

Abyssal A 931

Chapter 931: Grand Cathia

As the group approached Grand Cathia, all of them were rather speechless at the sight. Minus Suyin of course as she had long prepared herself for this level of spectacle.

Even from afar, they could see the sheer size and scale of the city. Far bigger than anything they had seen before yet most of it was hidden underground.

All of its factories and tunnels hidden from the naked eye. And despite all of that, it still towered over the surrounding scenery like a large needle pointing into the sky.

A network of carefully laid out layers split into three. Even with all of the arches, pathways and connections between the floors, a clear distinction could be observed from the 'quality' of each layer.

The closer they got, the more the smoke thinned, revealing the rather industrial ground layer. Tattered banners and the echoes of idle chatter.

Overhead, large shadows cast by airships blocked out the sun.

Alice leaned slightly to the side, trying to get a better view of the whole city as her hair fluttered in the wind.

Through her eyes, countless strands of energy converged towards the city.

A dormant barrier and weapons lined on the city walls and on the floating devices that circled the city. A fortress made for defence.

However, contrary to this belief, the upper layer for the nobles were constructed with arrogance and ignorance. They stand at the highest peaks yet at the same time are the most vulnerable.

Ironical considering how they wish to be separated from those of the layers below.

Without the pillars supporting them from below, how can they rest comfortably in their upper layer?

Alice rested her chin on her arms, watching as the sun and clouds were slowly blocked out by the giant top layer.

"This city has not changed at all. If anything, it might even look worse than before." Suyin shrugged.

In her previous visits, the city was always so lively. Colourful banners being flown from every house, the sound of laughter and song. It was no exaggeration to call the entire city a place where geniuses are born.

After all, every house wanted to make it big with an invention of the century. They wanted to prove that amongst all the different houses, they could make a difference.

But now...

"This is just a dead city wearing the shell of Grand Cathia. Disappointing really."

Could she blame them? No, Suyin could not blame them for how things turned out. But she was still disappointed at the end of the day. Disappointed by the fact that they couldn't overcome it.

Upon reaching the city gates, Alice no longer had a smile on her face.

Flanking their sides were several camps. Families camping out by the roadside but it was different to beggar. They weren't begging for anything and some of them actually looked well dressed.

If not begging then...

'Were they rejected from entering?' Alyss wondered as Alice nodded her head.

That was her thought as well.

"Papers and ID please." One of the guards spoke by the front gate.

There were four of them visible but Alice could sense a few more just out of view.

All of them stared at the group with cautiousness

Suyin had it easy. She was invited to the city in the past and all she had to do was produce a token that allowed her to be recognised instantly, even in doll form. Elias had an old license that he had spare.

So did Alice.

But the issue arose with Cayla.

She didn't have ID.

"She's with me. Can't I guarantee that she'll behave?" Suyin asked but the guards looked at one another with a difficult expression.

In the end, one of them shook his head.

"Even if you are an esteemed guest, we can't allow exceptions during these troubled times. If you don't have ID on hand for now, you are more than welcome to camp out here. Should you require a camp, we will provide you with the necessary equipment.

"Food and other equipment will be brought out at the end of the day so you don't need to worry about provisions." He added.

Alice was about to use her first Sigil when Suyin shot her a glance.

There were a myriad of ways to detect Abyssal energy usage. Using her power for a moment of convenience wouldn't be suggested.

"Can you put in a special request because it's me? You see, she's a result of an Abyssal ability. Can't exactly give her an ID can you? I mean, just look at me? I bet you were confused by my appearance until I told you I was who I am.

"And... Even if I had given you an ID, it'll be pretty hard to accept wouldn't it?" Suyin smiled helplessly as the guards let out a slight sigh.

She wasn't wrong. Even if they received an ID for Cayla, seeing a miniature person like that was... strange to say the least.

It wasn't like she was a child either, it's like if a human was shrunk down.

"We can put in a request but with everything that's been happening, I'm not sure if it'll be approved soon. You can see the others who've been waiting out here. The best we can do is provide provisions but the situation doesn't seem like it's going to improve anytime soon."

Suyin folded her arms.

"Nightmare?"

The guard nodded with a helpless smile.

"Nightmare."

"In that case I might be able to help. We have information along with a prototype of a device that might be able to help with some of the side effects."

The soldiers looked at one another.

"I'll pass on the message, can you hang on for a moment?" He asked as Suyin nodded.

While one of the soldiers ran off to pass on the message, the group parked the carriage off to the side for now.

"I'm aware that you can fool human perception, but a machine is different. Things are stressful right now, don't use Sigils just because it seems easy." Suyin warned while Alice was on her knees.

This was a light scolding.

"Sorry..."

"It's fine. I'm not blam- Well... I guess I am in a way. But the people here focus heavily on machinery, even if they have Abyssal powers. So they're sensitive to Sigil users and have safety put in place in case they try something funny." She folded her arms, looking at the giant scarred walls around the city.

Some of the damages are fresh...

"Let's just be patient for now. Since I'm the one who sent in the request along with mentions of a prototype machine, our request should have a slight priority." Suyin sighed.

Just as Alice was about to say something, she noticed an influx of Nightmare energy from one of the tents.

The way it was fluctuating... Whoever it belonged to was planning something.

"Seems like lady luck is on our side. Do you think if I earned some merit by taking out someone preparing to abuse the Nightmare powers, we'll be allowed in faster?" Alice narrowed her eyes while Suyin's hand came down and chopped her on the head.

"Ow!"

"It is not lady luck, it is in fact the winds of misfortune. They'll think that you're friends with the person trying to launch an attack. And if they do, not only will our request be delayed, but it'll also have other complications put in with it." Suyin furrowed her brows.

"Grand Cathia has maintained it's security for now, let them handle this. We don't know if they want help or not so let's not force it."

Calming herself down, Alice sighed and nodded her head.

Resting her chin on the side of the carriage, she glanced at the situation in boredom.

Stepping out of the tent, a woman with a neutral expression stepped out.

There were traces of Nightmare energy being suppressed around her body but Alice only noticed due to Cayla's power.

Normal people on the other hand... she wasn't sure how they'll be able to notice the subtle danger.

But as Suyin said, she'll watch for now.

"Halt. Please go back to your tent. Your request is being processed. Any closer and we'll consider it a violation of the mercy and patience we have given you." The guard warned.

"You keep saying that... How long must I wait?" The woman narrowed her eyes.

"My apologies but times are tough right now. Please go back and rest. We will get to you when the request has been accepted." The guard didn't budge.

Even though he didn't pull out his weapon, Alice could tell he was ready for a fight.

Blue flames erupted from the woman's body as her right eye was ignited. A black blade with the same blue flames appeared in her hand and a strange symbol appeared on her back.

It wasn't the same kind of feeling as the Sigils but the power they hold held some similarities.

Without another word, she lunged at the guard, clearly confident in her abilities.

*BANG!!!

From within the city, golden spikes shot out, piercing her arm and pinned her against the ground.

"ARGH!!!" Letting out a cry, the woman writhed in pain as she grabbed the spike in an attempt to free herself.

But as she took her eyes off the city, she didn't notice the shadow falling from above.

Four more spikes dropped down, pinning the woman's limbs in an uncomfortable position.

She wasn't dead but the wounds were severe.

"That's the second strike. If you proceed with the third, I will take your life." A calm but annoyed voice sounded out as a woman walked out of the city with a glare in her eyes.

