

Abyssal A 851

Chapter 851: Zenia Secrets

Alice sat on her bed with her legs crossed.

A deep frown visible on her face as she listened to the information that Elias shared from just outside her window.

"Based on your silence I'm guessing you know something and this is not good at all." Elias asked as Alice scratched her hair.

"It's... Complicated. But yes, if the Zenia's are doing this much then something is definitely up and nothing good at that. Let's buy a few samples. If I can figure out what's inside the blood vials then maybe I can hint on what they're trying to do." Alice sighed and stood up.

"Can't you explain a little more before we go? I'll be honest, treading into the dark like this is a little bit... rough even for me."

Scratching her chin, Alice nodded, gesturing for Elias to step in.

"First of all. What do you consider to be a 'perfect' specimen when it comes to bonding with Abyss Blood."

"A... perfect specimen?" Elias was a little confused.

"Yes. If you could make a perfect human who is compatible with Abyss Blood, what kind of powers do you want them to have?" Alice clarified.

Folding his arms, Elias leaned back.

When it comes to Abyss Blood, there were several variants. Some gave permanent buffs such as physical power, some were temporary.

But what was a constant risk was the dangers of side effects. Depending on your own resistances, you may experience side effects on your 20th vial or you might experience it on your first.

Once a side effect manifests, it's basically there for life. Counter agents are only there to make it a little more manageable, not get rid of it.

"I guess If I had to design a person... It would be immunity to side effects. Ah but then the vessel might not be strong enough to handle the changes within the body." Elias scratched his chin.

"You guessed correctly. At once point, Zenia's had such a specimen in their possession. However, due to certain events, the specimen managed to escape and now they're trying to recreate that miracle." Alice nodded.

Hearing this, Elias blinked his eyes.

"Wait... What?"

"At one point, the Zenia's had a specimen who is was exactly as you described. Of course, it wasn't immunity to side effects. The side effects still occurred. The only difference was that the body managed to repair itself, purging the side effects." Alice clarified.

"What about the benefits of Abyss Blood then? Was that kept?"

"It wasn't. Any passive buffs such as physical power was purged just like the side effects. On the other hand, if the blood was to grant an ability, that would be stored. How much of that ability the specimen can access is simply a matter of purity and how much of the blood they consumed." Alice shook her head.

Elias raised his eyebrow.

"How... do you know all of this?"

"How? Well it's pretty simple. I was involved. A few research notes here, a few research notes there. You know the deal." Alice shrugged.

It was partially a lie.

"You... were involved in this." Elias frowned.

He wanted to say something but stopped. The matter of the fact is that right now, she was working to stop whatever the Zenia was planning.

"Yep. Ever wonder why the Zenia family suddenly produced a crapload of Blood that required heavy, extensive testing? There's your answer." Alice nodded.

Elias scratched his hair.

"Since the specimen escaped, the Zenia family must be scrambling to get it back. And I'm guessing that probably fuelled their desire to start taking over the other families. If anyone else gets their hand on the specimen, it could uproot everything they've done."

"Your thinking is too shallow. The Zenia doesn't care about anything like that. What I can say is that their focus has turned to recreating that special blood ever since the specimen escaped.

"Not only that, but they've been producing hybrid monstrosities that can alternate between man and beast." Alice shook her head.

Now that Elias has seen the kind of products that the Zenia's are making, it was a good time to get him up to date on her enemy.

Otherwise, when he faces a Hybrid, he'll be taken by surprise and that could be the difference between life and death.

Elias took a deep breath. Hearing that such things exist... he couldn't quite believe it. Yet Alice didn't look like she was joking around either.

"Have you taken a look at their... artifact store yet?" Alice asked.

"They have an artifact store?"

"They should do. Artifacts are a great source of power for a Hunter, especially one that grows alongside them. But their creation of the artifacts have been... Questionable. Take this one for example.

"I had received it while infiltrating their ranks for a bit using my disguise skill. See if you can tell the difference between this and a normal artifact." Alice snapped her finger and summoned Ruinous Void.

Receiving the weapon, Elias could sense a great flow of power coursing through its body.

But more than that... There was something else hidden within.

His pupils trembled, his hands began to shake.

He opened his mouth in horror, wanting to say something, anything but the words were stuck in his throat.

Elias turned his eyes up at Alice.

"This..."

"A child was cultivated into the weapon. All of their growth type artifacts are like this. They turn the child not yet born into a vessel to harmonise with the Hunter. They become an extra storage in sense and synchronise with whatever power the Hunter has.

"A blank slate." Alice explained, retrieving her weapon.

"I had promised this child that I'll take revenge. Whether or not they understand me I do not know." Her fingers gently brushed against the sides of her artifact before storing it away.

Elias clenched his hands together and gritted his teeth. Veins bulging on the back of his arms and neck.

"How long have they been doing this?" Elias asked, trying his best to maintain his calm.

"Hm... If I had to guess, probably 10 years or so give or take. And they're still doing it."

"How exactly are you planning on uprooting this family? Even if you have allies, do you even have enough manpower to destroy every single branch? And what about those not involved? Simply hired because they need a job?" Elias asked.

He was angry at the family. He was furious at the fact that children were being used, that they were creating monstrosities in this world for the sake of research.

But even though he was angry, he knew the limits of his power. Charging in with raw anger wasn't going to solve everything.

And then there was the case of people simply trying to get by in life. They were unlucky enough to get involved and many of them might not know what the family is doing.

They can't simply go around destroying anything with the Zenia mark on it.

"How you say? Well there's the easy way then there's the hard way. The hard way has me erasing things slowly from bottom to top. The easy way has me destroy everything with my allies." Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Isn't that unfair for th-"

"Unfair? Yes I agree. But at the same time, what about all those who have died already? I think destroying everything that the Zenia family are involved in will be much better." Alice cut him off.

She too understands the unfairness of it but even so.

Uprooting the family is something that MUST be done regardless of reason.

Even if it wasn't for revenge, she can't allow these vile monsters to roam these lands.

Every day they're around is another day where a victim is created.

"Unless someone can give me a good feasible plan that destroys the family quickly, I'll stick with obliterating everything." Alice grinned.

Elias looked at the girl in front of him.

Behind her, he could see a sea of flames. The ruins of destruction and the corpses that follow. In the pursuit of a better world, she'll leave a land of ruin.

And as much as he hated it, her words hold merit.

How do they uproot a family that has spread their influence far and wide? How do they determine those who know what's going on and those who don't? What about the people who agree with their views?

The liars fleeing consequence?

How do they appease the souls of those who have been killed by the family?

What about the ones who want redemption? Can they take the time to go through it one by one?

Elias leaned back and sighed.

"Let's not think about the complicated stuff for now. Even if I want to go through with the easy plan, it's not like I have the power to do so just yet. The Zenia's might have ties to someone really annoying to deal with. Not to mention the Doctor who doesn't seem to die even after I blasted his physical body to shreds." Alice rested her chin on her palm.

Thinking back to the brief exchange in the north, she clicked her tongue in annoyance.

The Doctor must've done something to his body. A hybrid operation perhaps to place his core elsewhere. His physical body is one that can be regenerated at all and so long as his core is not destroyed, he will not die.

Thus the annoyance becomes finding that core or...

'Severing that connection.' Alice narrowed her eyes.

With the power of Allura and now even the Slayer under her belt. There was a little experiment she wanted to try with her sixth Sigil.

To overlay Theron's power and experience so that she too can open the gates of Oblivion.

And by combining both the Slayer and Severance, could she perhaps merge Oblivion with her strongest attack?

This will be an experiment like no other and possibly become the key to defeating her strongest foes.

Chapter 852: Karya

Thinking about the potential of Oblivion, Alice eventually sighed and shook her head.

Oblivion was a realm far beyond her understanding right now. Trying to pierce through the veil and experiment without prior knowledge was stupid.

She didn't know the dangers nor the rules.

It's clear that this power is far beyond what she was prepared to handle. After all... Even Theron, the Slayer, could only use this power for a short period of time and his energy became a little unstable afterwards.

She has yet to become a Lord thus the thought of using this power...

While Alice was contemplating about the powers of Oblivion, Elias fell silent at the mention of the Doctor.

Someone who wouldn't die even after Alice destroyed his physical body. And based on her words, it seems like a physical body didn't matter much for this man.

Side effects aside, Elias knew full well how important the connection between soul and body is. It's why people can't easily shake off the side effects.

And yet this man in question was ignoring this connection completely to achieve an immortal body?

A gimmick.

That's all Elias could think about.

If this connection could be temporarily separated so that the body doesn't affect the soul, can't they make adjustments against side effects easier?

Or was there another factor he wasn't considering?

Right now, his powers can only 'undo' certain changes up to a limited period of time. Trying to go further was impossible.

So in order for him to cross this boundary of impossibility...

Elias narrowed his eyes and entertained a certain idea.

'Is one of the people who can undo side effects imposed on others that Alice spoke about... the specimen that the Zenia family had access to?'

Alice was incredibly knowledgeable about this specimen after all. And considering the nature of this secret, sharing the location would be rather risky hence the delays.

"You alright? You look a bit worried. I know the Zenia family is big but it's not like we're going to bomb them head on. At least not yet." Alice's voice rang out as Elias glanced over.

"Huh?"

"If you're worried about the family targeting you, you can help from the shadows instead." Alice offered, knowing that taking on this task wasn't everyone's cup of tea.

She didn't care much since her family consisted of stupidly strong people who can take care of themselves. But others might not be the same.

"Ah no, I was thinking about something else." Elias shook his head. "I was wondering if some of their research, materials or even the blood may be useful for me.

"Based on what you said about the Doctor, it's clear that somehow, by separating his soul from the body, he's able to practically ignore the damage on his main body. So what if... we apply the same when I revert side effects? Would that allow me to go past certain limits?" Elias theorised.

Hearing all of this, Alice leaned back.

"It's not quite the same as what you're thinking." She shook her head.

