

Abyssal A 791

Chapter 791: Alice Vs Syrion Round 2

"A berserker..." Syrion muttered to himself.

Someone with an extraordinary regenerative ability that allowed them to shrug off most attacks.

Weapons of war that will land a hit no matter what it takes. So long as their will burns, they will regenerate and fight to the bitter end.

However, she's not showing her true power.

Hiding? Why?

She seemed concerned as well.

Every so often, her eyes would flick to the side, towards Gwen.

As if to check out her reaction.

Syrion stabbed his blades into the ground.

"Well, will you fight? And I don't mean just the mundane action of swinging your sword. I mean fight like your life depends on it." He asked with his arms folded.

Alice paused.

Fight... Yes, she would like to.

But wanting to do so and actually doing so was... difficult. Gwen may have spoke about wanting to kill Solaris but at the end of the day, her father was still the Apostle.

Actually using her skills in front of her at this stage... without a long talk, it would be a bad choice.

Alice dismissed Void Fang.

"Not yet." Alice sighed as Syrion nodded.

"If you want my advice, be ready to fight with everything you got. Resolve the misunderstanding between you and your friend."

Waving her hand, Alice made her way over to the table and sat down next to Gwen who suddenly found her bottle very interesting.

"Sorry, for hiding the artifact and how I fight." Alice didn't hold back and told her straight up.

"Why are you saying sorry? Everyone has things they want to hide." Gwen sighed.

"Perhaps. But it feels like a betrayal. And I don't want to do that, not to you."

After knowing Gwen on a deeper level, Alice wanted them to stay as allies. If they had to meet on the battlefield as enemies... it would be a shame.

"If... If you have anything you want to ask, ask away." Alice hesitated.

"Are you actually my aunt's disciple? And why she doesn't remember you." Gwen asked.

This was the thing holding back most of her suspicions.

But if Alice wasn't her disciple... Questions had to be asked.

Questions she'd prefer not to talk about.

"Yes and no. It's true that she trained me, it's true that I studied the previous Zone from her. But to call me her actual disciple would be far fetched.

"We had one training session together. Back then... I was also supposed to get a training session from your dad as well but my fighting style wasn't suitable." Alice admitted.

"So why don't they remember?" Gwen was confused.

Another question that surfaced was how she could even request that kind of training to begin with.

To study under two Apostles.

Was she someone important to the Sun? Then... did she just declare that she wanted to kill Solaris in front of someone like this?

Gwen clenched her fist.

"Because it was in a memory. An Inverted World. I came across your aunt and dad in the Inverted World. One thing led to another and I studied under Shiera for one day."

Gwen's pupils constricted.

One day.

She could tell Alice wasn't lying.

One day was all it took for her to understand the principles of Zone and even use it to her level of proficiency.

After a moment, Gwen took a deep breath. Hesitation gripped her heart but she asked anyways.

"Are you... Are you an enemy of the Sun?"

Alice froze mid drink and placed down her bottle.

"Yes, yes I am. I also see the Moon and Eclipse as my enemies."

Gwen slumped in her chair.

Her agreement with Solaris appearing in her mind.

She couldn't let Alice confirm her suspicions.

Not now, not like this.

"Tell me honestly. Are you an enemy of my dad?" That was what's important for Gwen.

It doesn't matter if Alice is Solaris' enemy so long as her dad was no involved. A rather impossible task considering his position but Gwen wanted to ask regardless.

"No, I am not. And I hope to keep it that way. I don't want to make you, your dad or your aunt my enemy. My target is Solaris, Lumiria and Enris." Alice clarified.

It was those that sat upon the divine throne she had an issue with, not those below.

But if they become her enemy, Alice will deal with them.

Gwen closed her eyes. With Alice's statement, her suspicions were starting to prove themselves right.

Therefore, she had to stop Alice before she's forced to do something she didn't want to do.

"Kaia... Was all of this an act? Please just... Tell me honestly."

Tapping her fingers against the table, Alice decided to respect Gwen's wishes and just tell her honestly.

"It was at the start. As you said, I wanted to learn how to use Vision. But somewhere along the line, it stopped being just an act. You're someone I consider a friend. Should you need my help with anything, I'll do my best to help."

"I see..." Gwen sighed inwardly.

She knew it, it was just an act at the start. But... She was glad it wasn't an act anymore.

That Kaia was actually her friend.

Snapping her fingers, Alice dismissed her disguise, surprising Gwen.

"Since I said I was your friend, I don't think it'll be fair to keep this disguise. And my name isn't Kaia, it's Alice. Alice Agnelia."

[Alice what are you doing?!] Cayla widened her eyes in surprise.

She didn't think Alice would just expose herself like this.

'Sometimes you have to extend the hand first.' Alice smiled.

"You really are just full of secrets." Gwen sighed, leaning back on her seat.

"I get told that pretty often." Alice offered her a drink.

If Gwen accepts, then nothing changed between them.

"I trust you one more time okay? After this, there are no more." Gwen sighed helplessly, accepting the drink.

"Hehe~ I'll keep that in mind. But lucky you, you get to try a mead that can't be gotten anymore. Now then, I think it's time to show you how I actually fight." Alice winked, standing up.

Raising her eyebrow, Gwen took a sip, pausing at the taste of Ayrian mead.

"Seems like you've resolved your differences." Syrion unfolded his arms.

There was a new air of fighting intent around Alice.

A dangerous one.

The girl in front of her wasn't going to be an easy target.

"Yep. Sorry for not showing you everything I got before. Shall we give this another try?" Alice grinned, her energy flaring and pushing the dust away from her.

"Of course. I'll allow you to use casting." Syrion chuckled, pulling out his blades.

"Don't regret it okay?"

*RUMBLE!!!

Alice clenched her fist, transforming Void Fang into a blade before injecting it with Void energy.

In an instant, Gwen felt a chill down her spine.

This power that Alice had kept contained within her body all this time...

Magnificent!

How could a six Sigil Hunter possess this level of power without blessings?!

"My my, you give some of the geniuses I've seen back in my day a run for their money." Syrion let out a hearty laugh. He could feel the excitement pumping through his armour.

He was dead yet he felt alive at this moment.

There was no need for a start signal.

Once the first move was made, the spar began!

*BANG!!!

Stomping down, an array of blood beads appeared around Syrion! Each one was preparing a Void Flux!

"HA!!!" Crossing his blades, Syrion unleashed a tightly woven net of slashes that destroyed the casts before they could even be fired!

"F*cking hell you're someone who specialise in killing casters!" Alice understood immediately.

"In the heat of battle, casts are thrown all over the place! If I can't do this much I would've died much earlier!"

Twisting his body, he slashed downwards as Alice flicked her finger.

A portal ripped open in front of him, transferring his slash elsewhere as Syrion quickly parried his own attack.

Using this change, Alice ducked down and took a low stance.

Void Flux – Cleave!

*CLANG!!!

Parrying the sword slash with the guard of his blade, Syrion wanted to counter but Alice was already gone.

Void Step!

Appearing above Syrion, Alice transformed her sword into a bow and created a blood arrow.

Energy spiralled around her as a singularity spun to life in her eye.

Void Flux – Piercing form!

Firing the arrow, Alice watched as Syrion clenched his fist and conjured a spectral blade.

He wasn't going to dodge!

"Monstrous b*stard." Alice grinned.

"Tsk tsk, a young lady like you should stop cursing so often." Syrion chuckled, slashing up with his blade and cutting the arrow in half along with the sky!

Transforming bow into a set of dual blades, golden chains manifested around her limbs.

"Finally! My turn! Let's f*cking go!" Alyss laughed.

Destruction Point!

'She's faster!' Syrion took a step back.

His blades won't make it in time so he opted for hand to hand combat instead.

Pushing Alyss's wrists away, he was barely able to move his head when her attack patterns changed.

Three silhouettes appeared, one was attacking, one countering and the other dodging!

"So it's like this." Clapping his hands together, three swords appeared and attacked all three.

"Not quite." Alice intercepted with portals before switching back to Alyss!

A quick swap between the two!

Alyss flashed behind Syrion, her blade was vibrating as her smile twitched.

"How f*cking tough is that armour of yours?! Void Fang didn't even land a scratch."

She had slashed Syrion's shoulder with Void Fang but all it did was remove the dirt. Nothing more.

Since that was the case, it's time for them to get a little serious.

As the golden chains disappeared, crimson spider lilies began to bloom.

Chapter 792: Alice's Weakness

First Resonance!

Alice's armour shifted as she unleashed two quick slashes that tore apart the earth as it travelled towards Syrion.

*CLANG!!!

Pushing the blades off to the side, he noticed a convergence of energy.

Alice was preparing something dangerous!

Void Flux!

Syrion slashed on instinct, cleaving the attack in half.

But as he finished his sword swing, Alice was face to face with him.

On the back of her neck, Alice's sixth Sigil burned!

Revenant Recollection – Allura!

*CLANG!!!

Syrion felt a chill and parried with his second blade!

Alice followed up with two rapid strikes, pushing Syrion back.

In that instant, Alice transformed into someone unfamiliar. Someone far more experienced than even him!

Syrion understood this was no time to hold back.

Three blades manifested behind him, helping him with defence.

He needed to find a gap but Alice wasn't making it easy!

*BANG!!!

Creating some distance between them, Alice slammed her hand onto the ground.

Revenant Recollection – Kaden!

A pool of blood expanded and from the blood, beasts lunged out.

Syrion summoned a false moon, unleashing a net of slashes around him.

"10 meters, that's your preferred range it seems." Alice analysed before pulling her arm back.

A singularity spun to life but before it could be launched, Syrion grabbed her arm from behind.

"!!!"

Widening her eyes, Alice detonated her attack, destroying her hand in the process but escaping the grapple.

"Alice!" Gwen stood up in shock, about to cast a healing skill when she saw Alice's flesh beginning to regrow.

First came the bones then came the flesh and finally, the skin.

"I knew it. A berserker, that's the kind of fighter you are." Syrion chuckled.

"Bingo~ Now here's your prize!"

Stomping down with her foot, metal and ice pillars burst out from the ground.

"A distraction?" Syrion chuckled.

Twisting his body, he unleashed a horizontal slash that cut all of the pillars down!