Her pink hair was tied up into a ponytail but Alice's eyes lit up as she recognised her face.

Miki Nightingale!

Chapter 932: Miki's Change

A part of Alice wanted to greet Miki but at the same time...

This Miki was very different from the girl she knew. The aura, her gaze, her demeanour, everything had changed.

Gone was the soft spoken yet energetic Miki.

In its place, a cold stern captain was in control.

The woman tried to fight back, she wanted to protest. She couldn't stay out here when it could be dangerous for her.

She opened her mouth, about to say something when she felt Miki's glare.

A chill ran down her spine. If she spoke just now...

That would've been strike three.

Death.

Even if she didn't care, even if she wanted to fight to the bitter end, what is there to fight about?

The moment she shows her hostility it'll become a one sided slaughter.

Gnashing her teeth, she eventually gave up as Miki withdrew her weapon.

"All of you! Listen up!" Miki roared as she stood with her back straight and an unfaltering gaze.

Upon the city walls, several Nightingale family guards lined up.

A clear show of force and power.

Summoning a flag with the Nightingale family crest, Miki slammed it into the ground, causing a mini earthquake as people started to crawl out of their tents.

"We have shown you mercy!" She roared, her voice carrying a deep sense of authority. "We will continue to show you mercy and respect. However!"

She tightened her grip against the flagpole.

"We will not allow Grand Cathia to descend into chaos! We will now allow you to rise above the law because you believe the Nightmare makes you special! Our patience is not permission for your whims!

"Our patience is so that you can be treated as a human! So you will behave with the dignity of one! If you lose yourself to your desires! Lose yourself to the lust known as the Nightmare..."

Veins bulged on her neck as Miki's anger hit its peak.

"I will personally come and put you down like the beast you intend to act as! I will stain these grounds with your blood and make you an example to the others! An example that awakening new powers does not give you rights to do whatever you want! To whomever you want!

"The Nightingale family will act as both the protectors of this peace and the executioners to those who wish to disturb it!"

Taking a deep breath to calm her emotions, Miki swept her gaze across the crowd.

"And if you believe otherwise, I welcome you to challenge me at any time, any point. Simply remember the fact that there will be no mercy. There will be no begging. There will only be one outcome.

"And that outcome..." She trailed off.

"Will simply be another statistic. An extra tally to the list of casualties. You've been warned."

Without saying anything else, Miki dismissed the flag and turned around.

She made eye contact with Alice for a second.

Alice gave her a small wave.

There was a slight hint of surprise in her eyes but she quickly regained her calm as if nothing happened.

Without acknowledging the wave, she made her way back into the city.

"Well would you look at that." Cayla leaned against the carriage while Alice shrugged.

"Not exactly surprising to be fair. We weren't exactly close and the situation is tense."

While she understood the reason, Alice couldn't deny the fact that she felt a little saddened by the disregard.

But setting that aside, even as the Nightingale guards stepped down from the walls, calm gradually returned to the camps.

Even if they were impatient, none of them wanted to test out the bottom line of the Nightingale family.

And as things settled down, Elias stood up.

"What's up?" Alice asked curiously.

They were still waiting for their request to be heard and since it's Suyin, it should be relatively fast.

"Nothing much. Just going to do my job as a healer." Elias shrugged.

The lady earlier was wounded pretty badly after all.

"I'll tag along. Might be able to give some assistance as well." Alice dusted herself and followed after Elias.

As they approached the injured woman's tent, they could hear the sound of groaning from the inside.

Elias gave the tent a light tap.

"Excuse me." He called out.

"What do you want?" She grunted, clearly annoyed as she had just been humiliated earlier but didn't want to be rude either.

Everyone here was in the same situation, denied access to the city.

"You see I happen to be a doctor. The wounds you sustained are pretty rough to heal. I wanted to know if you have any healing blood or alternatives to treat the wounds. If not, I'd like to offer my services." Elias explained himself as the woman hesitated.

"Come in." She sighed.

Nodding his head, Elias pushed open the tent slightly while Alice followed after.

Within the tent, the woman could be seen in the process of treating her wounds.

Scraps of clothing tightened around the wound haphazardly with some basic medical supplies spread out the floor.

"A little heavy handed, but she missed the vitals. Helping you function normally won't be an issue." Elias mumbled as his eyes shifted.

He had activated Diagnosis.

"May I?" He smiled.

"If you want payment, I don't have anything to give you."

"That's fine. Just think of it as charity. I'm sure that if you're willing to go this far despite being alone, there's something you need to do within that city right?" Elias shook his head.

His demeanour was a little surprising for Alice.

Considering his attitude back at the port, she thought he wouldn't care for situations like this. But instead, he was showing more delicacy than before.

"Do as you wish." The woman surrendered, allowing Elias to peel back the bloodied cloth as she winced from the pain but held back her cry.

Despite the wounds, Miki was actually being merciful.

Had the attack been any higher... it would've completely destroyed the shoulder joint, making healing a lot harder and complicated, even with healing blood. Something expensive would be required or a skilled medic.

Elias maintained his smile and activated his Sigils.

"Operation."

A barrier formed, a faint dome appeared around the tent as he sterilised the area, making it safe for surgery. He didn't want anything dirty getting into the wound after all.

The guards noticed the pulse of Abyssal energy as they were sent put on alert. Alice noticed, prepared to de-escalate the situation if needed.

Thankfully, nothing happened as Elias got to work.

To the woman's surprise, the operation didn't hurt as much as she thought it would despite Elias helping her reconnect muscle tissue along with anything else that had been cut apart from the attack.

Alice watched silently from the side.

Elias's focused expression along with his care when it came to treating the wound.

After a short while, his treatment was done.

Fast and painless.

The woman glanced at her arm in surprise.

No pain in the movement.

In fact, it might even feel better than before. No scarring was left either.

Giving her one last scan, Elias nodded in satisfaction and put away his tools and retracted the barrier.

"There should be no problems and you can move as usual." Elias concluded.

"What if I feel lingering pains?" The woman asked, giving her shoulder a stretch.

"Then some healing blood will do. Even cheap ones but I'm sure you know the risks that come with such choices so I recommend a medic."

Turning around, Elias was about to leave when the woman reached out.

"Thank you... May... I have your name?" She asked.

"I'm no one special. Just a wandering medic. Please take care of yourself. As the lady from the Nightingale family has mentioned, these are tough times." Elias shook his head.

Giving her a wave, he left the tent.

"Look at you being professional. Colour me impressed." Alice smiled.

"I'm always professional when it comes to treatment. It's just the situation's we've been in have been particularly abnormal." He sighed.

Had it not been for the Nightmare, he wouldn't have needed to focus on fighting and surviving alone.

If anything, he'd rather spend his time lounging around and experimenting for the cure. Fighting was not on his list of things to do.

"That's fair. Can't exactly be normal when everything around you changes." Alice patted him on the shoulder with a soft laugh.

As they made their way back to the carriage, the group waited for a while.

Long enough for Cayla to have a nap.

There was the option to send her back into the mental scape but...

It would cause the guards more concern if Cayla was to suddenly disappear.

Then, one of the Nightingale Guards approached.

"Apologies for the delay, Miss Bai. It is no excuse for someone as great as you but accepting anomalies is rather... risky for us. There are several safety nets we have to put in place in order to ensure public safety." They explained, providing a temporary ID for Cayla.

One that seemed to track her movements as Alice noticed the strands of energy connected to the card.

"It's fine. Things must be pretty bad if it takes this long even for me." Suyin shrugged.