She decided to tell him a little about the solution she has found when it comes to reverting side effects.

"The connection between the soul and body is too important to sever. While the Doctor may seem like what you want to achieve, there are probably large downsides we don't yet see. Dangers that we don't yet know.

"When we obtain Sigils from the Abyss, do you know the process that occurs?" Alice asked.

Elias nodded his head.

"I believe a contract is formed right?"

"Yes. A contract is formed where a portion of your soul is taken away and replaced by that power. An equal exchange to some degree. And that soul is stored in a library of sorts. A library that can be used for a few things but mainly for the construction of the Inverted World.

"But the same applies when you drink Abyss Blood. It's equivalent exchange. Whatever you sought to obtain through that blood, you pay with small fragments of your soul. So when you carve out the side effects, you lose pieces of yourself as a whole.

"To avoid that, you must revoke the contract. But what was gained cannot be undone. So what they avoided must be reapplied. If you drank blood to regenerate your arm, undoing the side effects means that your arm disappears along with it. Do you understand?"

This was the key thing that she learned when helping Arwen.

"And if you want the host to be perfectly fine even after revoking the contract..."

"Something else must take the damage." Elias realised as Alice nodded her head with a smile.

"Yep. Something else must take the damage in the host's place."

In Arwen's case, while Alice had the help of the Will to revoke the contract, she still received the power of the Siren in return. A power that, due to her unique constitution, could be turned on or off at will so long as she replaces one of her Sigils.

Unfortunately, because of how useful her Sigil selection is, exchanging it for the Siren sometimes feels like a slight waste. Especially since the hypnotic effect could be cleansed through various methods.

"I get the vessel part. But revoking the contract... How does one even achieve it? When I cleanse side effects, I'm simply undoing what's occurred and applying my own healing when I can." Elias folded his arms with a large sigh.

"Who knows. But I believe it should be something heavily related to souls and how you can interact with them." Alice waved her hand dismissively.

She's told him enough for one day. Any more and this'll be a one sided trade, especially since she wasn't sure how he would help when it comes to the Zenia family.

"When do you think you can contact your friend again?"

Alice rubbed her chin.

"It'll have to wait quite a while. A lot of us were separated after what happened in the North. I'm continuing on my journey but I have trust that they'll be fine. All of them are powerful."

Of course, that didn't mean that Alice wasn't worried. But Gwen had already promised her that she'll look into what happened in the North.

Elias furrowed his brows. He saw what happened in the North through the newspaper.

The fact that she was keeping hope despite what had happened... This level of trust wasn't something that could be cultivated easily.

"Anyways, that's enough of that. Let's just hope the Blood they sell in the store isn't that expensive. It'll take a pretty big chunk out of my savings if they are." Alice sighed.

After buying information from the Underground, she might have to do a few odd jobs again to replenish her coffers.

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"Well well well. Would you look at what the wind blew to my doorstep today. A limp d*ck piece of turd that splattered against my f*cking door, leaving a stink that just won't f*cking go away.

"What the f*ck do you want Gin." A white haired woman spat out in annoyance while smoking a cigarette.

She wore a white sleeveless collared dress with a black ribbon under the collar. A large black jacket unzipped slightly and pulled in a manner that exposed her shoulders.

Her golden eyes held a light of contempt.

In front of her stood the Abyss Lord of Death.

Someone who's her opposite and someone she disliked. Not because of his Lordship or who he is. But because of what he did to her in the past.

"Arys I-"

"First of all. Don't f*cking call me that. We're not close anymore. Second of all, I can smell a rotting corpse. Is the medicine from your normal supplier not working?" She asked, taking out her cigarette and pointing at the figure sitting with her back against the wall.

Gin opened his mouth and sighed before nodding his head.

"Karya, can you take a look at her?" Gin asked, almost pleading.

If anyone can help Allura, it would be Karya. While she may not be able to undo the curse, she'll be able to extend what little time they have left.

Karya furrowed her brows. Her eyes darting between Allura and Gin.

"Stay 5 meters away from me. Any closer and I'll ignore Lua." Karya glared as Gin stepped away.

Walking out of her house, Karya walked past her gate and kneeled in front of Allura.

"Lua... Look at yourself. What did you do this time?" Karya's gaze softened after seeing Allura's wounds.

"Arys... Sorry... about this. I know you don't like the old man... but I can't exactly move freely right now." Allura smiled apologetically.

"It's fine. You saved me a bunch before after all. I can forgive something small like this. But... If your old medicine doesn't work anymore, I'm not sure what else I can do." Karya furrowed her brows.

The old medicine that Allura took was something that was created partially with her help and power. To make something stronger than that... it would be difficult.

"I told Gin... But he was adamant about coming here. Even after all this time, he still believes you-"

"Stop. I don't care about what he thinks." Karya gritted her teeth.

Scratching her hair, she deliberated in silence.

In the end, she sighed and nodded her head.

"I'll take a look but I can't promise anything okay?" Karya tapped the ground beneath her.

Gentle energy began to flow outwards as Karya's hair began to shift. Parts of it transformed into wings that unfurled, revealing blue and gold eyes hidden in the feathers.

A golden halo spun to life behind Karya, spectral wings and bells tolled.

Gin watched from afar. Complicated emotions flowing through his mind.

But he trusted Karya.

After all... She was his 'opposite'.

The light to his shadow. The life to his death.

Karya, The Abyss Lord of Life.

Chapter 853: Buying 'Time' From The Reaper

As Karya finished checking on Allura's condition, her expression remained perfectly neutral.

No shift of good or bad.

No one else would've been able to tell a difference. . . but Allura has seen Karya has never allowed herself to show worry. A furrowed brow, a slight frown, a nervous tick in the voice.

These were all signs that could shatter a patient's courage faster than any wound. This shattering could quickly spiral into something far worse as fear and panic take hold.

As a healer, as someone who's responsible for Life, Karya made sure not to make a bad expression when treating her patients.

She wanted them to feel safe while she operated on them, to know that everything was under control. To know that they had a chance of recovering.

At first, she tried to keep a smile whenever she could. Soft, gentle, reassuring.

But after a certain point, she lost that smile. She couldn't smile in reassurance anymore. All she could do was look them dead in the eye with no shifts in emotion and tell them that everything was under control.

So long as her expression didn't turn bad, things were 'under control'.

"Be straight with me Arys. How bad is it?" Allura asked.

Based on her understanding, the fact that Karya hasn't said anything, not even a slightly happy expression, could only mean one thing.

"I can try to stabilize it for now-"

"Arys." Allura cut her off.

Kayra closed her eyes for a moment and sighed, revealing the worry on her face.

She didn't like showing this side to patients. But Allura was different. She wanted things up front without deception, regardless of good or bad.

And as her friend, Arys decided to be truthful as per her request.

"It's not just bad. It's terrible. I don't even know how you have the energy to speak right now. Your insides are a complete mess and calling you a walking corpse is being VERY optimistic. You could topple over and die tomorrow if we're not careful."

Allura opened her mouth, wanting to say something before giving up.

She simply smiled helplessly.

"So... What can we do about it?"

"I would suggest overdrafting your life force to compensate. But there's nothing really left for me to overdraft. But... Well. The conversion is a little sh*t but it's not like we have a better solution at hand.

"My only question for you is..." Karya hesitated on whether or not she should even ask this question.

"How long do you want to live?"

How long does she want to live...

What a peculiar question.

It's not a matter of if she wants to live or not. But rather... how 'long'.

She has been alive for centuries now. She has seen sights that many would not see even after spending their entire life looking for it. She has experienced quite a lot of what life can offer.

She has seen the world change with each era and within this time, she has only ever thought about whether or not she wanted to survive.

If it was just that... then the answer was easy.

Yes, she wanted to survive.

But when it came to length... she didn't know.

Did she live a satisfying life? Allura had to admit that while the end of her life dulled out a little, her early years were the happiest she's ever been. In that city of Ayr, she had everything she could've ever wanted.

If she was to describe the most treasured view in her life... It would perhaps be the moment she returns home.

The moment she sees Kaden greeting her with a snack, or perhaps seeing him come home safe and sound while she's relaxing.

This mundane moment was a ray of gold for her.

She had to admit that she's lived long enough.

However... There was one more person she was responsible for now. A little lost girl who's been hurt by the world around her.

She granted that girl her surname, took her under her wing.

As... strange as it feels, there's nothing Allura wouldn't do for her. A sense of protectiveness towards the young chick who has set foot into the vast world around them.

If she was to depart now... She wouldn't feel at ease.

She couldn't help but let out an amused chuckle.

She could feel the greed bubbling inside her veins.

"Two... no. One year. If I can just get one more year, I'll be happy." Allura smiled.

Within that year, she'll look at how Alice is doing and help when she needs to. It's... a little shame that she wouldn't be able to experience Ayr all over again.

But that was a small price to pay to take one more year when the reaper is calling her name.

"One year... You truly are a greedy one aren't you?" Karya's smile twitched.

Brushing her hair back, her wings folded themselves away as Karya glanced towards Gin.

She pulled a face of disgust.

"Turd. Come here but don't come closer than 2 meters. I need to scan you to see if your wrinkly old ass has enough years left in that husk to be of use." Karya gestured Gin to approach with her hand.

Stopping him once he reached the two meter mark, Karya squinted her eyes.

"Jeez... She's not the only one who's been pushing herself, it seems."

Shaking her head, Karya turned back to Allura.

"That year you want... I can give it to you. But I want you to know this. With the way the conversion works, your lifeforce and energy become directly tied together. Your energy also wouldn't regenerate like normal.

"Each time you fight, you're fighting with lifespan rather than energy. And when you bottom out after using that energy, you die. So judging from your output... Two uses of severance is all you can handle.

"And that's not even including your f*ck ass ability of using Oblivion either. If you use that, don't even think about a second use." She warned.

