she could claim herself as unbeatable.

Thus the weak need to band together in order to fell the strong.

[I think we need to start looking towards what can be done with the relics of the Abyss. They are the key to Velouria's divinity after all. And as the Divine Throne of the Abyss, she was stronger than the others.] Cayla chuckled.

'I think the first thing we need to figure out is how to allocate bounties properly. Velouria was able to do that and even create shrines where people can choose. Rather than leaving it up to chance, we need to figure out a way for me to control that phenomenon as a whole.

'At least with this, I'll be able to assign the bounties that people want, potentially even bestowing a path to Lordship.' Alice pitched the idea with Cayla thinking about it for a moment then nodding.

[I'm not sure how feasible that is but it doesn't hurt to give it a try. You have to remember that Velouria's divinity has been left unattended for a long time. Meanwhile, the Will has been doing whatever it wants.

[Some authorities that she had in the past may not be open to us.]

'I know. But that was Velouria. With her artifacts, I'm not becoming the next Velouria. I'm becoming the next Goddess of the Abyss. Inheriting and obtaining new authorities are something completely different.' Alice grinned.

'Every part of my instincts are telling me that it's possible you know? Rather than simply inheriting, I can create and obtain new authorities that weren't open to her. The Will and the Abyss are two separate entities, even if the Abyss used to be an extension. He no longer has a monopoly over it, it's beyond his full control.'

[A tug of war then.] Cayla smiled.

'Yep, a tug of war. If I can wrestle the entire realm under my control, then just like what he did to Velouria, I'll be able to leverage this over him.' Alice chuckled.

'A little ambitious. But what are we if not ambitious?' Alyss laughed.

Their plans were laid out.

Long term goals were to wrestle over the authorities of the Abyss.

And as for short term goals. . .

She'll figure out how to activate one of Velouria's authorities.

"What are you grinning to yourself about?" Gwen asked, seeing Kaia grinning by the railings.

"Just thinking about some exciting things."

"Hou? Naughty exciting things? Iya~ How lewd." Gwen jokingly cried out as Kaia rolled her eyes.

"Not naughty things. Combat stuff."

"Boo~ How boring. You only got fighting in that head of yours. I swear, you're one of those that aunty Shiera call combat sexual." Gwen sighed.

"Anyways, when we reach the branch don't cause any trouble okay? We're only going to be there for a short while." She warned with Kaia raising her hands in surrender.

"What do you mean? I'm innocent." Kaia whistled.

"As if. Even though that ritual was one to tell the truth from lie, I've dealt with people enough to know when they're only partially telling the truth okay?" Gwen rolled her eyes, causing Kaia to choke on her saliva.

"But~ I also know it wasn't on purpose. Plus, it's their fault for not keeping a Lord sealed properly and instead unsealing it. They can only blame themselves." Gwen laughed.

Kaia's smile twitched. Even without the ritual, one could tell that Gwen's faith towards the order was faltering. If not, why else would she act this way?

“The fact that you even got a sponsorship from Solaris is starting to seem more and more impressive.”

“Well, if he’s going to overwork my dad, I might as well get more from him. It’s not like giving a sponsorship is a lot of effort either and yet the lazy b*stard almost refused to do even that. Honestly.” Gwen ranted.

“In fact, he should be grateful I stayed faithful to this church for so long because of my dad. If it wasn’t for him, I probably wouldn’t even care.”

Alice was speechless. The fact that someone with her views could become a cardinal. . .

She could only give her a round of an applause. The benefits of being a nepo baby was not to be underestimated.

Even Solaris, in a sense, was a victim as he’s forced to give her a sponsor due to the work of her father.

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“Hm~ Now aren’t you an unfamiliar visitor. Did you miss seeing me after so long?” A faceless white silhouette grinned seeing a twisting spot of darkness within his realm.

However, the visitor didn’t say anything. He simply glared at the Will of the Abyss.

“What’s wrong? You went through all that effort to reach my realm and you won’t even say anything?” The Will leaned back, creating a throne for himself.

The one who stood in front of him.

The great betrayer.

Nyer.

Chapter 773: Turning Of Cogs

“This is quite the dull place you’ve occupied. For someone of your stature, I figured you would have something more luxurious. Or are you telling me you’re someone who would prefer living frugally?” Nyer smirked, snapping his fingers and creating a throne of his own.

Seeing this, the Will’s smile twitched briefly.

“Nope. I simply don’t see the need for such material extravagance.” The Will shrugged. “Though I would consider it if I have more visitors. Are you planning on visiting me more often seeing as how you’ve gone through the effort to break into my realm?”

Nyer shook his head.

“See? So there’s no need to decorate this place at all. In fact, are you sure you should be here? Shouldn’t you be busy with your own side project?”

“So you know.” Nyer smiled, tapping his finger and a table appeared between them with a chess game placed on top.

“Of course I would know. Why wouldn’t I know? You can split the divinity all you want but I can tell when a cluster of them begin to gather. Even more so when that cluster starts taking on the appearance of my daughter.” The Will grinned, moving the pawn piece forward.

“You claim she’s your daughter but when she was alive you did nothing but torment her. What right do you have to call her such?” Nyer replied, moving his own pawn forward.

“What right? By right that I brought her into this world. But what about you? You were one of her most trusted companions and what did you do? You turned your back on all of them for your own selfish desires.” The Will chuckled, moving the knight piece.

“Or are you really so blinded by your own desires that you think what you’re doing is right?” He asked as Nyer also moved a knight piece.

"I'm fully aware that my actions are not right. It's simply the result of a one sided unrequited desire. But be that as it may, I still believe that Velouria is required for the world to become a better place.

"Lumiria cares more about her entertainment as the eons go by, Solaris wishes to be looked upon with respect but not the work required. Enris. . . Well, Enris wants to die a most glorious death. A death that ignites the soul and passion. Only then, can she reach her destination, her Elysium." Nyer chuckled before losing his smile.

"You see these three and do you really think the world can be better with them at the helm? Only Velouria has proven the qualities of a God and you took her from this world."

The Will moved his second knight piece.

"The world can't be basked in only light. Where there is light, there is shadow. These three were simply the shadow to her light. And if the generation cannot provide a light great enough to counter this shadow, then what value do they have?

"With Velouria around, they would simply look towards her for everything. You know about the requests and burdens she had to take. And her personality made it so that she tried her best with all of them." The Will grinned as Nyer stayed silent.

Indeed, during the era of Ayr, Velouria tried her best with everyone. An exhausting endeavour no doubt but one that made Nyer respect her more for.

Nyer moved his second knight piece as well, but the Will immediately countered with a bishop press against his knight.

"If you ask me, having her leave the stage during that point was the biggest mercy I can give to my daughter."

The corner of Nyer's eye twitched as he fumbled the next move with a pawn, allowing the Will to take his knight piece using the bishop.

"But did Velouria ever accept that mercy? She didn't. You simply made the choice for her, a choice she'll never make." Nyer fought back, claiming the bishop that took his knight with a pawn.

"Just like how you are right now? Did she request for her corpse to be defiled and her divinity spread in such a manner?" The Will questioned, attacking with his first knight and taking a pawn.

Nyer countered with a knight, taking the Will's pawn at the same time.

"I'm aware. But unlike you I don't see my actions as a mercy." Nyer glanced up. "What I do, I do for myself. It is my own desire to have Velouria return to this world, even if I have to burn every connection I made in Ayr. Because that's what I believe this world needs, a true Goddess that can lead them instead of the false trio they have now."

The Will curved his lips into a sadistic grin.

"How much suffering have you already caused with this crusade of yours? You allowed the Outer Gods to enter this realm despite the barriers keeping them out. Now that the seed of corruption has taken root, ejecting them will prove to be far more difficult than you can imagine."

The Will's knight piece claims Nyer's final knight.

"Is that really what you think? Unfortunately for you, I've already made preparations for such a scenario." Nyer moved his queen piece forward, threatening a pawn take that'll lead into a check against his king.

"You mean the stunt you're trying to pull with the Zenia family right now?"

The Will castled his king, keeping it safe from the queen for now.

Nyer had expected this. If the Will hadn't found out then it would be truly disappointing.

Nyer's queen takes one of the Will's knights.

Will presses with the pawn.

Nyer's pawn takes the Will's pawn.

The Will moved his rook.

The exchanged continued for a while with neither saying a word.

Then, at one point, the Will opened his mouth.

"Are you aware with what's happening with little Alice?"