The guard could only smile helplessly.

He had expected her to be far more difficult than now. Perhaps a bit of screaming paired with some cussing but she was very understanding.

"Yes it is. As for the information you wish to provide, the young miss is waiting inside the city. Please allow me to show you the way." He did a slight bow as Suyin glanced over to Alice before nodding.

"Please."

Following behind the guard, the group entered Grand Cathia at last.

Chapter 933: Meeting Miki Again

As the group entered Grand Cathia, they half expected a lively city but what they saw was the opposite.

Despite the giant sprawling towers, the marbled surfaces and the humming of machines, the group could tell some of the smiles and daily interactions were forced.

Everyone was trying their best to look happy despite being worried about the Nightmare.

A sister trying her best to hide her sobs while she mumbled about her brother.

A father who looked dead in the eyes as he realised his children can no longer return from the nightmare...

Lovers separated.

These were common sights next to people trying their best to survive this chaotic time.

The guard kept his eyes forward. He was guiding the guests deeper to the city but at the same time, he was also patrolling this area.

Several eyes turned towards the group. Hints of anger and caution.

They didn't say anything on the trip to the inner city. What could they say?

If they say too much and seem overly cheerful, it'll earn them ire from the city.

The moment they entered, they had to follow the laws here. And by extension, they understood that they shouldn't disturb the 'peace' that has been established.

Parking the carriage off to the side, the guard led the group into the biggest building of the current layer.

Inside, employees ran around.

Some had Nightingale family crest on their jackets, some had crests belonging to other families. Regardless of their ties, they were all working together.

Closing her eyes, Alice began to eavesdrop as she listened in on their conversations.

Everyone here were talking about the Nightmare, information from their own experiences. Information gained from others and... information gained before they lost their mind.

There were a small handful of leisurely conversations but they were few and far between.

However, there was a common theme across a few of the conversations.

Reinforcing defences.

"Is the city being attacked by beasts?" Suyin spoke up first.

She had also been eavesdropping on the conversations around them.

"Pardon?"

"I hear all this talk about defence but there are still lots of refugees outside isn't there? Are they not afraid of being caught in the crossfire?" Suyin clarified.

The guard scratched his cheek.

"It's... complicated. During the downtime between Nightmares, we are being attacked by man and beast alike. Usually close to nightfall. They're only focused on breaking the wall and strangely avoids killing unless provoked." The guard decided to share this information since it wasn't exactly a piece of rare knowledge.

Everyone who stays in the city for longer than a day would find out.

"Avoiding killings? Even though they're attacking the walls?" Suyin raised an eyebrow.

"Indeed. We don't know why either, they seem to be intent on breaking out defences rather than taking our lives."

"If they're breaking the walls, have any of them tried to break the pillars supporting the upper layer?" Suyin asked.

If the upper layer was to fall...

She frowned at the thought of the casualties should the layer crash down.

"We're not sure. We've been focusing mainly on air defence because of the fear of the upper layer."

"Tsk, so nothing has changed." Suyin clicked her tongue.

While there were a few good ones that live on the upper layer, most of them were... insufferable.

A cultivation pot of the worst traits in humanity.

The guard couldn't help but laugh upon seeing Suyin's disgusted expression.

She shared the same sentiment as most of the people who were here. All of them harboured some degree of dislike towards the upper layer.

But at the same time, they couldn't exactly act out against them.

Not when the branches of their families would no doubt seek vengeance should anything happen.

Thus they can only try their best to keep the city safe.

"Well... I can't say nothing has changed. With the nightmare, people are getting restless about the divide between the layers." The guard sighed, surprising Suyin.

"Are you sure you can say that?"

"Why not? It's a fact that everyone knows. It's why we're put out for patrol. We have the Nightmare taking us out one by one, beasts that seeking to destroy the wall and possibly the pillars.

"And when we're not thinking about threats on the outside, we have the parasites above us looking down like we're dirt even though their survival hinges on our actions. They take everything for granted but we can't do anything about it." He complained, venting his frustrations.

A few of the people who overheard his words nodded in agreement.

Arriving at the elevator, the Guard took the lead and sent them up to the floor where Miki was waiting.

Giving the group a polite salute, he bid farewell as they were now waiting outside of Miki's office.

"Sounds like the people have their work cut out for them." Alice mumbled, walking over to the glass windows.

Looking down, she could see most of the city being shielded by the shadow cast down from above.

She could also see the camps being set up outside the walls. All of these people would be in danger the moment the attackers determine that they wanted blood rather than to take out the wall.

And recalling the people she had seen outside, Alice felt bad for their predicament.

This was a situation where one must ask, are you willing to let unknown variables into the city because you feel bad and risk killing everyone due to bad actors?

Or, will you be cold and cruel. To prioritise the many and ensure that as many of the bad actors are outside of your walls.

If Alice had to make a choice, and it wasn't a trick answer where she'll use her strength to resolve everything, then she'll pick option two.

She'll abandon those outside the walls and ensure the peace and order she has established.

However, this'll change if any of her close ones are on the outside.

Then she'll risk it and take action should any bad actors appear.

"Sorry for the wait miss Bai, please come on in." Miki opened the door.

Despite Suyin's size, she didn't show a hint of surprise in her face nor eyes. If anything, there was only respect for the genius as Miki gestured for people to enter her office.

Alice was about to say something when she decided against it.

If... Miki wasn't acknowledging her then perhaps they weren't as close as she thought they were.

With a light shrug, Alice entered after Suyin while Elias entered after Alice.

Making themselves comfortable on the sofa, they turned to Miki who leaned against her desk.

"As you can see, Miss Bai, the city is not in a good shape. I'm not sure why someone of your standing has decided to visit but glad I am to hear that you have a method of solving some of the Nightmare side effects and information." Miki spoke first.

Despite having a casual tone, her expression was that of seriousness.

"Visiting wasn't my original intention you know? I was relaxing in my home when I got a message from a dear friend. So I decided to surprise her with this body and got pulled into this whirlpool of chaos known as the Nightmare." Suyin shrugged with a laugh before her smile faded.

"We have some ideas on what the Zenia is planning to do but we can't make major moves until we resolve the danger of the Nightmare. I have some notes and readings on what happens to the body when the Nightmare occurs.

"We also discovered that leaving the border of Extalia, where the Nightmare is in effect, will temporarily erase all knowledge on the subject matter and replace it with something else." She placed a stack of notes on the table as Miki walked over and picked it up.

"The researchers in Grand Cathia have noticed the second point. It's why we're bunkering down in this city. Naturally, we've tried other methods of communication to the outside world but channels are abnormal.

"Even if we pass the information to someone trusted, the world still passes in ignorance. I wouldn't be surprised if the Zenia family has a control over what information is passed out into the world." Miki flipped through the pages before pushing a button on her desk.

Soon, an assistant stepped through as she handed the sheet over to him.

"Pass it over to the research department. Have them examine the notes and see if we can do anything with this."

Ideally, they can help those who have died too much in the nightmare return to their bodies but... the chances weren't high.

Despite that, it wasn't going to stop them from at least trying. That's the least she could do after their sacrifice for the greater good.

"Hou~ Funny you say that. The Underground had a Zenia spy that Alice met when trying to gather information. We don't know how much of the Underground has been compromised already." Suyin gestured to Alice with her chin.

Miki folded her arms.

"The Underground is currently struggling with an internal battle. There was originally a sanction placed on the Zenia family for unknown reasons, stopping them from using the service whatsoever.