Nodding her head, Allura had a smile on her face as she could clearly see that despite everything that had happened, Kayra was still deeply worried about her.

"Wipe that dumbass smile from your face. We haven't even started yet. As mentioned earlier, the conversion is a little sh*t. What the half expired turd can't provide, I'll make up.

"Plus, it's not like I can give you much beyond this one year even if we have spare life force to give. So use it carefully okay?"

Clasping her hands together, a pillar of golden light began to wrap around Allura's body as chains pierced into Kayra's chest.

Stumbling back, blood began to seep through the gaps of her teeth. She could feel an invisible hand grabbing something of hers.

Her lifeforce.

Once it grabbed hold, it mercilessly pulled without care for how much pain she was going to go through. The same was for Gin.

And within this light, Allura felt the power flowing into her body.

She could move her limbs again, take a deep breath.

Yet within this comfort, she felt as though she was staring at a long crumbling road.

A road of light and on the other side, a hollow child with her skin wrapping against bone.

It was a countdown.

The moment the child reaches her...

Her time will be over.

No more bargaining, no more second wind.

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"They just keep coming don't they?" Nalem gritted his teeth in annoyance while looking at the swarm of hungry fanatics rushing towards them. Each of them forcefully starved and imbued with Famine's power.

"Doesn't matter. Just means Deva is panicking if she's sending grunts like this." Kaden narrowed his eyes, cold as ice.

"Yeah I suppose. But she's a slippery one." Nalem clicked his tongue.

Even for someone like him, his patience was running thin. Deva has been taunting them despite running away non stop.

"Doesn't matter. The sooner she exhausts her tricks, the faster I can grab her. I'd much rather deal with these grunts than not have a single clue on her whereabouts."

Tapping his foot against the ground, a giant pool of darkness expanded with Kaden in the centre.

Each of the fanatics rushing towards him were slowed by the darkness as though walking through a thick mire.

The harder they pushed, the stronger the resistance.

And while they struggled, Kaden walked on the surface with ease.

As he approached one of the fanatics who tried to claw their way out and bite him, Kaden didn't even turn his eyes before...

*BANG!!!

He swung his foot, destroying the fanatic's head in an instant.

Without the head, the body twitched for a few moments, carrying out the final orders before falling limp.

*CRUNCH!!!

Kaden stepped down, crushing another head as though it was fresh grapes.

With each step, fresh blood would wash over his shoe.

"Deva. This song and dance, surely you must be tired of it." Kaden spoke calmly, snapping his fingers.

From within the mire of darkness, black barbed chains whipped out, killing every fanatic within range.

"So why run away from the inevitable? You will keep running, and I will keep chasing."

"Pft ahahaha! Are you threatening me or are you giving me a love confession? Act calm as much as you want Kaden, I can tell you're desperate. How long huh? How much time do you have before Allura finally kicks the bucket."

A woman's voice echoed out from several headless corpses.

"I just have to keep running and make sure you don't catch me before she dies. Once that happens~ It's my victory." She goaded with a smug tone.

A vein bulged on Kaden's temple as he curved his lips up into a furious smile.

"Good. Stay with that thought. Let's see how well that works out for you."

Black tears began to fall as power flowed through his veins.

Nalem took a few steps back.

Through the gaps of the realm, Kaden reached out and summoned his grimoire.

In order to capture Deva, he was going all out!

Chapter 854: Walking Bank

Standing in the middle of the street, Alice had a complicated expression on her face.

The Zenia family store.

There wasn't really anything... 'wrong' with the store. She just didn't like the feeling.

The feeling of repulsion. If she could do anything about it, she would either choose to destroy this place or walk away.

But in order to figure out what they're planning, they needed to buy three things.

First, a strange merger of different bloods together.

Second, a counter agent.

And lastly, the 'lite' version of Abyss Blood. High potency but short duration.

They needed to get a sample of all three so they can properly test. And not just one either. They needed around three of each.

"I know there are probably others who are acting like this too. But we should head in soon, people are starting to take notice." Elias furrowed his brows.

Taking a deep breath, Alice sighed and nodded her head.

"I know. Just sorting out a few feelings."

Walking into the store, the immediate sound of chatter dominated her hearing.

People inquiring about what blood to use, what effects they have.

Panicked customers begging for a counter agent to be made.

Employees helping out as many people as possible.

Despite having the Zenia name attached to it, this wasn't a bad store.

Alice took this moment to have a walk around the store.

'Even if it's a Zenia store, there are normal people involved with the family as Elias has said. Going the easy route... we'll probably have to kill them too if they've made a contract with the family.' Alyss sighed.

Their original goal of wiping out the family would've been partially achieved through the contracts that they've made.

But that would be indiscriminatory and would even kill those like Selen.

As hypocritical as it may be, she'd rather not do that. Only because her friend is involved.

"Hi~ Are you lost? Do you need some help?" A voice called out to Alice as she glanced over.

A woman bent down slightly with Alice's smile twitched.

"Not a kid, I'm in my 20's."

"Ah..."

[PFT!]

'HAH!'

'F*ck off.' Alice groaned inwardly.

"Ah I'm terribly sorry!" The woman apologised, but Alice waved it off.

"I'm a bit curious about some of these products. Can you help me?" Alice asked as the woman nodded.

"With pleasure. How may I help?"

"I just need to know a few things. You see, I studied blood when I was at school and some of these are a bit confusing to me.

"I know that when you mix Abyss Blood, only one effect remains but it's weaker than before. And since you're doing the mixtures on the scene, are you able to tell me a little bit about it?" Alice asked.

"Of course, if you can't tell me because it's industry secrets or something I understand. I'm just curious."

The woman thought about it for a moment before smiling.

"I'm not too well informed. But we have people responsible for the mixing process in every branch. The same is applied to all of the new services." She explained as Alice folded her arms.

[Depending on how many people they have per branch, aren't they spreading themselves a little thin?] Cayla frowned.

'Probably. Though I'll bank on the fact that they wouldn't need something like that. Remember Suyin? She's giving us crystals and stuff to deal with Outer Gods when they appear.'

'That's transported through the Void in a vault. So... I'm guessing the people sent to the branches have something similar. They'll access it when needed. All they need is someone to pass along the message with a slight understanding of the process.' Alice furrowed her brows.

She doubted that the Zenia family would send important people to every branch.

'Why don't we kidnap them? It'll probably be easier to find out about the behind the scenes stuff.' Alyss suggested.

'I don't think the guards will sit around if I do something like that.'

'Fair point. Security is surprisingly tight in this city. Do you think it's a side effect of the Royal family's caution against the Zenia family?' Alyss theorised.

'Probably.'

The moment they exited their tavern, Alice could feel eyes watching their movements. Surveillance that was spread throughout the city. No corner was spared and anything would happen, the response was fast and snappy.

If she was to cause a single commotion in the shop, the guards will arrive within minutes if not less.

Impressive yet annoying. That's how Alice would describe it.

Regardless, Alice decided to browse their ware of Abyss Blood for now.

There were a few that caught her eye but most of them was limited to low level beasts. High level ones were either stupidly expensive or completely unavailable.

In the end, Alice bought three different blood mixtures, all with completely different effects.

Looking at her pouch that was now clearly lacking a few coins, Alice let out a deep sigh.

"I'm poor again." She groaned.

Of course, she had enough mead money. Just not enough to do clothes shopping or important expenses on top of that.

[Most would argue that the latter is more important than the former or even mead at that.] Cayla sighed while staring at Alice with a neutral expression.

She wasn't poor. She had more than enough money in reality.

The only issue was... when considering her mead expenses and how much she likes to drink and hoard, no amount of money was going to be enough.

'We can always take some jobs at the Hunters Guild if needed.' Alyss reminded.

'True. I also need to renew my license since it's a tad outdated. Once I do, getting a high level job that pays well shouldn't be an issue. But... Do you think they'll find my improvement suspicious?' Alice scratched her hair.

Most people would usually take a long time for their Sigils.

They need to train to change the selection of beasts, find a shaman or a natural communion point to designate their targets then find the corresponding beast and it's location.

If they're unlucky, they could be stuck and miss out on the kill. Or, on the way there, the kill is stolen from them so they'll have to track a new one down.

The process of finding the right beast and tracking them down was a long an arduous one.

One that Alice skips using Cayla because she can simply designate whatever she finds interesting as her target.

Take the Tenebris for example. She wasn't even thinking of going after that kind of beast.

But there was a flood of beasts and she just happened to be there.

Thus skipping the annoyance and immediately setting her bounty.

Saving time was one of the biggest benefits of Cayla.

Though... considering what it was like in the past where everyone can set or even revoke their bounties... Alice couldn't help but wonder if that kind of power will be available for her in the future.

"I was wondering why I saw a kid staring at their wallet. So it was just you. Need some cash?" Elias asked from behind as Alice glanced back.

"Maybe. I bought three samples for now but they're more expensive than I thought." Alice groaned, showing the vials that she bought.

"Hm? You should've just told me. How much did they cost?" Elias asked, reaching into his inner pocket and tossing over a pouch.

Catching it, Alice raised her eyebrow and opened it slightly.

"!?!?!?!?"

Platina.

Just Platina.

No silver, no gold.

Only the highest denomination of currency.

In front of her stood one of the richest people she has ever laid her eyes on.

"What? There are benefits when it comes to healing people sometimes. I just so happened to heal a wealthy dude a few years back. Haven't struggled with buying anything since." Elias explained.

"Ahem, would you like to develop some mead with me? We can use that funding for a great cause." Alice grinned as Elias rolled his eyes.

"Just because I have money doesn't mean we should spend it however we want. Let's just buy what's needed and leave." He pushed Alice's head away.

"Boring." Alice stuck out her tongue.

But now that she knows they have a literal walking bank with them, she didn't hold back.

She looked for the most strange and contrasting blood types to fuse and requested it.

Abilities such as being able to summon flames but fusing it with one that extinguishes all flames.