This question caused Nyer to pause.

"Depends on what you're talking about. Knowing her, there are many things she can be up to." Nyer replied, placing down his piece.

"Indeed it's as you say. She's not someone to sit still. Alice is chasing something rather, peculiar. Well, I say 'she' but I could be wrong. But I suppose you're not someone to divulge the secrets of your research unless I find out myself." The Will chuckled with Nyer not denying that claim.

"Then what about you? I've noticed that the layers of the Abyss are becoming blurred. No more expansion. Rather, it's more like you're deconstructing the whole realm little by little. What are you up to?"

"Is that why you've broken into my realm? Even though you know full well of the risks that comes with doing so?" The Will raised an eyebrow.

He knew that Nyer kept a close eye on what's happening in the Abyss, even with his attention mostly focused on his own research for Velouria's resurrection.

But to notice this. . . Even after he's taken the measures to make sure it's as subtle as possible was rather impressive.

Most would only dismiss it as a coincidence or a slight anomaly but not Nyer.

"That's not answering my question." Nyer moved his queen.

"Same goes for you. If neither of us takes a step back, no progress will be made. You ask and I don't answer. I ask and you don't answer either. Unless you're willing to take the first step? A show of sincerity." The Will chuckled, threatening a take with his own queen.

"If I had no other plans then maybe. But thankfully, you've answered a lot of my questions just by being here. I hope you can maintain this confidence next time." Nyer chuckled, moving one last piece before standing up.

The Will wanted to move when he noticed it was checkmate and frowned.

But when he looked up, Nyer was already gone.

Returning back to his base, Nyer smiled. Next to him, a woman sat staring at him with eyes of curiosity.

Seeing this, Nyer patted her head.

"You're in a good mood. Was it successful?" She asked, licking her lips while staring at his veins.

"Yes it was successful. Very successful in fact." Nyer nodded. "He didn't notice a single thing. Even someone like the Will can be tricked."

Rolling up his sleeves, he allowed the girl to dig in while closing his eyes.

He recalled his many conversations with Yvael, the hints she gave towards certain Cogs of Fate.

In this instance, he could feel one turning already.

The promised time was approaching and he needed to finish his preparations.

Soon, everything he's toiled away for centuries will come to an end. Soon, his journey would be complete.

Soon, Velouria will return to this world in all her beauty.

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"Kaden! Kaden!" Nalem shouted, running towards Kaden in a hurry.

Dropping the corpse in his hands, Kaden crushed the skull with his heel before turning.

"Hm?"

Slowing down to catch his breath, Nalem pulled out a roll of parchment from his jacket and tossed it towards Kaden who frowned.

Unfurling the parchment, he read the contents as his hands clenched the edges.

His pupils constricted and his fingers trembled.

"Is. . . this true?" He asked.

"If it ha... Wasn't, why would I... *Pant* be in a rush?" Nalem wiped away his sweat. Before he could properly catch his breath, Kaden grabbed his collar, dragging him along into the shadows.

If the information they just received was indeed correct as Nalem has confirmed, then this chase was going to come to an end.

And once it does, Allura can finally get the help she needs.

The Apostle of Famine has been found!

Chapter 774: Beyond Severance

"Don't you get tired of this song and dance? You chase me, I walk away. You keep chasing me and I keep walking away. I choose to fight, you choose to skirmish. Then I walk away and you just keep chasing." Tiamat narrowed her eyes.

Two figures stood in front of her.

One familiar, one unfamiliar.

"Well it's either we keep repeating this over and over or you give up trying to free the sealed Lords. Your era is long over Tiamat. I cannot in good conscience allow you guys to roam free." Allura smirked as Tiamat let out a heavy sigh.

"Look at yourself. Broken beyond belief and yet you still keep being an absolute pain in the ass. I've taken pity on you Allura, to not kill you while you're down. Or is my judgment of you wrong? Do you fit the philosophy of the Eclipse better? To die in the heat of battle?" Tiamat glared.

The world around her began to lose its colour with energy gathering around her at an abnormal rate.

"If you wanted to kill me, you would've already. I'm simply pushing my luck at this point." Allura chuckled, matching the surge of energy as flames burst out from her fists.

Veins bulged on Tiamat's neck as she heard Allura's nonchalant attitude.

All this time, she had pitied the woman broken past her years. A blazing will dragging that husk of a body along. And yet she continued to annoy her to this extent.

"Fine then, have it your way." Tiamat snapped.

Clasping her hands together, a cage was instantly formed around the area, preventing them from escaping. Countless flaming dragon heads manifested in the sky above, each gathering energy and condensing it into a spark before firing!

*RUMBLE!!!

A maelstrom of blazing fury exploded out but Tiamat was not done yet.

She knew full well how tenacious Allura is. She is someone who's managed to survive this long despite having a body that's basically dead!

A pair of draconic wings unfurled behind Tiamat.

She'll show Allura why she was given the title of Apocalypse!

Beneath her, countless symbols spun to life as rings of energy connected them all to one another.

Above each symbol, a spark of raw unfiltered energy began to form a tether towards Tiamat as flames converged towards her.

The air split and crackled, flickers of energy ripping through the atmosphere as Tiamat's wings covered the sun. Her crimson rage darkening the world as though she was doom incarnate.

*BANG!!!

Tiamat soared towards the sky. There was no reason for her to stay so close to the ground. What she desires right now was the erasure of Allura!

Behind her, glowing pylons of energy erupted from her bath, latching onto the tethers shot out from her sparks.

The ring began to deconstruct itself, orbiting Tiamat like celestial bodies. Each turn, each cycle, formed a spiral, a weave of energy in front of her.

"Allura!!!" Gin shouted in a panic, seeing the calamity that's about to befall them.

Gritting his teeth, he grabbed some medicine from his inner pocket and tossed them into his mouth.

His Sigils flared to life and the space above him was torn in half! Beyond the veil, the avatar of death clawed its way out. Darkness latched onto Gin's body, forming a tattered cloak as his flesh began to peel away, revealing a withered skeletal frame.

Resonance!

Tiamat's eyes blazed with an apocalyptic fury.

She has shown them mercy, she had allowed them to leave. Yet they refuse to backdown.

Then so be it.

Gathering energy into her fist, Tiamat punched up towards the sky! From her fist, a line of energy tore through the realm, shattering the barriers that held the world together!

A raging inferno poured down from the sky, twisting, converging into a massive sphere of annihilation. And from within this spear, a blinding light so bright it darkened the sun itself.

A light so bright that it transformed their world into a world of shades. All colour erased.

Pulses of heat burst out from the sphere. Each pulse setting the world around them ablaze, all moisture evaporated in an instant.

Gin, despite under the protection of his avatar, found his body being set on fire. He wanted to fight back, to unleash an attack to counter this orb, to prevent it from converging but a suffocating pressure bore down on him from all directions.

An invisible pressure that eliminated all acts of defiance.

Tiamat clenched her fist, condensing the sphere to the size of her fingertip.

It all ends here.

Tiamat flicked the spark towards the spiral tether of energy that she had created.

Three seconds till extinction event.

"I know that I've grown weaker as the years have gone by. But aren't you in the same situation? Your seals are almost completely gone but you can't even kill a woman on the verge of death! How you've fallen Tiamat!" Allura's voice burst out from the clouds below.

Pushing the clouds of dust away from her, Allura revealed her Resonance and aimed her Executioner's Blade towards Tiamat.

Two seconds till extinction event.

"You ask me why I kept bothering you for days on end well let me give you my answer! I was judging whether or not I could still kill you! And guess f*cking what you dumb lizard! I CAN!" Allura laughed, blood pouring from the seams of her armour.

One second till extinction event.

As Alice's guardian, Allura's task was to pave a way for a safer future. Having Tiamat go around destroying the seals of the Old Lords was not going to benefit them at all. Especially with the hatred that's been accumulating over the years.

Thus, this was her task as a guardian.

Of course, she wouldn't just blindly throw herself into danger no matter how desperate she may be. Time was limited but that did not mean she should give up on being prudent.

And so she began to test Tiamat.

Test her powers over the course of several days.

While she may have broken out, the seals have done their job. Her powers have dropped drastically.

Had this been Tiamat in her prime, Allura wouldn't even dream of fighting her in her current state.

In fact, Tiamat in her prime would've killed her during their first exchange. There would be no chance for skirmishes, no chance for talking.

But this? This was manageable. Even for a walking corpse like herself.