"Not quite."

Revenant Recollection – Kazira!

War Gods Step!

Alyss appeared behind Syrion.

Destruction Point!

But before Alyss could draw her blade, she felt her body lock up.

Similar to Nyer's skill yet at the same time, very different.

"You're definitely a tough one to beat." Syrion admitted. But the fight ends here.

[It's a bit early but we're using it!]

*RUMBLE!!!

Violet flames burst out from Alyss's body, destroying the binding as blood blades intercepted!

Taking a few steps back, Syrion stared at Alyss in surprise.

"Well... I've seen my fair share of mimicry but this is a first." He muttered.

He could see the three blades hovering around her along with Void Fang that split itself into dual swords.

She was copying his fighting style!

It wasn't just a rough copy either.

He felt like he was looking into a mirror.

The way she carried herself, her centre of gravity, the way her eyes would shift and even the small habits.

Alyss rushed forward, the three blades following suit.

*CLANG!!!

They parried in the same way, attacked the same.

Even the thin blade point collided at the same spot despite their height difference!

Right now, there was two Syrions fighting one another beneath the false moon.

Syrion parried her downward strike off to the side then followed up with a kick towards the stomach.

Alice tagged in, creating a portal to intercept the kick while lunging forward with a Void Flux aimed at the stomach.

*BANG!!!

A sword dropped down, piercing her Void Flux before it could be fired while Alice's floating blade countered by targeting his leg.

Both fighters twisted their body and ended up with their backs to one another.

"How on earth did you even do this. This isn't an ordinary copy that can be done with just mimicry. You know my habits, how I think during a fight. It's a one to one copy." Syrion asked curiously.

"Sixth Sigil. It let's me learn the history of combat and overlay it to myself. But that's just the simplified version." Alice admitted.

"The new generation is really full of monsters. But you used this in a hurry didn't you?" Syrion smiled.

Alice chuckled, nodding her head.

"I figured. That last move just now was a test. To see whether or not you knew about what I haven't showcased yet. If you did, you would've struck. But you didn't."

"I did just say it was reading the history of combat rather than your mind." Alice shrugged.

Since she couldn't consume Syrion's blood, the best she could do was read 'land' around them.

The history of their recent battles.

Therefore, the copy was still a little poor in some places but it would suffice for now.

"That you did. But I think we can stop here. Any more and it'll become a full blown battle instead of a spar, don't you agree?" Syrion offered, pointing his finger at the sky.

Alice didn't even need to look up to see the 'silhouettes' of the attacks he's stored.

She could survive it with her regeneration but that was cheating in a spar. In fact, she already did so when she detonated the Void Flux in her hand.

"I'll admit, my methods aren't suitable for spars. They're more suitable for life and death battles." Alice raised her hands in defeat, retrieving her energy and weapons while Syrion did the same.

"Don't be foolish, you're plenty strong for sparring. The only reason you think that is because a spar won't end with a clear decisive winner with that regeneration of yours. If I had a method of stopping the regeneration, we won't be having this conversation." Syrion rolled his eyes, flicking Alice on the forehead before she could dodge.

In a spar, regeneration would be considered to be cheating. But just from that small instance, he could tell that her healing factor was far stronger than most. Treating it as a weapon was understandable.

And with that being a core part of her fighting style, taking it away would also be unfair.

Therefore, to actually figure out a winner, it'll transform to an actual fight instead of a spar.

"I assume you already have a finishing move right?" Syrion asked as Alice nodded her head.

"Then there's only one issue that I can think of. You take too long to ramp up in your fights. But if you fight with your all, it seems like you'll burn out just as fast. A contradictory set of skills I must admit.

"You can't fight a battle of attrition since the enemy will probably run away. You can't fight a short battle since you're tapped out once they survive the burst. So you go for this weird in between where you try to whittle them down before finishing them off.

"But by the time you do that, your offensive power has already dropped due to the battle of attrition. Am I correct?" Syrion asked as Alice blinked her eyes in surprise.

[He's actually read you like a book.] Cayla was impressed.

In just one spar, Syrion has already identified Alice's greatest weakness.

She can't fight long yet her strategies suit long fights. She can't fight short either since if she does so, she's a one and done kind of fighter. Completely at the mercy of her enemy.

Her second resonance helps resolve this to some extent but if the resonance is broken, she'll be a fish on the chopping block. Therefore, it's best to save it for the end.

All in all, Alice was a fighter that can't commit to either style of fighting.

Her versatility is her greatest strength yet also her biggest weakness.

"I think to solve it, there are two options you can go with. First, is to develop a fighting style that can stall properly while also ensuring that your opponent can't run away. The second option, is to probe their defences to see which strategy is most fitting. With this however, you need to understand them on a psychological level.

"A battle is a mind game as much as it is a brawl. If you understand your opponent and force them to show their cards first, you can control the tempo. But this is just me and the advice is rather general. I must admit."

Alice scratched her hair.

The best way for her to resolve things properly would most likely be the second option.

To force her opponents to show their cards first so that she can estimate what kind of fighting style would be suitable.

Although, with Void Axis, the issue of a strong attack is resolved.

She simply had to improve it further and incorporate as much of her power as possible.

All of her theories, all of her skills.

All of the possibilities she can come up with.

It may be a little premature to say this but Void Axis will be her life's work.

An attack that best represents this journey she's embarked upon.

Allura's techniques, Kaden's control, Tiamat's energy manipulation, Kazira's Sigil.

Because if she can make this attack match the image she had in mind, she'll become a fighter that can produce the most lethal first strike without a need for a prolonged battle.

Rather than letting her opponents show their cards one by one, it's much better to just end the game before it even began.

"I'm sure you two are exhausted so feel free to take any of the rooms in the house except the main one on the second floor. That one's reserved for my wife." Syrion offered, sitting by the cliffs overlooking the ocean.

He was happy that both Gwen and Alice were reasonable enough to not destroy his house or fight without a proper conversation.

As strange as it may seem, Syrion felt human after all these years of wandering.

Today, he reclaimed a bit of his lost humanity.

Chapter 793: Gwen's Concerns

Accepting Syrion's offer, Alice made her way to the second floor where she promptly made herself comfortable in a medium sized room with one window.

The house was comprised of a main bedroom, two guest rooms and a room for his son. Then there were the bathrooms, living room and kitchen.

A standard family house that was a little bigger than average.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Alice sat on the bed and glanced out the window towards Syrion.

After today's training session, it was clear that it would be difficult to decide on a winner.

Her regeneration was integral to her fighting style, even if there is the risk that her opponent can hinder it.

Of course, trusting in an unknown source was concerning as Alice didn't know what made her body function this way.

In order for her to confidently put more trust into her body, she needed the answers to her regeneration.

{I don't think it's something we can work out quickly. Instead, I'll work on a theory for now. A theory on how to balance exile and harmonisation.} Cayla spoke up, surprising Alice.

[Don't look at me that way, I could already tell that you were planning something earlier, it's obvious you know?] She sighed.

'Thanks.'

Nodding her head, Cayla buried herself deep in her research while Alyss sat in deep contemplation.

She would occasionally glance down at her own hand before letting out a sigh.

Alice wanted to ask her twin what was bothering her but it was clear that Alyss didn't want to talk.

At least not right now, she needed a bit of time to mull over her questions on her own.

*Knock knock

Opening her eyes, Alice shifted her attention back to reality.

"Come in."

Opening the door slowly, Gwen stepped in. She was hugging a pillow while in her pyjamas.

"You got changed pretty quickly. What's up?" Alice asked, offering Gwen a seat on her bed.

"I'll be more concerned if changing outfits took longer." Gwen retorted before trying to focus back on what she wanted to do. The reason why she even came here despite needing to rest.

"The corruption by the port, it was your doing right?" Gwen asked after a pause.

Alice understood that Gwen would've found this out in due time anyway.

Therefore, it was probably better for her to say it with her own mouth instead of Gwen finding out.

"Partially. But what I created was never truly alive per say, they were just bundles of energy that were going to die out after a while. Big enough to pose an issue to you guys but not big enough to actually wipe out the port.

"I was also keeping an eye on what they were doing. I'll be honest, the original goal was to use them as distractions so I could sneak away. But who knew I would find you using Vision and that changed all my plans." Alice fell backwards, resting on the bed while staring at the ceiling.

"So you were just responsible for the few I saw at the end?" Gwen double checked as Alice nodded her head.

"I'm glad." Gwen smiled softly, hugging her knee.

"Glad? Aren't you supposed to be annoyed or trying to burn me with purifying flames? Ya know, for the whole corruptive energy thing." Alice raised an eyebrow while Gwen shook her head.

"I know I'm someone who likes cleansing the sinful but even I can tell differences between you and them. How do I put it... Compared to them, your energy feels... Cleaner? It's still ominous but it doesn't give me a bad gut feeling." Gwen tried her best to explain her feeling but struggled.

As someone who's deal with, killed, those with corrupted powers, she was familiar with its sensation and their wielders.

Alice, as always, felt like an anomaly to these rules.

"You really letting me go with just a gut feeling?"

Alice couldn't believe a Cardinal was taking things so easily.

"Would you rather me try to burn you then?" Gwen asked, wrapping her hand in purifying flames as Alice quickly shook her head.

"I'd rather not. Every time you put healing fire on my body I felt like crying ya know? It f*cking stings I'll tell you that now."

Gwen sat in silence.

So many questions yet she wasn't sure where to begin.

Did she want the answers? Or did she want this friendship to continue.

Setting aside the issue of power, Gwen imagined herself facing Alice in combat.

Her finger twitched.

Hesitation.

Dangerous for a Cardinal that's supposed to hunt down the sinful.

But she couldn't bring herself to do it.

At least, if what she knew of Alice was true anyways. Her personality, the way she approached life, her experiences.

Gwen wanted to know if any of it was true or was it all a lie?

Was she lying now?

Was this all an act to make her drop her guard?

"Between Alice Agnelia and Kaia, how much of it was the real you?" Gwen bit the bullet and asked the main question bothering her.

She always prided herself to be a good judge of people but now she was struggling.

"More than 90% of it. There may be parts I've adjusted to try and shift away the suspicious parts but what you see is what you get. I'm just someone who likes drinking mead and fighting." Alice stuck out her tongue, causing Gwen to let out a relieved laugh.