Or perhaps a siren based ability that made one infatuated while merged with one that forced berserk.
Would they be angry but in love?

Speak words of love while trying to punch you?

Alice wanted to see how well the Zenia family was able to fuse these strange abilities together. Whether or not they would still cancel out or take effect in the strangest possible ways.

Only by going through all of the options can she determine what kind of mixing agent they have concocted and determine their progress.

Progress towards recreating her blood and her powers.

With the samples now acquired, same with the lite version of the blood, the only thing left was to see the Counter Agents.

In order to get one, they must either bring the victim here or explain the issue in full detail.

What blood has been drunk and the side effects that's manifested within the body.

The only issue was...

Where will they find the victim?

Alice wouldn't manifest something like that easily and even if she did, it'll mean exposing her blood to them.

'Wait a second...' Alice slowly widened her eyes.

'Have we even seen a person with a side effect on the streets since we've arrived?'

Chapter 855: Abnormal City

'Have we even seen a person with a side effect on the streets since we've arrived?'

The moment she thought about this, Alice could feel her heart rate increasing.

She looked around the store, even those looking for counter agents had no visible side effects.

She rushed out and looked around the streets.

No one had side effects.

People behind windows, people sitting in alleyways. Even a few of the guards walking around.

Not a single person had a visible side effect.

The only person that remained was... the informant that they saw earlier.

[That's...] Cayla frowned as she too began to feel uneasy.

In a way, it was similar to when Alice saw a hybrid.

Something that shouldn't be.

Only this time, the entire city felt unnatural.

Extalia, the hub of Abyss Blood, shouldn't be this 'clean'.

Alice gritted her teeth.

Just as she was about to jump away, a hand grabbed her shoulder from behind.

"!!!"

Alice was about to swing when she noticed it was Elias.

"You feeling alright? You're sweating buckets." He asked with concern as Alice blinked her eyes.

She glanced down and saw that her hands were sweaty and trembling.

"F*ck... No, I need a breather." Alice sighed, brushing her hair back.

Walking away from the Zenia store, she sat down on the benches while Elias sat next to her.

"Have you noticed?" She asked out of the blue.

"Hm? Noticed what?"

"Side effects. How many people are walking the streets with them? Or even visible to us?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

"What do you mean? It should be pretty easy to spot on-...?!" Elias turned to the crowd but froze.

Alice was right.

No one had a single side effect.

"Strange isn't it. The only one we've seen with a side effect has been the informant. Everyone else is 'clean'."

Elias began to frown.

"Do you think they're... being dealt with? Or are they hidden away. Since the people asking for counter agents are asking for someone at home rather than themselves."

"I don't know. But unless I sort out this freaky feeling, I don't think I can experiment peacefully." Alice shook her head.

Everything about this city felt wrong now that she's identified the main issue.

"Where do we even start with the investigation?" Elias asked.

"I think we have to say hi to the weird informant again." Alice sighed.

As the only one with a side effect in this city and along with being an informant, she was probably the best one to ask.

"Do you want me to have a deeper look around the city while you do? So we cover more ground." Elias suggested as Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Alone? Are you sure?"

She hasn't seen him fight at all so she wasn't sure about his combat abilities. But as a healer, he'll probably struggle.

"How long do you think I've been alone for?"

"First of all, that sounds depressing as hell." Alice interrupted as Elias' smile twitched.

"Ignore that. But I can handle myself. There's been times when my patients have tried to capture me after I heal them and so on. So I'm pretty confident I can deal with most things alone." Elias shook his head and stood up.

"Plus, I still have the blood bead if anything goes wrong right?" He smirked, pointing at his sleeve that had the blood bead acting as a button of sorts.

"True. Alright, I'll trust you with the investigations when. And... There's possibly one Lord level person hiding here. I can't tell unless I see them so take care." Alice warned.

There was a large signature of energy present in the city but Alice didn't know the source just yet.

However, it was clearly above what a six Sigil hunter could produce so it was best to be on guard.

"Hm... Alright. Considering how you handled Theron, I can assume you'll save me against a Lord right?" Elias asked with a troubled smile.

He might be able to handle himself but fighting a Lord... he's never tried it yet.

"Depends on what their powers are. But I should be fine." Alice shrugged.

She's faced plenty of Lords at this point. If she can't even kill a Lord, how does she expect to fight against Apostles and Gods?

"That's reassuring. You still have the coin pouch I gave you right? It should be enough to pay for whatever information she needs."

Snapping his finger, Elias summoned his umbrella and jumped towards the rooftops for a second time today.

Seeing him leave, Alice smiled before making her way towards the tavern.

She had a serious expression on her face as she made the same order, this time with the added bonus of Yggdrasil Tea.

The bartender raised an eyebrow at Alice's order but didn't question it.

She handed Alice a slip and left.

Looking at the directions, Alice noticed it was a different entrance than before.

This time, it was actually behind a bathhouse.

Handing the slip over, Alice stepped into the elevator and waited.

[Do you think she'll have the answers for you?] Cayla asked curiously.

'Probably. I'm assuming she's been here for a while. And if she's been here for a while, she'll definitely know why the city is the way it is.' Alice narrowed her eyes.

With the elevator taking a while to start, Alice assumed it was because the lady was busy with another client.

Taking this time, she created a thin layer of blood mist and dispersed it through the gaps of the elevator.

She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, focusing her senses on controlling the blood mist.

Right as she was about to have it scout out ahead of time, a rush of energy lunged towards her, forcefully establishing a link.

"Dear client, as this is your first strike, I'll kindly warn you. Do not use such abilities within the premises of the Underground. It is a sign of respect towards us as the host and the other clients who have placed their trust in us.

"If you ignore this, we will have to remove your participation from our future services."

The voice rang out directly in Alice's mind, surprising her.

Just as she wanted to respond, she felt it retreating.

A smile appeared on her lips.

In that instance where he established a link with her, Alice had already used Cayla to observe the flow of energy.

She analysed and memorised the skill.

She'll need a moment to recreate it but relinking herself to his tethers?

That was easy.

"My bad. I didn't think it would be bad since my ride was taken a while. I don't suppose my informant is busy right now." Alice smirked.

Hearing her voice, the unknown person was clearly surprised but kept his cool.

"The elevator will move once she is ready to receive you. During that time, please wait patiently."

"Heh~ Why don't we chat for a little bit. Why the rush to leave?" Alice narrowed her eyes.

"Unfortunately, I am not an informant. I will not have what you require dear client."

"How are you so sure? I haven't even said my request yet."

"The informant will have what you desire." He replied once more. But this time, the tether was abandoned as Alice shrugged.

'Guess I'll have to behave a little. The fact that I don't feel eyes on me... it's probably a network of detection I assume.' Alice mused to herself as Cayla nodded in agreement.

Soon, the elevator began to move.

It traced a familiar path as the elevator hopped rails. Once more, Alice could see the underground markets through the gaps.

This time, she made sure to observe all of the clients and even store owners.

She wanted to see if they had any visible side effects.

But once again, not a single one of them had it.

All of them were 'clean'.

*Cacha

The elevator hooked against the final railing and led Alice to the room.

As the door opened, she saw the informant sitting facing Alice.

"Welcome back. I hadn't thought you would come visit me so soon. Or do you perhaps miss seeing a pretty lady like myself? I must admit, I've received a few strange requests over the years, perhaps due to my ears." She chuckled elegantly.

"Though I'm sorry to say but I offer no such services. If anything, it'll be a risk to the client since I might get a little... hungry in my passion." She licked her lips, pulling up her dress to reveal the mouth that was drooling a little.

"No I'm not here for that. I have a question for you and it's to do with the city." Alice shook her head, sitting opposite the woman.

Before Alice could say anything else, the woman held her finger over her lips.

"It seems like the young lady has noticed the strangeness of this city. But are you sure you wish to learn it from me? Why not experience it for yourself then come visit me afterwards." She narrowed her eyes.

Alice tilted her head in confusion.

"Surface, Void, Abyss. Three realms that exist side by side. Then there is the unknown realm beyond the three. Those who come from there are known as the Outer Gods. The young lady knows this much yes?" The informant crossed her legs, resting her chin on her palm.

"And each of these realms contains a Realm Ruler. Though the Abyss is a little unique in that regard. The Void now slumber while the surface has long perished. But that's diving a little off topic. Instead of

answering your question little miss, why don't I pose you a question instead." She stood up, circling Alice before leaning down, whispering into Alice's ear.

"How do you think one would go about artificially creating a new, fourth realm? One of nightmares and blood?"

Chapter 856: Fourth Realm

"How do you think one would go about artificially creating a new, fourth realm? One of nightmares and blood?"

Alice furrowed her brows.

How would one go about creating a new realm?

First of all, she needs to consider how a realm even exists.

How were they classified?

She knew that the Void was simply the 'empty space' between the Abyss and the surface.

And despite calling the surface well... the surface, it's not like it's above the Abyss. The two realms simply intersect at certain locations, forming gateways.

Then there was also the case of the natural laws along with the Realm Rulers. Would a new space require a new ruler? How was a ruler chosen?

"Don't think too hard about it. Even if you give me an answer, I can't verify it for you. After all, I don't know the answer either." The Informant chuckled as Alice's smile twitched.

"Okay, let's say that's the case. But how would I even 'experience' this? You told me to experience it for myself before looking for you."

"Wait till sundown. The realm of nightmares will naturally ensnare you. And come daybreak, find me if you still remember." The Informant chuckled.

After saying this, she simply sat down without saying anything else.

"Don't you need a payment?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

"What for? You'll naturally find out when you go to sleep. I've simply told you to keep your request on hold for now. Ah... Actually, there is a piece of information I suggest you buy right now." The informant clapped her hands together.

"That being?"

"If I told you, how would I get paid?"

". . ." Holding herself back, Alice gave the informant a few platina coins and got some change in return.

"When you are in the realm of nightmares, there are three things you must not breach. First, do not stare at the sentinels, the watchers of the realm. Your eyes may brush past them but do not stare.