"But with the emergence of the Nightmare and a display of power never before seen, the faction has gone into survival mode. One side is against the Zenia family while the other seemed to be in favour of allying themselves with them. If you intent to use the services of the Underground, careful not to expose yourselves too much." Miki explained.

"Ohya? You seem to know a lot. Do you happen to have a pair of eyes and ears inside the group?" Suyin narrowed her gaze.

The Underground has always kept itself a neutral source of information. Any form of discourse within the group is heavily hidden unless you were directly involved.

So if Miki knew what was going on...

"My father happens to have ties with the group. It's a battle of information and espionage right now. So everything you learn from them should be taken with a grain of salt." Miki explained off handedly, not wanting to dive deeper into the subject matter.

For a split moment, there was a hint of pain in her eyes.

However...

Alice realised something.

If Miki's father had a connection with the Underground then...

There was a chance that Miki knew she came from the Zenia family.

Chapter 934: Information On Alice

With that realisation in her mind, the sofa Alice was sitting on suddenly became uncomfortable as she couldn't sit still.

'Why the guilt? It's not like you were the one carrying out the atrocities.' Alyss yawned while lounging around on her sofa.

'Maybe not, but I'm still connected to the Zenia family. To outsiders, that differentiation might not matter.'

Raising her eyebrow, Alyss shrugged.

If it was her, she wouldn't care. So what if she's treated coldly, it's not like she was condoning what the Zenias were doing. Her conscience was clear.

She wouldn't let their actions bother her. But of course, should they get in her way, then she'll have to make moves of her own.

However, Alice still felt bad since even if she wasn't connected, it was still the family they came from. Not to mention...

Some of these accidents occurred due to their research of her blood or an attempt to recreate it.

She was involved by extension.

Then there was also the change of personality within Miki. Unless something... drastic happened, this wouldn't have occurred. So to her, Alice may as well be another enemy.

Alyss was silent. In a sense, it's similar to their resolve in taking out the Zenia family. Even if innocents who don't know anything are in the family.

"We will be providing accommodations for you to rest in. Do you have any requests on where you want to be?" Miki asked while Suyin leaned back and pointed upwards.

"So long as you don't put us with the sh*tters up top, I'll be happy. If I have to live with them, I'd rather be homeless."

Miki held back a laugh.

"Of course. During your stay here Miss Bai, please let me know if there are any other requests that you may have. We will do our best to meet your expectations." She smiled.

There was another goal to her words. Well...

Rather than a goal, it was more hope than anything.

She hoped that during Suyin's stay in this city, should anything go wrong, she'll be able to help them out with the defence of the wall.

A silent exchange of favours and naturally, Suyin picked up on this.

Even if she wasn't planning on helping, she knew that Alice would.

Therefore, why not get some extra benefit out of it?

"Speaking of requests, do you think you can arrange for a lab? You see, my friend here is a Doctor. He's been making do with the equipment he has on hand for a while now. But if he was to get a space where he can work, he'll be able to create medicine." Suyin asked, causing Elias to blink his eyes in surprise.

"A lab... We can do that. But... our medical equipment is rather outdated. We are primarily a city that deals with machines rather than medicine after all." Miki smiled helplessly.

"It's fine. Just having some basic equipment in a lab is sufficient." Elias waved his hand hurriedly.

He felt a little bad for taking advantage of Miki's words but Suyin didn't care.

This was simply payment for the work they'll be doing later.

Equivalent exchange.

"In that case, I'll have someone guide you to the lab once you have settled down in your accommodation. I'll make sure the distance between the two isn't too far." Miki nodded.

"Is there anything else you desire? Please, don't hold back."

"Those are fighting words. But~ I'm not a bully. How much metal can Grand Cathia spare?" Suyin waved her hand.

Upon the mention of metal, Miki's smile faltered a little.

This request was a little difficult.

"I can put in a request but it'll be tough. We need as much as we can get for our weapons and defences. Trying to get shipments of metal from other places have been... impossible.

"We're making do with everything we can procure ourselves but there is a limit."

"I can imagine. But this is the main request since I'll need to make some new weapons. You see, there's been some... invisible monsters coming from the Nightmare. Monsters that my current equipment can't deal with since their durability is off the charts."

Reaching into her vault, Suyin pulled out a projector.

She had the raw data on hand from Alice's fight with the Invisible beasts. All she needed to do was plug in the data and the fight will recreate itself.

While Miki was watching the simulation of the fight, her expression turned grave.

The first thing she noted was Alice's strength. Her figure flickered through the battlefield in raw bursts of speed that far surpassed anything she revealed back at the academy.

The impact of each punch, the turbulent flow of energy within her body. The sheer volume...

If Alice back at the academy could be called a monster... then what was this?

A single punch from Alice would be enough to shatter their defences, never mind a full scale barrage.

And with that in mind, Miki couldn't help but be wary about Alice.

Next was the durability of the invisible beasts. Their defences allowed them to withstand multiple strikes of that calibre.

Had their enemy employed these beasts in their offence... Grand Cathia would've long fallen.

"Can I request the raw data for the beasts only? I'm sure if I had that on hand, requesting metal for your use would be allowed. Though... it'll probably come at a cost." Miki asked as Suyin nodded.

"Of course. Knowing those old sack of bones, the cost will probably be to reinforce the weapons around the city right? I'll do what I can but I need to figure out how to properly pierce the defence first."

The priority was to get her hands on enough metal first. Without the raw materials, no matter how strong the weapon blueprints in her mind were, she'll never be able to make use of it.

Meanwhile, Miki let out a sigh of relief.

Since Suyin knew what the council wanted, it certainly made things easier for her.

"That's all my requests for now. I'll let you know if anything else pops up okay?" Suyin smiled as she turned to leave.

Just as Alice was about to follow, Suyin gave her a glance.

"You probably want to talk right? Go for it, I'll wait outside with Elias."

The two knew each other so there were probably things they want to talk about without anyone else in the room.

Unfortunately, it was a slight misunderstanding.

It wasn't that they had things to talk about, but rather they didn't have anything to talk about!

Alice's smile twitched as she was left on her own with Miki.

"H-hey... It's been a while." She forced a smile while turning to Miki.

'And the most award greeting of the year goes to... Alice! A round of applause please~ Pachi pachi pachi pachi~' Alyss joked while clapping her hands, causing Alice to burn up in embarrassment.

"It has indeed been a while Alice. Last we met, it was during the second Inverted World accident. The academy closed for a while too since the Principal became a Lord." Miki nodded her head.

An awkward silence stretched on between them.

Unable to take it, Alice let out a frustrated sigh and threw herself on the sofa.

With a serious expression, she turned to Miki.

"How much do you know?"

Miki narrowed her eyes.

"Depends. I know a lot of things in this city."

"With your connection to the Underground, I'm sure you know what I'm asking. Let's not play around right now."

A slight pause.

Finally, Miki opened her mouth.

"Alice Zenia, later renamed to Alice Agnelia after being taken in by the benefactor of the Underground, Allura Agnelia.

"Daughter of the Zenia family, hidden away from public eyes since her 10th birthday. Recently reappeared and since her reappearance, the Zenia family had begun to make moves they never would've before.

"Weapons, strange mutations and even human experimentation. Your movements have been well documented, even with your ability of disguise.

"You assisted the North with overcoming the attack the Zenia family launched on the capital and helped with the creation of a new type of soldier for Queen Verona. Berserkers who fight without care.

