

Abyssal A 901

Chapter 901: Empty Shell Of Desire

"Would you care to humour me for a moment?" Astrelya suddenly spoke, surprising Ria.

Raising an eyebrow, she dismissed her experiment and turned to the Abyss Lord who's kept her captive all this time.

"If you want me to do some jester crap, sorry to disappoint but I'm not exactly known for making people laugh." Ria scratched her cheek but Astrelya shook her head.

"No, I simply want to converse for a moment. For now, ignore the fact that I am a Lord. Can you do that?"

"Will you kill me if I do?" Ria asked.

"Do I look like that kind of person?"

"You do."

Astrelya simply shrugged.

"Fair enough. But I've kept you alive all this time have I not? So humour me for a moment and ignore the fact that I am a Lord for now."

Ria folded her arms.

In the first place, there's not much she could do.

Therefore, she reluctantly nodded her head.

"Fine, what do you want?"

"I want your honesty. You see, in the past I had a friend I cared a lot about. She had... many choice words for how I am as a person. Therefore, I want to hear another perspective. What do you think of me as a person?" Astrelya smiled.

Ria let out a deep sigh and folded her arms.

She leaned her head back and stared at the sky.

"You still desire that death by glory don't you? To die in the heat of battle where your opponent focuses solely on you, right?" Ria asked as Astrelya nodded her head.

"It has and always will be my goal. To die in that satisfa-"

"Can you really call that satisfaction though?" Ria looked at Astrelya dead in the eyes.

She has seen too many like her in the cult.

Too many lusting after battle, after adrenaline.

"Of course I am. In that transcendent moment, there is only me and my opponent. The moment where nothing else matters in the world, I yearn for that feeling." Astrelya closed her eyes but Ria shook her head.

"But that moment can be gained with other-"

"I sought your opinion of me as I am. I think that goes beyond an opinion, that's advice. Don't you agree?" Astrelya cut her off, causing Ria to crease her brows.

"Fine then. You are exactly the type of person I hate the most. A selfish being who only thinks of herself.

"You don't care who or what gets crushed so long as the moment brings you enjoyment. You don't weigh the consequences, the aftermath, the lives spent in that moment. If something amuses you, you do it.

"If it bores you, you discard it. It's just selfish indulgence without the effort. You stripped away everything that makes the 'moment' feel worth it. Then when you feel the emptiness that comes from your actions, you don't seek the issue within.

"You project it out and blame the world you live in. You blame the fact that people can't give you entertainment even though you reject the foundations of reaching that moment." Ria spat out without hesitation.

"You're just a baby throwing a tantrum because the world won't go your way. Screaming for attention, thrashing around and simply put, a f*cking nuisance."

Astrelya's eyelid twitched for a moment but Ria continued.

"And when facing a nuisance, who would give them the time of day? It's just another chore to do. Another annoyance to deal with. There is no transcendent moment of understanding, no utopia.

"You ask me what I think of you? I think of you exactly as that. A nuisance. Annoying and pitiful. Someone, despite with so much power, doesn't understand humans and the world you live in.

"All you seek is sensation. There is no purpose, no chance of understanding. Just an empty shell of desire and a hollow pit for attention.

"You will be alone till the day you die and no one will give you the attention you desire so much."

As Ria finished her evaluation of Astrelya, silence dawned on them.

The Lord stared at Ria silently while Ria stared back. She didn't avert her gaze, she simply saw Astrelya for who she is.

For a long moment, nothing happened.

Then Astrelya leaned back and stared at the sky.

She contemplated Ria's words.

"Even if I were to kill everyone you know and love, would that still not earn me the utopia I desire? In that instant, don't they focus their rage towards me?" Astrelya glanced down but her head continued to face the sky.

"Rage yes." Ria nodded. That she could not deny.

However...

"But not acknowledgement."

". . ."

"That moment you desire, the mutual respect as both combatants give everything they got in a battle to the death. There is acknowledgement and respect in that. If there is only rage, then it's just another battle without satisfaction." Ria shook her head.

She hated Astrelya, the very type of human that the Eclipse would love.

But at the same time...

There is a sense of pity in her heart. Pity that the person in front of her was simply an empty shell.

She couldn't even be called a person.

Just a slave of adrenaline.

A pitiful slave.

"Can you really be satisfied with such a death? A death where you are forgotten. Simply because you are a nuisance that doesn't deserve a second glance."

Astrelya closed her eyes.

"The evaluation is a little different from the past. Though I suppose it's also similar in a sense. Maybe you are right and I won't be satisfied with such a death. But am I not also the most honest towards my desires? I live without lies or false justification. I live for whatever makes this heart of mine beat." Astrelya grinned as insanity radiated from her smile.

But Ria continued to stare at her with pity.

Astrelya's smile faltered.

There's no need for Ria to say anything else.

Ria turned away, focusing back on her own experiments.

Astrelya opened her mouth, wanting to say something.

Then...

She stopped herself.

Her smile slowly faded.

What could she even say? What could she refute?

Ria didn't deny that she was being honest.

No... That was her main point.

Astrelya contemplated her final words.

Could she be satisfied with such a death?

Forgotten after the battle.

Astrelya furrowed her brows.

This was the first time she's felt such a sensation in her chest.

It was unfamiliar...

But not in a good way.

It didn't feel the same as the thrill of battle.

Annoyance? Not that either.

Was it anger? No, this feeling didn't burn like anger.

It was a suffocating coldness that strangled her heart.

Not the fear of death or pain, such notions held no meaning to her.

It rooted itself deep in her heart, refusing to disappear.

Not remembered as a rival...

Not acknowledged as someone worthy of such attention...

A nuisance. Erased from memory, dismissed and ignored as noise.

Astrelya's veins bulged, her chest tightened.

What value did her glorious end hold if this was the result?

If someone could kill her of all people, shouldn't she be worthy of a tale far grander?!

Where was the ecstasy if all her opponent gave her was indifference!?

Her eyes slowly turned bloodshot.

This feeling that stabbed at her chest.

She didn't know what to do with it.

"Rage yes. But not acknowledgement."

The words echoed in her mind.

She recalled the battles of the past. From the smallest skirmishes, akin to crushing an ant to the largest wars.

Yet not once... Was there the so called acknowledgement that she desired.

All she was... All she is... Is an icon of fear. They feared her but none truly acknowledged her presence.

There was no glorious battle.

As Ria said, just another chore to take care of.

But as she thought of this, she came to a realisation.

She was never treated as such in the past. Even though... She was the same as she is now, true to her own desires... She was accepted for it.

Acknowledged.

Even with all of her quirks, her friend accepted everything. She joked, she laughed.

There were times when they argued, when her antics would go beyond the line and she would be lectured.

But at the end of the day, they were still friends.

Astrelya held her hand over her chest.

She realised what this feeling was.

Fear towards the emptiness that would follow. If she fails to leave a mark.

There will be no understanding between her and her opponent. No glorious final battle that brings the height of ecstasy to her soul.

She could already picture it. The moment of her death, the indifference in her opponent's eyes as they walk away.

For the first time, Astrelya was feeling the fear of being forgotten.

If she continues down this path, was that all that awaits her?

She clenched her fist, unsure of what to say next. She simply sat in silence as they drifted through Terminus, towards their next destination.

###

Rosalyn stood alone, she kept the others back for now as they aren't fit for battle.

In front of her she could see a camp that had been hastily prepared and reinforced. There were no signs of beast corpses laid out, someone handled it carefully to not attract more enemies.

Just as she was about to approach after seeing some silhouettes in the distance, she paused and blinked her eyes.

One of the silhouettes was familiar... It was during the time when she was still managing her academy.

And if she recalled correctly, someone that Alice had mentioned when they met up again briefly in the east.

Selen, the hybrid who uses time.

Chapter 902: Rosalyn And Selen

Had she not met back up with Alice and heard her story of the North, Rosalyn wouldn't feel compelled to trust Selen.

However, since she has revoked her ties and even helped Alice go against the Zenia's, it's clear she's an ally.

"S'cuse me~" Rosalyn called out as Selen glanced over.

The moment she laid her eyes on Rosalyn a slight frown appeared on her face.

The girl was keeping her aura restrained, barely noticeable even. But now that she had revealed herself, Selen could tell the person in front of her was a Lord.

When it comes to Lords and those who are stuck at six Sigils, there was a type of... aura that couldn't be forged through energy output.

Frida has it, same with Sigurd. Caera didn't yet she felt stronger than a Lord.

Then there was this women in front of her.

"What brings an esteemed Lord to these areas." Selen asked cautiously.

She was currently helping setting things up for the ritual Caera was preparing to do in order to bring everyone out. All of the patients have been moved and there were only a few things left they need to handle.

Tapping her heel, Selen sent out a thin wisp of energy.

Even though she can fight, fighting a Lord was still... questionable. Not to mention the fact that she didn't know how strong this Lord is.

'As expected of Alice's ally I suppose. She's already made preparations in case I'm hostile. Should I test her?' Rosalyn wondered.

As humorous as it would be, now was not the time for such matters.

"I'm just wandering around. You see, I heard some news that there were more people trapped in Terminus. Figured I might as well come say hi and see if I can help in any way. And... I'm a friend of Alice Agnelia.

"You know, split haired drunkard who likes mead a tad too much. And honestly you should recognise me too." Rosalyn winked as blood surged around her body.

Creating a disguise for now, she transformed into her old form temporarily. The one that copied Allura's appearance.

"Eh?" Selen blinked her eyes in surprise.

Then, before she could even say anything, two Lord level signatures erupted from within the city, rushing over at breakneck speeds.

To them, anything Lord level within these depths could not be trusted! Caera has already told them what Terminus is.

Therefore, whoever was Lord level here must be a sealed prisoner!

"Wait! Waittt!!!" Selen shouted, looking to stop the misunderstanding but the abilities were already fired.