"Second, do not chase or delve after shadows of familiar ones.

"Third, no matter what, do not cause a scene. Accept the world for what it is, do not mention the abnormalities." The informant held a finger over her lips.

Folding her arms, Alice thought about it for a moment before nodding her head.

"Thanks."

Stepping towards the elevator, she left the room.

Watching the girl leave, the informant contemplated to herself for a moment before reaching into her mouth.

Pulling out a strange deck of cards, she laid them out and picked three.

The first card was upright.

The Fool.

The second was reversed.

The High Priestess.

And the last card was also reversed.

As she flipped over the card, her expression fluctuated for a slight moment.

The Empress.

"Uwaa~ How ominous. Though... I wonder if it's a good thing or bad." She tapped her finger on the three cards, landing on the fool.

"The first step shall be taken towards the songs of nightmare. The boundary that echoes its lullaby."

Her finger traced the reversed High Priestess.

"The veil will whisper words meant for the silent void, an audience of ruins."

And finally, her finger stopped at the reversed Empress.

"In the silence, a gaze holds the world. It will not sleep, it will not look away. It will not blink for anything."

###

Elias darted across the rooftops.

His eyes constantly scanned the streets, at the guards. As Alice had mentioned, none of them exhibited side effects.

But that wasn't even the strangest part.

The more he observed, the more he realised that there were a few people who were actually moving based on a designated route.

They would follow the path till the end before looping around, repeating it without stop.

It felt fake, robotic. It was only after observing everything from above that he saw the abnormalities.

Hell, there were even a few people walking around with abnormal shadows yet no one said anything.

If one had a brief glance at this city, it would seem normal. As though nothing was wrong.

But the longer they stare, the uncanny feeling would only grow stronger.

Making a mental note of this, Elias turned his attention towards the main building within this city.

A part of him wanted to investigate it but at the same time, his gut was telling him not to.

Elias narrowed his eyes.

His gut feeling has kept him alive for a long time. Rather than going against it, he wanted to trust in his survival instincts.

Making a decision, Elias turned around.

"!!!"

Widening his eyes, he quickly stepped to the side as a needle blade narrowly missed his back, brushing past him and stabbing into the rooftops.

The people below didn't care about the commission.

"How did you spot me? This umbrella should make it pretty difficult." Elias narrowed his eyes, slowly turning around.

His assailant was a strange woman with dark tanned skin, bleached white hair and a golden crown of horns protruding from her head. In her spare hand, she had another needle blade.

She wore a tattered white robe that covered most of her body, keeping her physique hidden beneath the layers.

'A dual wielder.'

It wasn't just that either.

Something about her felt... unnatural. As a healer, his mind was telling him the person in front of him wasn't a person.

Nothing felt right just like the rest of this city.

"You've been snooping around a bit too much. Should've just left it alone earlier." She warned, flicking her finger and retrieving her blade.

But before the blade could reach her, Elias twisted his body, snapping the invisible thread using his umbrella.

While the needle blade was still travelling through the air, he twisted his body and kicked the blade towards her!

*BANG!!!

Leaning to the side to avoid her weapon, she kept her eyes on Elias, ensuring that he didn't escape her view.

"Stop staring so hard, I might get embarrassed if you do." Elias chuckled, scratching his chin.

Snapping his fingers, three Sigils lit up on his arm.

"As a healing, taking lives is usually the opposite of what I usually do. So I would be grateful if we just walk away from this peacefully. Don't you agree?" Elias narrowed his eyes.

The woman ignored it. With a flick of her arm, the needle blade returned back into her hand while white bone spikes burst out from the rooftop!

*Sigh

"Must we really do this? It's not like I saw something I'm not supposed to. I even decided against looking at the city hall." Elias groaned.

Clenching his fist, a barrier of sorts expanded around him, destroying the bones.

"A healer must keep their surroundings sterile when performing an operation." He smirked.

His eyes shifted colour as rings could be seen.

*CLANG!!!

Leaning back, he parried the lady's needle stab with his umbrella.

Despite being parried, she wasn't done.

She kneed towards his wrist in an attempt to disarm him but he had already caught it with his palm.

She followed up with an elbow but Elias ducked down.

A quick two hit combo with her needle blade aimed at the chest.

Both parried with the umbrella.

No matter what moves she was doing, his eyes would dart towards exactly where it would land.

And as her second strike was bounced off his umbrella, he lunged forward, slamming his palm against her stomach and sending her sliding back.

With some distance created between them, Elias glanced down at his hand and frowned.

"Yeah you're not normal. That body composition... Seems like you're one of the monstrosities she spoke about.

"A hybrid between man and beast." Elias forced a smile.

That last hit should've applied one of his abilities. But since her physical body was different to that of a normal human, the skill didn't take effect.

If he wanted to harm her, he would need to study her body thoroughly before he can perform an operation.

The lady tilted her head.

A frown deepened on her face.

Without hesitation, she activated all of her Sigils as her form began to shift.

The golden crown erupted from her skull, covering the upper half of her face.

Her skin turned pure white as her robes broke apart, revealing the black undergarment that turned into a strange skirt.

Her body split open in the middle with bone spikes and eyes staring at Elias while her lower half transformed into a mass of skeletons.

"What the f*ck." Elias blinked.

He had not expected this kind of transformation.

Even if he knew that she was a hybrid, seeing it in person was something else entirely!

Jumping back, he wanted to create some distance between them but she created a bow from within her own body.

Using the needle blade as an arrow, she took aim and fired!

Right as he was about to parry the arrow, Elias watched as a skeleton manifested behind the needle blade, changing the trajectory into a swing at the last minute!

*KRK!!!!

The slash broke through his chest, shattering his ribs and tearing his lung in the process.

Slamming against the rooftop, blood began to flow against the tiles.

The hybrid took aim once more.

Her arrow focused on Elias's head.

Right as she was about to fire, she felt an invisible slash against her chest.

A deep gnash manifested on her body, breaking her ribs and digging into where her lung should've been.

"Well this isn't far at all. Do you even have a heart that I can damage if you stab me there?" Elias's voice rang out as he appeared behind the hybrid.

Placing his palm against her spine, he narrowed his eyes.

Rearrange.

*CRACK!!!

Her spine immediately bent to the side twice, breaking the natural arc and transforming it into the shape of an S. The ribs flared outwards while the rest of her bone structure began to bend in unnatural ways.

*BANG!!!

Jumping away before he could be caught in a maelstrom of bone splinters, Elias looked up and watched as she shredded her own body.

"Crazy b*tch. Is your regeneration enough?" Elias's smile twitched.

As she stepped out from the maelstrom, the hybrid's body was now healed. She had destroyed her bones to undo the damage he did!

Taking a deep breath, Elias narrowed his eyes.

He entered a stance favouring speed.

Leaned forward...

Took aim...

Spun 180.

And ran.

"F*ck this sh*t I'm out."

Chapter 857: Guinea Pig

The Hybrid didn't expect this as she even braced herself for an attack.

Yet seeing Elias turn and run so quickly...

She felt both insulted and livid!

Just as she took aim with her needle, Elias glanced back and snapped his fingers.

*CRACK!!!

Her arm fractured, forcing her to drop the blade!

"Sorry! As a healer my killing power is pretty low! But I can make sure you suffer a bunch!" Elias shouted back, sliding down some tiles before launching himself to the opposite building.

While flying through the air, he quickly opened his umbrella and blocked several bone spears launched towards him.

"Tch." Clicking his tongue in annoyance, he was shocked to see the extent of this woman's regeneration.

Though perhaps he should be rather grateful. After all, she seems rather slow when it comes to movement, limiting herself to ranged attacks.

'Either that or she doesn't want to make too much of a scene.'

Despite the fact that the civilians seem oblivious to what's happening, the hybrid was still making sure she wasn't directly harming them or being too obvious about her attacks.

Always making sure it would be out of sight to some degree.

'She's not stopping me from making large movements so I can't use that as leverage against her. Just in case, I should probably keep things subtle too.' Elias analysed her pattern of movement.

While Elias was analysing the hybrid's attacks, she raised her hand and snapped her finger.

A wide smile appeared on her face.

In that instant, Elias felt his guts screaming at him to leave!

But by the time this instinct appeared, it was already too late.

Energy erupted around them, trapping him in a cage while smaller skeletal clones of the hybrid flanked Elias's sides.

There were four in total, each of them had a golden mask and needle blades.

***BANG!!!**

"Urgh!" Gritting his teeth, Elias barely managed to lean out of the way as an arrow was fired from the main body.

But while he was dodging, one of the clones slashed up, severing his arm from his torso.

Jabbing his finger into his torso, Elias forcefully stopped the bleeding for now while using his umbrella to parry two clones behind him.

***RUMBLE!!!**

"Are you kidding me." From above, several arrows began to fall as Elias adjusted his footwork, weaving through the net of arrows.

However, with his attention focused on the arrows, wounds began to appear across his body as the clones took this chance to attack him whenever they could.

"Really? This much for a healer? Aren't you going a bit overboard?"

Stabbing his umbrella into the roof, he used it as a platform and jumped backwards.

Opening his palm, he expanded a barrier around him.

"Operation."

Regenerating his arm, Elias flicked his finger and retrieved his umbrella.

Pulling out a thin blade from the handle, he took aim at the closest clone.

"Scalpel."

Just as the clone parried the strike with a needle blade, she watched as Elias's sword cut through the metal as though it didn't exist!

"How many people with side effects do you think I've operated on? Some of them have skin tougher than metal!" Elias chuckled.

Kicking the clone away, he pulled back his umbrella once more, using it as a shield against the arrows.

The impact threw him back but he was unharmed.

Although...

Elias furrowed his brows. His umbrella was showing signs of damage. A few more of those and it'll be destroyed.

"Though I'd be able to run but I guess an archer needs some good eyesight." He sighed helplessly.