"Is that so... Well I suppose being a little careless, clumsy and bad in the mornings are traits you can't exactly hide. That and being surprisingly innocent when it comes to teasing."

Falling backwards, Gwen also rested on the bed while looking up at the wooden ceiling.

"Mornings are just different okay? Just give me like a good hour and I can get up properly. And I don't think I'm that careless or clumsy."

"My shirts?" Gwen raised an eyebrow.

"I'm very clumsy and careless at times." Alice corrected herself.

She'll admit that she was being a little clumsy during the... poison incident.

"I'm guessing your poison resistance is tied to your regeneration. What is up with that anyways? I can't even keep up despite having healing flames."

"No clue." Alice shrugged.

Gwen sat up in confusion.

"Huh? No clue???"

How does one have no clue on how their body functions? Was it not a Sigil power? A technique?

"Yep, I don't got a clue. Here, you can take a look for yourself. Nothing is hidden." Alice nodded.

"Wait no don-"

Before Gwen could even finish her words, Alice raised her hand and detonated a small orb inside.

Blood froze in the air and converged around her wound.

While this was happening, Gwen observed with a slowly deepening frown.

She could sense the flow of energy but... As for its nature, she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

"My body is a mystery even to myself. I told you I didn't like my original family right? Well let's just say they tried to find out about this power in less than friendly ways. It's been modified but I don't know to what extent."

It was a simplified version since Alice didn't want to tell her everything just yet. Especially when it comes to the details of her body, Zenia family and Nyer.

She still held a position in the Sun Church after all.

"Huh..." Gwen was speechless.

For Alice to be so... nonchalant, what did she even go through for this to be negligible?

"Jeez... You are probably the furthest thing from normal that I've ever seen."

"First of all, rude. But yes, if I was even remotely normal, my corpse would've been found long ago." Alice chuckled.

"So what are you planning after learning Vision? I... I doubt you'd want to stay in the order." Gwen asked curiously.

"After learning Vision... Well we need to sort out your Sigil first. We can't deny the fact that we do have to fight Syrion to the death after all of our training. But after helping you with Syrion, I think I'll go look for my other friends. There's also things I need to sort out in the north.

"There are... lots of things we need to prepare and sort out. They're all a bunch of crazies like myself so you can probably imagine the things we'll be getting up to. However... I'll try avoid becoming enemies with your father and Shiera." Alice folded her arms.

At the end of the day, her issue lies with the God and not the Apostles.

"Is that why you looked worried when you saw the news?" Gwen recalled how Alice was restless after seeing the news about the north disappearing.

"Yea... What about you? I don't suppose I could convince you to join me on this journey." Alice turned her gaze over but Gwen shook her head without hesitation.

"Unfortunately, there's a bunch of things I can only do if I'm in the order. So I'm stuck with Solaris for a bit longer than I hope. Though... there's probably a chance in the future. If anything, this is good for the two of us don't you agree?" Gwen grinned, confusing Alice.

"If I'm in the order, I can give you some information you might need while you can do the same for me since my movements will be limited. You help me, I help you. A win win in my books."

Smiling helplessly, Alice relaxed her mind.

If Gwen puts things like this, it meant that they were going to keep being friends even after dealing with Syrion.

A situation that she would prefer over fighting each other to the death.

"What do you say?"

No response. Gwen tilted her head, looking over.

A helpless smile appeared on her face as she saw Alice sleeping peacefully.

"What a trusting girl..." Gwen chuckled, pulling the blanket over Alice.

Not that she could say anything since she was the same.

Making herself comfortable, Gwen slept next to Alice.

Chapter 794: Developing A New Technique

"Put your back into it! You can't hope to get stronger if you don't take an active role in battle!" Syrion shouted, slapping one of Gwen's attacks away.

Gritting her teeth, Gwen lunged forward into Syrion's guard with her flames wrapping around her weapon.

But before she could even attack, moonlight crashed down, extinguishing it.

"You're getting too tunnel visioned. Expand your horizon. You have Vision, use that to your advantage. Don't fall for the first gap you see." Syrion explained, pushing Gwen away and creating some distance between them.

"I haven't even started to craft my seventh blade. What do you think would happen if I chose to go all out? Do you really think you can hunt me for your Seventh Sigil?!"

Biting her lip, Gwen summoned her spear and stabbed it into the ground.

Resonance!

A radiant golden glare burst outwards with Gwen in the centre.

The flames whipped the air around her as light began to distort. Black markings lit up around her body, cracks that manifested like broken porcelain.

Energy shaped itself into a set of armour as Gwen's body underwent a transformation to that of obsidian.

Behind her, the icon of Solaris blazed into life as a blindfold wrapped around Gwen's eyes.

Activating her Vision at full power, Gwen flickered behind Syrion.

Her spear burning with radiant fire and ready to attack!

*CLANG!!!

"Nice but not quite. Using Resonance as a crutch will only get you so far if your foundations are not up to par. Tell me young lady, are your foundations up to par?" Syrion asked, slamming his palms into Gwen's stomach, sending her body tumbling backwards.

While Gwen was training with Syrion, Alice was sitting on a hill not far away with her legs crossed.

Above her was the Crimson Halo while Tiamat's wings were flickering behind her.

In order to achieve her desired level of Vision, she needed a delicate balance of Inversion and Exile.

However, as her experience had proven, a two Sigil resonance was volatile and prone to falling apart.

Thus she decided to throw Tiamat's power into the mix. A counterbalance of sorts. If she is on the verge of exiling herself, Tiamat's power will anchor her down by absorbing more energy.

If she's too close to harmonisation, or rather, death, Tiamat will expel as much energy as possible.

A constant back and forth.

While it did work, actually focusing on the Vision side of things was now proving to be difficult.

[We're flying from one extreme to the other.] Cayla sighed.

They kept swinging from side to side like a pendulum when ideally, they want to cruise down the middle.

'I know. But the speed it's trying to exile or harmonise is a bit faster than expected.' Alice scratched her hair in frustration.

If she fully focused on the exile part of her skills, she'll be forced out the realm in less than 2 minutes. If she focuses on harmonisation, she'll be dead in the same amount of time.

Truly a case of swinging from one side to the other.

Alice had tried a few methods as well such as automating it with her Triggered Casts.

Unfortunately, this was more like an unruly animal that does whatever it wants.

The conditions that Alice would set wouldn't work all the time.

And in the moments where it didn't... Alice had to quickly wrangle back control otherwise she'll reach a bad end.

'Maybe if I try have it constantly switch.'

Adjusting the model of her Triggered Casts, Alice activated her skill once more.

Sweat began to drip down her face. She could feel strands of energy simultaneously latching on and then breaking off from her.

The pressure building up in her body from the constant alteration of her skill.

In the end, she chose to deactivate this new skill.

Looking down, she could see her hands trembling from the aftereffects.

'Yeah, this one is a no go as well. Each alteration is a cast and firing that many casts at the same time stops me from doing other stuff.'

Because she was flipping between the two sides, trying to gather energy for literally anything else proved difficult.

If she had to attach numbers to it, her casting efficiency would be down by around 20% while the cost of casting increased by 30%.

This method was the opposite of optimal.

Taking a deep breath, Alice fell backwards to recover some of her stamina.

"What am I even missing..." She muttered, feeling stumped.

She thought that she would be able to reach a breakthrough after thinking about this idea.

But instead of a breakthrough, she found more problems creeping up one by one.

Was the foundation of her thinking incorrect?

To achieve Vision, Alice wanted to harmonise with her surroundings and become a receptacle of information.

And in order to harmonise beyond the natural limit, she would invert her skill.

There were two benefits that came with this.

First, she'll be able to establish another resonance using the three Sigils.

Second, by using the inverted Exile, she was still benefiting from the first part of the skill.

The forceful level up.

If she can maintain the state of balance, she'll be able to keep her skills upgraded during combat.

However...

[If you can't maintain the state while also making sure casting is simple, it'll be a detriment instead of a benefit.] Cayla was also stumped.

This was unknown territory that Alice was walking down.

A complete override of the preestablished rules of casting and Abyssal Abilities.

Which was to be expected considering the fact that Alice could overlay several different abilities over herself.

'What if you add another ability into the mix?' Alyss suggested, confusing both Alice and Cayla.

'Wouldn't a four Sigil resonance completely fuck me up and collapse the structure?' Alice raised an eyebrow.

There was a reason why their abilities work in threes rather than anything else.

It was to establish a foundation of balance so that no ability overpowered the other.

By throwing a fourth and turning that triangle into a square, one wrong move and it'll collapse.

'I'm not talking about a four Sigil resonance. But rather two Three Sigil resonances with two abilities that are shared across them.' Alyss corrected herself.

Snapping her finger, she created a diagram.

Four nodes that represented Sigils appeared with lines appearing between the nodes.

First, three of them linked to one another.

A standard resonance.

But then the fourth entered the picture.

Rather than breaking the preestablished three Sigil resonance, it augmented it.

Despite having four nodes, two triangles were formed.

'If you add a fourth into the mix like this, the two resonances are activating side by side while maintaining their shape.'

Alice and Cayla blinked their eyes.

[Aren't you supposed to be the one who thinks with your fist?] Cayla asked as a vein bulged on Alyss's neck.

'Hah?! The f*ck is that supposed to mean? Just because I like martial arts more doesn't mean I don't have a brain up here!'

'Even if I add in a fourth, I don't see how it'll help with the stabilisation issue.' Alice cut in before the two of them started to fight.

[And even so, is it possible? The two Sigils that are already being used can't have a link established to it. It's like the second Resonance. Even though six Sigils are working in harmony, it's still just two Three Sigil Resonances working separately from each other.] Cayla added.

Hearing this, Alyss fell silent.

It was just an idea she had in mind. Actually putting it to work was... different.

'Actually... I think I can make it work.' Alice's eyes began to dart between the nodes.

'[It can???]' Both Alyss and Cayla looked at her with a mix of confusion and disbelief.

'Well... Saying that it can is stretching it a bit. Rather, it's entirely based on a single Sigil that can make it happen.' Alice smiled, snapping her finger.

Next to her, the Sigil of Duality appeared.