Rosalyn raised her hand, blood converging around her palm. She could see the edges of her blood beginning to freeze but she should still be able to create a barrier to block things for now.

*Click

Rosalyn blinked her eyes.

Sigurd and Frida were also taken aback.

All three were now facing each other, still in the process of preparing their attack but...

Whatever ability they had used dissipated due to a lack of control.

Rosalyn's pupils constricted.

Alice mentioned Selen's power in the past briefly but didn't go into much detail. Only stopping at the fact that Selen could control time and even screw around with your perception.

But experiencing it first hand...

It was a freaky experience.

"Ah sorry sorry, I didn't know the lady here is actually an old acquaintance." Selen apologised repeatedly to Frida and Sigurd who rushed over.

Scratching his head, Sigurd sighed.

He was worried for a moment. Right now, the only ones capable of fighting against a Lord was Frida and Caera.

Caera was busy with setting up her prep while his powers were... severely limited.

Especially considering the fact that he's 'bound' to his forge. With the incident of the false ascension, he was forcefully ripped from his home and thus a lot of his power was restricted due to it.

Had he not signed the contract with Alice that allowed him to borrow her flames, things will truly be dire for him.

As for the price of the contract... he can only hope she doesn't remember the equipment he promised her.

"If she's an old acquaintance how come you didn't recognise her?" Frida furrowed her brows.

"She took on a different form than I remembered. Sorry for calling you out here for nothing."

Massaging her eyes, Frida nodded her head and gave Rosalyn one more glance.

Turning around, she tapped Sigurd on the shoulder.

She was heading back to Verona's side, leaving Sigurd behind.

"Sorry about that. You know what she's like." Sigurd apologised before holding out his hand.

"Sigurd. Lord of the Forge." He introduced himself.

"Rosalyn. Lord of Scarlet Ruin." Rosalyn shook his hand.

"We're just busy with something right now so I can't keep you ladies company. Selen enjoy catching up with your old friend, we'll be leaving after tonight. If... Your friend wants to come along, we'll have to go through the procedure okay?" Sigurd smiled.

"Understood." Selen nodded.

Giving Rosalyn a nod, Sigurd made his way back as well.

"That was a pretty neat trick. As disorientating as Alice had mentioned." Rosalyn chuckled now that it was just the two of them.

"Just a trick nothing more. But what brings you to Terminus Principal Rossalyn?" Selen asked curiously.

To her knowledge, only the north was affected.

Scratching her hair, Rosalyn gave Selen a rundown of everything that's happened.

Might as well cover everything that occurred during the time they met Alice again before parting ways so soon.

Then facing the false divinity in the north and splitting up in Terminus.

"..." Selen needed to take a moment and just sit down.

"Why am I simultaneously surprised yet not surprised?" She let out a sigh.

Right after telling Alice to be careful and not push her body like she did in the north, she's now hearing tales about how Alice was going around beating up Lords and even somehow managing to kill an Apostle belonging to the Eclipse.

In the short time they've been away, Alice has soared past her wildest expectations.

"After a certain point you just learn to accept these things from people like her. Her teacher or rather adoptive mother isn't exactly different either." Rosalyn chuckled.

Though in Alluira's case, the things she does are a result of her strength.

For Alice, it's like hearing an ant managed to kill a human. Not through poison or anything like that, but sheer f*cking brute force.

The very concept of such things happening was inconceivable. And yet Alice proved that it was very much possible.

But setting aside the details of Alice's strange adventures, Selen focused on why Rosalyn was here.

"I can ask Caera to take a look at the dagger since she's the one who's going to take us out of this place. As for everyone else, we have a healer who can operate. We'll need to unpack a few things but it shouldn't be an issue." Selen smiled.

Since they were friends of Alice, it was only natural she gives them a hand.

"Thank you."

###

"Hmm..." Caera scratched her chin while observing the dagger.

After bringing Isolde and Jin to the healer, Selen and Rosalyn came straight to Caera while Luke stayed behind to bring Isolde and Jin up to date once they wake up.

"Where did you get this dagger?" She asked, running her finger along the blade as it hummed with a strange tune.

"My brother gave it to me. Said it could help us out of Terminus. Since he sent me to this direction, I figured it might help with your ritual." Rosalyn answered, causing Caera to look at her in surprise before letting out a sigh of annoyance.

"Is your brother perhaps an immortal guy who only knows how to do things in a roundabout way?"

With such an accurate description, Rosalyn understood that Caera knew about her brother.

"Yes, he is." She nodded.

"F*ck." Caera cursed, flicking the dagger between her fingers before throwing it with a flick.

The blade embedded itself deep into the rock as she stood up with a sigh.

"Selen, do me a favour, let the queen know that the preparations aren't needed. I can make do with just this portal without doing what I need to do. However, we'll have to take a slight trip to one of the old contraptions that I made in the past." Caera scratched her hair, surprising both Selen and Rosalyn.

She glanced towards the dagger her brother gave her.

"What about the dagger?"

"The dagger itself is normal. Even one of Sigurd's trash pieces that he discards is better than that dagger. But just know it's very useful for me and solves a bunch of my problems when it comes to transporting everyone out." Caera explained but didn't go in depth.

To the ones who've lived a long time in this world, the one true immortal isn't exactly an unknown face.

He's someone who's tried to find various methods in order to seek death after all.

Even to the point where the Gods can't do anything about him.

But immortality wasn't the only thing he's known for. There are few things he knows about in this world. And if there is, the moment he gets a hint of it, he'll find out everything there is to know about it sooner rather than later.

The fact that he sent Rosalyn over here with this dagger...

It's clear he knew about her circumstances. In fact, he might even know everything.

After all... his gift was too specific to be called a coincidence.

For within that dagger, a certain kind of energy was sealed.

Had it just been any outer god, she wouldn't have cared. But it was energy belonging to the Outer God she was contracted to.

The energy belonging to one of the Great Ones who lead the Outer Gods.

The Formless One.

Chapter 903: Formless One

How did Caelan get a hold of the Formless One's energy? How did he know she was contracted to them?

Countless questions rushed through Caera's head but she had no answers.

Unlike the ordinary Outer Gods, the Great Ones are held back by rules that completely prevent them from interfering with the main realm.

Rules that were set since the dawn of time, rules that completely bind these Gods from ever attempting to destroy the realm with their own power.

Hence why each of the main factions sends out their retainers to gather more icons and spread their influence.

To inject then cultivate the cancer inside the world. And once that is done, only then would they be able to harvest this realm in its entirety.

Velouria discovered their plans in the past and put a stop to it. But once she disappeared, Nyer struck a deal and welcomed them back in.

It was also during this time that Caera decided to make a deal with the devil in order to strike back at Nyer.

However...

Even if Caelan was alive during that period, this was something she had never told anyone. There shouldn't be any traces nor witnesses as the Formless One made sure of it.

To the ordinary eye, whenever she uses her powers, it'll simply look like strange Abyssal abilities or an alternate form of the power that Outer Gods use.

But he saw through that disguise, pinpointed which Great One she was bound with and even sent over some of its energy.

Caera began to bite her nails.

There were going to be questions if she ever sees Caelan again. Questions she'll force the answer out of him if he refuses to cooperate.

He may be immortal but there are methods she can use.

###

Sitting behind his desk, a smile formed on Caelan's lips as he sensed the energy he sealed into the dagger fade away.

Rosalyn has successfully delivered the package that would help them escape Terminus.

However, as an added bonus, he now knew which Outer God Caera was contracted to.

After all, the energy within the dagger was uniquely modified for this purpose. A 'blank' slate that would adapt and change to whoever unseals the artifact.

With Caera being the one to do it, the energy has successfully mimicked whatever power she uses.

And of all the candidates, he did NOT expect her to have actually get in touch with one of the Great Ones.

He knew she had defected from the Abyss to gain Eldritch power. But to think that was the Formless One...

Caelan leaned back and scratched his chin.

When it comes to the contract between humans and Outer Gods, the minor ones are negligible.

But when it comes to the Great Ones, even the simplest contract can have dire effects on the realm.

What did they do to disguise the contract?

But most importantly, what did they trade?

Tapping his finger, Caelan wondered if he should intervene...

But as this thought crossed his mind, black spiked chains manifested around his neck, wrist and ankle, holding him in place.

"Just a thought. I know what I can and can't do." Caelan smiled bitterly.

Yet despite his words, the chains continued to tighten.

A warning.

He has been making lots of moves lately, darting on the edge and weaving through loopholes.

A deep frown appeared on Caelan's face as he clenched his fist. Little by little, the chains began to fade away as his wounds healed up.

He'll need a method to find out more about the situation and give Rosalyn a warning.

Even if Caera is an ally, becoming an Icon of one of the Great Ones automatically sets her as an enemy of this world.

Letting her live...

Cannot be allowed.

###

Alice had Suyin work on the prototype for the chip for now while she and Elias got busy with something else.

Yet her plans came to a halt when she tried to meet Karina again.

"Can you repeat that?" Alice furrowed her brows.

"Yggdrasil tea isn't available anymore. Off the menu. I can get you something else if you want." The bartender repeated.

Karina wasn't available anymore.

And if she's off the menu... She won't be available in the future either.

With Karina now unavailable, Alice and Elias stepped out of the tavern.

"Do you think it's because they're realising what you're planning?" Elias asked but Alice shrugged.

"No clue. But we can't spend more time looking for her." Alice folded her arms.

If Karina can't be found, then all they can do is focus on making the memory chip and analysing the Nightmare as a whole. Blindly progressing it without finding out anything would be stupid.

"Looking for who?" A voice echoed out directly next to Alice's ear as she snapped her head to the right.

She expected herself to come face to face with Karina only to see her sitting by a food stall.

Giving Alice a small wave, Karina gestured for the two to sit in front of her.