A bad match up.

Using his umbrella, his usual tactic would be to hide himself on the battlefield. But if that wasn't possible, then his options was limited to stalling.

But in this case...

Reaching for the cuff on his sleeve, he crushed the bead.

At the same time, two clones rushed forward with several arrows raining down from above.

"Didn't I tell you to be careful? Why are you calling for me so quickly?" Alice's voice rang out,

She pinched the needle blades between her fingers while void portals appeared in the air, teleporting the arrows away.

"You can't exactly blame me when she's countering my biggest skill." Elias chuckled, sitting down.

Despite only just appearing on the scene, she was able to accurately understand what was going on and even snuff out the arrows travelling at insane speeds.

With how confidence she was being, he felt rather safe in her hands.

"I suppose so. But an opponent like this... you should be able to deal with pretty easily ya know? She's not that strong." Alice tilted her head at the hybrid.

Sure she felt uncanny.

Sure she looked spooky.

But...

Alice wasn't feeling any sense of danger.

Just a weakling, nothing more nothing less.

"I'm just a healer. I'm not exactly meant to have a strong offensive power." Elias scratched his hair.

"I suppose so. Well let me clean up quickly then. If anything, this hybrid feels more like a failed product. Would it even benefit us to capture her? Probably not." Alice narrowed her eyes.

While having her conversation with Elias, the clones had abandoned the needle blades and tried to attack only to have every attempt blocked by a mix of blood and metal.

Every strike, every slash, all of it was countered before any power could even be generated.

As for the arrows from the main body, none of them had any hope of landing against them.

Not when Alice filled the entire airspace with void nodes that'll open the moment an arrow approaches.

She didn't even need to consciously trigger it either.

Tiny threads were spread across the arena and triggering it with the arrow would open the portal.

She could even lay down and sleep if she wanted to and this hybrid wouldn't be able to kill her at all.

"Let's see... How should I do this." Alice mumbled.

Void Step.

Appearing behind every clone for a split moment, Alice tapped them with her finger, causing them to erupt with violet flames.

"!!!" The hybrid felt a chill.

She had to ru-

"Let's not have that. It'll just be more work for me." Alice sighed, staring at the hybrid at eye level.

The hybrid wanted to counter but... it couldn't?

Her breathing faltered.

Where was her bow? Her arrows?

Alice lifted the hybrid's head.

She could see the trembling lips as she was beginning to realise what had happened.

"Ah~ So you're worried about that. I'm a kind person so here you go." Alice turned her head around.

In front of them stood the headless body of the hybrid, blood still spurting from the neck stump.

"Like I said, you're not that strong. Are you a failed product or something?" Alice questioned, turning the head around once more.

If anything, the only surprising thing about this hybrid was the survivability.

Even after the head has been severed, she was still alive.

Gritting her teeth, the hybrid glared at Alice.

Then, from her head, tendrils and bones shot out in an attempt to stab Alice.

*CLANG!!!

The hybrid froze.

Clang?

She glanced down and Alice's arm was protected by Void Fang, the bones and tendrils struggled to breach her arm.

"Hmm... You're not a very talkative one are you?" Alice furrowed her brows, giving the head a little shake.

Thinking to herself for a little bit, a deep sadistic grin appeared on her face.

"Elias!" Alice shouted out.

"Hm? What is it?"

"I think we found a perfect guinea pig for our experiments." Alice licked her lips.

Elias raised his eyebrow.

To him, this hybrid was a dangerous foe. But to Alice...

This hybrid was nothing but a guinea pig.

"Do whatever you want. It's your prey anyways." Elias sighed.

He knew she was strong considering her performance against Theron.

But now that she's put against someone with the same number of Sigils, her dominance was clearer than ever.

No one below Lord can even think about harming her.

Hearing that she was going to be turned into a guinea pig, the hybrid prepared to self detonate.

Yet with a single snap of her finger, some blood mist and her second Sigil, Alice stopped that plan immediately.

"Let's not have you do that. You're a precious material right now. If you were to go an blow yourself up, I'll be pretty sad ya know?" Alice chuckled, swinging the head around like a bag of groceries, holding it by the hair.

As for the headless body...

Alice glanced back and condensed her fire into a single tiny spark.

Flicking it towards the body, she turned around and walked away.

The instant the spark collided, the body was turned to ash, disappearing into the wind.

"I hope I didn't interrupt anything did I?" Elias asked curiously, pulling himself up but Alice shook her head.

"Nope. The informant didn't exactly tell me much except that we should experience sundown first. Afterwards she'll answer any questions that I have."

"Sundown? Does it have something to do with the anomalies we've been seeing?" Elias asked, gesturing with his chin towards the civilians.

Despite the battle, none of them 'noticed' the commotion.

"Probably. Something about a realm of nightmares and blood. I'm guessing... we'll probably find the side effects we were expecting to see." Alice scratched her chin.

"Well that name isn't ominous at all." Elias' smile twitched.

Once again, he was forced to consider if coming with Alice was the right choice at all.

In the short time he's met her, he's already being dragged into a realm he didn't even know existed along with a hybrid of the Zenia family that almost killed him.

"Don't worry about it~ Life is all about surprises after all." Alice laughed.

Elias sighed.

Before going to this strange realm, he needed a drink or two to calm his nerves.

Chapter 858: Lord Of Withering

Hiding behind a rock, Luke took a deep breath and sighed.

Not far away from them, beasts were patrolling, trying to find their location.

“What a pain...” Luke mumbled while Isolde was next to him.

Still injured and unable to fight.

“I won’t say something like for you to leave me behind anymore. But at a certain point, you have to admit that it’s time to look at things more realistically.” Isolde chuckled softly.

“Yeah well Alice has never done things realistically before has she? Always pulling out the most insane suggestions.” Luke countered.

Raising his head, he glanced towards the distance at the fractured moon.

A strange landmark that they decided to travel towards in hopes of finding a way out.

With things as it stands, walking around aimlessly might be worse than just going towards the landmark.

Waiting for the beast to past, Luke helped Isolde out of their hiding spot, giving her an arm to hold onto while they moved.

Even though he wanted to help heal her wounds, he has yet to copy a healer using his pieces so the best they could do was rely on her natural regeneration.

###

Leoric had a deep frown on his face.

In all his years of administering poisons and torture, this is the first time he's seen two people so firm in their will that they refused to say anything.

Jin refused to talk about his physique and the one who fixed it.

Same with Rosalyn. No matter what he asked, she refused to reply.

Opting to simply glare at him with hatred no matter what he attempted.

At this stage, he was beginning to run out of options.

His most painful and potent poison couldn't force them to open their mouths. What else could he do?

The only poisons more painful than this would... no doubt kill them as a result. And if they still don't open their mouths after that well... He would've killed the golden goose before it even laid an egg.

He kneeled down in front of Rosalyn and lifted her face.

She was absolutely exhausted and weakened but the light of defiance was still strong in her eyes.

'So she won't break no matter what...'

That was the conclusion Leoric came to.

Standing up, he walked over to the operating table and furrowed his brows.

He had a few options left with what he wanted to do but... Doing so might cause some of the information to be forgotten. After all, the only method left would be to forcefully overwrite their mind and extract the information through that.

Just as Leoric reached out for one of the vials stored on the side, his pupil constricted.

He quickly pulled his arm back and rolled up his sleeve.

His arm... His flesh... It was withering?

Without hesitation, he injected several thorns into his arm and applied poison to counter the withering.

“Sorry to say but you’ll probably have to abandon that arm completely and regenerate a new one.” A calm voice echoed out behind him.

Turning around, Leoric glanced at Caelan who had Rosalyn in his arms.

He gently brushed her hair off to the side and fed her a vial of strange blood.

After a while, she began to relax. Her wounds were healed but her mind was still exhausted.

“Even after becoming a Lord, you still need your dear big brother to cover your back? How am I supposed to relax with you leaving the house.” Caelan chuckled as Rosalyn rolled her eyes.

“F*ck off... Jin’s in the other room. Can you... take a look at him?” Rosalyn tried to sit up but Caelan tapped her forehead, forcing her to lay down.

“How often do you think I leave my office with all the restrictions and crap placed on me? Now that I’ve finally left, why don’t you let me stretch my leg a bit? Now that I’m here, just leave it to me okay?” Caelan smiled.

Rosalyn froze.

Despite his teasing tone, she noticed a silent fury in his eyes.

Not towards her but rather towards Leoric.

A warmth spread throughout her chest as Rosalyn smiled.

“Fine. I guess I can let you have my prey. You should be grateful.”

“Your prey? Ohou~ Confident are we? Who was it that needed me to save your ass two seconds ago?”
Caelan raised an eyebrow.

“Yep. You should praise me instead for letting you have some fun. What kind of sister would I be if I let my brother rot away in his office?”

Letting out a chuckle, Caelan set Rosalyn down and faced Leoric who was treating his arm.

He had stopped the withering process but the arm was still damaged.

“Should I praise you for being a gentleman? Allowing me to have a conversation with my dear sister.”
Caelan asked, adjusting his sleeve.

Leoric didn’t respond.

The man who had just appeared... He was dangerous!

“While I’m happy that you let me have a conversation with my sister...” Caelan trailed off.

“You still put her in that kind of state. Are you prepared for the consequences?”

“!!!” Leoric widened his eyes as Caelan crossed the gap in an instant and grabbed him by the face.

Shoving him through the walls of the building, Caelan twisted his body as the veins on his arm began to bulge.

*BANG!!!!

Throwing him towards the ground, a deep crater was formed as Leoric tumbled across the land. He tried to slow himself down but struggled.

However, before he was thrown, he managed to land a strike against Caelan.

It should be enough-

“Did you think your sh*tty poison would be effective? Against me?” Caelan asked, his eye appearing in Leoric’s shadow.

Grabbing Leoric by the throat, Caelan jumped out from Leoric’s shadow and tossed him into the air.