'Inversion. If I invert a Sigil, it becomes something new. However, technically, it's still the same Sigil just with a different power. So if we were to follow the standard three Sigil resonance and then...' She trailed off.

Creating a triangle for the Resonance, Alice cut the third node in half and opened the structure like a butterfly.

'Two three Sigil Resonances while using the same two as base. It's only the third that changes.'

A new theory.

A fresh idea.

She could feel her mind injecting ideas to make this a possibility.

Different from Yvael's inspirations.

There was no blueprint for her to work from.

There was no preestablished technique.

No, this was a new path.

An augmentation of the already established rules of Resonances. A path that's only open to Alice due to her body.

[It'll be tough. Just because you use Inversion on the Sigil, it's still one power.] Cayla frowned.

This was nice in theory but plenty of holes exist.

'But that's where you come in. We'll use the eyes of the Abyss to isolate what exactly changes with the Sigil when Inversion occurs. If we can do that, we might be able to limit what gets changed and what doesn't.

'That way, the Sigil is in both states at the same time.'

[Thus striking a balance...] Cayla muttered.

'Bingo.'

[Argh!! Do you even know how difficult this looks even though you make it sound easy???] Cayla scratched her hair.

She was already struggling with completely undoing Kaden's seal and now they have to develop a new form of Resonance.

If she was an employee, she would file for abuse!

Alas, she was the Eye of the Abyss and Alice her master.

'It'll be fine~ Just think about the rewards.' Alice grinned.

Taking a deep breath, Cayla sighed.

[F*ck it. Let's make this a reality.]

Chapter 795: Arax's Worries

Holding his shield against the ground, Arax stared at the landscape of destruction in silence.

Below him, the scorched earth. What had once been a nation in the north, a sprawling network of buildings and roads were now reduced to ash and ruin.

Craters, jagged spikes of black obsidian.

Lightning clawed down from above, veins that split the sky. Every strike clashed against the obsidian towers as though they were lightning rods.

In the middle of the city, a twisted blossoming flower with tendrils of flesh hanging from the petals.

The closer you got to the centre, the more it would rain.

A vile black rain that felt wrong in every way. When it splattered, it would leave behind a red marking.

A blood rain.

The sky was weeping for the tragedy that occurred.

Then, in the very centre of the flower, Arax could see a cocoon of sorts. It had once 'held' something within its walls but now, there was nothing. Empty.

Arax let out a deep sigh.

He couldn't keep his legs still, the constant tapping of his heel against the ground.

The fidgeting of his fingers and the darting of his eyes.

"I didn't take you for someone who couldn't sit still." Shiera sat next to him with a light chuckle.

They were tasked to investigate this place but whoever cleaned up was good.

There was no sign of energy that she could track. Even with the use of Vision, she couldn't find any clues.

All they could do was make haphazard guesses from the clues they got. Unfortunately, most of the teams couldn't approach the city centre.

"Hm? Yeah... This is different. It doesn't feel like the Eclipse nor does it feel like the Outer Gods."

Hearing this, Shiera revealed a helpless smile and tugged on Arax's ear.

"Hey! Ow!"

"That's the fifth time you told me that now. If you're worried about Gwenny why don't you call her?" Shiera rolled her eyes.

Arax was always like this.

Even though he was out on a job, whenever Gwen would do something dangerous, he would become a clumsy oaf who didn't even register what was being said to him or what he said in return.

A worried father.

"What if she's in the middle of a fight? If I call and she gets distracted..." Arax frowned.

"If you're so worried, you should've just followed her. You realise that you're not doing much right now, right?" Shiera rolled her eyes.

"Prevention is the best form of protection. You don't know what might happen." Arax sighed.

No matter how worried he was for his daughter, the lives of everyone here was counting on them.

"Do you really believe that? Really?" Shiera leaned forward, staring Arax in the eyes.

Furrowing his brows, Arax frowned.

"Of course I do. Or are you saying my philosophy over the years was wrong?"

"Tch, this is why I call you a dumbass. I don't mean your philosophy, I mean do you really believe you should be here instead of your daughter? Haven't you chosen this job over Gwen for years now?" Shiera rolled her eyes, smacking Arax on the back of the head.

"Right..." Arax mumbled.

Looking up at the bleeding sky, he took a deep breath and let out a deep sigh.

Indeed... No matter what excuses he's been giving, he can't deny the fact that he's been neglecting Gwen.

A part of it was because of his duty.

The other part...

Well, even saying it out loud sounded like an excuse.

But that doesn't change the fact that the people needed him here.

Shiera is strong. There's no denying that.

But their strength truly shine when they have each other's backs covered. When she could fight without worry.

Without him around, Shiera's fighting prowess would be cut down by half.

"I'll call her tonight."

"Seems like I'll have to change my nickname for you. You're dumber than I thought and I've known you for centuries." Shiera let out a frustrated sigh.

"Either call her now or go to her. You being distracted puts everyone in danger." Shiera glared at Arax.

Scratching his cheek, Arax knew that Shiera was being serious.

"You're right. Sometimes you remind me of my wife, she had give me a kick in the back as well ahaha." Arax let out a laugh but Shiera gave him a kick.

"What are you saying you stupid b*stard. Go call Gwenny now before I hit you!" Clicking her tongue, she turned away.

She made sure Arax couldn't see her fanning her face with her right hand.

After messing around with the orb for a bit, Arax finally got it to work.

"Ah! Dad! Is everything okay?" Gwen could be seen scrambling to set things up on her end before sitting back.

She was covered with sweat and dirt yet a wide smile could be seen on her face.

"Is everything going alright?" Arax asked with a smile.

It felt a little awkward since it's always been Gwen who called.

"Ah! Yes it is. I've been training diligently. Right the report-" Gwen wanted to stand up but Arax shook his head.

"Not today. I just wanted to see how you were doing."

Blinking her eyes in surprise, Gwen couldn't control the smile on her face.

She started to talk about the journey through the Abyss, the slight anomalies that's been happening.

Despite the nature of her journey, there was a big smile on her face.

"What about your bounty? Are you struggling?" Arax asked as this was his biggest worry.

A bounty given by Solaris wasn't going to be an easy one, especially since sponsored ones are notably harder than the rest.

Scratching her hair, Gwen sighed.

“Well... I’m definitely struggling. I realised how weak I really am.” Gwen sighed, showing the dirt on the body.

“Thankfully, it’s just training otherwise...” Gwen looked down before quickly shaking her head.

“Training?” Shiera’s ears perked up.

Shifting Arax out of the frame, Shiera looked at Gwen and raised an eyebrow.

“You’re getting training? From who?”

Scratching her cheek, Gwen laughed.

“Don’t be surprised when you hear this okay? I’m getting trained by my bounty target.”

“PFFF!!!” Arax choked on his saliva as this was the most outrageous thing he’s heard in a while.

Shiera was speechless.

“Your bounty?”

“Yes.”

“Is training you?”

“That is what I said yes.”

“The beast you were meant to hunt down?” Shiera felt as though someone had just hit her on the head with a sledgehammer.

Turning the orb slightly, Gwen showed Syrion not far away from her with his swords stabbed into the ground.

He gave a small wave.

“The situation is a little... complicated. But he’s helping me get stronger right now.” Gwen laughed.

“If you trust him then I won’t say anything else. What about the stupid girl using my old technique? How is she doing?” Shiera asked curiously.

“Are you worried for your disciple?” Arax asked, causing Shiera to kick him again.

“Who’s my disciple! Just because she’s using my techniques doesn’t mean she’s my disciple!”

Seeing this, Gwen held her silence.

If only her aunty knew Alice was gaslighting her.

It was both a truth and a lie.

And despite feeling a little guilty, Gwen didn’t reveal the truth.

“Kaia is doing fine. She seemed to have found a breakthrough of sorts since she’s been meditating by the tree and testing out some methods. Her version of Vision is a little different from ours.”

“Oh?” Shiera frowned.

Even though she didn't accept Kaia as her disciple, she didn't want her to do anything dangerous when it comes to this technique. It's not something you can just rush into.

"This is just what I think based on the things she showed. I don't think Kaia is really compatible with Vision and I think she knows that too. Instead, she's using her Sigils to emulate something similar?" Gwen folded her arms.

"Hmm..." Thinking about it for a moment, Shiera clicked her tongue.

"When the girl finishes her prototype, tell her to show it to me."

Both Gwen and Arax were surprised by Shiera's offer.

If she's telling Gwen to have Kaia show her the prototype, then it meant that Shiera was willing to give some personal pointers.

A reward that not even Cardinals could get without special exceptions.

"Alright, I'll let Kaia know." Gwen accepted on Alice's behalf.

Talking for a little longer, Arax decided to let Gwen continue her training, promising to call again tomorrow since nothing much was happening.

With the orb falling silent, Arax had a smile on his face.

"Feeling better?" Shiera asked as Arax nodded his head.

"I didn't think she would get training from a beast of all things..."

"Me neither. But if she's getting training then it might not be too bad." Shiera nodded.

Overall, it was still a strange situation but they've seen their fair share over the years.

"I'm just concerned on how she'll resolve the bounty side of things. I doubt a beast would just allow her to claim his head for free. Unless... do you think he's training her so that she could be a proper opponent?" Arax threw out a theory but Shiera shrugged.

"If it was part of the Eclipse sure. But I doubt that's the case. But setting that aside, you're finally focused right?"

"Of course, I'm always focused."

"Bullsh*t." Shiera rolled her eyes.

It wasn't until talking to Gwen did the oaf finally sit still. It was clear that he was too distracted by the concerns of her safety.

But now that he was finally calm, Shiera took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

"Since you're focused, let's talk. As friends rather than Apostles or anything else." Shiera stared at Arax with seriousness.

Arax frowned and nodded his head.

For Shiera to be this serious, something must be up.

"Solaris has been acting fishy, more so than usual."

Chapter 796: Vision Prototype

"Seems like you're finally in a good mood." Alice chuckled.

She could see Gwen training with a wide smile on her face as well as her increased enthusiasm.

"Yep. My Dad called to see what's going on."

It was something simple but Alice understood how important it was for Gwen.

Thus she couldn't hold herself back from patting Gwen on the head.

"Huh?"