"What are you doing out here?" Alice asked.

She didn't think they would meet so soon, especially since she 'quit' her job.

"I'm just enjoying my favourite meal in this city before leaving. Anything wrong with that?" Karina chuckled softly, taking a bite of from the dumplings skewered on a stick.

Swaying from left to right, she enjoyed herself happily while occasionally throwing some dumplings into her abdominal mouth.

Alice stared at the woman in front of her.

"You met Monika again didn't you?" Karina spoke while enjoying her food.

"I did. Told me about anchoring bosses and so on." Alice nodded.

"Figured. She's just doing whatever she wants at this point, not caring about the rules. Guides aren't supposed to tell you this much. Only after dying to the boss and seeing a new one take its place, is a Guide supposed to teach you about anchoring down a boss.

"You're supposed to find clues scattered around the zones. Whether that be on rooftops, deep ravines or even the sewage areas. And once you know what the boss is, you'll be able to anchor them down.

"For us who desire your death in the Nightmare, this is one of the easiest ways to rack up early deaths. After all..." Karina trailed off.

"Those that dislike exploration will simply keep bashing their heads against an ever changing boss no?" She chuckled.

"So why are you here? Considering you're quitting your job, is it because of something Monika did or..."

Thinking about it for a moment, Karina smiled.

"Because I'm needed elsewhere. How about this, let's have an exchange of information. You tell me what Monika has told you, and I'll exchange with some information of my own." She offered.

Narrowing her eyes, Alice understood that this was probably their internal politics at work.

Monika doing whatever she wanted meant that the others have to keep her under control.

Since that was the case, getting some free information on her side was appreciated.

"She mentioned the rejection of the realm. Sentinels that will take care of anomalies. How dreams and reality will become blurred and if I don't know my way out, I'll be stuck in a maze of my own perception. How time flows differently."

Karina blinked her eyes and let out a sigh.

"Again, she's just telling you everything. You didn't happen to have seduced her now did you?" Karina asked helplessly while pointing a skewer at Alice.

"Why would I want to seduce her?"

"True. Gaining her interest is one thing. But gaining her love... that's a death sentence." Karina flicked her finger, tossing the skewer into the bin not far away from Alice.

"Alright, as agreed upon, I will give you some information of my own. In fact, I'll give you two considering what your friend managed to accomplish in one night." Karina narrowed her eyes as Alice was instantly on guard.

'They know about Suyin!'

"First, I'm leaving this place because the Nightmare is done here. There's no need for me to remain an overseer in this location. It will carry on its own without my assistance.

"Second, pray that your friend never gets dragged into the nightmare. She has been marked by the one who roams. If she was to gain insight into the Nightmare and become capable of 'seeing' the ones who hide in dreams... The ending would be rather bloody." Karina held up two fingers.

Finishing her skewers, she stood up and reached into her stomach.

Pulling out a card, she placed it on the table.

"This is a gift. If you ever fall into the nightmare again, use this and you'll gain one of the authorities afforded to guides. Though I say it is a gift, it is beneficial for both sides.

"For you, it reduces the time you waste. But for us, it increases your connection to the Nightmare. So use it if you wish, or toss it away. Regardless, I will now bid you farewell, Lady Zenia." Karina gave Alice an elegant bow.

The instant Alice heard the word Zenia escape her lips, she flicked her left hand and sealed the space around them.

Theoretically, Karina shouldn't escape.

And yet...

Her body faded to the same fog that filled the dreams.

She managed to escape.

"So they know..." Alice frowned.

But it wasn't too surprising.

While she may be in disguise outside of the Nightmare, in the Nightmare, her form was laid bare. They can see her true face as well as her split hair.

If they're working with the Zenia family, it'll be no surprise for them to know about her.

Letting out a sigh, Alice massaged her eyes and had a look at the card placed on the Table.

It was metallic silver with golden etchings across the surface.

A description of the authority Karina was gifting to them.

A guide's authority of teleportation between branches.

Chapter 904: Mara

Looking at the card in her hands, Alice wasn't sure how to feel about it.

On one end, it was great since it'll allow her to travel between her checkpoints with ease. However, that also meant becoming more attuned to the Nightmare Realm.

Sure it may be a drop in the bucket for them in the grand scheme of things, but for her as an individual, this was something she should avoid if possible.

Shaking her head, she stored the card away for now. Attuning to the realm was unavoidable so long as they stay in this city. Reducing it when they can should be a priority.

But if this card was useful, it would be a waste to not use it. Even if it comes with a few risks.

Plus, they don't know the exact 'size' of the Nightmare. How far do they need to travel in order to not get dragged into it? They know that escaping to the Abyss worked. But what if they continued to travel on the surface? Was it limited to cities?

What about the memory manipulation?

They couldn't just flee to the Abyss every two days otherwise it'll be impossible to make any progress on the surface.

While Alice was thinking about this, Elias stared at Alice's back.

Lady Zenia...

Previously, when Alice had spoke about the 'specimen' under the Zenia control, she simply waved off her involvement as a researcher.

But just being a researcher wouldn't get you the name of 'Lady Zenia'.

And even if she was a researcher, she must've been deeply involved in order to warrant such an attention from the information broker.

Feeling Elias's doubts, Alice understood that some answers had to be given, even if they're not the full details.

So instead, she'll delay it a little. He wanted a method to resolve side effects. That was his dream. She'll give him a hint.

The Library of Contracts hidden within the fabrics of space that the Will can access.

If he was able to access or manipulate the connection between that library and the victim, Elias would be able modify the side effects or even make it disappear in its entirety.

Though doing so required the power of manipulating souls.

Something he can only get if he was to become a Lord for his seventh Sigil. And with everything going on right now, getting that seventh seemed far more difficult than ever.

She wouldn't be able to give him a hand for that.

Tapping her fingers for a bit, Alice let out a sigh and glanced back.

"You're curious aren't you? But let's not dive into things right now okay? In exchange, I'll give you something to research okay?" She pretended to reach into her pouch.

Grabbing an empty vial, she injected some of her own blood into it before sealing it up.

"This is a sample of the blood gained from the specimen. Apply it onto Abyssal Abilities and it'll negate the properties with ease. Use it on a person and it'll act as a super charged abyssal poison that triggers side effects. Cure wise... I don't believe there is one outside of very niche situations where the stars align."

Blinking his eyes, Elias paused in surprise. He stared at the blood shimmering inside the vial and activated one of his abilities. Briefly analysing the composition of the blood, cold sweat dripped down his back.

"What the hell is that..." He mumbled, clearly disturbed by the information he has just gained from analysing the vial.

"Blood. A scary one at that. If you can figure out the secrets that the Zenia struggled with, you might be able to use the power to properly eliminate side effects. Applying the power of nullification on a specific part of the contract might render it to zero." Alice answered, handing over the vial of blood.

Holding the glass vial with his trembling fingers, Elias took a deep breath to calm himself.

"You can ask Suyin for some equipment to help you do your job. I'll wander around a bit more and see if I can find anything."

Nodding his head, the two of them split up for now.

###

"Which Old Lord are we targeting?" Ria asked with a bored sigh.

While the break was a welcomed rest, travelling for this long was still rather boring for her. Especially since Astrelya stopped talking after their... previous conversation.

One where Ria was starting to feel conscious of.

After all, the woman in front of her is still a Lord! One that kicked her ass and didn't seem to have gone all out.

If she got pissed and tried to kill her, there's nothing Ria could do about it.

"The Lord we're travelling towards is a weird one. Their title isn't grandiose or anything like that, if anything it seems simple. But their master of power is the scary part. Figured you could learn something from their application." Astrelya replied bluntly.

"Mara, the Old Lord of Ink. He's someone who uses his own body to paint the world in his colours. The Authority is Ink is... Well, you can imagine what it's like through the title. But by mixing his authority with his other powers, he's managed to transform it into something that transcends the confines of Ink.

"Like your magnetism that's an extension of electricity, his merges ink into his own body and uses himself as the paint to modify the world. Be careful not to get hit too often. If you do, you'll become the canvas in which he does whatever he pleases."

Furrowing her brows, Ria closed her eyes.

It was both vague yet informative. She figured it probably worked similarly to her charges previously. By stacking enough charges onto her target, she'll be able to land a powerful attack that couldn't be dodged.

In which case for Mara, it would be the power to modify her body once enough stacks are accumulated.

An ability that ends the fight the moment the limit is reached.

"We'll be there soon. The only advice I have for you is... Good luck. The interactions between your powers don't conflict. This battle is a simple one. The stronger one will win." Astrelya informed before snapping her finger.

Her body transformed into starlight and disappeared while the cloud continued to travel forward.

"!!!" Widening her eyes, Ria wanted to say something when the world around her began to change.

Mountains blurred, edges smeared like wet ink. The ground faded into nothingness, as though an invisible hand came down from above to erase its existence.

The skies disappeared, replaced by a canvas of pure white. Clouds painted above shifted ever so slightly with each second, mimicking the movement of real clouds.

In this strange world of art, only Ria found herself unaffected. Her body didn't lose colour not did the cloud beneath her.

But everything else was converted to a painting done by Mara's hand.

And in the distance, in an unassuming abode painted atop a mountain, a man sat while painting a waterfall to decorate his garden.

"A guest? In these areas?" He spoke without turning around.

With a flick of his wrist, a streak of ink rushed towards Ria who quickly jumped out of the way in fear of being caught.

The cloud that came into contact was instantly converted into a painting, joining the other clouds in the sky.

Hovering in this 'empty space' Ria struggled to find a foothold yet she didn't fall.

"Did Tiamat send you? I already told her I'm not joining, even if she freed me from my bindings." The man sighed.

"But you don't have her traces. She would never send a human to greet the old Lords. Instead, you have traces of something far worse."