Severance is the action of cutting.

To sever, to isolate, to bisect.

But what lies beyond severance? What lies beyond the horizon of the absolute authority of severance?

"Beyond it lies only Oblivion." Allura smiled.

Extin/ction Ev/ent imm/anent.

*Bzzpt

Tiamat froze.

She stared at Allura who erased everything that Tiamat had sent towards the earth.

"Oi. . ." Tiamat muttered, her eyes slowly turning bloodshot as veins bulged on her neck.

Allura smirked.

"Hah! Seems like you've noticed."

"Oi! What the hell did you do!?" Tiamat roared, raising her hands and trying to gather her energy once more only for it to dissipate.

"Oblivion. Only that." Allura replied, her resonance fading away and revealing her bloodied self.

Blood pouring from her lips as she fell backwards towards the earth.

Tiamat gritted her teeth.

She underestimated Allura. She should've dodged! Unlike her previous attacks, that one was not infused with the authority of Severance! It could've been dodged! Yet she had believed it wouldn't harm her!

She didn't feel the threat of death!

She didn't sense any danger!

But that was the key.

What lies beyond Severance was Oblivion.

It did not require the desire to kill for that was never Allura's goal.

What she desired in that moment, was erasure.

When Allura's attack collided, what it erased was not the attack.

What it erased was the core principles behind it.

Tiamat's method of casting. The rituals and contracts she put in place in order to draw out her maximum power.

What Allura used the power of Oblivion on, was Tiamat's habits and knowledge accumulated over the course of her life.

Like an artist who knows the core techniques needed for art yet their projects continue to deteriorate, Tiamat can never reach the same peak using her tried and true method.

She had to start over from the beginning. To discover something new.

And with this, Allura has also erased Tiamat's ability to unseal her fellow brethren.

"I know I can't kill you. Had I tried to use Oblivion to try and erase you, you would've discovered its weakness. But what I can do is piss you off like I've been doing the last few days." Allura let out a laugh as Gin caught her just before she collided against the ground.

"Let's leave Gin, we're done here." Allura's vision blurred. Her breathing was weak as she pushed her body beyond the limit once more.

All so that she could erase one more danger for Alice in the future at the cost of her time.

"Do you think I'll let you leave so easily!?" Tiamat screamed, preparing to attack once more but Allura glared at her.

Even though she's weakened, Tiamat felt her body freeze up.

"I'm sure you have more important matters at hand. Shouldn't you figure out how to cast again? Or is the mighty Lord of Apocalypse going to die to a sh*tty geezer, unable to do anything?" Allura grinned with Gin preparing to attack if needed.

Seeing Tiamat hold her tongue, the two of them stepped away from the battlefield, leaving the old lord behind.

Staring at their retreating silhouettes, Tiamat felt a seething rage like no other.

But she couldn't deny the power of Allura's Oblivion. It's as she said.

Right now, she is merely a vessel for power but lacking the tools needed to unleash it.

She has been crippled for the moment. Her wings clipped and bound.

As Tiamat's rage hit its peak, she unleashed a cry of anger. A fury that could be felt in the bones of all who heard her cry.

Chapter 775: Shadow Of Death

Quickly placing Allura on the operating table, Gin gritted his teeth and unbuttoned her shirt.

Immediately, the sight of blood and rotting flesh caused him to wince.

"I told you! You're being too hasty right now. You're already short on time and you keep pulling this crap. Do you want to die? Is the little time you have left too much? Is that why you want to speed things up?" Gin lectured in anger as he grabbed a knife and heated it up.

"Haha... It's better to use Oblivion while I still can. Tiamat's a dangerous one, even weakened." Allura laughed weakly while blood continued to pour from her lips.

"You don't think it's better to use that time with Alice instead of trying to solve potential dangers? Let me reiterate. POTENTIAL dangers." Gin clicked his tongue, cutting off pieces of rotting flesh.

Seeing the dark energy inside her body gnawing away at flesh and bones, Gin gritted his teeth.

"And if anything, why didn't you use Oblivion on your own wound? Can't you erase its traces or something?" Gin questioned.

Allura didn't talk about her powers much, and what little he knew was what she could do while weakened.

"It's not that simple. I already tried to do it before, but the curse only fought back stronger than ever. Why else do you think I'm in this state?" Allura wanted to sit up but Gin pushed her head back down.

"I don't know, maybe because you keep pushing your body?"

The more Gin removed, the deeper his frown became.

Some of this damage... it wasn't a result of the curse. It's something else, something violent.

"I can already tell what you're thinking. The price of erasure is pretty steep. It's not something I can use often even if I was in my prime haha..." Allura joked, grabbing a cigarette and lighting it up.

"You know the medicine doesn't work anymore right?"

"I'm aware. But I've gotten used to smoking, it calms me down I suppose. Though maybe it's time I find something that tastes better than this medicinal garbage." Allura grinned before flinching from Gin's surgery.

"Alright, you can tell me this after I finish." Gin wiped away his sweat.

As the Abyss Lord of Death, his authority was... a unique one.

The avatar of Death, not quite a god but one that is similar in a sense.

An omnipresent being who watches over the mortality of mortals.

With his authority, he's able to see the 'shadow' that's being cast over someone.

A premonition of their lifespan and how long they can live.

With his powers, he's able to adjust this 'shadow' to some extent, either to make it thicker or to lessen it.

Some would perceive this as increased luck or decreased luck in some sense.

Being lucky that a sneak attack just so happened to miss your vitals, or a stray attack managed to kill your opponent. These were the kinds of situations that might occur with the use of the Death Authority.

Of course, using this power wasn't without its drawbacks.

For the user of 'Death,' the lives they erase are compiled as a tally. If you kill someone who's supposed to live 3 more years, those 3 years are added to the tally.

Then, if someone was to die in a year, you can spend that tally to delay that time of death.

Of course, for those who live longer, it works a little differently but the general idea is what you take is what you can give.

However, that's only when it comes to natural lifespan.

To 'erase' the death caused by an attack, the cost multiplies manyfold as you are pulling a soul away from the grasp of death.

Allura's... situation was unique. A mix of both.

As he stayed by her side, Gin had been delaying the time of her death via the 'time' he'd consumed on the battlefield, the tally that he's accumulated. But this was starting to lose its effectiveness.

The shadow of death loomed over her ominously like a thick blanket of darkness.

Once this lost effectiveness, he wouldn't be able to 'pay off' her death by attack.

"Done..." Gin let out a breath of exhaustion as he collapsed onto his chair.

"So how long do I got left?" Allura asked, buttoning up her shirt once more.

Scratching his hair, Gin closed his eyes for a moment before opening them again.

He stared at Allura.

The avatar of death that's clinging onto her body...

"Do you want me to estimate an exact time or a general idea?" Gin offered.

"General idea."

"Not long. It also fluctuates based on what you do."

Allura's fingers froze as a helpless smile appeared on her face.

"Not long huh? Alright."

Closing his eyes, Gin massaged his eyelids.

Allura was the first one that he'd seen with such a thick stench of death, someone that the reaper had been trying to grab yet kept defying fate.

In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if the Avatar of Death was to descend without any ritual just to claim Allura's life.

As for the second one who's in possession of a similar... 'shadow,' it was Alice.

The shadow over her was... abnormal, as with everything surrounding her.

It was the kind of shadow of someone who's 'died' yet still lives, not quite an undead yet not quite alive.

A strange shadow that was thick enough to have the avatar of death cling onto them like Allura yet they haven't shown up.

"I think it's about time you cashed in some favours rather than doing everything yourself."

"When did you learn to read my mind? I'm thinking it's about time as well. There's nothing else to be done down here after all. So I'm thinking... the first favour I should cash in should be the Underground, yeah?" Allura smiled as Gin nodded his head.

Indeed, cashing in the favour from the Underground would help them significantly, especially considering their influence.

With Tiamat dealt with, Gin could only hope that cashing in favours wouldn't take too long. He missed his granddaughter. Was she eating well? Was she getting hurt? Was that damn Luke laying his hands on her???

"!!!" Luke suddenly felt a shiver.

"What's wrong with you?" Ria glanced over in confusion.

"Nothing, I just felt a chill." Luke rubbed his arms with a frown.

"Don't tell me you caught a sickness?" Rosalyn frowned as Luke shook his head.

"Good, because we have no time for that and you can blame Alice for that." She grumbled.

While waiting for Alice to meet up with them, they finally got a message from her.

And the contents were... as expected.