"Don't worry about it." Alice shrugged.

"Oh right, aunty also asked about you. I told her that you were struggling a bit with Vision and she said to call her when your prototype is finished. If you show it to her, she'll give you some pointers."

Alice froze.

Getting pointers from an Apostle was NOT in her plans nor was it part of her expectations.

"I thought you shouldn't get pointers for Vision?"

"I think it's because you're modifying it for your own purpose. At this stage, it's already different to the technique that aunty made." Gwen theorised.

"Hmm... Fair enough." Alice accepted.

There were risks associated with showing an enemy Apostle her abilities but Alice had to admit. Shiera's techniques were godly.

The Zone had carried her this far and they only had one day for that.

If she could get a few extra days with Shiera...

Alice was getting excited just thinking about it.

"Aunty is kinder than she looks right?" Gwen chuckled.

"Yep. Which makes me question how the hell Solaris even managed to get Apostles like these two. They're much nicer than Famine or War. Griselda and Nana are a tad freaky too." Alice groaned, shivering while recalling their first meeting.

The souls attached to them...

Meanwhile, Gwen's smile froze.

What Alice casually threw out made her mind explode.

Talking about how different the Apostles were as though meeting them was an easy case.

While her dad and aunty make public appearances a lot, Famine and War tend to keep themselves concealed.

Though War made big moves lately and see where that got her.

As for Spirituality and Immortality... They stopped interfering with church operations for a while now, only lending a hand if the Goddess demands them.

But this was just the information that her dad was able to gather.

So how on earth does Alice know what they were like???

And to talk about it like you were meeting an acquaintance while out on a grocery run was...

"Anyways, I do have a prototype I want to test. It's manageable on my own but I need to see what it's like in combat first. Can you watch and let me know if it's close to Vision?" Alice asked as Gwen snapped out of it and nodded her head.

"Sure."

"Syrion! It's my turn, I got something I want to test out." Alice called out as Syrion glanced over and unfolded his arms.

"Of course young lady. I'm ready when you are." Syrion chuckled.

These days were calm, peaceful. Reminded him of his time training his son.

Had he found them earlier instead of being designated as a target for the bounty... There's no point dwelling on what can't be changed.

He's going to enjoy the time he has left as much as possible before reuniting with his family.

With Syrion taking a neutral stance, Alice took a deep breath and paused...

***RUMBLE!!!**

A pair of draconic wings unfurled behind her while a crimson crown spun to life.

Now that she was in combat, the surroundings began to react harshly to her power output!

Storm clouds loomed overhead as the crackle of lightning flickered through the shadows.

Summoning Void Fang, Alice transformed it into a sword.

Resonance!

Duality + Tiamat + Tenebris!

Tiamat's wings began to intertwine with the Scarlet Wings manifested by Tenebris's Sigil. Tethers extended from Alice's back, fading into her surroundings and forming a connection.

Harmonisation!

'Split the Sigil. Ensure that only half is inverted. Simultaneously draw power and expel it!'

Void Step!

Alice's figure flickered out of view as Syrion moved into action.

*CLANG!!!

He parried an attack from behind but his spare hand was already moving to intercept.

This felt different.

Something was off.

Parrying then jumping over one of Alice's attacks, Syrion summoned three blades that were immediately consumed by the Void before they could even be fired.

Void Flux Cleave!

Syrion slammed his blade into the face of the attack, shattering it.

Void Flux!

Leaning his head to the side, he avoided her attack from above.

She was getting... faster? No, her speed hasn't changed.

Syrion frowned.

Gathering energy into his palm, he slammed down, creating a net of energy strands.

Each one sharp as his blades! A network of densely packed sword slashes to ensure his safety.

*Click

A finger snap.

The eruption of blood mist and the disintegration of his net.

"!!!"

Syrion instinctively grabbed the space next to his head.

Little by little, an invisible blade appeared along with Alice.

During the finger snap, she had disguised herself!

"Damn..."

She thought she could've taken Syrion by surprise but his instincts were stronger than she initially expected.

"Guess I'll go a tad serious for a bit." Syrion chuckled, tossing Alice into the air.

He'll reveal why he's dubbed the Blade Sovereign by the Abyss!

Blade Horizon.

Syrion didn't move but his blade was already sheathed.

Alice's pupil constricted, her left arm had been severed!

Blood lashed out, reconnecting her arm as she landed on the ground.

"I was looking for a shallow cut against your chest but you actually moved out of the way. As expected, you're seeing something different to the young lady over there right?" Syrion smiled.

Blade Horizon, a technique that allowed him to close the gap between him and his target in an instant.

To bypass defences and cut exactly how he wished in that space.

Yet Alice managed to move out the way at the last second, no. That wasn't accurate. She moved before he even made the motion to do so.

Was she seeing into the future?

He doubted it.

"Let's just say my eye is a little special." Alice grinned, pointing at Cayla.

"Then I'll put it to the test."

Blade Horizon!

*CLANG!!!

Alice gritted her teeth. She was barely able to move Void Fang into place when the attack struck, cutting deep into her arm.

"You're definitely seeing 'something' before I move."

Jumping to the side, Alice fired a void Flux to counter a Blade Horizon while simultaneously parrying another that breached her defence using Void Flux.

If it wasn't for the properties of Void Fang, her weapon would've broke on the first parry!

[Alice your body is approaching the limit. The theoretical resistance is much lower than expected in combat since you're focused on other stuff.] Cayla warned.

'Already?'

Based on her estimations, Alice figured she could hold this state for at least 5 minutes. But it's only been a short exchange and she's already reaching her limits...

'We'll need to adjust the formula a little it seems.' Alice frowned.

But for now, she'll finish this fight!

She wanted to land at least one good hit!

Alice transformed Void Fang into a spear and lunged forward.

Void Step!

Syrion wanted to duck down but Alice had already adjusted the course of her strike.

However...

"So with physical moves, you're reacting later than expected. Is it a body limitation? Or perhaps it doesn't fit the criteria for your new technique." Syrion analysed.

Grabbing Alice's spear, he tried to slam his shoulder into her when she flipped over him.

Blade Horizon!

"!!!"

Alice froze.

Six slashes surrounded her.

Even though she could 'see' it coming, dealing with it as another matter entirely.

"Tsk, freaky b*stard." Alice's smile twitched.

Syrion's battle IQ was insane. The fact that he had already dissembled and analysed her new technique, even making accurate guesses in some instants was ridiculous even by Alice's standards.

"I give up. This state lasts a lot shorter than expected." Alice raised her hand in defeat as Syrion withdrew his attack.

Blade Horizon wasn't a singular strike. No, Blade Horizon was simply a slash he could do at will and in mass quantities if he wished.

"Let's see... You react slower to physical, faster when I cast. In fact, you react before the attack even flies out. I'm guessing... Energy?"

". . ." Alice blinked her eyes.

He was able to break down the foundations of his own thinking, the rules that he's been taught all his life, and adjust himself mentally to match the anomaly that was herself.

By applying new rules that she's demonstrated, he gathered the hints and clues to her ability.

*Sigh~

Letting out a big sigh, Alice sat down.

"Yep. I'm reading the energy around you and simulating what you could be doing in my head. Before your attack even flies out, information has already been stored and transmitted. I'm just intercepting that." Alice admitted.

During her version of Vision, she is both harmonising and being exiled from the realm. But in doing so, when paired with Cayla's natural ability, Alice found herself in the weave of energy during the fight.

She could see the flow of energy being gathered, projected and even the circulation within the body.

Unfortunately, it wasn't perfect.

She still needed a moment to process the sequence and store that in her mind. Similar to triggered casts, the more she sees something, the better she'll be able to react in this version of Vision

No matter how fast an attack is, as long as she could read the flow of energy, she'll be able to predict its course.

This was Alice's version of Vision. One that made full use of Cayla's properties and her own reaction speed.

Chapter 797: Beyond Safety

Ria vanished from sight. An arc of lightning ripping through the darkness, illuminating the surroundings in a flash of blue.

The shadows lunged, a smear of black within the moment of light that Ria created.

*CLANG!!!

Claw met blade, sparks flew but Ria was already gone.

Arcs of lightning dancing across Terminus, trying to find the most optimal angle of attack.

Raikiri!

Lunging forward with a stab of absolute speed, Ria clicked her tongue seeing the beast flee. Flicking her fingers, she quickly adjusted the grip of her sword and parried a strike from behind.

Blood coiled like serpents around her blade, aiming for her jugular.

To end this farce with one attack.

*RUMBLE!!!

Lightning crashed down on Ria, burning away the blood.

'They're getting desperate.' Ria could tell.

After fighting these two beasts over and over, she could now sense the desperation in their attacks.

Their hunger.

To train her, Astrelya had kept these two beasts from running and even dying.

She fed them if they could 'kill' Ria.

Starved them if they couldn't.

This cycle that constantly drained their sanity, forcing them to repeat the process over and over for another day of food.

Ria had gotten stronger after training with these beasts... But so have they!

"Food!" The shadow beast screamed, transforming into a black mist that tried to envelop Ria.

Clicking her tongue, Ria sheathed her blade as lightning coiled around her arm.

Shinsei Raikiri!

Unleashing a net of slashes around her, Ria cut away the darkness only to reveal an armoury of blood ready to descend on her location!

Just as she wanted to adjust her footwork, hands erupted from her shadows, locking her in place.

"Tch!"

Stabbing her sword into the ground, Ria created a cage of lightning.

Each of the bars started to split, after images upon after images, shattered into countless fragments.

It was a little premature.

Just an idea in her mind.

A vision of possibilities.

But she wanted to accomplish it.

No.

She had to accomplish it.

In order for her to keep walking down this path, in order for her to take down Enris.

She had to!

Two turned into four, four turned into eight.

Eight into sixteen.

The fragments continuously multiplied as energy converged around Ria.

For a moment, it looked as though her own body began to fracture, transforming into afterimages of herself. Fragments, splitting apart and gathering energy!

A spiral of energy slowly began to transform into a false Eclipse that hung in the sky, blocking out the darkened canvas of Terminus.

***BANG!!!**

The blood armoury shot towards Ria as shadows coiled up.

Two attacks both aimed at killing her!

In that moment, the world slowed down.