Ria opened her mouth, wanting to talk but a streak of ink was already in front of her face.

"!!!"

Electricity crackled across her body as her form disappeared, dodging the strike.

"Fast one. I don't know why you've come, but having a fresh canvas is always welcomed." He stood up and turned towards her.

Mara, the Old Lord of Ink was man with deep bags under his eyes. Black and grey hair that reached his lower back. He wore a white robe with black straps and nothing else.

Ria furrowed her brows. Even though he didn't know why she was here, he was already showing killing intent and the desire to turn her into a canvas.

It was clear the Old Lord wasn't friendly at all!

Undoing the upper half of his robe and freeing his arms, Mara revealed his muscular body filled with tattoos. Not Sigils, tattoos of his own creation.

Reaching towards his back, his fingers touched upon a spear that he drew on his own back.

The ink twitched before energy burst forth. From the tattoo, the weapon was slowly pulled out.

Then, with his spare hand, he conjured a brush and aimed at Ria.

With a diagonal swipe, the space between them was shortened in an instant!

"!!!"

*BANG!!!

Ria unleashed a torrent of lightning before forcing herself to jump back.

However, her back slammed against the edge of the 'canvas'.

"Don't make me use more effort than I need to. I wouldn't want to ruin the canvas that is your skin."
Mara narrowed his eyes.

Astrelya lied.

While their powers don't directly impact one another, Ria was at a significant disadvantage against Mara. After all, with his power of ink, he's able to draw an invisible boundary within the world.

And in this world, it doesn't matter how fast Ria was. There's not enough 'space' for her to move around freely.

In order to break free, she'll have to evolve her offensive power using magnetism to forcefully break through the barrier.

Of course, there was an easier course of action. To use the Eclipse to override this zone in its entirety.

Astrelya wanted to see if she would stay on her path even as death approaches.

Chapter 905: Kaden Vs Famine

"Kah! Kahahaha!" A bloody laugh echoed out.

There is no room for mercy. No room for hesitation.

Kaden knew it from experience.

Famine smiles, a bloody forced smile. That mocking bend of the mouth, the maniacal glee in her eyes.

He couldn't stand that look.

*BANG!!!

When did he throw the first punch? How long as it been since he pinned her against the ground?
Strangling her throat while throwing punch after punch.

Each hit, the ground beneath them would fracture. The dirt kicked up by the impact, the rocks that split.

A ringing filled his ears. Famine was speaking.

Not of the information he wanted.

No, he could tell it was mockery.

He didn't let the Apostle finish her words.

He threw another punch. No thought behind his attack, just simple violence.

A deep thud mixed with a wet impact sound. The blood clinging onto his fist, the skin splitting under his knuckles.

The bones jutting out of the cheeks and the teeth falling out of her jaw.

Famine continued to laugh. Air escaping the lungs.

*BANG!!!

Again, he threw another punch.

This one caved in the skull. Blood bones and brain matter began to mix. Kaden pulled his arm back.

He could feel a pair of arms trying to stop him but he shook it off.

Opening his palms, black blood dripped from his eyes as a grimoire manifested. Black spears stabbed into Famine's body as the head was reconstructed.

Famine opens her mouth.

Even before she says a single word, he could tell it was going to be mockery once more.

A mockery at his attempts, at his effort. Grasping at straws for the survival of another.

"Does it feel good? Using me as a punching bag?" Famine cackled as Kaden landed another punch, cutting off her string of questions.

Pulling his arm back, he landed a single jab against the centre of her chest, fracturing the ribs before forcing them to stab into the lungs.

*COUGH!!!

Each breath was taken with pain but Famine's smile never faded.

"Go on, keep satisfying yourself." She grinned as Kaden threw another punch.

Ah... It was starting to feel numb. She mocks, he punches. Again and again, over and over.

The answers he's chasing for never appearing.

"You want it don't you? The answer, the solution."

*KRK!!!

Kaden's left hand tightened, crushing the neck in its entirety.

Healing Famine once more, he glared at the Apostle pinned under him.

"Kill me and Allura will still die. Leave me alive and I won't give you the answer you want. Kaden o' Kaden you pitiful fool." Famine found amusement seeing Kaden's desperation.

The desperation that rendered him numb to the world.

Kaden closed his eyes, regaining his calm. Taking a deep breath, he stood up and lifted Famine by the throat.

"Just wait for me. I've got a hold of you now."

Darkness overwhelmed Famine's vision.

###

Walking through the wastelands, a woman suddenly stopped and glanced up at the sky.

One droplet at a time, black rain began to fall.

"Ah~ I might've played with fire a bit too much. I even wasted the Betrayer's gift." She skipped through the black rain with a smile on her face.

The tether between her and the vessel has been severed, Kaden now has a lock on her true body and will no doubt be actively pursuing her.

But would it be so easy?

Twirling her body, Famine danced through the rain.

As a storm poured down, the rift above the sky began to crack open.

"Ah~ Darling~ to think you'd cross the world to find me." Famine laughed, raising her hand up into the sky as black chains shot down from above.

Yet before they could reach her, the chains rusted away and turned to dust.

"Wow~ Pursuing with such passion. Is this how you chase after all the ladies? I suppose we do love the cold mysterious types, don't you think?" She asked, hopping back.

Lunging out of the rift, Kaden flicked his arm towards her direction as her shadow began to mutate.

However, she only laughed, tapping her heel against the ground to counter his attack.

"Sorry but my heart belongs to only one."

From the rain that he conjured, a large bestial shadow loomed underground before a giant maw consumed the area.

"And yet despite your heart belonging to one, you're spending this much time pursuing another lady? Oh you two timer~" She appeared in front of him, tapping his nose.

However, Kaden simply leaned back and snapped his finger.

*RUMBLE!!!

A cage formed around Famine but she simply shrugged.

Clapping her hands together lightly, a rift split behind her.

Kaden immediately shut it down.

He won't allow her to escape to the Abyss or the Void-

"!!!"

The rift remained open.

A gateway to a different location, a new realm.

"Nice try darling~ but you've been too occupied with me to see what's happening in the world." Famine chuckled elegantly before blowing him a kiss.

Creasing his brows, Kaden summoned his grimoire and a black thread was attached between them.

"Hou~ How romantic. But wouldn't your dear Lua take offence to this? Connecting yourself with another woman. How scandalous." Famine coiled her finger around the thread.

Kaden ignored her provocations. Instead, he turned the pages of his artifact and summoned a robed silhouette who revealed a row of golden teeth.

Beneath the robe, a single golden monocle shimmered.

Diving into the portal, Famine began descending into the Nightmare.

Flickering through the clouds, she appeared in a realm with no ground. Buildings floated in all directions while the cosmic sea surrounded them.

In a sense, this was similar to the Void.

"To think you'd think of a counter so fast. As expected of the Apostle of Corruption. Shall we dance in the land of dreams? Dance until the hunger in our heart is fulfilled." Famine raised an eyebrow before turning around.

Kaden hovered in the air, black mist surrounding his body.

He breached the barrier using a curse along with the tether formed between them.

"I have no time for such dances. Unless you have another spare body, you'd better prepare yourself." Kaden narrowed his eyes.

His form disappeared with a splash of darkness.

Jumping out behind her, he tried to grapple her but his arm was parried.

Famine tried to stab him in the stomach but he trapped her claw between his elbow and knee.

Flicking his finger, a ray of darkness aimed for her throat but a mouth manifested on her neck, swallowing the attack.

Both of them unleashed a pulse of energy to create some distance but Kaden was faster.

In terms of casting, he was superior!

Jumping back, Kaden flicked his finger to the left, down then snapped.

Raven feathers appeared around Famine as briar thrones burst out of her arm.

"How vicious. What if you scar this pretty body of mine?" Famine smiled as mouths appeared on her body, consuming the briar thorns.

Just as she was about to dodge, blood dripped from her nose.

Poison.

Not strong enough to kill or debilitate, but enough to cause a slight hesitation and Kaden took advantage of this.

Appearing next to Famine, he grabbed her by the arm before slamming his hand into her gut.

*BANG!!!

The impact sent a shockwave that pushed several buildings away but he wasn't done.

Pulling her into his next strike, he landed two rapid punches against her head before bashing his knee into her temple, throwing her into one of the buildings.

Summoning his grimoire, the pages began to flutter as darkness converged behind him.

A single black eyeball with a red iris appeared and instantly snapped towards the sky.

Clenching his fist, black chains rushed up with Famine consuming everything without stop.

"Being greedy as always." Kaden spoke coldly.

Before Famine could respond, chains bust out from her stomach, piercing her body and anchoring her against several buildings.

"Yes but don't trust your eyes dear. In the land of dreams, anything is possible!" Famine emerged from the fog, bigger than ever.

Opening her mouth, she chomped down and crushed the eye that Kaden summoned.

Recoiling back, Kaden furrowed his brows while dark spots began to appear across Famine's body.

Corruption was stacking up.

But against someone like Famine, corruption was only a slight hindrance to her!

Slamming his palms down, energy began to spiral and condensed into a singularity. Taking aim, Kaden fired!

***RUMBLE!!!**

A black hole appeared behind Famine, threatening to consume everything.

"A battle of gluttony? Against me?" Famine smirked.

Behind her, another larger version of herself ate everything in the area. Her body, the black hole, the buildings around.

Everything was swallowed into her mouth.

"Tch!"

Since this is a dream, he'll turn it into a nightmare!

Kaden tore out two pages before merging them together.

The space began to collapse and a building was constructed around Famine.

A long dark corridor barely illuminated with light. The creaking of the wood and the raven perched upon the doorframe, staring at her with crimson eyes.

Famine grinned.

"Who said this dream was yours to control?"

Blood burst out of every room, drowning the new dream in scarlet as Kaden felt his power being pushed back.

"!!!"

An invisible force slammed into him, forcefully dragging him across the sky as black energy tried to thread through his limbs.