[Infiltrating Sun Church. Can't join up. Good luck.]

Just thinking about it made Rosalyn angry.

The f*ck did she mean infiltrating the Sun Church? What does she mean she can't join up? Good luck?!?!

Seeing the quickly rising anger in Rosalyn, Ria quickly changed subjects.

"I thought we were going to see the cardinal? How come we're journeying to the north instead?" Ria asked.

Next to them, Isolde's expression remained the same.

"Because the cardinal doesn't know us. The one he knows is Alice, and I doubt he'll believe us. Not to mention the fact that since he's affiliated with the Church, we don't know if he'll report it to the Goddess or not. Instead, it's probably better to meet up with some of Alice's other friends in the north since they're not affiliated with the churches.

"Since Alice had made quite a few friends up north, it should be a relatively easy time to convince them as long as we show them some proof." Rosalyn sighed.

The second reason why she wanted to go north was to check out the situation with the Queen.

According to Alice, she was in a state of ascension right now. Similar to what happened with Velouria in the past, the Queen was trying to become a god. Unfortunately, it wasn't going to be smooth considering the Zenia family might be targeting the north.

Thus, Rosalyn wanted to survey the situation first before deciding what to do. There was no telling when they'd be able to party up with Alice again, so it was best to make use of this time instead of sitting around doing nothing.

Ria was quite interested in the friends that Alice had made while she was on her own journey.

Considering the dangers that Alice faced, there was no doubt they were strong. The question now was how strong.

Right now, Ria felt as though she was simply a spectator. She could feel the potential inside herself, the possibilities using her Sigil and even the power of Nyzel that she inherited.

But tapping into that power felt impossible. It was as if a veil would not budge. She needed some fresh inspiration, a stimulant to push her beyond the boundary.

Perhaps seeing Alice's friends should be able to spark that fire of competitiveness within her.

To see the gap between them.

Though there was another issue at hand...

"Miss..." Ria turned around.

"Astrelya. You don't need to pay me any attention, I'm simply tagging along for when dear Alice returns. I tried to find her before but she's with another girl." Astrelya sighed.

"Just ignore her. It's not like we can do anything to her to begin with." Rosalyn reminded Ria.

Even if they didn't want her to follow, what could they even do?

Rosalyn could try to fight, but there was an invisible wall between them. She could instinctively tell...

If she tried to fight Astrelya, the one standing at the end would be her!

Chapter 776: Astrelya's advice

"Isn't that quite the interesting thing you're trying to do." Astrelya peaked over Ria's shoulders.

Ria furrowed her brows, the afterimage of her blade shattering along with her concentration.

"Can you not? I'm trying to concentrate." Ria sighed.

They were currently sitting on a carriage journeying to the north. During this time, Ria wanted to increase her mastery over the three fold lightning.

Right now, she can only use two fold. But once the requirements are met within her personal realm, three fold was possible.

However. . .

She needed three fold to be something she can do at will.

It's only with three fold can she match up to the dangers they might face. If that ability was locked behind her last resort, the moment it doesn't work she'll die.

Thus, she needed to make her strongest attack her most common attack and go up from there.

"Why should that be an issue? Aren't you trying to use this skill often? If so, this should come second nature to you, no matter the distractions." Astrelya chuckled, flicking Ria's blade and watching the afterimage shatter.

*Puchi

Before Ria could lash out, Rosalyn spoke up.

"As annoying as she is, she's right. You don't see Alice complaining about focusing when she has to use her Void Flux. If you can't use your three fold lightning when death is gripping your neck then it's not an attack you can rely on."

Hearing this, Ria sighed in frustration. She was right.

In the heat of battle, your opponent won't wait for you to finish charging your strongest attack.

Instead, they'll be taking that chance to attack you and land potentially fatal damage.

Gritting her teeth, Ria sighed and tried to focus once more.

One fold. . .

An afterimage slowly appeared on her blade.

Astrelya grinned and flicked it.

*Ping~

Snapping in half, the attack was broken once more.

Ria tried again.

Astrelya flicked.

She tried again.

Flicked.

Again.

Flicked.

"ARGGG!!! F*CK!!!" Ria shouted in anger, throwing the blade down.

"I get that I need to learn how to do it while something is distracting me but don't you think I need to succeed first!? So I can get a feel for it?!" Ria glared daggers at Astrelya who smiled smugly.

"Did dear Alice succeed first in getting a feel for killing an Apostle? Or did she wing it with everything she's accumulated?" Astrelya asked, causing Ria to choke on her own words.

Her frustration did not stem from the fact that she was being distracted. No, it stemmed from the fact that she wasn't succeeding, she was simply trying to find reasons to vent.

And it seemed like Astrelya honed in on that feeling.

As for Rosalyn, she didn't want to intervene too much. Maybe it's because Astrelya was bored but receiving advice from such an old Abyss Lord was valuable in many ways. Experience that they've spent years gathering, the insight of one who survived this turbulent world.

Of course, she was also old in a sense but she didn't spend that time as a Lord.

"Are you aware of the saying that a Hunter's power is tied to their mentality?" Astrelya asked, crossing her legs.

At this point, even Luke, Isolde and Jin were interested.

"Yes, my old teacher told me that before." Ria sighed, sitting back down.

"Oh my, bonus points to them. They're a smart cookie." Astrelya clapped before getting back on topic. "The term a Hunter's power is tied to their mentality has multiple origins. Different ways of saying the same thing in originating from different cultures. But the key take away you want to get is the fact that strong hunters, experienced ones that reach the top are those who are true to themselves.

"They don't shy away from their desires, they're honest with what they want and they find the most efficient path towards that desire. Hunters are innately selfish creatures. Being true to that selfishness pushes them to the next level.

"Take me for example, at the beginning, I wanted to be strong because I desired to stand at the top. To tear the lives away from those clinging onto it so desperately. I wanted to see their panic and fear, to revel in it." Astrelya grinned as the four listening to her shivered.

"But once I reached the top, I realised that's not what I truly want. I wanted a battle, a conflict between two. A romantic collision where one dies and one lives. This time, I wanted to feel the panic and fear of death." Astrelya hugged herself, feeling excited by the prospect.

"Are you a masochist?" Ria asked out of habit before shutting up with a glare from Astrelya.

"Anyways, what I'm trying to say is that all four of you are turning away from what you're like on the inside. It doesn't matter how ugly the inside you may be, accepting it is the first step to becoming stronger. Especially for you two." Astrelya pointed at Ria and Isolde.

"I don't know your story, but this lady here is a walking bundle of malice and anger. I've seen your kind pretty often you know?" Astrelya turned her gaze towards Isolde who furrowed her brows before shrugging her shoulders.

"So you're telling me to be true to myself?" Ria frowned.

"Yep, you got it. It doesn't matter how ugly or heinous it might be, it'll definitely help you achieve a new level of power. That's just how twisted our world is." Astrelya chuckled.

Ria frowned.

Was this the case for everyone? Did her grandfather go through the same process to obtain his level of strength? What about Allura? Then is Rosalyn or Caelan the same?

To listen to the voice she buries deep in her chest.

Ria sat down and closed her eyes.

Once more, she focused on the blade in hand.

'Be true to myself. . .' She frowned.

When. . . did she feel most like herself?

When she was holding nothing back?

She could hear the drums in her ear, the call for battle.

She could taste the blood in her mouth, the fury in her veins.

She could feel the rising desire for murder.

In the deep recesses of her mind, she could hear a faint chant.

Sweat began to drip from Ria's mind as an after image appeared over her blade.

Seeing this, Astrelya smirked and flicked it.

As the blade broke, the shards started to reform, multiplying even. She wasn't bound by simple after images right now.

Ria twitched. Flashes of her memories.

Her time in that blood pit.

The chants that kept echoing on and on. . .

Blood in our mouths.

Ash in our hands.

Steel in our hearts.

Death is our crown.

Kill! Maim! Burn!

Blood in our mouths, ash in our hands. Steel in our hearts, death is our crown.

KILL! MAIM! BURN!

She saw herself in the reflection of the blood. That blood soaked smile as she cannibalised on those who were in the pit with her.

Her throat bellowing out the same chant to the rhythm of her slaughters.

The sensation of ripping flesh from bone.

That feeling of tearing the life from someone else.

That desperation, the fear.

Through their despair did Ria feel alive in that moment.

Why did she chase after absolute speed? She wanted to avoid seeing that moment again.