Ria could see a shadow of herself.

Her ideal self.

The speed that could be achieved.

The formation of her counter.

". . ." Ria saw her own body breaking apart.

Her silhouette shattering into countless pieces as she unleashed that attack.

Something was still missing.

Something crucial. Without it, she wouldn't survive using this attack.

Gritting her teeth, she reigned in her power, concentrating it onto her right arm.

Three Fold Lightning!

*RUMBLE!!!

###

Looking at the smouldering ash of the two beasts that she had been training with, Ria couldn't make herself smile.

She wasn't satisfied.

This wasn't enough, far from it.

"My my, shouldn't you be happier that I don't have to 'save' you again today?" Astrelya asked with a set of lazy eyes and a nonchalant smile.

"There's nothing to be happy about. You saw it as well." Ria furrowed her brows.

"Oh that I did. I saw your lack of resolve."

"!!!" Turning to glare at Astrelya, Ria paused seeing the grin on her face.

"Safety. Such a curious word don't you think?" Astrelya giggled softly. Her voice dripping with honey yet filled with hostility.

"A dream we pursue, a promise of tomorrow. The walls we feel so inclined to build out of self preservation." She tilted her head. "It's the fire during the cold night, the warmth in the dark. It soothes, it comforts..."

"And it chains us."

"Safety is the barbed cage dressed in gold. The anchor that keeps us tethered to the ground, never allowing us to soar to the horizon beyond it. Safety is the hesitation you feel whenever you try to go past your limits but fear the pain that comes with colliding into the barbed cage.

"Safety is the knife that carves the wings off a bird so that it may never fly again." Astrelya stood up and walked towards Ria.

"Safety is what kills the inquisitive mind. The rules that constrain thought. Safety is what breeds cowardice, the fear of losing everything in that moment. Giving into safety is what rots a Hunter from the inside out.

"How many times have I saved you now? How many times have I pieced your body back together yet you still worry about... safety?" Astrelya lost her smile.

Her shadow seemed to loom over Ria.

"Beyond safety lies growth, it lies danger. There lies... death. Safety is to be stuck in your cage, never knowing the satisfaction of flying high into the sky. Growth is the leap into danger.

"To dive head first into the flames and emerge from the fire reforged! To grit your teeth through the uncertainty and slaughter the danger that lies before you. Will safety let you walk with dear Alice? Will safety let you kill a God?!

"Or will safety kill you? Slowly from the inside until you are nothing but a husk of yourself. A shadow of what used to be, a perfect demonstration of lost potential. What is life but a gamble? What is a fight but a test of your limits? What is desire but to step past the threshold of safety and push aside all that stand before you to reach your goal?"

"Every nation, every religion, every being that had left their mark on this world had long forgone safety in pursuit of their desires. The willingness to risk their essence of being to reach that boundary beyond the cage.

"Once you become the flame stuck inside the lantern surrounded by safety, you'll never become the inferno that burns down the God's garden." Astrelya pressed her finger against Ria's chest, right above her heart.

"That is unless you decide to break out of your cage of safety."

Ria's response was stuck in her throat.

She stared at the Lord of Stars that was glaring up at her.

"So long as we remain in Terminus, I will continue to piece you back together. Whether you like it or not, I will burn away any thoughts of safety that might linger in your mind. This world is one that cares not for safety. It thrives on the will of those who have gone insane.

"Those who have lost their mind in pursuit of something great. Until you can give up your sanity, you'll be forever stuck as someone WITH potential. But never as the one who realised it." Astrelya tapped Ria on the head.

"Now this is the question you have to ask yourself. Is whatever you're wanting to achieve worth the price of sanity?"

After asking this question, Astrelya turned around and left, searching for more victims to use in Ria's training.

Ria was so very close. She could feel it. Just a little more, just a little push.

That one final step and she'll become something... magnificent.

An instrument of destruction. A weapon craving the blood of a God.

What lies beyond Ria's boundary? What will appear once she finally lets go of reason?

What is the beast that is she hiding within that heart of hers?

"Ah~ I want to see it." Astrelya held her arms with anticipation.

###

Rosalyn panted heavily. Sweat coating her body, drenching her clothes.

She didn't expect them to be transported to Terminus of all layers. Had it been anywhere else, it might've been fine.

But here? In the depths? Where the worst of the worst are kept?

Gritting her teeth, she forced herself to sit up.

Her regeneration was being slowed by a poison. Even if she makes herself a new vessel, the poison seemed to linger.

This was deeper than just a physical poison.

"I believe I have given you plenty of chances now. Is it not time you give me an answer?" A man sighed, approaching Rosalyn while Jin was being dragged along by his head.

Jin was completely paralysed. Even with his Outer God Physique, there was nothing he could do.

The man in front of them was not someone Rosalyn could take out even on her best day.

"F*ck you." Rosalyn forced a brave smile.

". . ."

Letting out another sigh, the man made a light cut on his finger and held it over Rosalyn's leg.

As his blackened blood fell, Rosalyn shut her eyes and gritted her teeth.

"ARGH!!!!" Despite her preparations, she couldn't hold back her scream as her flesh began to darken.

"It's a poison that seeps through the pores. A painful one, though not a lethal." The man explained, snapping his finger as the pain disappeared.

Rosalyn panted heavily. She could feel her heart slamming against her chest, the nervousness when facing this man.

She knew full well about the kind of devastation he could cause, the transformations that he could induce.

"Are you still unwilling to give me an answer?"

Rosalyn held her tongue.

"Stubborn thing..."

Shaking his head, the man stood up and grabbed Rosalyn by her collar.

Rosalyn could only hope that the others were better off than her and Jin.

After all...

The man they met deep in the bowls of Terminus.

A man known by many. He who handles the most potent poisons in this world.

Leoric Becker, Abyss Lord of Poisons.

Chapter 798: Cursed Words

Wiping away her sweat, Gwen finished another day's worth of training.

She got some more tips, some pointers, but she too understood that she was stuck at a bottleneck.

Unable to progress no matter what.

There was something she needed to change about herself but she didn't know what it was.

All she knew was that she couldn't stay like this.

"Alice~ I need a recharge..." Gwen groaned, dragging her body upstairs.

But as she approached their room, she saw Alice sat by the table.

Using her own blood, she was drawing diagrams on the table.

"No... This wouldn't work. Too inefficient... No, this one is too distracting... this method wouldn't work, Syrion proved it..." She mumbled under her breath.

She flicked through countless iterations of her design.

The method, the theory, the foundation of her idea.

Gwen wasn't sure of the key details behind it.

But she was certain it had something to do with her new Vision.

"No, doing it that way would kill me instantly. It won't give me a chance to counter it with exile..."

Gwen felt like she just heard something dangerous but her brain was already beginning to filter it out.

"Are... you okay?" Gwen approached hesitantly as Alice stopped what she was doing.

"Hm? Oh yeah I'm fine. Seems like you finished up with your training, how was it?" Alice dismissed the blood and smiled.

"It was so so. Nothing new ya know?" Gwen sighed, sitting on her bed.

"So what's it this time? Which attack isn't working the way you want it to?"

It felt like Alice was reading her mind as Gwen revealed a helpless smile.

"Unfortunately, all of them. What little surprises I have in store for him have become boring now. Too predictable, too organised he says. That I go through a sequence of actions rather than formulating plans on the fly.

"If something messes up, my sequence gets ruined and my power decreases drastically. Or at least that's what he's saying. But who am I to refute that? I haven't even landed a single good hit yet ya get me?" Gwen ranted, flailing her limbs around like a child, causing Alice to laugh.

Gwen pouted.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing much. Haven't you noticed?" Alice grinned.

"Noticed what?"

"You started to copy me. Started to use Ya pretty often don't you agree? The little 'ya know' and 'ya get me' at the end of your sentences. Seems like I'm pretty influential." Alice pointed out.

Gwen wanted to retort but her words were stuck in her throat.

"F*ck... Arg! It's just easier ya k- ..."

"See?" There was a sh*t eating grin on Alice's face, a smug smile that made Gwen want to smack Alice.

"Urgh... What? Are you going to tell me to stop using it?" Gwen pouted.

"Oh no, far from it. It just means you're feeling more comfortable around me now. 'Ya know?'"

"Argh! You ruined it! Now I'm feeling conscious!" Gwen tossed her pillow over in annoyance.

It was something she did subconsciously after hanging around with Alice.

But now that she pointed it out, Gwen couldn't help but think about it all the time whenever she or Alice says it.

"But you know what's better than being you feeling conscious about adding ya know at the end?"

There was a slight glint in Alice's eyes.

A Hunter who found her prey.

Right now, Alice wanted to bully Gwen.

"What..." Gwen was on guard, cautious.

What could Alice possibly say that's better than being conscious about-

"How about~ Breathe manually."

". . ." Gwen's smile twitched.

"Your tongue can't find a comfortable spot in your mouth? Can't rest it properly?" Alice giggled.

". . ."

"What about... You start noticing every time you blink? Hehehehe~" Alice let out a gremlin laugh.

Gwen felt her eyeballs becoming dry, the urge to blink.

But...

But!

It was manual this time!

"I hate you." Gwen groaned.

"Muahaha~ I got more where that came from! You haven't swallowed your saliva yet have you?" Alice went on the attack, Gwen wanted to stop Alice but she was too fast.

"Your jaw has weight~"

"Shut up already! I can't do this anymore!" Gwen pleaded but it only served to ignite Alice's desire more.

"When you swallow your ears click~"

Gwen paused. She furrowed her brows for a moment and swallowed her saliva.

"Huh... That's just cool, I don't see why that would bother me?" She blinked in confusion.

Alice tilted her head.

"It doesn't? Hm, might need to remove that one then." Alice made a mental note of it before looking back at Gwen.

"You're now aware that your clothes are touching your skin."

". . ."

[You are an evil b*tch sometimes...] Cayla was facepalming behind her desk.

Anyone who heard Alice's words were affected by her, all of them.

Even Alyss who realised what Alice was going to do found herself holding back the urge to smack her twin.

As for Alice, she simply stuck out her tongue. Breathing manually, blinking or being aware of things didn't bother her. Seeing the chaos it causes brought her greater joy than the discomfort she felt.