"F*CK OFF!!!"

Clenching his fist, black lightning shattered the grip as his Grimoire fought back with the power of curses.

Famine clapped her hand.

Even in an unfamiliar realm filled with unfamiliar laws, Kaden held his own through carefully chosen restrictions.

Contracts placed upon his body through the use of curses in order to maintain peak fighting potential.

Truly the height of casting in their generation of Apostles.

But just being good at casting wouldn't be enough.

Famine could sense it.

More sentinels were approaching their area!

Chapter 906: Two Primordial Sins

Kaden pulled himself from the rubble. His eyes narrowed as something definitely grabbed him just now.

And yet despite that, he couldn't see the target.

This realm was already filled with strange laws, but now there were also invisible enemies that evaded standard detection.

Wiping his blood away, he creased his brows.

As expected of famine, wounds don't heal easily, even if she wasn't the one to hit him directly.

So far, he's been careful about that. But if there are invisible opponents around, it might become difficult.

Opening his Grimoire, Kaden flipped through the pages before applying another curse.

*RUMBLE!!!

From his shadow, a cackling could be heard as a pulse of energy rippled out.

But... Famine simply grinned.

"Curse of False Perception. To turn allies against each other, perfect in a chaotic situation where it's one against the many. But... Unfortunately for you my dear, they don't perceive allies or enemies. They perceive 'rule breakers'. And that, is you." Famine smiled, allowing herself to drift gently in this dreamscape.

Tilting his head for a moment, Kaden's pupils constricted as he sensed danger approaching rapidly.

Since the Curse of False Perception wouldn't work, he'll have to choose something else!

*BANG!!!

An invisible fist struck his location but he had already transformed into a flock of ravens.

Manifesting not far away from Famine, he tried to attack but another invisible hand grabbed his ankles.

"Tch!"

Pulled away, Kaden tried to break free as black chains erupted from his shadow.

Against Famine, average curses won't work. She'll just consume them.

Then there was only one thing for him to do.

Push his body to the limit and invoke the power of Sin.

But first, he needed to resolve the issue of these invisible targets!

Gritting his teeth, Kaden opened his Grimoire.

He doesn't need to see Famine, he can sense her through other methods. Therefore, his sight of the real world can be given up for now.

As he applied the curse, the white parts of his eyes turned black as markings appeared on the corners. His iris shifted in colour with curse markings circling the pupil. His world darkened an inverted in colour.

And within this ever shifting vision, figures started to appear.

The moment he laid his eyes upon the invisible figures, he held his breath. Chills shot through his body.

His senses distorting from forcefully perceiving these creatures hidden from sight.

He felt pin pricks across his entire body, the sense of discomfort that warned him to stop but it was already too late.

Upon seeing these creatures, the world around him slowed down. Sound faded, movements halted. His perception of one second constantly being dragged out.

A malformed skull of inhuman proportions, eyes where there shouldn't be eyes. Mouth where there shouldn't be mouths. A cage of bone wrapped around the head and through the gaps, pulsing orange energy with inverted teeth attached to the inside.

Its torso a mass of limbs fused in all the wrong ways, as though countless humans piled together to form a ribcage. Its arms, bending with three joints, longer than its length, wrapped around the buildings flanking its sides.

Blood flowed from Kaden's eyes.

Seeing what's not meant to be seen, perceiving and understanding what shouldn't be allowed to be understood.

It wasn't just one either.

Tens, hundreds.

They were approaching rapidly from all directions, crawling atop the buildings.

And the moment he could see them, all of their heads snapped towards him in an instant. They also sensed his perception.

The Sentinels of the Nightmare Realm.

*CRACK!!!

A split appeared on their skull, the cage that started to break in half. The darkness that was seeping out.

Kaden gritted his teeth.

He made a mistake.

In this unfamiliar realm full of laws he didn't understand, he had tried to forcefully wrestle control via curses.

As the one who controls curses, he could tell the next result if he didn't stop. He felt his energy freeze to a halt. Right now, he was being 'observed'.

Without hesitation, Kaden lifted his hand.

In the next second, his world darkened.

His actions surprised Famine.

It was the right one but to see him do so without hesitation...

She let out a shrill laugh while blood dropped from Kaden's eyes.

He had blinded himself in order to avoid seeing the Sentinels.

With the removal of his own light, he felt the flow of his energy resume. The slowed world began to turn once more and he narrowly avoided death.

"How do you expect to kill me now that you've removed your own sight? You were struggling before already." Famine laughed, wiping the tears from her eyes.

But as she looked forward, Kaden's fist was already in front of her.

"!!!"

*BANG!!!

Quickly guarding her body, Famine crashed into the building.

"I taught a girl how to fight in the past. Told her to not rely on her sight so much. What kind of teacher would I be if I can't do what I request of her?" Kaden creased his brows.

Slamming his Grimoire down, he applied curses onto himself.

Curse of Temptation, Curse of Obsession.

Violet markings began to etch across his skin, causing him to wince in pain.

He felt his blood rushing through his body and longed to come into contact with any one.

However, it is also this feeling that allowed him to hone his senses towards touch!

'Above, behind, below.'

Twisting his body, Kaden dodged the Sentinel's grasp as black lightning coiled around a cursed spear.

Unleashing a flurry of slashes, he created a pool of cursed energy and dove in, dodging Famine's slash.

She had tried to find a gap in his defences while he was busy with the sentinels.

Lingering in his pool, he could sense creatures trying to breach and drag him out. Famine who's waiting for her opportunity.

Curse of Longing, Curse of Desire.

Veins bulged on his body as he had to hold himself back.

While these curses are useful in this situation, the drawbacks were annoying to control.

Freeing himself from the pool, he slammed his palms down, creating several beasts from his shadow to act as a shield for now.

With four curses on his body, there was only one left.

Jumping back to create some distance, Kaden dug his fingers into his chest. Blood dripped from his lips but he continued to push. And once his fingers came into contact with his heart.

Curse of Submission.

Five curses stacked, requirements are met.

The Grimoires pages began to turn and black energy invaded Kaden's body.

Of the seven primordial sins, Kaden has now activated the Sin of Lust upon his own body!

*BANG!!!

His body disappeared from where he stood as the building collapsed under his jump

Usually the Sin of Lust was one that debilitates someone to the point they can't even fight back.

But for him, it also allows him to avoid all interference and go after the one he sets as the target for his desire!

In this darkness, Kaden could sense the 'obstacles' preventing him from reaching Famine.

Tapping his foot down, a giant maw burst out from his shadow as a colossal beast swallowed the Sentinels, dragged them away.

But just using the Sin of Lust to go after Famine wasn't enough.

No, he needed more power in order to subdue this women.

Power that can burn away her defences of hunger.

Behind him, the Grimoire opened.

Curse of Frenzy, Curse of Ruin, Curse of Slaughter.

Kaden felt the voices of violence dominate his mind. The hatred burning in his heart towards Famine amplifying with each passing second.

*BANG!!!

Blocking Kaden's strike, Famine was about to say something when her smile froze.

Sparks flew and she instinctively dodged under.

*KRK!!!

A horizontal arc of energy carved away at the realm, the damage to the space itself refusing to heal.

Curse of Carnage, Curse of Annihilation.

A crimson aura burst out of Kaden's body as his skin began to split. His blood sizzling and burning, melding with the aura around his body.

Sin of Wrath.

Gritting his teeth, Kaden glared at Famine.

When applying Lust, Kaden focuses on a single target to the point of infatuation and love.

But when stacking wrath afterwards...

The greatest love births the greatest hate!

*RUMBLE!!!

The entire realm began to shake as Kaden started to disturb the very foundations of this realm. He was willing to burn his body along with the space so long as he could reach Famine!

At this point, cold sweat began to drip down Deva's back.

It was one thing to provoke Kaden while she was using a spare body. But now that she was here in person and not even the laws of the realm could hold him back, playtime was over.

Famine instinctively took a step back but Kaden was faster.

His hands grabbed her skin, his blood burning against her skin.

She couldn't even let out a scream as flaming serpents sunk their fangs into her throat.

Glaring at the man lost in rage in front of her, Famine exploded with an arsenal of rusted weapons that pierced into Kaden's body.

Yet her joy was short lived as he simply shrugged it off.

Despite the wounds, despite the blood dripping from his body, nothing was going to stop Kaden now and Famine realised that.

"Sh*t! Let go of me you freak!" She screamed as the Sentinels rushed over to help.

With Kaden now breaking the laws along with the realm itself, everything should be at their advantage!

And yet...

Raising his hand, Kaden opened his palm as a bead of pure darkness was created.

Crushing it with his hand, an ominous energy began to spread.

Authority of Corruption.

Chapter 907: Memory Device Prototype

"Hm?" Allura froze in her step, a frown appeared on her face. Creasing her brows, she glanced down at the ground and tapped her heel a few times.

"Something wrong?" Karya asked, wondering if Allura felt off with her condition.

Even though they should've traded enough life force to buy her a year, that could change at any moment.

Especially with how fragile Allura's body was right now.

"Somewhat... Somethings bothering me." Allura sighed, shaking her head.

It's like when you leave a house not knowing if you forgot to turn the stove off. Her gut twisted and she felt uncomfortable.

"Is it your body?" Gin frowned.

"No, my body feels fine. Maybe I'm just worrying about something." Allura shook her head. This feeling...

Could it be that something was happening to Alice?

But she always got into trouble and Allura never felt this unsettled before.

So she doubted it was Alice. And if it wasn't her... who could it be?

'Kaden?...' Allura clenched her fist.

Taking a deep breath, she composed herself.

Despite their... changes in views in the passing years, their goals changing and sometimes even standing on opposite sides, she had always trusted in the fact that he'll be safe.

And this time, it was going to be no different.