The slow agonising deaths that brought forth a twisted desire in her heart.

While the ritual may be incomplete, it's left its mark.

The mark of the Eclipse.

*RUMBLE!!!

Ria felt her inner world tremble.

As though giant chains that she's been desperately holding onto slowly being removed from her body.

She saw a silhouette in front of her.

Enris.

She saw her smile, she saw the joy in her eyes.

She saw Enris's bloodthirst.

"Yo~ It's been a while." A voice whispered behind her.

Ria recognised it. The same voice she heard when they walked in on an Eclipse Ritual.

Her own voice.

The call of the Eclipse.

"F*ck off. . ." Ria struggled but her own silhouette walked past her.

"Didn't Astrelya tell you? To be true to yourself. You were made as a vessel for the Goddess, which means you have the power to contain divinity. Why don't you simply accept that this is who we are? Go on, partake in the blood sport once more.

"Kill maim burn as your heart desires. Sing along with the chorus of Eclipse like before. Blood in our mouths~ Ash in our hands~" Her silhouette jokingly sung along as Ria glared at her only to freeze up.

Her silhouette was nowhere to be seen. Only Enris.

But this time, it wasn't quite Enris either.

It was a reflection of herself, used as a vessel.

"Either you make this power yours or be used as a vessel."

Before Ria could respond, she felt a pair of arms grabbing onto her, restricting her movements.

"RIA!" Rosalyn shouted as Ria blinked her eyes.

"Huh?"

"F*cking hell you're finally back. What the hell was that?" Rosalyn sighed in relief, letting go of Ria as she had put her into a headlock while Isolde was restraining Ria's limbs.

Confused, Ria looked around and saw a burning line of destruction. Luke managed to shift his body to the side as cold sweat dripped down his face.

A dreadful thought filled her mind as she glanced to her left and saw Astrelya grinning at her.

She pointed her finger up at the sky, gesturing for Ria to look towards where she's pointing.

Then she saw it.

An ominous icon hanging above them. It was slowly fading away but Ria could tell. . . It wasn't a coincidence.

Above them, a false Eclipse had manifested.

Chapter 777: False Eclipse

Ria's pupils trembled at the false eclipse that was slowly fading away.

The moment she lost herself to that voice, to that call. . . An eclipse appeared and she didn't even know what had happened.

She could tell that line of destruction was her doing.

And worse of all, it had almost struck Luke.

Ria could feel a rising heat in the back of her throat.

"My my, so you do have it in you. But it seems like your ties to the Eclipse are far deeper than I thou-"

"No it's not!" Ria interrupted, refusing to be associated with the cult.

"You say that but the link is undeniable. Honestly, if you let yourself go a little I might even get a little interested." Astrelya grinned, licking her lips.

Ria frowned but before she could say anything, Astrelya flicked her wrist.

An array of stars manifested around them and a scene began to play out.

Ria saw herself, sitting with her eyes closed.

She saw the afterimage of her blade being broken into fragments but it didn't dissipate. Instead, she saw it continuously multiply. From one to two, from two to four. From four to eight and so on.

With each second the false eclipse manifested above her head, the afterimage continuously multiplied.

Then she saw the ritual marks slowly manifesting on her body.

Burning lines of black and red.

Markings that were present on her body during the blood pits.

They never left, they were simply hidden.

Dormant.

Waiting for the moment she accepted the inner eclipse.

Even though she couldn't feel any energy from the replay, Ria could see the growing worry on Luke and Rosalyn's face.

Once the marks were completely covered in a blood red, every single shard of her afterimages snapped towards the blade!

Rosalyn panicked, Astrelya lunged towards.

Blood converged into a barrier, the stars reinforced it and Isolde quickly dragged Luke to the side.

With the barriers barely being erected in time, the line of destruction struck forth. A blade of lightning that won't stop at anything. Blood evaporated in an instant, shocking Rosalyn.

A piercing power like no other.

As the blade struck the star barrier, it began to falter.

A collision that would end up in an explosion within the carriage had Astrelya not yielded and allowed the attack to pass.

"What did I say? If you let yourself go a little I might become interested." Astrelya chuckled.

Ria was silent. She wasn't even conscious of what she was doing at that moment. Simply letting her instincts take over while she was fighting the voice inside her own head.

Yet. . . just listening to that voice was able to transform her two fold lightning into something. . . abnormal.

An afterimage that kept multiplying, stacking up power until the moment of release.

A power beyond that of a simple three fold lightning.

Was she truly lacking this much power if she didn't listen to the voice inside herself?

"I appreciate your words of advice for Ria. But choices like these are up to the individual rather than having someone skew their opinion from the side. Just letting them know of the path is enough don't you think?" Rosalyn interrupted Ria's train of thought.

She could tell that Astrelya was pushing Ria towards the path of power. A power that she herself was wary of and something that dove deep into Ria's path.

And Rosalyn could see the struggle within Ria's mind.

Astrelya lost her smile for a moment. She stared at Rosalyn in silent while Rosalyn felt a creeping killing intent.

Her hands tightened.

If she had to fight, she'll fight. But the collateral damage a fight between them could cause. . .

Rosalyn would rather avoid such a confrontation if possible.

"No need to be so serious, I'm just suggesting a possibility. And I'm sure you already saw the hint of power that she is capable of haven't you? If she wants power, why not suggest a path that's opened up?" Astrelya shrugged with a laugh.

Rosalyn let out a sigh of relief inwardly.

But at that moment, Rosalyn felt signature on the edge of her detection.

"Arm up! It seems like Ria's attack woke something up." Rosalyn clicked her tongue.

"No need, I'll deal with it." Astrelya spoke up before turning to Ria.

"You showed a pretty interesting application of power. But since you didn't see it properly, I'll give you a quick demonstration." Astrelya chuckled.

In the distance, they could see an approaching silhouette.

A three headed beast radiating a menacing aura that dyed the world in darkness.

However, due to the distance, they couldn't quite make out the details of the beast.

"Watch carefully girly." Astrelya grinned.

Stars began to converge around her hand, slowly transforming into an arrow.

*KRK!!!

Cracks appeared across the body and it shattered, leaving behind a spectral shadow.

The cracks that formed split and multiplied in a similar manner to Ria, surprising her.

While Nyzel's three fold lightning wasn't a unique ability to her race and rather a skill that she created, it was still a unique application that Ria hadn't seen elsewhere.

The method of multiplying then slamming everything together to create a force bigger than what she can originally achieve.

Yet after seeing it briefly, Astrelya could now replicate it to some extent.

"Hmm, it's still lacking a bit of punch but this should do." Astrelya chuckled before taking aim.

"Bang~"

Silence.

A single line of light that pierced through the horizon. No explosion, no earthquake.

Just a single raw concentrated beam of light that fired the instant the shards converged back into an arrow.

In the distance, the beast froze. Its wings were no longer moving and the body crashed towards the ground. It's ominous presence disappearing with its demise.

But the people in the carriage weren't concerned about the beast dying. What they were most concerned about, the danger that's looming over them in this moment, was Astrelya's whims.

Judging from Rosalyn's initial reactions, it was clear that Astrelya was not to be messed with. She was a walking bomb waiting to explode if things didn't go well.

If all of them gathered up to fight her, death was guaranteed. It didn't matter if Rosalyn won or if Astrelya won.

The issue was how many of them had to die if that was to happen.

"My my, what frightful stares you all possess. Are you perhaps worried about whether or not I'll kill you? Don't worry, I won't. You are all so very important to dear Alice after all.

"Killing you wouldn't serve my purpose, even if it might make dear Alice focus her attention on me. It's not the kind of attention I want." Astrelya shook her head.

She had already tried this method before with other people.

To kill the ones they love most, to butcher and taunt. To do their worse fears in front of their very eyes in an attempt to make them chase after her.

Sometimes it succeeded, sometimes it failed.

When it failed, her subject's mental was broken by her actions. They no longer had the fire of passion in their hearts, they gave up.

When it succeeded, the joy was fleeting.

Sure they chased after her, sure they accumulated strength faster than usual.

But it wasn't 'pure'. The levels they stooped for power was extreme to the point they were willing to abandon everything about themselves. At that point, it didn't matter if they were the one to kill Astrelya or if someone else did.

She simply had to die.

And that wasn't what Astrelya wanted.

She wanted a pure pursuit. A consensus between two individuals that their battle will be one to the death.

A battle where they reveal everything about themselves. A heart to heart 'talk'.