"Seems like you two are still excited. Should we go for more training?" Syrion asked from outside the window.

Alice stared at Gwen.

Gwen started at Alice.

Alice's silent stare was all Gwen needed to know.

Gwen shook her head but Alice nodded.

"Do it." She grinned.

"I can't."

"Do it, it'll be fun." Alice nudged, her voice sweet like honey.

Gwen hesitated. She stood at a cross road, a conflict of choices. What should she do...

In the end, she poked her head out from the window and looked towards Syrion who's waiting for an answer.

"Is something wrong?" Syrion found it a little strange that Gwen was just staring but not saying anything.

"Go on, do it. It's just two words, nice and simple." Alice whispered from behind, urging her.

Gwen bit her lip then she opened her mouth.

"Breathe manually."

Syrion's finger twitched.

"You little..." He had to hold himself back from letting out a curse.

Gwen held her laugh in.

Maybe Alice was right. This was pretty fun...

No! She shouldn't think like this!

...

But what if.

"Your tongue feels uncomfortable."

Syrion didn't want to say it. He didn't even have a tongue so why is it working?!

"Your training will be twice as tough tomorrow." Syrion's smile twitched.

"Wha!? That's not fair!"

"Fair my ass go to sleep already." Syrion sighed, walking away while the sound of Alice and Gwen could be heard.

He only had a son but if he had two daughters, maybe this is what it would feel like.

The two of them messing around with him.

Shaking his head with a slight smile, Syrion walked over to the tree and sat beside the swing, staring off into the distance.

"I'm surprised. I thought you would've either killed them already or have gotten yourself killed. But not this." A voice rang out. A figure appearing on one of the branches of the tree, her presence concealed.

Had she not spoken, Syrion wouldn't even have noticed her.

"Really? I spent my years wandering. Now that I finally found my home, what makes you think I'd want to turn this place into a bloody battlefield?" Syrion chuckled.

"It's going to happen sooner or later." Griselda shrugged, jumping down and taking a seat next to Syrion.

"You don't want to kill them, do you?" Griselda turned towards Syrion.

"No, no I do not." Syrion let out a sigh.

He's someone who had already died long ago. What use is there to cling to life where there is none?

"But just letting them take the easy kill won't be good for them."

"Is that why you're training them?"

"Partially. I simply won't want to kill the daughter of another father. She took the time to converse with me, to understand me. So I'll do the same, I'll converse and I'll understand. I'll see their circumstances for what it is. And I will use the rest of my life in the best way possible." Syrion chuckled.

Griselda let out a sigh.

"It's going to be hard for those girls. The longer you take, the more of a connection you build. And when that connection is formed... Breaking it feels like a knife to your chest." She hugged her knees, eyes softly gazing at the ground beneath her.

"I know... But it has to be done. They're not ready for this world yet. It doesn't matter how long it takes, I'll keep going until they're ready to take my Sigil."

Griselda paused. She looked up at Syrion and smiled softly.

"You feel more relaxed."

Previously, Syrion was always looking for his memories, his home and wandering this land.

A husk of his former self.

But now, he was feeling more lively. More human.

He was enjoying his life and Griselda loved to see it.

"I won't deny it. Though playing with those girls come with their own set of headaches ahahah." Syrion laughed.

"Oh? What do you mean?" Griselda blinked.

"Nothing much. They just taught me a set of cursed words I don't think I'll ever be able to forget." Syrion smiled ominously.

"Cursed words? I didn't know they worked with curses."

"They're not curses in the literal sense. More of a... psychological impact." He licked his lips.

"Well that's a first. Care to share?"

"Oh naturally. The words are..." He trailed off.

Griselda listened intently.

"Breathe manually."

". . ."

"You should blink."

". . ."

"Your tongue feels uncomfortable."

". . ."

The sound of a fist hitting metal armour could be heard that night.

Chapter 799: Setting Up Foundations

Alice sat behind the table in their room.

She peered out of the window, watching Gwen train with Syrion.

Trying to change the way you think during battle, especially when you've been fighting for a long time is difficult.

Muscle memory, habits and strategies that have worked in the past all need to change.

But Gwen was striving for it, to change that something inside herself so that she could reach the next level.

Alice created a blood pen and spun it around on her finger.

Both of them were stuck in their training.

Alice couldn't resolve the issue of efficiency and short duration, Gwen couldn't change her approach to battle.

A bottleneck.

[I mean... It's pretty impressive that you even made a prototype at all. Splitting a Sigil in half and suspended in a state of half inversion. I can tell you one thing for sure and that is no one has even succeeded in doing this before.] Cayla sighed.

She was also feeling a little frustrated.

All of the pieces of the puzzle was there.

The theory lined up but it was just missing that something to make it functional.

'Let's reset out thinking a little. We know that the Resonance is the correct answer. Without it, the technique wouldn't even activate properly.

'That helps us fulfil the requirement of being a receptacle of information. So no matter what, this is something we cannot change.' Alice flicked her pen.

In order for her to complete the technique, there was two key issues that she needed to tackle.

Efficiency and time being one.

And the other was actually something to do with the effects of the technique.

Right now, she could see the flow of energy. The spark before a spell was cast. By directly intercepting that spark, she could read the information and estimate the intended course for the spell and dodge before it's even fired.

However, the same couldn't be said for the physical attacks.

That aspect was still stuck in the state of Zone, meaning others can avoid it to some degree if they knew the technique.

Alice tapped her finger against the table.

'I'm gonna try something stupid.'

[When have you ever not tried something stupid?] Cayla folded her arms.

Alice rolled her eyes.

'Fine then, I'll try something stupider than normal.

'I think I'm going to augment the base Resonance with other stuff. I'll keep stacking things until I feel it change.'

[Okay, I still don't see how that's stupider than normal.]

'By other stuff, I'm also including my Spiritual Heart.'

[. . . This isn't stupider. This is straight up idiotic. What kicked you in the head to make you think this is even remotely a good idea. Inverting Sigils, I get that. Splitting them in half? I also get that. But to directly use your Spiritual Heart in this, do you WANT to cripple yourself???] Cayla massaged her eyes.

'Look, hear me out.'

'I'm pretty proud of my reaction speed and instincts. And I think focusing more on this isn't necessarily a bad thing.'

[Okay but how does that evolve into you using your Spiritual Heart? If anything wrong happens, you'll cripple yourself.] Cayla folded her arms in frustration.

At this point, knowing how stubborn Alice was, changing her mind was going to be difficult. So Cayla wanted to fully understand the idea before poking holes into it.

'Because I want to inject the information directly into my brain. I'm going to skip the steps in between then have an array of cells, triggered casts and other things in place to help me out.'

Cayla paused.

[Explain.]

'I mean... There's not much to explain. It's simply a case of me reading and reacting to everything the moment it happens. To reduce the time in between as much as possible by directly injecting the information into myself.' Alice scratched her cheek.

[Okay, but that can be done without using your Spiritual Heart no?]

'Not really. Since I plan on using Bloodline Release during the technique. By involving my spiritual heart, my casting speed increases simply due to the fact that the time between thinking and casting disappears.'

[I still don't get it.]

Scratching her hair, Alice decided to make a prototype first. To test it against Syrion and see how it goes.

###

"Ohou~ Seems like you are holding up rather well my Queen." A woman smiled, rubbing her chin while observing the changes within a one armed woman's body.

Even though she had separated herself from the corrupt divinity at the last moment, the damage was done.

"Just tell me the bad news." Verona groaned, sweat dripping from her pale face.

A strange black obsidian had formed over the stump where her arm would've been while black veins tried to reach the rest of her body.

"Hmm... Getting better is pretty much impossible for you. Your cultivated Divinity was tied to your soul deeply and cutting it off has wounded you beyond repair. Holding up well is the best you can do." Caera admitted while poking Verona's stump with her finger, causing the Queen to wince.

"So I'm crippled?" Verona gritted her teeth.

"I wouldn't go that far. Just~ Unless you have a way of supplementing the missing piece of your soul, you won't get better." Caera chuckled, swinging herself onto a boulder while writing down some notes.

"You must be rather annoyed." Verona forced a smile.

Caera froze. Her smile looking a little forced.

"What makes you say that my Queen? I'm merely ensuring that the test subject is nice and healthy before we try again. Is that so strange?"

"Yes. Especially considering your reaction when that man was about to kill me." Verona leaned back, letting out a laboured breath.

Caera's smile faded.

"Seems like that man is your enemy. Care to tell me a little about him?" Verona asked, finding it difficult to stay conscious.

"I'll let your dear retainers know about your current condition. We'll figure something out so don't worry my dear queen and rest easy~" Caera ignored Verona's question and stepped out of the cave for now.

Verona shook her head.

She could see the pure rage in Caera's eyes, the bloodthirst that was seeping out.

Caera was livid.

Closing her eyes, Verona focused on keeping the corruption at bay.

On the way out, Caera was biting her nails.

When was it? When did Nyer intervene?

How did he know that she was cultivating a false divinity?

And most importantly, why did he let them go?

Was the false divinity all he wanted?

So many questions flew through Caera's mind. She felt as though she was about to go insane.

"How is she doing?" Frida asked with a look of worry.

"Not good not bad. She's somewhat stable for now." Caera replied half heartedly while looking out at the darkened sky.

After Verona had severed her arm that held the divinity, the outbreak occurred, killing thousands that lived in the capital.

The Guards tried to slow down the corruption but it was no use. The false divinity couldn't be stopped.

Then Nyer appeared.

Strangely, he didn't kill them. He harvested what he could then transported everyone to Terminus.

Why?

Frida clenched her fist.

"Is there a way to help her?"

"Do you have a way to supplement her soul? I'm working on it so stop bothering me." Caera glared at Frida in annoyance. She was trying to figure out her own issues while this b*tch kept hounding her about the condition of Verona.

Why can't she take a clue and just shut up already?

"Caera, she's just worried. Everyone's stressed so let's not lose our cool." Sigurd grabbed Caera on the shoulder with a frown.

"!!!" Sigurd felt a chill down his spine.

The cold glare from Caera and the bloodthirst that was seeping out of her.

He quickly let go of her shoulder.