Without waiting for Leoric to fall, Caelan slammed his foot against Leoric’s stomach, sending him high into the air.

There were burns on his arm as a result of the poison but all Caelan needed to do was tense his arm.

Then, after a brief moment, the poison would be destroyed.

But rather than destroyed, the better more suitable word would be withered.

As the Lord of Withering, his body was basically a crucible of pure malice. His blood, his flesh. If he desired, even his sweat would cause whatever it touched to wither.

Stabilising himself in the air, Leoric frowned.

Caelan wasn't looking to kill him in one go.

He was taking his time.

"Leoric Becker, first son of the Becker Family. Lord of poisons and the old friend of a certain librarian who just so happen to be one of the few remnants of the Ayrian Queendom.

"You had helped quite a lot of people early on in your life then everything shifted. I believe it was... Marina?"

Upon the mention of Marina's name, Leoric's eye twitched for a moment.

"You did your research."

"Research? Not quite. As someone who deals with information, I know a lot of things about a lot of people. You're not special enough for me to pay attention to you specifically, boy." Caelan smirked, tilting his chin up so he was looking down on Leoric.

"You're just another report I have to listen to because of a slight commotion that you caused. Nothing more, nothing less. Though I suppose you have done one thing that warranted special treatment.

"Out of all the people you could've chosen to mess with, you decided to use your poison on my sister. And for that, you have earned my ire. So congratulations." Caelan narrowed his eyes as killing intent burst forth!

In an instant, the air around the Abyss changed. The realm around them darkened as dark storm clouds loomed overhead.

It felt as though the Abyss was frightened!

Leoric was silent. There's no point trying to justify his actions when Caelan was like this. Not that he was planning to in the first place.

He had his goals, Caelan has his own.

They didn't need to share their stories with one another.

All that mattered right now was that one of them had to die.

Taking a deep breath, Leoric grabbed his arm by the shoulder and tore it off!

Holding back a cry of pain, he stimulated the potential of his body using poison and reconstructed his arm.

"Take as long as you need to prepare. Use as many things as you want. I'll break them down one by one until you have nothing left. Only then, will you understand that your entire life was a waste of resources." Caelan taunted.

Ignoring the taunts, Leoric summoned his personal artifact.

A jade green spear with a crimson tip.

First Resonance!

Second Resonance!

He knew the danger he was in so he wasn't going to hold back!

This battle, he has to put everything on the line against Caelan.

The world around them began to shift before collapsing with the shattering of glass.

Leoric's second Resonance didn't require a barrier.

No, his Second Resonance was one that allowed him to maximise his potential as a walking bioweapon.

To turn his body into a crucible of poisons. To become a mixing pot of the most vile concoctions that he could create.

"Are you done? If so, stop dawdling." Caelan scoffed.

Before Caelan could even finish his sentence, Leoric had already burst into action.

Twisting his body, he threw his spear towards Caelan as it split into countless copies mid flight.

Seeing the array of poison spears, Caelan only sighed and raised his hand.

*Click

With a single snap of his finger, every single spear without exception lost its colour and shattered into dust.

All of them withered and destroyed in an instant!

"Come on. Show me more so I can prove how worthless you are." Caelan glared.

Chapter 859 Leoric's Poison

Retrieving his spear, Leoric had a deep frown on his face.

The potency of Caelan's withering was far greater than what he had originally expected.

The fact that he could even wither the poison that flows in his veins was evidence that this was clearly a bad matchup for Leoric.

A fight where the victory line could not be seen.

And what's worse was that Caelan was clearly toying with him.

This guy had no intentions of letting him leave or even talk his way out of it.

But so what?

If he wanted to play around, then Leoric will use it to his advantage.

Taking a deep breath, a poison mist began to wrap around his body, forming into the silhouette of countless serpents.

Each coiling around his limbs, each hissing towards Caelan.

Taking him with his spear, Leoric narrowed his gaze, the tip of the spear now oozing with venom.

Should he scream at Caelan, warning him not to underestimate him? No, that would be most unbecoming.

In this battle, he had no need for words. The more Caelan looked down on him, the better!

*BANG!!!

Leoric shot forward as the serpents followed.

“A head on battle? Is that what you wish? If so, you are more worthless than I thought.” Clenching his fist, Caelan unleashed an orb towards Leoric that expanded in an instant.

The poison mist that came into contact with the orb dissipated but Leoric didn't show a reaction.

Instead, he unleashed a horizontal swipe with his spear, wrapping the orb in a veil of poison that began to eat away at the energy.

Withering and poison clashed into a standstill.

Snapping his finger, Leoric's spear began to shift.

The different compartments within the spear reassembled themselves as he concocted a new poison into the tip.

Landing against the ground, he stabbed the spear into the ground.

Reaper's Breath.

In an instant, the land started to rot from the inside out. Sickly brown viscous liquid oozed from the earth while Caelan raised an eyebrow.

“Odourless gas. Most would be preoccupied by the rotting of the ground to notice the true danger in the air. It seizes the muscle, causing rapid flesh degeneration across the body. Victims will immediately collapse as though they're a newborn, convulsing on the ground confused.

“The lungs will halt, the pain of a thousand suns will burn through the veins. Blood will thin out like water, seeping through the pores and even the smallest breath will be lethal for most.

“Doctors who first saw this would describe it as liquefaction of the human body held together by a skin bag. Not even the bones are safe and death usually occurs within 10 minutes depending on resistance. Am I correct?” Caelan revealed a calm smile.

There was not even a hint of worry in his eyes.

“Though~ I suppose it’s a little better than before.” Caelan took several deep breaths.

“A little quicker. The mix has changed a little. Well... Calling it quick might be inaccurate. Just impatient.” He chuckled.

The poison didn’t take effect at all.

Caelan stood unharmed.

Leoric pulled the spear from the ground.

Despite his neutral expression, he couldn’t help but wonder if Caelan was immune to poisons.

“What else do you want to show me boy? I’ll be your daddy today and give you the time your father never gave you.” Caelan mocked, disappearing from his spot and reappearing next to Leoric with a hand on his shoulder.

“!!!”

*CLANG!!!

Leoric swung his spear on instinct but Caelan bite the spear tip, stopping it from going further.

Adjusting his grip, Leoric rearranged the concoction once more.

"A new flavour? Let's give it a taste." Caelan grinned, licking the venom from the spear tip before pushing Leoric away.

Smacking his lips a few times as though he was tasting wine, he stumbled back.

He clutched his throat, coughing and almost buckling to his knees.

"Bleh~ just kidding. But this one is another pretty old one. Just a tiny droplet is enough to kill a room of Hunters, never mind a mouthful. It completely stops the heart and shuts off the brain. Skin begins to rot and fall off.

"Just a little spicier than the others. That's all it amounts to." Caelan chuckled, standing up straight and adjusting his sleeves.

"So, do you have any more you want to show daddy or am I going to have to tell you words that your real father told you?" Caelan sighed, walking towards Leoric with his hands behind his back.

Leoric lunged. Twirling the spear around his body, he stabbed it into the ground before vaulting towards Caelan.

Blocking Leoric's kick with his palm, Caelan pushed it to the side before ducking down to avoid the spear swipe.

"Ash lung. Black vein, oh~ I didn't think you'd know about Pale sleep too." Caelan began naming the poisons that Leoric was mixing into the air. Each attack that he threw, Caelan would name the poison used.

With each attack, Leoric would continue to mix the concoctions within his spear.

There came a point where Caelan even allowed Leoric to land a few hits.

The spear stabbed deep, injecting the venom but Caelan would heal up almost instantly.

Even with poisons that inhibited this natural regeneration, Leoric found it to be useless.

“Soul spore, Red silence, Corpse vine. Why don’t you hit me with something original? Or are you incapable of that? All you have shown me is poisons that men greater than you have produced. Poisons that this world has already felt. That I have felt.” Caelan asked, twisting his body and going on the offensive.

Slamming his palm against Leoric’s chin, Caelan grabbed his spear and pulled Leoric back, following up with a fast hitting two kick combo.

A kick against the back of the knee then a kick against the forehead.

Crashing against the ground, Leoric rolled back but Caelan grabbed his ankle using blood.

Lifting the Poison Lord up, Caelan pulled his arm back and punched Leoric in the stomach.

Just as Caelan was about to land a follow up hit, he paused momentarily. He glanced at his arm, the skin rotting on his knuckles.

“Oh? Finally, something original. Got a name for it kid? I’ll make a special exception and make a record in your name. The poison that managed to harm the Lord of Withering.” Caelan asked as he shook his hand a few times.

The wound healed before rotting away again once more.

Even after using the power of withering, all it did was slow down the spread.

Caelan was now rather impressed.

“Everyone’s got a poison their weak to. It just takes time to figure it out.” Leoric freed himself and aimed his spear.

*BANG!!!

Stabbing his spear forward, he watched as Caelan tilted his head to dodge at the last moment.

“That doesn’t answer my question of giving it a name kid.” Caelan smiled, pushing the spear away.

The moment his palm touched the spear, the poison began to spread once more.

“So a contact type poison. Numbness, a burning sensation. If it were anyone else, they would’ve lost most of their body already.” Caelan chuckled.

Stomping down with his foot, a pulse of withering energy burst out with Leoric wanting to back off.

However, Caelan ignored the effects of Leoric’s poison and grabbed his spear.

Either Leoric abandons his weapon or get hit by the full force of withering.

With no other choice, he jumped away.

Looking at the spear in his hands, Caelan weighed it in his hands before grinning.

Holding it in reverse, he stabbed it into his own body.

“!!!”

Leoric froze.

He watched as Caelan repeatedly stab the spear into his own chest, into his heart.

The poison began to spread, rotting marks appeared across his body. His flesh began to fall yet Caelan continued to smile.

This... insanity that Leoric was seeing.

Caelan's joy the more he stabbed himself with the poison.

The expectation in his eyes.