And this ecstasy couldn't be achieved by simply killing their loved ones.

No, one had to be patient. One had to wait their turn, to allow their target to set aside the time needed for a direct confrontation.

And the reward at the end of her patience would be the transcendental death she so desired.

Thankfully, time was something she had in an abundance.

The only thing that was limited in quality was those with the potential and those with the willpower needed to help her reach that moment.

"If you're just waiting for Alice, surely there are other methods than to follow us around." Rosalyn asked with a frown.

"Oh of course. But while I may not be averse to waiting, it doesn't mean I'm not a victim of boredom. Boredom is the worse enemy of people who live long after all. Boredom is what kills the mind, weakens the spirit." Astrelya chuckled, sitting back down.

She almost had her fill of entertainment.

Almost.

Had Ria accepted the call of the eclipse, THEN her boredom would've been fulfilled.

She would've been interested to see what kind of devastation she could cause, the kind of bloodthirst that runs in her veins.

But no, she rejected it at the last moment.

How truly. . .

'Disappointing.' Astrelya sighed inwardly.

She wanted to mess around with Alice but she was occupied.

And showing up would simply ruin Alice's current objective.

With Alice, she was shown surprise after surprise.

Anomaly after anomaly.

She was someone who's true to herself and followed her guts.

The kind of person Astrelya wished she could have a final battle with.

But for now, she'll make do with Ria.

She was also interesting in her own sense but she kept turning away from it.

If Astrelya could find a way to convince Ria to explore that wellspring of power, she could prove to be far more interesting than initially expected.

And so Astrelya prayed.

She prayed that Ria would become a target of her amusement, of her affection. She prayed that Ria would match the potential that she saw inside her.

Chapter 778: Failed Ascension

"What the hell is that?" Ria muttered in disbelief.

They had travelled towards Verona, expecting the northern cities and landscapes of ice.

Even the sprawling verdant forests that were scattered near the borders and giant mountains.

Instead, what they were greeted with was the complete opposite.

Where there should have been the azure frozen plains flanking their sides were instead replaced by cracked and bloodied soil. Broken weapons stabbed into the ground like gravestones, corpses littered as marks of battle.

There was no grass or vegetation, only scorched and withered debris.

The forests of Verona were turned into skeletal husks, each tree melding with bone, transforming into a malformed ribcage as though a giant beast was merged with the ground.

Bark that peeled away, revealing pulsing lungs.

It was still 'alive'.

The sun, or rather what should've been the sun was replaced by a crimson moon that hung ominously in the sky. Its light bleeding out an oppressive crimson into the world, turning the sky into a brutal shade of scarlet.

In the distance, within the heart of the city, blossomed a jagged spire mimicking the flourishing of a twisted flower. Each petal soaked with blood and coated with barbs, tendrils of flesh stretching along each spike and the waterfall of blood pouring from the blood moon that hung above.

Clouds hung like flayed flesh hanging off the bone. Beneath the bloodied sky, blood poured towards the land, covering broken buildings and the frozen walls of the city.

The northern wind should've been sharp and clean, the kind that carried the coldness from the ice into your lungs.

Instead, all they found was the stench of iron clinging to the back of their throats with each breath that they took.

Rosalyn didn't have an answer for Ria.

They left for the nation mere days ago. And their information from during that period suggested that nothing was wrong. Yet in the span of a short few days, a hellscape had appeared over Verona.

For Jin and Ria, they could recognise that this wasn't the work of the Eclipse.

There was no purpose in this. No glorious ritual, no altar for Enris.

This was done by something far more twisted. Violence and murder for the sake of violence and murder.

Isolde had a deep frown on her face.

There were traces. Markings of things she found all too familiar.

After all, she partook in something similar when giving offerings to Zal-Ka'Rith.

The way she transformed the sinners into art.

She could see the 'flow' of this piece. The intent and desire.

A paradox of order without order. Purpose without purpose.

Though perhaps that wasn't the right thing to say. Instead, Isolde believed that the carnage was the intent.

"My my, I sincerely hope the Queen of this nation and her retainers are doing fine. Though. . . her soldiers not so much." Astrelya mused, looking down at a withered hand poking through the ground and gave it a kick, breaking the arm.

Ria felt a surge of anger.

She remembered Nyzel and her garden of graves. To desecrate and mock the dead in such a way was a complete insult.

"Are you angry? More reason for you to become strong is it not? So that you can impose your own justice onto others." Astrelya laughed, turning towards the heart of the city and the twisted flower that was blooming.

"Last I recall, the Queen should be trying to achieve divinity. A man made divine throne like the one present centuries ago." Astrelya spoke, shocking Rosalyn.

While this information wasn't exactly uncommon for them due to their connections, having someone unrelated like Astrelya know this was very shocking to say the least.

After all, the three churches worked hard to hide information about Ayr and eventually succeeded in erasing it from the minds of the people. To them, there was never a city called Ayr and the Abyss was always a hostile land.

Expeditions further into the depths were always a struggle with most Lords or powerful beings opting for safety instead of exploration.

Which is to be expected considering the deeper you go, the stronger and more abnormal the beasts are.

"But such pursuits are folly don't you agree? Exceptions are exceptions for a reason. It's not something that anyone can just achieve on a whim. And if everyone was to become the exception, then it simply becomes the new norm.

"So I ask you." Astrelya smiled with her hands behind her back.

"Why do you think that even as the centuries have passed, there still only remains three divine thrones? The fourth may be empty but a fifth or sixth never appeared." She chuckled.

Rosalyn couldn't respond. She couldn't even make a guess towards the potential answer as this was a field of study that she didn't focus on. She was too preoccupied with how to break her 'curse' of looking like Allura and reaching Lordship instead of the process of becoming a divine.

"No answer? As Caelan's sister, I half expected you to be as knowledgeable as he is. But then again, I suppose knowledge is discovered and learned rather than inherited through the blood." Astrelya shrugged.

"Since you have no answer or even a guess, I'll refrain from asking questions. Instead I ask you to turn your eyes towards the heart of the flower. You might discover something rather. . . interesting?"
Astrelya chuckled.

Ria followed Astrelya's gaze reluctantly, turning her attention to the heart of the twisted flower that blossomed in the centre of the capital.

Then she noticed as did the rest of the group.

Something, someone was in the centre of the flower.

Waiting.

Suspended by the countless tendrils that hung off the flower's petals, its elongated body fused with the pulsing vein-like stems that protruded from the depths.

The silhouette was vaguely humanoid.

But the mere thought that 'THAT THING' was a human sent shivers down their spine.

Its spine arched in unnatural turns, limbs bending with too many joints. Strips of skin, torn and hanging off the jagged spikes that protruded from the body.

The torso, split open from the middle, revealed a mass of shimmering wet flesh tissue. And through the layers that throbbed to the rhythm of a heartbeat, countless fine wormlike tendrils wriggled and writhed, parting to reveal a face fused with what seemed to be an eye.

Where its face should've been, layers of metal and flesh fused to one. Serrated edges that cut the skin with each movement, each twitch. Each cut causing a wave of pain, thus repeating the cycle.

Rosalyn couldn't turn her eyes away and neither could the rest.

It wasn't curiosity. Even in the morbid sense.

But rather, an innate fear, a primal fear. That the moment they turn, the beast might break out.

If that 'Thing' was to be allowed out. . .

"An ascension sabotaged at the last moments. A shame really since this might've become the next exception." Astrelya chuckled without fear.

She stepped towards the heart.

Countless tendrils lashed out, blood spikes that erupted from the ground. All to stop the approach of Astrelya.

But the barrier of stars held firm, unyielding. Nothing the false herald tried to do even slowed down Astrelya and soon, she reached the suspended being.

"Hm?" Noticing something strange, Astrelya leaned forward, getting a better look.

"Ohya? My my maybe they will become an exception after all!" She laughed, snapping her fingers.

Motes of light converged towards her finger, turning into a blade. Using this, Astrelya made a diagonal cut, exposing the internal structure of the false herald.

With the insides exposed, Astrelya made her way back to the group.

"I had thought that the queen perished in the sabotaged ascension, becoming this twisted mound of flesh. But it seems like that is not the case. She is what I would call a smart cookie." Astrelya narrowed her eyes.

Ria turned to the false herald.

The 'head' of Verona was actually not a head at all. A mimicry born from a corrupted right arm housed between the ribs of the false herald.

Astrelya found her amusement at an all time high. She closed her eyes, imagining the moment of her ascension.