"Right, right~ my bad. Just secure the perimeter for now and see if we can find Verona's other subjects. I'm sure the dear Lord of Titans is out there somewhere so you better start looking for him." Caera waved her hand dismissively.

The two Lords stared at Caera who walked away without care. They could tell her mental state was unstable right.

Not far from where Verona was resting was the temporary camp. Several wounded 'berserkers' and Hybrids could be seen being treated by Alfva with the help of Selen.

Occasionally, Alfva would curse out new orders while also throwing up in a bucket due to the overexertion of her body. But deep in the Abyss, in Terminus, healing wounds was much harder due to the miasma.

Selen was dragged along as Alfva's assistant. Without Selen's time powers, treating this many wounded would be impossible, even for someone like her.

Moreover, treating the berserkers and Hybrids were different to normal soldiers. They were modified by herself and Alice in order to save them from the curse that the Zenia family released.

"Alfva~" Caera called out as Alfva's eyes shot towards Caera before letting out a sigh.

"What do you want? I'm busy keeping the b*stards alive here." Alfva groaned, holding back the urge to throw up while supporting herself with the bucket.

"I need to borrow Selen for a bit. There's something we need to hunt down to stabilise the Queen's condition."

Alfva frowned.

"Make it quick then. This place can't survive long without Selen's help."

Not only was Selen responsible for assisting her in healing the wounded, she was also responsible for helping the Lords fight back any beasts that stumble across them.

And with how the beasts in Terminus was acting as of late, every fighter was needed to ensure this place didn't collapse.

"Don't worry, it'll be quick since I'm familiar with this place. Well... to some extent." Caera chuckled, giving Alfva a wave before looking towards Selen.

Of course, needing help to kill a beast was just an excuse. Caera had other needs for Selen's presence. Namely, her time powers.

Caera needed to start setting up the foundations for her revenge against Nyer.

Chapter 800: Making Use Of Selen's Power

Dragging Selen away from the camp, Caera took the lead and they ventured into Terminus.

Selen was naturally worried about the state of the camp. Having helped in nearly everything, she understood how precarious their situation was.

Not only was more than 80% of the civilians who lived in the capital gone, but those that remained were struggling against the miasma of Terminus.

If they don't find a way out of here soon, things will take a turn for the worst.

"Where are we going? If it's just killing something shouldn't you be able to handle it yourself?" Selen asked curiously.

Caera was strong. Far too strong.

Strong enough where not even the two Lords under Verona could do anything about her.

So the fact that she needed her help of all things, and to kill a beast at that, seemed a little improbable.

"This is Terminus we are talking about. Even for myself, I have to be careful. The beasts trapped down here are those that were banished for their danger after all~" Caera chuckled sticking out her tongue.

However, Selen couldn't quite believe that excuse.

The look of doubt was clear in her eyes.

"My~ You don't need to be so on guard. The successor would be saddened if I did anything to you after all. But I'm not lying, we are out here to hunt down a beast amongst other things." Caera shrugged.

"When the Queen failed her ascension, she forcefully anchored the spiralling divinity into her right arm and severed it. However, nothing is so simple. Since she had been cultivating that Divinity for a while and wanted to ascend, it's only natural that the soul is heavily entwined with that power." She began to explain, flicking her wrist and swatting away a camouflaged beast with a tentacle.

The beast was right behind Selen and she didn't even notice.

"You see, with the soul being so heavily involved, cutting it away will naturally have its downsides. She's lost around 50% of her soul with that cut. Maybe even more and it wasn't a clean cut either. There are still traces of that false divinity clinging onto her, corrupting her."

Hearing this, Selen furrowed her brows.

"Then shouldn't we remove the rest of the corruption? Or would that be cutting too much of her soul?"

"It'll be too much. She's already struggling to stay conscious and speak, what makes you think she can survive another cut? The beast we're going to hunt down is one that helps supplement the soul." Caera laughed, glancing back at Selen.

"However, killing the beast wouldn't benefit us at all. So we need to capture it. What better person for the job than you?"

Selen scratched her hair. She'll admit it, her skill was helpful in this aspect. But it still doesn't change the fact that Caera could just overpower the beast on her own to capture it.

"But before we capture the beast, I'll need your help to restore an old lab of mine."

"You know that I can't reverse time right?" Selen furrowed her brows.

While she may have the powers of Miralith, reversing time was still something beyond her scope of powers. Even for Miralith, such an act felt impossible.

"Oh I'm fully aware. I'm not asking for you to reverse our time. No, I just want you to help me manipulate it to a certain extent. So that we can find the right era." Caera chuckled.

Her explanation didn't help as Selen was more confused than ever.

"Right era?"

Caera rolled her eyes.

If it was Alice, she probably would've guessed it by now.

"The Inverted World. I'm going to kill a Lord and forcefully open an Inverted World. The conditions are a little strict but I'm pretty sure I can make it happen.

"The only issue is making sure it captures the right memory. So instead of killing a handful and hoping they latch onto the right time frame then failing, I'll have you adjust the era it latches onto. Surely that's doable for you right?" Caera rolled her eyes.

There's no doubt that whatever remains of Ayr was beyond repair. Making use of them was impossible unless Selen could turn back time. But even for a god, this was an impossible feat.

So Caera settled with an alternative.

"I... I'm not sure." Selen frowned, she never tried such a thing before. In fact, she's only ever interacted with the Inverted World once never mind trying to manipulate the era captured within.

"I'm sure you'll do fine~ If Miralith holds the potential to do so then so can you." Caera waved her hand dismissively.

Selen sighed.

She couldn't help but wonder if everyone from Ayr had the same thought process.

Shaking her head, Selen followed behind Caera.

###

"I think we should change up the training a little." Syrion withdrew his blade from Gwen's neck.

Another day, another defeat. And not a single step closer to her goal.

"Change? How so?" Gwen sighed, panting from the exhaustion as sweat rolled down her cheeks.

"I think it's better for you to see what you are lacking rather than trying to find it blindly. Perhaps the method worked for you in the past but it's clearly not working now. So you need to shift your mentality a little." Syrion explained.

Tapping his chin, he got an idea.

With Alice testing out her new prototype, this was the perfect chance.

"Alice!" Syrion called out as Alice's ears twitched.

She poked her head out from the window and saw the two looking up at her.

"What is it?"

"Come down here, I got a new style of training that might be suitable for the two of you."

Alice's interest was piqued as she made her way down.

She was still working on her new prototype so this might be a good moment to test it out.

"What kind of training are we doing?" Alice asked curiously.

"One where you don't fight back."

"Oi, what kind of training is that?" Alice's smile twitched.

"Gwen is having issues with making up new plans on the spot and you're having issues with Vision. So I'm thinking you two can supplement what the other lacks. Gwen can observe your movements to understand what she's lacking when it comes to making up new plans.

"Meanwhile, you can observe Gwen and see what she's doing for Vision while she's attacking." Syrion clarified.

Thinking about it for a moment, Alice nodded her head.

"Alright, I need to test out the new defensive properties of my technique anyways."

With Alice agreeing, Syrion clapped his hands.

"Perfect. Gwen, focus on attacking. Don't fall into a rhythm. Don't worry about things getting too dangerous, I'll step in if needed."

Taking a few steps away from Gwen, Alice took a deep breath.

Resonance!

Tiamat's wings unfurled behind her, linking Alice to the world around them.

The power of duality spread through her body, splitting her fifth Sigil in half as the crown above her head shimmered.

Bloodline Release!

*RUMBLE!!!

From Alice's shadow, a silhouette of a crying lady appeared. A wicked smile that sent haunting chills down the spine of any who saw it.

Alice's eye twitched momentarily as her vision began to shift.

The world unravelled into energy and information, directly being injected into Alice's mind.

Blood dripped from her nose.

"I'm ready."

###

Seeing Alice's powers, I'm once again reminded how strange she is.

The collision of opposing energy within her body.

Corruption that seeped through every vein.

Then there's that... silhouette behind her.

It didn't feel like a normal technique. It felt... different.

Even now, my body was trembling ever so slightly. My instincts telling me not to fight whatever was in front of me, regardless of the fact that this was simply training.

I aimed my hand towards Alice. My intent was clear, I'll test out her defences first with my spells.

...

Blood moved guard Alice before my attack could even formulate.

"Are you just going to stare at Alice? Why don't you fire an attack or two?" Syrion called over.

He's right, I can't just stand here gawking.

This is my chance to understand how Alice fights, how I should change my fighting.

Sorry Alice, I'm going all out.

###

Gwen stomped down, a flaming spear appearing next to her as she activated her resonance.

Gritting her teeth, she threw the first javelin that split into five.

*CLANG!

Alice destroyed the javelin with ease.

She could see it, the flow of energy faster than before. The moment even the slightest hint of energy was being gathered, her body was already reacting.

The triggered cast she put into place was doing its job.

From above, she sensed the convergence of energy and created a blood mist to counter.

The best defence against spells was to interrupt the formation process!

[Everything is within expectations. Seems like this is fine so long as you focus on defending.] Cayla reported while Alice defended against the attacks being thrown at her.

She didn't even need to move from her spot as her automated defence was working on its own.

Her soul directly receives information and reacts instinctively.

Of course, this has the downside of not telling the difference between a feint and the real attack since it's reacting to everything being thrown at Alice.

But with a bit of fine tuning, this could work.

*BANG!!!

Alice tilted her head just in time.

A physical attack thrown by Syrion while merging with Gwen's attacks.

"I thought this was sparring between me and Gwen!" Alice shouted out, quickly stepping to the side in order to avoid Syrion's barrage.

Her automated defence still handling Gwen's onslaught but it was beginning to falter with Syrion cutting apart her blood.

"I never said I wasn't going to join." Syrion shrugged.

Even though he sounded nonchalant, there was a light of appreciation in his eyes.

Clicking her tongue, Alice slammed her hand down, creating a pool of blood beneath her.

With both of them attacking her and one even being able to cut apart her spells, Alice had to put more filters in place.

To use her energy efficiency and extend her time in this state.

Summoning Void Fang, Alice countered. Physical attacks against physical, spell based against spells.

She'll adapt based on the patterns shown!

Cayla didn't say anything. She couldn't say anything.

She was watching as more and more triggered casts were put into place in real time!

If this continues...

'Alice will be able to block everything automatically.'