Leoric didn't know what to say. He wasn't even sure what he was looking at.

Then, Caelan stopped.

His smile slowly disappeared.

He looked at the spear in his hands and tossed it against the ground.

When the poison made for him touched the ground, it immediately began to melt without stop!

*KRK!!!!

Caelan's flesh began to rapidly regenerate, as disappointment filled his eyes.

"How is this... possible." Leoric mumbled in shock.

His authority as the Lord of Poison was to find a poison perfectly tailored to the one he fights.

The requirements for this to take effect are to have enough time and exposure to certain poisons.

He was confident that this effect had been achieved.

So how? How was Caelan now regenerating all of the damage as though it was nothing?

“That was a close one kid. I almost saw it for a second. A nostalgic feeling. But still lacking in the end.” Caelan started to walk towards Leoric.

Naturally, Caelan didn’t stop him.

“Will you show me a new concoction. Or is this all you are capable of?” Caelan asked. His voice bored and ready to end things as they are.

Furrowing his brows, Leoric’s eyes shifted for a moment and observed Caelan’s body.

Sweat began to roll down his face as he saw the truth.

In that short period, Caelan’s body composition and defences had changed completely!

If he wanted to try the same thing, he would need a new more potent poison than before.

“You... What did you do to your body?” Leoric asked, his voice bordering on insanity.

He wanted to know the secret. No.

He NEEDED to know the secret.

Caelan narrowed his eyes. An idea appeared in his mind.

Perhaps they could both benefit from this.

Besides the previous Lord of Death, Leoric was now the second person to have brought him close to death.

And within this achievement... was the possibility of greatness.

Chapter 860: Erasing Tracks

Freeing Jin from his bindings, Rosalyn winced at the state of his body. The different poisons assaulting him from the inside.

Even though he has an insane amount of natural regeneration, it only makes the pain worse rather than better.

Just as Rosalyn was thinking about what to do, she jolted in shock when she felt a hand from behind.

"F*cking hell you scared me Cael." Rosalyn sighed in relief after seeing that it was just Caelan.

"Scared you? You little sh*t, did you think your brother would lose?" Caelan's smile twitched, pinching Rosalyn by the cheek.

"Hey! Ow ow ow ow! Sorry!" Rosalyn cried out in pain while Caelan handed her two vials.

Holding the vials, she raised an eyebrow and held the liquid against the light.

"An antidote?" She asked with a slight frown.

"Yep. Are you mad?" Caelan leaned against the wall.

He knew that Rosalyn must've known that he let Leoric go if he had the antidote.

"Well... I'll be mad if it's not the real antidote. But it's not like I would've been able to kill him to begin with." Rosalyn bit her lip in annoyance.

"Don't worry. It's the real one." Caelan reassured.

"Mnm. I'm guessing he's useful for you?" She asked, flicking open the vial and pouring the contents into her own mouth first.

She could feel the pain disappearing from her body as her natural regeneration was stimulated.

The weakness disappeared and she felt energised.

"Useful huh? I suppose so. But that's something he'll have to prove. If he can overcome a certain challenge then sure, he's useful. Otherwise..." Caelan narrowed his eyes before shaking his head.

"You should start cultivating your Eighth Sigil. You're too weak right now and the old monsters and geniuses are starting to crawl out. Of course, you can also come home with me but I doubt you want that." He suggested.

"Well duh, do you think I want to be trapped in a house all day like you?" Rosalyn stuck out her tongue while pouring the antidote into Jin's mouth.

"And... I know I need my Eighth but it's not going smoothly." Rosalyn smiled bitterly.

"Need some help?"

"Maybe later." Rosalyn shook her head as she watched Jin's expression relax.

Seeing the wounds begin to heal, she sighed in relief.

"Since you're here, are you able to give me a hand with something else instead?" She asked, turning back to her brother.

Scratching his chin, Caelan mused in silence before nodding.

"Depends on what it is. Since I've already accomplished what I came here to do, I'll have to go back soon before the restrictions start biting me in the ass."

"When we went to the north, we got forcefully sent down here. Aside from me and Jin, Ria, Astrelya, Luke and Isolde were also teleported. Can you track them down for me? You don't have to take me to them, just track them down. And..."

"See if you can find if there are any survivors from Verona. They were hit the hardest by that vile thing after all." Rosalyn shivered, recalling the sight she saw on the surface.

That creepy beast sitting in the middle of the city.

Just thinking of it twisted her gut.

"Just tracking them down? Sure, that shouldn't be too difficult." Caelan nodded.

Had Rosalyn asked him to save them, then he would've been forced to reject her request.

But just tracking them down was still within his capabilities.

Stepping out from the building, Caelan made a small cut on his finger.

His blood concentrated into a single drop before falling to the ground, splitting into countless roots that spread across the Abyss.

Closing his eyes, he connected his senses.

'Hmm...' A frown appeared on his face.

Now that he was connected to the Abyss, he could feel the changes occurring within Terminus.

The mutation of the beasts that reside within this layer. The destruction of seals on certain Old Lords. Marks of battle...

"I found Luke and Isolde. Seems like the lad has grown considerably. He's using his head more with his skills." Caelan praised with a smile.

Hearing this, Rosalyn sighed in relief.

Luke was still alive.

"I also found a few Inverted Worlds that have been closed and one that remained open. It's done with intent and someone must've adjusted the memory it accesses. The location isn't too far from what seems like a camp in the far far east. I'm assuming those are the people from Verona.

"There are a few Lord signatures there but... One of them feels extremely weak. The other Lords are protecting it so it must be the Queen after her failed ascension." Caelan folded his arms.

"What about Ria and Astrelya?" Rosalyn asked while Caelan expanded his search.

There was a slight frown on his face.

Not a single sign or trace of Ria nor Astrelya could be found.

Which was weird considering everyone should've been dragged to Terminus.

Unless...

"Someone is erasing their traces. I can't track Ria nor Astrelya right now." Caelan admitted.

There were hints of erasure but not enough for him to determine who was the culprit behind it.

Like him, Astrelya had been chasing after death. Albeit her goals were a little different.

He chases death for the sake of getting rid of this immortal body.

She chases death for the euphoric desire of battle and the sensation of two souls putting everything on the line.

The same destination yet different goals and methods.

However, based on his prior knowledge on Astrelya, she shouldn't be someone who invests this much time on a rag tag group.

Unless...

Someone must've piqued her interest.

Someone interesting enough for her to act this way.

If he were to go by this assumption, then the one who erased the tracks is...

"Astrelya..." Caelan narrowed his eyes with a slight frown.

What was she planning...

Regardless. He wasn't one to back down so easily!

Tapping his finger, energy erupted from Caelan's body!

***BANG!!!**

"Argh! Warn me if you're going to do that sh*t!" Rosalyn shouted as she stumbled over.

The ground began to tremble as the entire layer of Terminus felt as though it was about to collapse.

Caelan was forcefully sweeping through the entire layer with his detection!

###

Looking at the exhausted Ria, Astrelya was about to say something with a smile when her head snapped towards the right.

There was a dangerous light in her eyes.

'So it's you, unkillable boy. But don't ruin my fun now.' She mused to herself, tapping her finger against the air.

***RUMBLE!!!**

Stars began to shimmer in the perpetual night as Astrelya forcefully wrestled control, turning this part of Terminus into her domain.

She had been erasing their tracks so that she could take the time to properly cultivate Ria into someone worthy.

She thought it would be enough of a warning towards anyone who tries to find them.

But clearly, Caelan didn't want to take that warning to heart.

Since that was the case, even with him going as far as to comb through this layer using his power, Astrelya couldn't stay idle.

'Know your place fool.' Astrelya warned.

###

"How scary." Caelan chuckled after seeing the retaliation. She had turned a large portion of Terminus into her own domain for now.

Trying to comb through that to find her would be... rather difficult.

And it seemed like she had figured out his identity at that. With the way she was provoking him, it was clear she knew that he wasn't able to do so.

"Ria is 'safe' with Astrelya. Though you'll probably struggle to find them for a bit." Caelan retracted his energy.

Since Astrelya didn't want to be found, there wasn't much he could do about it.

"Eh? How do you know?" Rosalyn blinked her eyes.

"Because Astrelya has a few screws loose in her head. But even though she does, she's someone stupidly dedicated to her own desires. No matter her opponent, she wouldn't let anyone rob her of her prey. In which case, that prey could be Ria right now." Caelan explained, adjusting his sleeves.

Reaching forward with a finger, he swiped down and cut open a portal back to the surface.

"Wait... so Astrelya is the one hiding their tracks?" Rosalyn frowned.

"Yep. They'll be fine for now. I suggest you go find the others first." Caelan nodded.

Pulling out an empty compass from his pocket, he dripped some of his blood into the compartment and closed it.

"Each of these beads are magnetised towards one of your allies. Follow it and you'll find them eventually. And take this too, it should allow you to rip a hole through Terminus. Just big enough for you to leave but not big enough to leave a permanent gateway." Caelan handed over the compass along with a small dagger.

Receiving the items, Rosalyn looked down for a moment before glancing up at her brother.

"Thanks. For saving me."

"You're welcome. That's what family is for. Now stop acting cute, it's kinda gross with how out of character you're being." Caelan laughed, patting Rosalyn on the head.

Without waiting for her reply, he stepped through the portal.

Seeing her brother leave, Rosalyn huffed but there was a smile on her face.

###

"Good job staying out of sight." Caelan praised while exiting the portal. Behind him, Leoric followed.

The entire time he was talking to Rosalyn, Leoric was actually there all along.

"Adding some hallucinogens into the air isn't difficult." He replied.

"True. But if Rosalyn saw you and told me to kill you, I wouldn't hesitate you know?" Caelan chuckled with a slight hint of killing intent.

However, Leoric didn't react. He knew that was the case already but so be it. It's not like he could run from Caelan anyway.

"Go and familiarise yourself with the lab. Let's have a fruitful collaboration shall we?"