"Ignore me, probably just getting used to not having pain in my body. Anyways, where should we go? It doesn't seem like Ria can be found right now." Allura asked while they surveyed the state of the Northern Lands.

According to Gin's friend, this should've been the location Ria and her friends tried to reach. But after the accident a while ago, they've been missing since.

Not dead, simply missing.

If she was dead, Gin would've noticed and he wouldn't be composed as he is right now.

"We'll travel down to the south. Ria I can't find more tracks of her here so I guess the next best option will be to find that mead addicted girl of yours." Gin kneeled down, tracing his fingers across the dirt.

Even though it was faint, they could still sense the remnants of power left behind. A false divinity, a failed ascension, the power of Lords and... Traces of Nyer.

"You keep meaning mead but how addicted can one even be? Plus, you talk about her as though she's a child yet mention her power." Karya asked curiously, sitting on a rock.

She had never seen Alice before so she had no foundation of understanding.

Yet from everything she's heard, Alice was someone who:

Loves mead, loves to mess around. Extremely competent when it comes to fighting and casting, learns very fast, shy yet outgoing, naïve yet brutal.

A mess of contradictions and insanity, like a powerful child still learning her place in the world. What can or can't be done, what they can get away with and so on.

A person who loves to get their blood pumping.

And despite how much information she was getting, it's hard to get a proper picture of the girl in her mind.

Allura folded her arms and thought about it for a moment.

With how much Alice loved mead...

"Honestly if you give her some good mead, she might even fight an entire faction for you. Granted the faction can be classified as 'evil' I suppose.

"The girl loves her mead but her morality holds it back... to some extent." Allura stuck out her tongue.

Karya's smile twitched.

"Though I haven't seen her in a long time now. You know what they say, children grow fast. A week can make a world of difference.

"Who knows, she might have grown out of her love for mead." Allura chuckled while Gin shrugged his shoulders.

"I doubt that. Mead to her is like a Kid's first toy. Only this one doesn't break."

"That is true." Allura laughed.

A warm smile appeared on her face. She's been far away from Alice for far too long now. Will her trick even work on her anymore?

To sneak up behind Alice and surprise her with a sudden reunion. To imagine the look on her face.

Allura couldn't help but chuckle just thinking about it.

Since there were no more traces to be found in the north, they'll start their journey south.

"Based on what my informant told me, her traces practically vanished in the south so she's most likely walking around with a disguise. In order for us to track her down, we'll need to know her goal and it won't be easy."

"Oh don't worry about that. There is and only will be one goal for the girl in the Extalia. Even if she finds other things to live for, even if she finds other hobbies, the Zenia family still persist.

"And so long as they are around, her rage will never be quelled, especially the ones that operated on her. So if we want to find Alice, we just need to see where the Zenia family are most active." Allura suggested.

"That's what I thought as well. But..." A deep frown appeared on Gin's face.

"Extalia right now is a black hole of information. People go in but nothing comes out. And more and more factions are starting to become aware of this. Even if they send in spies, they come back with no information."

Everyone, without exception, don't even realise they went to Extalia if people didn't mention it. It's as though their perception had been modified in order to trick their mind. To believe they were simply loitering around the area.

Even if five of their superiors told them they went to Extalia, they'll think it's the world that was wrong rather than themselves.

"Hmm... If everyone is affected, then it must be a passive law or contract put in place in order to prevent news from spreading. A stalling tactic?" Allura scratched her chin.

Immediately, she felt the need to go there and investigate but a single glare from Karya shot that idea down.

Allura instinctively held her arms up in surrender.

As a patient, there was one rule she must always remember.

Never annoy your doctor.

They are responsible for your life and death.

"We can go but you're staying back until everything is verified. If a Law or contract is in place, we don't know how that'll affect the energy drain in your body. Remember, your current state is fragile. Any energy used is permanent.

"If you randomly come across a beast that can suck away your energy passively, it might as well be over for you." Karya warned as Allura nodded her head.

"I know but-

"Shut up, no buts. You asked for a year, I gave you that year. I can't squeeze out more from someone who has nothing left to squeeze out. If you want to live for this year, behave yourself. This is the time to let others do their job rather than taking everything on by yourself." Karya glared.

Despite being the Abyss Lord of Life, Allura felt as though she saw a demon behind Karya.

With no other choice, she simply nodded obediently.

It was a strange sensation, letting others do the investigating and so on. All these years, even with her injuries, she could still protect herself whenever she wanted to find out the truth.

But now... all she could do was wait for the information to land on her lap.

A feeling she didn't enjoy but was forced to accept.

However, the silver lining was that she'll be travelling towards Extalia. Sooner or later, she'll find Alice again.

###

". . ." Alice stared at Suyin.

". . ." Suyin stared at Alice.

Elias sat in the corner, watching the two inventors stare at their newest contraption.

"It's big."

"Indeed it is. But it works." Suyin folded her arms.

"You sure?" Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Theoretically."

"Better than nothing. But..." Alice was hesitant.

"It's still big isn't it?"

"Yeah..." Her smile twitched.

The original prototype was simply the size of a small sheet.

To help make up for the missing information the moment they leave Extalia.

But this...

How were they expected to carry this?"

"Can you shrink it down?"

"If I could, do you think I would've presented this prototype?" Suyin knocked on the hard metal case with the back of her hand.

"This is already the smallest I can make it while ensuring that everything still works with enough safety precautions. We're working with the soul here, can't be too wary. Any mistake could be dire."

"That I agree with. But... Don't you think it'll be a little... conspicuous for us to walk around with this strapped to our back? If we can even walk comfortably that is." Alice sighed.

To see the top of this... device, Alice had to tilt her head back and even then, it was still barely visible.

That wasn't even a jab at her height either, Elias also struggled to see the top.

"Blame yourself. Who told you to make so many movements in the Nightmare? To record everything your brain remembers in that period takes a lot of space. If I try to trim it down, we don't know what might happen the next time you enter the nightmare."

"There's too little time to test and hardly any guinea pigs to test on. With a lack of test subjects, this is the safest prototype I can give you. Unless you want risks." Suyin shrugged while Alice shook her head.

"Even so... can't we shrink it down by just a little bit? Even with my strength... this is too bulky." Alice let out a sigh.

After all...

The prototype that Suyin made...

Was almost two floors tall...

Chapter 908: Portal Through Realms

Massaging her eyes, Alice let out a deep sigh.

Since they couldn't compress how big this machine is, they'll have to choose an different method.

Though...

So far, she had only tested this idea in a small confined area such as Caelan's Library.

If they wanted this to work a little better...

"Suyin, how likely is it for you to transport this contraption through the Vault? I know you brought all the materials here but it's clear we can't walk around with that... thing." Alice asked with a helpless smile.

She knew how hard Suyin had to work in order to build this within a day and have everything ready. And yet, she was now telling her to dismantle it all.

"You got an idea?" Suyin asked curiously.

"You could call it that. It's just theory right now but if I can make a few small adjustments, I should be able to punch a hole straight to your lab. As for how much energy it requires... Euff... I don't even want to think about it." Alice rubbed her temples.

The little trick she used when Cayla manifested in reality was just a gimmick she thought up of on the spot.

Trying to improve it would be the next step if they want to use Suyin's invention as it is.

Suyin hopped onto the table.

"So we're leaving the state of my invention up to chance? Disassembling it is fine but... reassembling will take a while. Unless we can guarantee something..." Suyin was hesitant.

She didn't want to destroy her baby over speculation.

Alice folded her arms.

"That's true... Let's give this a try first then." Alice had an idea.

Closing her eyes, she told Cayla about it and after a brief moment, she agreed.

Holding out her hand, strands of energy gathered together to form a new body roughly the same size as Suyin's doll.

Watching this happen, Suyin had to blink her eyes in order to double check she wasn't going crazy.

Elias was silent, watching as a living body was created in front of him.

Well... it was more of a construct considering the fact that it's entirely made from energy. But its resemblance to a living body was uncanny.

Once the body was created, Cayla slowly opened her eyes and gave her body a stretch.

Lifting the edges of her skirt slightly and going into an elegant bow, Cayla introduced herself.

"Cayla, it is a pleasure to meet the two of you. I am one of the voices in Alice's head."

"Her original form is obviously bigger, but this is the best we can do for now. She has access to a data bank of everything we've discovered so she might be able to help you either shrink down this machine or figure out a way to maintain the portal." Alice smiled.

Suyin folded her arms and nodded her head.

"With her size, fitting through the vault over to the East shouldn't be an issue. We can also test the energy drain. Keep the portal small since we only need to hook you up to the machine through a small opening." Suyin suggested.

It's not like they need full visibility of the machine. The only problem was its size. Too big to store in her vault. So the options were what Alice suggested or simply carrying it with them.

And...

Walking around with a two floor tall metal box certainly wasn't stealthy at all. If anything, it was screaming for people to come investigate.

Alice clasped her hands together, created a portal behind Cayla.

"This should follow you around, I'll make a mental note of the drain so you can use it as reference. In the meantime, I believe I'll be helping Elias with some experiments with the blood."

With the plan confirmed, Suyin opened the vault as Cayla climbed in.

Alice maintained the portal. So far, the drainage was still largely negligible. But the further Cayla travelled, the faster the drain becomes.

Closing the vault door, Alice immediately stumbled a little, not expecting the distance to increase so drastically.

However, this portal was one that breached through the realms after all.

"Are you okay?" Cayla was worried seeing Alice stumble.

Before she could climb through the portal, Alice shook her head and smiled.

"It's fine, I just wasn't expecting the jump. Hmm... I'll need way to replenish my energy but the drain isn't too bad. I think I can handle it for 30 minutes give or take. But if we can replenish my energy, it'll last longer." Alice clenched her fist a few times and estimated how long she could maintain this state.

But the issue was...

This portal only linked to the Void. It has yet to cross the distance to the east.