There's no doubt that there was foul play. Thus whatever divinity that Verona was trying to reach must've been isolated into her arm and severed from her core. To permanently modify her spiritual heart, her soul and her physical form so that all connections were detached.

All for the sake of survival so that she does not become the catalyst to bring forth the birth of a twisted monstrosity mimicking the might of the divine thrones.

But this ascension. . . it didn't feel quite complete. A trial perhaps.

But for what? The birth of a new god? Why go through such lengths? There were many cases where such experiments were done in the past so surely there are plenty of references to choose from.

Unless. . .

'A new direction of research?' Astrelya covered her mouth with her hand.

If that was the case, Astrelya had to shift her thought process as well.

Something was off, something that's been nagging in the corner of her mind.

She turned around, observing the broken cocoon of the false herald.

That arm. . .

It was 'fresh'.

The experiment ended right before they arrived!

No, saying that it ended wasn't right. It's still ongoing!

She saw a shadow in the sky. A silhouette of a man holding a woman with one arm.

A familiar face.

In that moment, Astrelya had one thought. She had to preserve the entertainment that she's discovered.

"Grab someone near you!" She called out, grabbing Ria by the shoulder.

The others were confused but did as they were told. Isolde grabbed onto Luke, Rosalyn grabbed onto Jin.

A blinding flash of light.

The sudden pressure of miasma. The bloodthirst that dominated the air around them.

Ria collapsed on her knees.

She recalled feeling something similar.

When she was still training with Alice and Allura.

But this was far far worse. A suffocating aura that almost made her forget to breathe.

Astrelya glanced around them. The others had been transported away and they were now isolated.

As for where they were sent. . .

Terminus.

Chapter 779: Marker

After leaving the Sun Church branch island, it didn't take long for Alice and Gwen to reach the mainland.

Unfortunately, it was a different port than the one Alice wanted to go to but there was a reason for that.

First, the Sun Church had a branch in this port as well, meaning Gwen could get some support tracking down her target.

Second, there was a unique branch of the Underground. One where they specifically specialise in tracking down bounties.

Most Underground branches work with information as a whole but rarely do they heavily skew towards one type.

But when they do, it's because they're one of the best if not THE best.

"Syrion The Blade Sovereign huh? That's a rather dangerous Hunt you have chosen there Miss Guinevere." The manager of the branch smiled.

Since an esteemed Cardinal was visiting, an Apostle's child at that, the best courtesy they could show was have the branch manager service her directly.

He was a tall young man with short black hair, a jewelled eyepatch over his right eye and wore a standard Hunter's attire.

A simple jacket, padded clothing and pouches holding useful tools scattered across his body.

There was nothing 'unique' about his appearance aside from perhaps the eyepatch.

Had it not been for the fact that they were told he's the branch manager, it would've been impossible to even make the guess.

Even for Alice, all she could see was that he possessed Six Sigils.

Outside of seeing the six markings above his head, he felt like a normal person.

Too normal in fact.

"Can you track him down?" Gwen asked though the answer was rather obvious.

"Of course. Though I must warn that sufficient preparation are to be made before departure." The Branch manager nodded.

"I'm well awa-"

"It's not for this Sovereign specifically but rather for every Hunt you are prepared to embark on. You see, there's been some. . . anomalies that have been occurring recently. Gateways and fissures leading deep into the Abyss." The Branch manager cut her off with a shake of his head.

Recalling what she and Kaia experienced with the Lord that climbed out of Terminus, Gwen fell silent.

"The beasts are undergoing rapid enhancement. Some evolve at a rapid pace, others somehow ascend to Lordship. There were even a case of a beast managing to regenerate despite having been turned into Abyss Blood.

"Armour that began to engulf the user, incarnating them into a new subject of the bestial race. These incidents have been happening rather often as of late. Thus I must warn Miss Guinevere to progress with the knowledge that Syrion will be far stronger than whatever information you gather might suggest." He warned.

Hearing this, Alice frowned.

They've been on the boat recently so in regards to what's been happening, she wasn't sure.

[Seems like we'll need to gather some information again.] Cayla sighed.

Even though she already updated her database in Caelan's library, information was everchanging.

New information appear, old ones become outdated.

IF she was completely unsealed, she could read the threads of energy to some extent, even with half of herself missing.

But since they brute forced a partial unseal, the rest of the seal was hanging on even more tenaciously than before. She'll have to readjust her unsealing formulate to break through.

Alice coughed feeling Cayla's glare which thankfully disappeared quickly.

'Do you think it's something to do with the Abyss? Having a gateway open into Terminus was weird enough as it is. Especially considering that the things down there are meant to be sealed off for good with all the teleport gates leading down being broken.' Alyss frowned.

The beasts in Terminus weren't limited to just the Sealed Lords. There were also Lord level beasts confined in the depths or beasts that would cause mass destruction if they were to break free.

Having a gateway forming between the layers felt like an ominous omen of what's to come. A downward spiral towards whatever the Will was planning.

[If it was just one or two beasts, I would disagree but having so many experience the enhancement is definitely weird. But in this case, it's something to do with the realm itself rather than the Will.] Cayla folded her arms.

'Oh? How so?' Alice blinked her eyes curiously.

[Because the Will isn't responsible for the deployment of beasts. The realm is. Hmm, think of the realm as something that's running autonomously with the Will being able to make certain adjustments here and there. But the overall functionality is still decided by the realm rather than the Will.

[And I doubt he has the authority to make such a drastic change to the deployment of beasts. If all of them are getting stronger, then it must be from the connection that beasts have with the realm.] Cayla theorised.

'So would it affect us? Seeing as how you're a relic of the Abyss, wouldn't you experience some changes?' Alice asked but Cayla shook her head.

[While I also have a connection with the Abyss, it's different to the connection that beasts have. If anything, I'm more worried about Rosalyn considering her identity.]

With Rosalyn being a beast, a connection will most definitely be formed. They can only hope that it's nothing harmful for now and simply a case of increased strength.

At the end of the meeting, the branch manager gave Gwen a list of previous sightings regarding the whereabouts of Syrion.

"Allow us some time to verify and update his whereabouts. If it goes well, she should be able to attach a 'marker' to him so the pursuit will be easier." He bowed with both Gwen and Alice being confused by the term marker.

"Are you going to be sending someone to come with us?"

"You misunderstand. The Marker is a recent invention that we've started to make use of. Simply put, it's a tracker that locks onto the energy unique to that beast and that beast alone. Once a Marker is attached, if you inject energy into the receiver, a tether will be formed between the two.

"The. . . linking process takes some time but once it's recorded the signature, as long as you keep the capsule safe, even if they dive deep into the Abyss or fly through the Void, you'll be able to track them down." The Branch manager explained.

Immediately, Alice felt warning bells ringing in her mind.

Recording a target's signature then storing it in a capsule. If she was to. . . shift her thought into tracking a person down instead of a beast.

Alice swallowed her saliva nervously.

She absolutely cannot let her signature be recorded!

If the Zenia or anyone else were to get their hands it, she'll be done for!

Just thinking about it sent a shiver down her spine.

To know that someone was tracking her every movement every passing second.

How there was a chance that the moment she sits down to rest, they could ambush her. . .

"It seems like the young lady here knows of the implications of such technology." The branch manager smiled seeing a small shift in Alice's posture.

"I would love to reassure the young lady that what she fears won't come to pass but unfortunately that's not the case. Thankfully, the ones who made this ensured that the linking process takes longer on humans than beasts so unless you want to, it should be relatively easy to break free." He explained.

"What do you mean by break free?" Alice frowned.

"In order to link, one must be within a certain distance and ensure that the signature isn't muddled by other sources. So the target must be isolated. Only by fulfilling these two requirements can a link be established. So if you see someone trying to isolate you, there's a good chance that they're trying to establish a link."

In a way, Alice could see the safety measures put in place. But regardless, it was still a risk, even more so with someone like her.

"Do you have a spare marker and receiver? It seems like my friend wants to investigate it a little." Gwen chuckled as the branch manager nodded his head.

Excusing himself for a moment, he stepped aside to retrieve the item.

"How did you know?" Alice glanced at Gwen who simply smiled.

"You had the same look on your face when we were at the branch so I figured you probably wanted to break it apart and see how it links. After all, you're someone with stealthy abilities that can even evade Vision. A marker like this is a threat no?" Gwen stuck out her tongue.

Alice scratched her hair and sighed.