"After a close call with the man known as the Doctor, you made your way to the port and prepared for a journey to the east. During this time, Outer Gods started to make a move.

"It was in the east where they launched an offensive and you were dragged into it. There, you met Bai Suyin, genius of the east and even caused chaos with the different sects.

"And now, you're here in Extalia. You have been designated as a trigger for the Zenia family. Where you go, danger follows. It can be a coincidence or even a direct result of your investigations towards your previous family.

"You are a dangerous individual. Contact should be carefully considered." Miki narrowed her eyes as Alice furrowed her brows.

She did not expect how much information the Underground had on her. It was staggering and almost traced her entire journey.

But this was simply what Miki was telling her. What about the information she wasn't sharing?

How much of her journey was exposed?

Alice couldn't help but feel as though several eyes were now on her. She knew this was simply a hallucination of her own creation but she was on guard.

"Now that you know, what do you plan to do? Why are you here?" Miki narrowed her eyes.

Alice leaned back for a moment.

There were several things she could say but...

There had only ever been one goal.

"I'm here to wipe out the Zenia family."

Chapter 935: Hero/Saviour

"I'm here to wipe out the Zenia family." Alice admitted.

Why else would she be in Extalia? If the Zenia family hadn't bunkered down in this nation, she wouldn't even care.

Hell, she would probably avoid it like a plague considering her bad memories. She'd rather not interact with anything that has a connection to the Zenia family if possible.

And yet she was here because she had a job to do.

"If it was just for the Zenia family, your previous journeys doesn't make sense. Attaining power could've been done in the Abyss without much risk compared to the North or the East." Miki wasn't convinced while Alice rolled her eyes.

"Damn girl, can't a cutie get distracted every now and then? Can't control the fact that I got spat out the Inverted World into the North. Since it was in danger I helped out. I went East to look for a few things and now I'm here."

"Whimsical or not, there's always a certain goal to your actions. Something bigger than just the Nightmare." Miki continued to push as Alice was starting to get annoyed by this questioning.

Snapping her finger, Alice teleported a chair in front of Miki then teleported herself onto it.

Staring at Miki dead in the eyes, Alice made her annoyance clear.

"What are you trying to say?"

"Simply gathering information. The Nightmare is simply a coincidental cover up for what you're truly after. And... Whatever that was, it probably caused the North to be destroyed." Miki countered, tapping her fingers on the desk.

"I'd rather not have that kind of danger looming over this city. So whatever you're after in this city, you better tell me."

Alice narrowed her eyes. This commanding tone... this demand. Had she asked nicely, Alice wouldn't have minded telling her a little.

But now...

"You know, you were a lot more fun before." Alice clicked her tongue in annoyance.

"Fun has now place here." Miki stopped her tapping.

"You have no idea what I've had to go through to get to where I am today. What I've seen. You don't know the feeling of being truly weak and out of options. The sacrifices that everyone in this city has had to make. There is no leeway for fun.

"My responsibility is to ensure the survival of as many people as possible in this city. And if accommodating you will cause its destruction like the North, I'll have to ask you to leave." Miki glared, gesturing to the door.

"And if danger beyond what you're capable of handling comes along? What if we're not here to hel-"

"And that's the root of it." Miki cut her off.

Alice paused.

"You assume you're needed to handle this danger. That we're just waiting for someone to save us, or that we can't manage our own tragedy without a hero, you, swooping in to save the day."

"That's not-"

"Savior complex, hero complex. Call it whatever. You're not the answer to every problem we have." Miki cut her off again as a vein bulged on Alice's neck.

She won't deny it. In some corner of her heart, she thought things were like that.

She has the power so she has a responsibility to 'clean things up'. To deal with the danger that Nyer brought into this world.

But Miki didn't want that.

Even if the city is facing something beyond their capabilities, she didn't want the extra variable that Alice brought.

Alice didn't know how to respond.

Lash out? Call her foolish?

How can she help someone who doesn't want to be helped?

Why did she accept Suyin's help but not hers? What's the difference between them?

'I'm taking over.' Alyss cut in, surprising Alice as golden chains snapped around the limbs.

Miki watched as Alice's aura shift. The change in her gaze.

"She might not be the answer to every problem you have but she's an answer that f*cken showed up. She doesn't know what you've seen, what you've heard or what you've experienced. But you don't know what she had to go through either." Alyss stood up, slamming her foot against the table in an aggressive manner.

"The North she helped. If she didn't, it could've been a lot worse than what it is now. The first invasion with the Zenias. If she wasn't there, there will be countless who are bedridden due to side effects. The destruction that happened after might've occurred even without Alice being there.

"The East? She helped drive off the Eclipse. She fought against the Outer Gods that tried to consume and corrupt everything and everyone. Her presence allowed Suyin to harness the power of Eldritch energy and even counter it to some degree.

"She has a saviour complex? A hero complex? Maybe. But that's because she has the power to help. She has the power to make things better. Would you rather her sit by and watch as this city burns to the ground even though she has the power to help?

"Why? Just because you guys never asked for it? Would you be happier watching the people around you burn and die when something could've been done?"

*BANG!!!

Miki slammed her fist into the desk.

"And what happens when you drown people in hope? When they forget how to solve issues on their own? When something can be done but they don't do it since they're waiting for someone to come save them?

"What happens to a city when a hero has left and doesn't look back?" Miki retorted.

"When every single expectation is thrown onto the back of one person, what about the burden they feel? The stress of carrying on their hope? When the people they're trying to save become lazy?

"When the hero fails, they're blamed for the mistakes. For letting everyone down. This hope that heroes give to people is a cancer. How many heroes can remain positive after being berated, blamed and punished for a single mistake? After keeping the peace time and time again?"

"And when that happens, when the hero snaps. They cause destruction far greater than any danger that would've befallen us. Tell me this Alice. After you avert whatever destruction is coming our way, after you save the world.

"What is your choice when the whole world turns its back against you? When they kill the ones you love, when they torture the ones you care about. When the people you bled your own blood to protect destroys everything you hold dear. Can you still protect them?

"Can you say you wouldn't regret saving them?" Miki asked.

Alyss was silent.

Her answer was clear.

She's not a good person. She's selfish. She would indeed cause them destruction a hundred times greater than the pain she'll feel in her chest. A futile attempt to fill the void they ripped open.

But Alice... She probably never thought about this.

What happens when the people she save kill others or more importantly, kill the one she loves.

What happens then?

Alyss looked inward and saw Alice staring at the ground.

Her pupils trembling at the thought.

Alyss gritted her teeth, she wanted to counter but she saw pity in Miki's eyes. It was brief but Alyss wasn't mistaken.

Miki was feeling pity for Alice.

But that pity was short lived before it was replaced by a stern gaze.

"Already, we are protecting parasites that sit upon the sacrifices of others. The upper layer who do nothing to defend the city yet berate, scream and cry whenever an accident happens. Before you think about whether or not you can help this place. You should sort out your own thoughts.

"Don't come pushing your ideals onto me, onto this city."

Alice turned around, taking control of her own body once more.

"And if you fail? If you cannot defend the walls that protect this place. Would you call out for help? For God? When it all comes crumbling down?"

Miki turned around and looked out at the city.

"Then all I can do is blame myself. Blame myself for not trying harder, for not finding a better way out of the situation. I don't want a hero or a god to swoop in to save us. To make us lazy. Because once they do that, they become the outlet for our frustrations.