"Try this then. Might help." Suyin jumped through the portal and tossed over a small contraption. It had a single Eldritch crystal attached to it and Alice could see energy coursing through the device.

"A small 'battery'. It's a prototype I've made for my babies. But if you can extract the energy like my machine, it might be suitable for you as well." Suyin explained as Alice thought about it for a moment.

Extracting the energy wasn't too difficult. It simply needed her to link her strands up with that of the device.

The only questionable part was the nature of said energy.

However...

Suyin had dealt with this through the device. Part of the energy was funnelled into a separate container thus creating a second more corruptive Eldritch Crystal.

What little energy is extracted is converted to 'blank' power that can be used.

Closing her eyes, Alice linked herself to the device and felt the energy flow into her body.

"Hmm... mostly neutral but the crystal is draining pretty fast. What are we going to do about the waste produced? This corruptive crystal is not exactly good." Alice pointed at the secondary crystal that was slowly being dyed with an ominous black energy.

"That's why I said it's a prototype." Suyin stuck out her tongue.

'Should I give it a try? I deal with Eldritch energy anyways.' Alyss suggested.

Raising an eyebrow, Alice allowed Alyss to take over.

With the crystal now in her hands, Alyss held it against the light before clenching her fist around it. Black energy started to fill her veins while the golden chains seared against her skin.

Alice wanted to say something but Alyss shook her head.

After a moment, the energy was absorbed and Alice took over again.

'I'll need to recuperate a little bit to 'digest' the energy. But other than that, no negative effects.

'You can probably set up an array for you to use the energy while I absorb the Eldritch stuff.' Alyss suggested.

'Are you sure? This...' Alice frowned.

'I mean how else are we supposed to use the memory device? Don't worry it's just for the moment. The moment we figure out a better way to do things, we can change. But time is important right now, isn't it?'

Alice hesitated but sighed and nodded her head.

'Alright.'

Setting up a relay with the Eldritch energy funnelling into Alyss, Alice maintained the power to the portal.

"Alright, you can exit into Suyin's lab now." Alice gave Suyin the thumbs up while Cayla had a face of worry.

As the vault opened, Alice winced a little from the drain but it wasn't as bad as before.

If anything the drain only decreased after Cayla stepped out and the Void was taken out of the equation.

'Seems like crossing realms are the main thing when it comes to draining.' Alyss smiled.

'To be fair, I am using Void Powers to cross through the Void twice. Once with my portal, second with the vault floating in the Void. If it's just on the opposite side of the world, I only need to cross the Void once.' Alice theorised.

'Perhaps. This does mean you don't need to use Eldritch energy as often since the drain is fine. Only the occasional recharge is needed.'

Nodding her head, Alice relayed everything to Suyin who set aside a bunch of energy crystals for Alice to use.

###

"How do you suppose we should transport everyone? Moving this many people, including the injured isn't realistic. Especially with the beasts running rampant. And... We don't know when her Majesty might fall into a slumber again." Sigurd leaned against the wall.

Now that they know Caera can do things without the need of the contract, a new problem has appeared.

Transport.

"We should be fine for an extended trip. We have several Lords with us." Caera shrugged.

How they get there isn't exactly her problem.

"Even with several Lords at our disposal, we're still in Terminus. What can we do if a Sealed Lord appears?" Frida reminded.

It's been mostly six star beasts attacking hence why they've been holding up just fine. But if a Lord was to attack, casualties will no doubt appear.

With the mention of the potential dangers of a Sealed Lord appearing, the group fell silent.

Rosalyn was confident in her own survival but she can only save a handful of people. Sigurd seemed restricted with his power while Frida wanted to save as many as they can.

Same with Verona.

Caera was the outlier but it seems like her power has some major draw backs.

"What if we take multiple trips?" Rosalyn suggested after some thought.

"But that's only if we can use the method of transport multiple times. You mentioned its an old device, can we guarantee it won't break after one use?" Frida turned to Caera who shrugged.

"I'm confident that it'll work but time wears down all things. It's durability I can't guarantee."

"And what if I can maintain its condition?" Selen spoke up.

If she can use the power of time to halt the degeneration of the materials while it's in use, they might be able to increase the odds of success.

Hearing this, Caera folded her arms.

To perform a feat such as this... an advancement is needed.

Selen won't have the energy to maintain such a task if she wants to help. Thus, the answer was simple

"Selen, how do you feel about becoming a Lord?"

Chapter 909: Selen's Choice For The Seventh

"A Lord? Me?" Selen blinked her eyes, pointing her finger at herself.

"Of course you. Who else? Out of the candidates I have in mind, your power will receive the most benefit with a little boost. Not to mention, with your tricks, I'm pretty sure a Lord level Hunt will be simple for you." Caera nodded her head.

In terms of one vs ones, Selen had the most powerful ability. An ability that only gets stronger the stronger her opponent is.

After all, they'll be wary about her movements and in that moment, their fate is sealed. They'll focus too much on Selen thus allowing her to exploit that second of focus.

Even someone as strong as Alice lost to this ability until she was told about the trick.

"Do we even have time? Aren't we in a rush? Getting a bounty and tracking down my target won't be easy." Selen frowned.

They didn't have the leisure to wander around aimlessly hoping to find her seventh kill.

"Yes. But only if you're using the new method. We're going with an old method that was put into place during the time of Ayr. As long as we know our target, we can pick what we want." Caera chuckled.

This kind of method, Alice spoke about during their time in the North. How in the Inverted World, they could choose whatever bounty they wanted and even swap at any given time.

But...

"Aren't the statues destroyed? And without the Goddess, are you sure it still works?"

Hearing this, Caera let out a sigh.

"Where do you think we are?" She pointed at the sky above them.

"We're in Terminus. THE Terminus, prison of the Old Lords. There are obviously statues here that haven't been broken yet, even with the passage of time. Plus, even without the Goddess, I have a few methods to stimulate the traces of power left behind.

"So don't worry, the Tracking aspect won't take long. I'll handle that part, you just need to figure out what kind of ability you want to take from your target." Caera reassured while Selen was still doubtful.

She might be good against humans in one vs ones. But against Lord level beasts... what's to say her offensive power is truly enough? And what if her fight takes too long?

Could she even breach the defences of a Lord in the first place?

Caera could see the doubt on Selen's face.

But she had already said everything that needed to be said. All that's left was for her to believe in her own power.

Plus...

"It's not like you'll be alone for the Hunt. It's simply a matter of contribution. If you're that worried, why don't you get your boyfriend to guard you while you hunt down the Lord?" Caera reminded.

Selen's expression dropped slightly.

With the failed ascension and everyone being dragged into Terminus, the list of victims included Egil's mother. She was growing weaker with each day they spent in Terminus.

The sooner they leave, the faster she can recover.

And right now, Egil was busy focused on maintaining her condition while taking care of beasts that might try to invade the camp.

After training with his new powers, it's not an exaggeration to claim that he has mastered the use of his new armour created from Alice's blood.

It had even reached a point where he could defend an entire battlefield on his own. Having allies would actually be detrimental due to the nature of the armour.

Frida guarded the north of the camp, Caera guarded the east, Egil south and Selen west.

If two of them were to leave the south and west undefended...

Selen looked up. After seeing Caera's expression, Selen let out a helpless smile and nodded her head.

"Alright. I'll let Egil know. As long as we're not away for too long, we should be fine."

###

"I'm back." Selen called out while Egil poked his head out from one of the rooms.

"Welcome back. You seem stressed, are preparations for the ritual difficult?" Egil asked curiously but Selen shook her head.

"We're trying something else. Some of Alice's old friends were dragged into Terminus as well. Turns out they had something that could help Caera fire up one of her old machines." She explained as Egil blinked his eyes in surprise.

"Alice's old friends? The world is a small place after all." He chuckled.

He had wonder why he sensed Lord Sigurd and Frida rushing over towards the west and thought something had happened.

"Mnm. But a new problem comes with this one." Selen threw herself onto the make shift bed they created.

"Transport. We're not sure if we can even move everyone in time without the machine just breaking."

Sitting next to her, Egil helped massaged her shoulders as Selen let out sigh of relief.

"And Caera's solution for that is to have me become a Lord so that I can freeze the condition of the machine, maintaining it until everyone has left Terminus."

"A lord? Is there enough time?" Egil was shocked.

"That was my thoughts too. But Caera said it would be fine so what else could I say. Plus... If becoming a Lord can help everyone stuck here, it might not be a bad choice you know?" Selen closed her eyes.

Egil was silent.

If Selen was looking to become a Lord...

"How strong are Alice's old friends? Do you think they can cover the camp for us?" Egil asked as Selen glanced back with a mix of surprise and concern.

She knew that he would come along the moment he found out she was going on a Lord level Hunt. But at the same time, she didn't want to take his time away from his mother. Not when her condition was serious and she was in a time of need.

"I'll leave my mother in Alfva's care while we're away. She might have a scary side to her but when it comes to caring for patients, she's the best." Egil reassured.

Of course, he would prefer to look after his mother if possible. However, he couldn't let Selen face the danger alone like this. And if his mother knew, she would no doubt tell him to go.

Hesitating for a moment, Selen nodded her head and hopped off the bed.

"Alright, since we have a tough journey ahead of us, I'll make us some nutritious food tonight." She grinned.

While Selen was making dinner, Egil set up the table. A moment of peace before embarking on a journey to slay an Old Lord.

###

"During the time of Ayr, Terminus wasn't entirely sealed off like it is today. In fact, some even used it as a training grounds since the miasma here worked as a natural restraint that helped with training.

"Of course, with the nature of Terminus, Lord level beasts were in an abundance. Even if they weren't truly Lord in status, some had powers surpassing their peers and put them in the same category as Lords through ability alone.