"Yeah it is. But is my face really that readable?" Alice pouted.

She noticed this with the people that she's become friends with. All of them felt like they could just look at her face and see what she's thinking.

"Nope~ I'm simply that observant. Did you forget I don't have friends so I spend most of my time observing people? I've come to tell the differences between shifts in expression. Guilt, sadness, pity and so on. Every little shift of the eyes, the way they speak, how they posture themselves. I got a little checklist up in here to see what they're thinking about." Gwen pointed at her own head.

Hearing this, Alice's smile twitched.

"That is simultaneously impressive yet sad at the same time."

"Don't you think that's a little blunt and rude? But I'll forgive you." Gwen kicked Alice's leg with a chuckle.

Indeed, it was both impressive and sad. However, this skill had its own perks so she wasn't too bothered.

Soon, the branch manager returned with the item and the two left the branch.

Chapter 780: Pale Knight

On the way back to their accommodations, Alice's eyes lingered on the item the branch manager handed over.

Despite its capabilities, the Marker looked like a simple trinket or toy. A sphere no bigger than her fingertip yet strangely intricate. A surface composed of several tiny interlocking segments that shifted subtly whenever Alice held it against the light.

She could tell that when the marker locks onto a target, these components will probably open up to reveal whatever it was hiding within its tiny walls.

The receiver looked even more so like a trinket. A compass that was stripped of the familiar components such as the needle or cardinal markings. Not even a piece of glass separated the user from the inner workings.

Instead, the central chamber was an open hollow disk containing a single shard of grey crystal, suspended by thin golden threads attached from the walls.

A crystal not unlike the one that Suyin gave when absorbing Eldritch energy.

Beneath the suspended crystal was another hidden compartment, concealed within the compass's base. Alice eased it open with her thumb, revealing the empty capsule that the branch manager had mentioned.

Crafted from a strange black glass, there was a thin strange of light held in the centre as though waiting for something.

Alice had some theories on how the marker worked based on certain clues that the branch manager gave her. But unless she took it apart, she won't be able to know for sure.

[Alternatively, you can write a note to Suyin no? Have her take a look at the compass for you and tell you about how it works.] Cayla suggested as Alice scratched her chin and nodded.

But she'll need to find a private time to do so as there's no doubt Suyin will be tampering with Eldritch energy in that vault of hers.

She couldn't risk opening it without the possibility of Eldritch energy being picked up by Gwen. After all, if her connection with corrupted energy was to be exposed before she found out the secret to Vision, it would go against everything she's worked towards thus far.

"Well? Did you find out what you wanted to know?" Gwen asked curiously, seeing Kaia fiddling with the marker.

"Not really. I think I'll let a friend of mine know about it later. Rather than Abyssal Engineering, it's more so just pure engineering with a sprinkle of Abyssal influences." Alice replied with a soft sigh.

"Oh? You recognise that kind of stuff?" Gwen blinked her eyes in surprise.

Most people wouldn't be able to differentiate between the two. To them, most things are Abyssal Engineering.

But she could tell that Kaia saw deeper than that.

"A little bit? I'm not exactly proficient so it's more so a guess than anything." Alice coughed.

"Heh~ That's impressive though. Perhaps you might have some talent in tinkering. Ever thought about giving it a try?" Gwen asked curiously but Alice quickly shook her head.

"No thank you. I've had enough of those to last me a lifetime."

Every time she messed around with Abyssal Engineering, she would be reminded of the collar they shackled around her neck.

She'd rather not think about that if possible.

But with one whole day on their hands, they decided to gather some more information on the Blade Sovereign.

###

The pale knight walked amidst a land of sorrow.

He had no name.

Fragments of a life long buried. The scent of a woman, the warmth of her breath.

The weight of a small child within his arms, the joy of a small hand curling against his fingers.

Yet their faces eluded him.

Were these truly his memories, or dreams planted by another's hand?

Had he once been a beast of battle, or a loyal guardian?

Fragments of monotony flashed through his mind.

The days where he polished his armour, raised his son into the air before catching him again.

The swing set beneath the tree, a garden at home.

Fragments of joy barged its way into his mind.

His son begging the father to learn swordsmanship. His praise towards the father, proclaiming him as the strongest.

Fragments of wonder. The three of them sitting by a fire. She would hum, his son would sleep. And he sat by their side.

He wished things would never change. But such wishes are fragile things.

Fragments of a call to action. His duty.

His wife's tearful pleas, his son's desperate protests, all weighed against the reality that their peace existed only through his allegiance to the cold light of the lunar sphere.

So in the dead of winter, he marched. His armour stained with mud, his blade chipped and rusted by the blood of those who fell before him.

He sought neither glory nor honour. Only the quiet hope of returning home. But the drums of war knew no mercy.

Fragments of bloodshed. . .

Fragments of screams.

Fragments of brother and sisters in arms dying by his side.

A battle against the darkened sun was never going to be smooth. But the man persisted.

He fought, he cleaved, he pierced. He tore through the battlefield with the very same swordsmanship that he taught his son.

Fragments of a battle won yet bad omen stirs.

The darkened sun retreated but not for long. They simply needed reinforcements, new soldiers.

Fragments of loss-

The pale knight flinched and kneeled.

Pain lanced through his mind, his body trembling. Warm memories always ended this way, drowned in a sudden, icy void.

It was always like this.

He could never quite remember the final fragments.

Or perhaps he didn't want to. A rejection.

But regardless of the answer, he walked within this coffin of steel.

Before him stood a hunter, one who desires his power. The pale knight sees the hunter's allies.

Was he also a father?

Or was the hunter a son?

To rend the lad in two would mean a despair.

Not for him, but for whomever waits his return.

The pale knight did not stop, he strode past the hunter for he wished not to deprave the lad of his life.

For he too was someone who had to return home.

His own war had ended, though his memories failed him. So he would march on, march until the road carried him back to the home he could no longer clearly see.

The hunter struck from behind.

A man with no honour.

The pale knight watched as a sky of flaming arrows rain down towards him. He recalled the Fragment of Bloodshed, a familiar scene.

His war has ended yet battle still raged on.

To return to his home, he was now forced to deprave another of his chance.

Thus the pale knight will pray. Pray that in the next life, the hunter would not be so foolish.

Moonlight crashed down from above, solidifying as an armoury of blades.

The pale knight marched into battle, blades lit with lunar radiance.

He dodged, he cleaved.

Fragments of memory manifest once more. He felt her tears on his skin.

Was it from the farewell? Or something else.

With one down, the hunter cried out in panic. A clear misjudgement of their power.

The pale knight saw the flames of anger, of rage in his eyes.

He will give the lad another chance.

To leave before another loses their life.

To avoid a dark future where all of them are buried beneath the ground they stand upon.

As expected, the lad could not put down his fire of anger and struck.

The pale knight offered words of apology before rending them in two.

How many days must he continue down this path, how many months.

Perhaps even years have passed.

But he believed. He believed that he'll reach that home.

###

A puppet sat by the tree. Her eyes gazing upon the walking set of armour wading through a river of blood.

A knight of the moon church, a man who was once their strongest cardinal.

A broken man with a mind fragmented.

She sees his soul controlling his body with a single objective in mind.

To return home.

"Old friend. . ." Griselda muttered.

It was a pitiful sight.

She sees the shadows of his past self, the days long gone.

But all that remains now was a baleful shadow and a fragmented mind.

She wanted to liberate him much sooner, to ease his pain.

But his fate was not in her hands. . .

No.

Her master lost the bargain, his soul was now a property of the Sun.

To be used as fuel for the one that the sun deems worthy.

At long last, will his endless journey come to an end. At long last, can her old friend get the rest he desired.

To finally reunite with the family he lost in that war.

To begin with, it was their fault. They should've known that his family would become targets when the Eclipse was pushed back.

They should've protected them better.

But the location of his home was exposed, burnt down.

His family was taken, materials for reinforcements.

Soldiers specifically crafted to fight him.

The face of his son grafted onto a hulking monstrosity, waving the sword around in a crude reminder of his swordsmanship.

His wife's memento strapped onto a skinless body begging for death. Her familiar voice called his name but this time in desperation. For liberation.

There was no home for him to return to.

No wife waiting for him, no son calling out his name.

Only an endless pursuit until death takes him.

Griselda took a deep breath and looked up at the sky.

She offered him one last prayer before leaving.

The cardinal was no more. In that broken mind was only the beast Syrion, the Blade Sovereign.