"They become the excuse we give when we don't put in the effort. It may seem foolish for someone with power like you. That I'm willing to doom the people in this city over this selfish ideal.

"Hypocritical considering what I had said earlier. But I stand by my point and I will die by it. I don't want Heroes or gods to become our excuse. Because after a certain point, they will become our worst nightmare."

Pausing for a moment, Miki revealed a bitter smile.

"People are flawed. We're not ready for icons such as heroes or gods. We never are."

"And if tomorrow comes, the city is in danger, you would still refuse my help? Even as the people you are protecting call out for salvation?" Alice asked.

Miki didn't answer immediately.

She took a deep breath.

"Yes. The future of this city should be created by the hands of man. Our fate should be ours to pave, not on the blood of heroes or gods. They are icons of worship, an ideal. But they should never become slaves to our weakness.

"Once they do, people become arrogant. They forget where they walk and soar to the skies. And once they do, they'll plunge to the ground and die a horrific death.

"My father told me a story once and a line stuck with me." Miki smiled.

"No more shall man have wings to bear him to paradise.

"Henceforth, he shall walk."

Chapter 936: Why Do You Save People?

Stepping out of the room, Alice shut the door behind her with a slightly annoyed expression on her face.

"Doesn't that just look like the definition of optimism." Suyin commented while sitting on Elias's shoulder.

After all, with her current size, looking up at everyone from below would be rather annoying to do.

"I'm guessing the talk didn't go very well?" Elias followed behind Alice who shrugged her shoulders.

"We talked. She knows more than I expected but she's not who I thought she was." Alice frowned.

She could somewhat see where Miki was coming from.

But a part of it was still baffling her.

Create your own future? Pave your own fate?

Yes, it sounds good in theory. Romantic even.

But in Alice's eyes, it was also stupid to an unbelievable degree.

You can only chase a future if you're alive to do it. How do you reach for tomorrow while something far beyond you is trying to kill you today?

Even if they don't want to be governed by a hero or god, shouldn't they be happy that disaster was averted?

Alice didn't understand it.

She understood the words but not why it was prioritized in such a manner.

She couldn't imagine herself making the same choice.

To her, survival was the priority. Only when you are alive can opportunity manifest itself. Only when you are alive, can you hope for a better outcome later down the line.

She made the mistake of giving up before. She tried to end it all in that pristine prison the Zenia's trapped her in.

If she had succeeded in her attempts, she wouldn't never met Kaden.

Never met Allura.

Ria.

Her friends.

She would've never seen the rest of the world, seen how people struggle every day yet live with a smile.

There is stupidity everywhere, but she has also seen what she considered as beautiful.

And that's coming from someone who spent their more than half their life in the prison.

Hell, she was born the moment Nyer injected Alyss with the needle.

So if anything, she spent 90% of her life there.

Yet in the year she was out in the world, she had learned to appreciate the act of survival and the opportunities that life offers.

The countless stories belonging to different people intertwining to create a moment between them.

So why can Miki casually doom the people she's trying to protect over... idealistic ideologies such as not wanting help from the strong?

"Oh? What do you mean?" Elias asked curiously since it was rare for Alice to show this kind of displeasure in just day to day interactions.

"She doesn't want any help. She doesn't want Heroes of Gods to appear in her city. She just want the people here to defend against whatever is approaching, even if it'll cause their death.

"When hell rains down, she doesn't want a hero to save them when they call out for help." Alice spat out with a click of her tongue.

"Ah~ So she's that kind of person. Pftahaha, I see why you're angry now. She's like the complete opposite to what you believe in." Suyin couldn't help but chuckle, crossing her legs in amusement.

Cayla had the same impression.

Miki's perspective was... Idealistic. Romantic and in a sense, realistic. Not everyone get's the opportunity to receive help from a hero.

How many villages, towns, cities are destroyed without ever knowing salvation?

You can't expect a hero to save everything when so much happens across the world.

Therefore, Miki's impression is to allow her people to fight on their own. Fight using their own powers, rise up to the challenge and pave their way to tomorrow.

Understandable.

But Alice on the other hand...

She was like the walking embodiment of the possibilities that open up to humans.

Alice doesn't quite fit into the description of power, hope or heroism. She doesn't operate like that.

She is someone who will continuously strive for the infinite possibilities.

Ironically, Alice is also probably the perfect embodiment of what Miki desires.

The part where they differ however...

Is that Alice succeeded and she failed.

Alice is someone who relies on her own power, to pave her own future and doesn't want to rely on heroes or gods to save her.

She'll save herself.

Everything that Miki wanted.

Had they met in different circumstances and discussed their ideas, they might've understood each other better.

But Miki is like the ugly reflection Alice couldn't handle seeing.

What if her attempts at rising above her fate failed? What if she lacked the power to make significant changes?

What if everything she believed in came crumbling down and she started clutching at the straws?

That's what Miki looked like to Alice.

And that part terrified her.

Cayla could see it.

After spending so much time with Alice, understanding how she operates, what she's willing to do and what she seeks from others, Miki is a brutal wake up.

A wake up to the reality of her actions and what could've occurred.

"Opposite of me huh?" Alice mumbled, thinking about Suyin's words.

Pausing in her steps, she turned to the group.

"What if you saved a bunch of people. You helped them survive another day but they weren't grateful. You keep making sure they're safe but when one of them die by accident, they all blame you and curse you.

"They start breaking apart the things you hold dear. Looking back, would you still save them?" Alice asked as Elias folded his arms.

"As a doctor, I've come across this dilemma quite a few times you know." He smiled bitterly.

"It's always a question of who I'm trying to save. Should I let them die when I have the power to help? There was a point where I tried weighing lives on a scale.

"There are two villages. Both are suffering from an outbreak. One village has 200 people. The other has 100. Which do I try to save first?" Elias smiled helplessly.

"And naturally, I chose the village with 200 people. The other 100 died.

"Then, within the 200 I saved, 150 left before the treatment was finished. The other 50 I'm still operating on. I have to make another choice. 150 vs 50. Again, I chose the majority.

"And finally, it became 100 vs 50. But at this point, can you see the issue?" Elias asked as Alice opened her mouth before pausing.

"Of the original 300, I now let 200 die while prioritising the majority. A mistake right? I was blamed for that incident. For letting so many die." He laughed.

"They cursed, they blamed. They set my house aflame. A part of me indeed regretted making the choices I did. Had I chosen the minority, perhaps I would've gained more appreciation for picking them over the majority.

"But then you have to ask yourself the question." He stared at Alice in the eyes with a serious expression.

"Did you try to save them originally because you wanted to be praised? Because you wanted to be a hero? Or...

"Did you save them because you wanted to do something to help the world?"

Alice opened her mouth but said nothing.

She looked down at her own hands.

She didn't want praise from the world. She didn't want to be known as a hero.

She... Does the things she does because she hated having others make the choice for her. She wanted freedom, she wanted her own autonomy. She wanted...

Recognition from Kaden, from Allura. To get validation from people she considered to be family. To act in a manner that wouldn't let down their hopes and expectations.

Alice smiled.

Allura wouldn't care about how she is viewed. Even if she protects the world from the shadows, so long as her heart is clear, she is content.

Kaden would laugh in the face of their curses. He cares not for what the world has to offer so long as the people he set out to protect are safe.

Rather than worrying about what if they failed, they spend their time finding solutions to the problems at hand.

So if she was to think about Elias's question, why did she want to save people?

"Why do I save people?" Alice mumbled before looking at the group with clear eyes.