"Thus making this layer the perfect training ground for most. And as such, the Queen of Ayr added the statues in this layer as well, allowing trainees for have easy access to bounties available here." Caera explained while leading Selen and Egil through Terminus.

Back at the camp, Rosalyn and others covered for their stations as Caera reassured that this wouldn't take more than a day.

"What kind of Lord should I even pick for my seventh Sigil?" Selen asked curiously.

She knew how difficult it was to attain the status of Lord so she never really thought about what kind of ability she wanted for her seventh.

How did she want to upgrade things? What kind of title did she want?

All of these questions felt useless to her at one point. After all, as a servant of the Zenia family, how could she hope to become a Lord?

And yet here she was, travelling through the most dangerous territory in Terminus in search of her seventh Sigil. One that will help her reach the status of Lordship.

"We'll see what's available and go from there. Plus... It might be a good chance for Egil to get his title too depending on what happens." Caera chuckled.

Their main goal was for Selen to reach Lord.

But if the time and situation allowed for it, having Egil reach the level of Lord might also good.

Though that's only if the situation allowed for it.

If it took too much time, they'll have to settle with just Selen for now.

"Though if I had to say, ideally we get a power that allows you to 'rewind'. You can accelerate, decelerate and even extend a moment in perception. If we find something that lets you rewind, I'm sure it'll be quite the sight to behold." Caera smiled.

Though Selen shook her head.

After using her power for this long, she knew how difficult it would be to rewind time. Especially when 'history has already been written'.

Changing the future, speeding up and prolonging the present were easy. But erasing and modifying the past borderline on the power of God. If that was even possible to begin with.

"I know that expression. But you'll be surprised at the kind of abilities that the Abyss can grant. There's a reason why Queen Velouria of the past was stronger than the three Gods." Caera chuckled.

Even after changing factions and joining hands with the Outer Gods, her faith in Velouria has never changed. She still believed Velouria to be the one and now by extension, Alice.

"We're here." Caera stopped as they approached a half broken statue of Velouria.

It was now time for Selen to make a choice for her seventh Sigil.

Chapter 910: Four Aspects Of Time

"Are you sure this'll work? The statue doesn't exactly look... operable." Selen furrowed her brows.

The statue was missing like half the pieces from the head and torso and as for the energy hidden within the core, it was one breath away from disappearing for good.

"It'll work. These statues didn't require a lot of energy to begin with, nothing like the fraudulent shamans of this day and age." Caera chuckled, leaning against fence with a grin.

Seeing her confidence, Selen could only shrug and place her hand against the statue. Closing her eyes, she linked herself up.

Immediately, she felt herself transported to a strange black void. She couldn't see the ground yet she was standing perfectly fine. No light source yet her hands and body was still visible.

Turning around, Selen paused upon seeing the illusionary silhouettes floating in the sky.

"Heh~ That's quite the selection you have. A few Old Lords to choose from too." Caera's voice echoed out next to her as Selen looked to the side in surprise and saw Caera with her arms crossed.

"What the f*ck?"

"Don't worry about it, linking myself to you and the statue is easy. It's something you get the hang of after experimenting with Velouria's stuff. Now then let's see... Nope, not this one. This one is horrible for you. Not this, oh god, definitely not this one." Caera waved her hand and started to filter out the list for Selen.

There was a slight hint of Eldritch energy that helped Caera anchor herself to this place, thus allowing her to help Selen with her selection.

Before she knew it, there were only four beasts left for Selen to pick from.

"These are the ones with the most potential and probably most likely for you to kill. The others give abilities that are too weak or niche ones that you can't interact with at all, even with your perception manipulation." Caera explained.

Out of the four, two were rather human like while the other two were bestial in appearance.

The first and biggest of them all was a colossal whale that hovered in the sky. There seemed to be a myriad of worlds anchored upon its back as waterfalls created celestial silken bands around its flippers.

Lined along its body were countless eyes that seemed to peer into a space beyond them.

"The beast of a thousand paths. Not a sealed Lord but one that might give you some good potential in your Sigil. One of its powers are the ability to peer into alternate choices and bring that possibility to reality in a moment.

"Say you are faced with a choice, to open or not to open. Should you choose one, he will be able to manifest the other. An attack you dodged might in fact pierce your body, an attack that landed might have missed.

"His power is one of potential." Caera explained.

"They say his powers are dictated by the eyes lined upon its body. I think that's only partially correct. But if you were to gain the Sigil, you might be limited to two selections with your eyes. Who knows? No one has ever killed this beast but with your power of perception, I think it's rather possible." She shrugged as Selen turned to the second option.

"Lady of the Promised Tomorrow, she who seizes the future." Caera spoke.

The second option was a woman with long flowing hair and spikes lined across her body. A dragon like tail that whipped behind her and an elegant dress.

Even without seeing the target in person, Selen could already feel the pressure emanating from this woman.

"An Old Lord, one that peers into destiny not unlike a certain witch of the past. Her powers allow her to perceive the future. Similar to the ring that Sigurd gives you only her sight is not one based on predictions and habits.

"And once she sees your future, she can bring certain consequences to the actions you will take. Again, no one has managed to kill her since she was a Sealed Lord. But with her unsealing, she is now roaming these lands.

"But what good is seeing the future if your present can't react? She'll be slightly harder to kill than the whale if what you desire is the power to properly observe the future."

Caera flicked her finger and the third option presented itself.

A giant serpent that seemed to be veiled in smoke. Its body flickered between transparent silhouettes of itself that seemed to be delayed from its actual movements.

"The moebius serpent, a beast that doesn't live in the present but rather feeds on the past. His powers allow him to force the projections of the past upon all who fight him. Actions you made seconds ago manifested as a shadow.

"If your past is destroyed, the present ceases to function. A weapon destroyed in the past will crumble to dust in your hands. The disappearance of cause thus the effect fades.

"When fighting this beast, you make sure you dodge the present while keeping it away from your past. For the moment your past is devoured, your origin will disappear. But killing it once wouldn't do. Far from it.

"As a beast that lives in the past, each death will only make it retreat further into the stream of time. Each death will make it lose power until it fades from time itself." Caera explained with a chuckle while Selen blinked her eyes.

Caera wants her to kill a beast with this kind of power???

"Oh don't look at me that way. The beast has a perverted power for sure but the rest of its abilities and physical capabilities are lacking. It's merely a gimmick. For a beast that fights in the past, it struggles with the present. You'll be able to kill it just fine."

With that kind of explanation, Caera flicked her finger to the final option.

Immediately, Selen pulled out her weapon. Fear that struck her core, the gaze that bore into the essence of her being.

This last option...

Was the most dangerous! Everything about the target was telling her to flee.

"Hou~ So even as just a silhouette, it can invoke such effects upon you. As expected of the Tyrant controlling Time." Caera raised an eyebrow.

"This one will no doubt be the hardest fight for you. Even with Egil's help. An Old Lord who governs over the present.

"I have shown you the whale who perceives possibilities, the woman who observes the future. The serpent who devours the past. And now, I present the king who controls the present.

"His powers are similar to your abilities of perception. Only he erases the time of the present. A desynchronisation where actions are carried out without knowledge. A master of assassinations. Much is unknown but what little is known makes him the best when it comes to time related powers.

"And... Here's a little bit of a history lesson for you." Caera smiled.

She knew the origin of Selen's ability. The sealed Lord Miralith, the Old Lord of Time.

"In the past when the Old Lords have yet to be sealed, there ruled a kingdom who's king was tyrannical in every sense of the word. The King of the Present. Because to him, ruling the present meant unyielding power.

"The past cannot be changed, the future will turn into the present. Thus only the now mattered. His word was Law, his ability unmatched. A king that even Tiamat, the Queen of Apocalypse gave her respect to as people of power.

"Then one day, he found a strange beast lurking around the edges of his domain. A beast that was feasting on the very essence of his power.

"Intrigued, the king didn't order the beast's death. No, it decided to take it in. He allowed the beast to feast upon his power day in day out. He fed it the essence of time itself, to allow the beast to adapt and grow.

"Little by little, the beast grew. Its mastery over time has become something that even the king praised. It was the king's pet yet it was also the king's friend." Caera chuckled.

"Thus was born the closest retainer of the King who ruled the present. Miralith the Old Lord of Time."

Hearing this, Selen froze.

The sealed Lord whom she made a contract with... was the king's retainer?

Then this fourth target that Caera wanted her to kill...

"If that's the case then isn't my power going to be useless against him?" Selen furrowed her brows.

"Not quite. Because despite being the closest retainer to the King, Miralith was also the one responsible for his sealing. A tale unknown to the world where only those involved understood what had truly occurred." Caera shrugged.

Out of the four choices, the last was definitely the most powerful and beneficial if Selen wanted to be a strong Lord who governs time.

However, the difficulty is by far head and shoulders above the rest. Even for her, killing the Lord who controls the present wouldn't be an easy task. Only winning due to the nature of her Eldritch contract.

But such abilities were impossible for Selen and Egil.

Unless...

Miralith intervenes.

As a Hybrid that's contracted with Miralith, communication between the two are possible to some degree. Hell, she could even summon Miralith's phantom if desired.

And that would be the key she requires if she wanted to kill the king.

Selen furrowed her brows, she looked at the selection presented before her.

She already knew the choice Alice would pick if she was in her place. Alice would no doubt pick the fourth even with the odds against her.

But unfortunately, Selen wasn't like that. There was too much uncertainty involved.

The whale who perceives possibilities was interesting but she didn't think that kind of ability would help them.

The woman who observes the future is also strong. But what use is looking to the future if she can't influence the present? Then there's the serpent who devours the past.

If she were to choose this serpent, she would be able to control all three aspects of time to some degree.

However...

"How much time can we afford? I need to think about this." Selen creased her brows.

Caera grinned.

Selen was considering the fourth option.

"As much time as you need."