"Isn't it obvious? Because I can. Because it bothers me when I don't. Because I hate it when I stand still and watch as someone else decides on how things should end.

"Kaden once pulled me out from hell. That feeling of liberation was the best feeling I have ever felt. So if I can give that to others, I would gladly put myself on the frontline for them. Even if they're not grateful.

"Plus, I don't do anything, how can I see what else this world has to offer? Humans write the story of this planet. Saving a bunch of them simply means keeping the story alive. So really...

"You can also say I save people because I want to give them a chance at changing things on their own." Alice grinned.

Elias smiled and nodded.

"A perfect Alice like answer." Suyin clapped her hands lightly.

"Plus, praise from people is useless anyways." She shrugged her shoulders.

"You can't eat it, you can't sell it. You sure as hell can't rely on it when the world collapses around you. If they have time for praise, I'd rather them act as my guinea pigs for the experiment."

"Don't bother yourself with the opinions of others. Just walk without regret." Suyin smiled.

"Now then..." Alice clapped her hands together.

"How about we explore the food this city has to offer?"

"For real? Mead again?" Cayla rolled her eyes.

"Why not?! It's the perfect moment no?"

Joking with each other, the group left the building.

Chapter 937: Defence Of The City

". . ."

Miki was silent while standing by the window.

She looked out at the horizon, at the skies above before back down towards the earth.

At Alice and the group leaving the building.

It wasn't hard to spot them, not when they're this obvious in a crowd.

Two dolls no taller than knee height, a well dressed gentleman and finally, a split haired girl with mismatched eyes.

During the Academy days, Alice had made a slight effort to conceal one of her eyes by swiping her bangs off to the side. Now she wasn't hiding it anymore.

She didn't care if people spotted her or took notice of her.

She simply did what she wanted.

"How nice..." Miki muttered.

It wasn't hard to hear what Alice was talking outside the room.

She has this role due to her strength after all. Her senses are better than most.

It's clear that her questions and answer had annoyed Alice, thus causing her to confide in her allies.

"Saving people because you can... Because it bothers you when you don't... Ha..." Letting out a hollow laugh, Miki took a deep breath and sighed out.

Sitting down on her seat, she leaned back. Fatigue hitting her mind as she just wanted to close her eyes and sleep.

But their enemies don't care.

They don't care if they're not in their best conditions. They simply attack as their instincts dictate.

"Dad..." She mumbled, clenching her fist before resigning herself.

*Knock knock

"Come in." Miki straightened herself up.

Gone were the doubts in her expression, her fears. In their place was the stern expression of a captain leading the defence of this city.

"Ma'am, here are the latest reports." Her assistant placed three documents on the table.

First was a finalised report on the casualties and damages of the Nightmare from last night.

A few soldiers were lost during the exploration, their minds couldn't handle the toll anymore and they've been reduced to puppets. They were discovered promptly and... Dealt with according to protocol.

They couldn't allow these puppets to roam the streets after all.

"Same as always. Next invasion, apologise to the families involved. Give them compensation and make sure they are safe." Miki flicked through the report.

If it was before, she might've shown more of a reaction.

Profiles on people she was familiar with.

A new recruit who made sure the snack table was always ready. To make sure the coffee was warm.

A greeting every morning when he sees people.

Yet he was now on the report of casualties.

Next was a veteran. Always putting himself in front of others. A man with a hearty laugh and an appetite that can shock anyone.

No more laughs, he was also gone.

Her fingers tightened around the report. She had to keep reading, to understand who died and what they did. That way, she can find a new replacement as soon as possible.

Grabbing a sheet from her desk, Miki began to note down a few shifts in deployment. New positions that have opened up were rapidly filled out.

The assistant was impressed as always. Despite how many people they have, Miki made sure she was familiar with everyone's skillset and any talents they show potential in.

And when the time comes, she can quickly rearrange their men in the most effective way possible.

A task that can only be accomplished if she pays attention to as many people as possible.

"Have them carry out these orders. Bring them up to date. Fan, Welt and Vik might struggle a little. They haven't had enough time to realise their potential yet. Morgan tutors Fan, Gerald tutors Welt and Collin for Vik." Miki ordered as the assistant nodded his head and picked up the adjustments to the report.

The second was a report on their weapons, defences, ammunition and equipment.

Not enough weapons, defences were slow in repairs. Ammunition production isn't meeting the demand. Equipment for Hunters were lacking.

Miki held back a curse as she massaged her temples.

Weapons for the average soldier couldn't be helped. Their blacksmiths were already trying their best. Defences that needed repairing... Speeding this up would require allocating materials from elsewhere.

Ammunition was the same situation. Increasing production here would only slow down their blacksmiths who are busy forging weapons.

As for the equipment...

This was the most annoying.

These were the artifacts that their strong fighters needed in order to fight effectively.

And unfortunately... their only suppliers are those that live above. They had a monopoly on the artifacts and equipment.

Miki has already opened the Nightingale family vault and distributed as much as she could. But compared to some of the other families here, their purchasing power was significantly lower.

"We sent a request for their assistance last time didn't we? Have they answered that request yet?" Miki asked.

"That... No, they have not answered."

Hearing this, a vein bulged on Miki's neck.

Of course they didn't answer. Why would they?

Sure they were low on equipment, but the city was still standing was it not? They were fighting against their enemies but they're holding out thus far.

The situation was dire but they can still live in luxury. That's all that matters to them.

Unfortunately, Miki couldn't do anything about it.

What can they even do? Rebel? Take them down? Impossible.

The moment they try, the people above would sooner destroy everything than help. Many would flee while destroying the vaults containing all the weaponry.

Not to mention...

Those above have their own guards. Guards focused on keeping them safe rather than keeping the city safe.

No amount of convincing will be able to convert the selfish b*stards living above.

Miki exhaled slowly through her nose, swallowing her irritation.

"Send another request. Urgently. Even if it's just an extra artifact, anything would do. Give them... 3 hours to respond. If they don't, arrange a meeting for me. I'll have to talk to them personally."

"Understood. But..."

"Don't worry, I'm not going to argue with them. I know their temper well enough. They just want to see me grovelling for some equipment and transfer some authority over to them." Miki shook her head.

"But Captain-"

"Enough. You know as well as I do that sending others wouldn't work. What they want is to humiliate me. Don't let it get to you. Our priority is not maintaining pride but keeping the city safe. So what if I have to grovel." Miki dismissed with a wave of her hand.

If her father was still around, things wouldn't have gotten to this stage. But...

Shaking her head, Miki cleared her mind and looked at the third and last report.

"Just arrived from outer watch. The scale is... twice as big as before."

Hearing this, Miki felt her heart freeze but calmed herself.

She skimmed the report.

A comparison of the energy between the previous invasions and the current one that will happen soon.
A rapid increase over the course of a few hours.

Not only that, but the affected area has also increased. They won't be sustaining attacks from just one area but all around.

'We'll have to thin out our defences a little... No, that's being too greedy. We have to allocate the men based on the concentration of enemies. The east wall might fall...' Miki creased her brows.

"How long till arrival?" Miki looked up and asked.

"They're not sure yet. The growth shows no sign of stopping so we can't predict when the invasion will happen. But the current estimation is roughly half a day."

Miki's pupil trembled.

With this kind of growth... what kind of army are they planning to amass in half a day's time?

Gritting her teeth, Miki continued to read the report before placing it back down on the table.

She closed her eyes, simulating the kind of defence they'll need to do in order to keep as many people safe as possible.

"Assign someone to look for Bai Suyin. Ask her nicely if she can make some progress on reinforcing our defences and walls for now. Tell her we have roughly 10 hours as a conservative guess. We need anti siege weapons rather than individual weapons and ammunition.

"Inform the blacksmiths to put a priority on whatever parts or materials that Bai Suyin will need. If a request comes in, drop all projects." Miki ordered.

"And the materials?"

"Give her whatever she wants. If she needs personnel to help her speed up the work, let me know as soon as possible."

Hearing this, the assistant blinked his eyes in surprise.

If they were to do that...

"I'll handle the fallout so don't worry about it. Also have Regi reinforce the western wall. Most of the enemies are gathering in the west so the wall needs to be extra sturdy."

Opening his mouth a few times, the assistant couldn't say anything and simply let out a sigh before nodding.

"Understood. I'll let everyone know of the order immediately. What about evacuation?"

"Level 5 red alert. And... Tch, let the ones above know as well. Make sure they're aware that using their airships would only put them in danger." Miki clicked her tongue.

"Even with half a day to do? I don't think they'll be convinced."

"If they want to die then so be it. Can't stop them when they'll just use their guards to fight me." Miki shook her head.

She couldn't waste her energy dealing with the ones above when she has to focus on the defence of the city.

There were also a few variables at play this time...

Alice.

Miki can only hope that her fears won't come to pass.

Chapter 938: First Time

Alice held the mug in front of her.

Rather, held was a crude word. It was more so 'cradling' the mug as though it was something fragile and could break at any moment.

Her fingers traced the handle, then the lip of the mug. She studied it deeply for it is the chalice that holds her drink.

She didn't indulge herself in the drink. It is not yet time.

She simply observed.

The mead itself was of a deep amber gold in colour. Reflections of the mid day sun from the tavern window flickered off its waves, scattering the light against the edge of the mug and into Alice's eyes.

She tilted the mug a few times, watching as the mead swirled, rising against the wall of the mug before sliding back down.

Alice narrowed her eyes with a smile on her face.

She brought the mug up to her nose.

The scent of the mead rose steadily.

Sweet.

But it wasn't a simple sweetness no. There were layers to this scent. First it was the scent of honey that then blended into something floral, soft.

Then, beneath that floral scent came the faint sharpness of alcohol paired with an earthy scent. The scent of aged wood.

Alice inhaled again.

And again.

Again.

Across the table, Suyin stared at Alice with a pair of dead fish eyes. Yes she's seen this once before but seeing it again...

She couldn't get used to it.

Cayla didn't care.

She's seen Alice act weirder about Mead than this so she wasn't even remotely fazed while Elias was in shock.

"Are you going to drink it or are you going to act like a pervert towards it." Suyin asked, resting her chin on her palm while her comment almost made Elias spit out his own drink.

"You have to be gentle with mead every time you try it. The 'first time' can't be forgotten after all. It's a precious memory that'll stick with me if the mead is good. Only after the first can you start ravaging the mead and get lost in its intoxication." Alice blushed with a smile on her face.

Suyin's smile twitched.

"Don't worry, she's describing mead and not something else. As if she'll have that kind of experience when she didn't even know what the aphrodisiac was." Cayla yawned while tapping her finger against the table.

She was currently spreading her senses and linking herself with the Abyss energy to get a feel for the land.

Elias coughed awkwardly.

"Erm... Alice, it's just alcohol is it not?" Elias scratched his cheek.

Alice set her mug down gently and looked at Elias with seriousness.

"I'm aware. It's why I'm taking this seriously. I can't squander the opportunity to fully immerse myself and enjoy my first time with this mead. I must savour it and burn it into my memory, for this first time won't come ever again."

"Right..."

Picking up her mug once more, Alice brought it up to her nose one last time as she prepared to take her first sip.

The first taste of heaven.

Just as the mead touched her tongue however...

The first note of an alarm came like a blade.

Piercing, loud, disruptive.

In her peaceful state, in her moment of focus, the alarm stabbed her in the back, bringing her out of her moment.

The jolt of her body, the sudden exhale caused the mead to splash back at her face as she sat in silence.

The alarm continued, a wail that resonated through the tavern and across the city.

Every patron in the tavern turned pale for they knew what this alarm meant and they began to make their way out of the tavern in an orderly fashion.

Meanwhile, Alice sat at the table without moving. Veins bulged on the back of her hand as she tried her best not to crush the mug in her grasp.

She tried to take another sip but with the footsteps around her, the mead bounced back and forth, disrupting her first taste.

'She's pissed.'

All of them thought upon seeing Alice in silence.

She was just talking about how her first time wouldn't be forgotten and yet the alarm had disrupted just that.

Now, whenever she thinks back to this mead, it'll be followed up by the piercing wail.

A ruined experience.

Placing her cup down with a silent, seething rage, Alice stood up.

"I'm guessing you want to take revenge on the thing that ruined your first time?" Suyin smirked while Alice took a deep breath.

"Of course I do. Do they even know how precious a first time is??? Sh*t!" Alice cursed while Cayla shook her head and shrugged her shoulders.

Snapping her fingers, she entered Alice's mental scape once more.

"The alarm that interrupted you is this city's red alert. There are shelters created underground in the event of a large scale invasion or attack. Shelters designed to keep the people safe while the military turns this place into a fortress to ward off the attackers." Suyin explained as she stood up, preparing to follow Alice when they noticed a person walking towards them.

He was dressed in the same uniform as the guards from earlier.

"Miss Bai, I apologise for disrupting your time of rest. However, we may need your assistance earlier than expected." The guard gave Suyin a salute, causing her to raise her eyebrow.

She glanced up at Alice who managed to calm down her rage.

"Probably the attack they mentioned before right. It'll be good for us to get some information." Alice scratched her hair.

If they're going as far as to ask Suyin for help not even a day into their stay here... then the situation must be dire.

Miki might not like it but Alice understood that she'll probably have to make a move.

She doesn't want this city to indulge in heroes or gods but as long as they don't see her, it'll be fine right?

"Let's have a listen then, shall we? I'm not sure how much time we have but even for me, the help I can give will be limited." Suyin made herself comfortable on Elias's shoulder.

After all, with her size right now, it'll be annoying for her to keep looking up at people and for them to look down on her.

They stepped outside with the guard while he briefed them on the current situation.

While listening to the briefing, Alice observed the world around them.

The tavern was emptied out quickly as people filtered out into the streets. Buildings abandoned.

They all left their belongings behind except for precious items. Clearly focusing on safety rather than wealth.

It was efficient and trained. All of these people were used to the drill. There was worry on their faces but they didn't panic.

Trust in the guards, trust in their city.

Alice closed her eyes and expanded her senses.

The entire city was moving to safety while the guards stationed themselves upon the walls.

The entire city was moving as one. Each person a cog in the machine known as Grand Cathia.

This was what Miki was pursuing. Power that comes from believing in what you can accomplish rather than giving up control of your fate to someone else.

She had to admit, it was quite the sight to behold.

But even then, there will be times when this isn't enough. Alice could accept Miki's ideals. It's not as if their beliefs couldn't co exist but rather there is a time and place for everything.

Sometimes heroes and gods are needed, sometimes they're not. It all depends on the dangers.

"You've got to be kidding me. Even with half a day's of notice, blacksmiths and materials at my beck and call, you can't expect me to reinforce everything in that time." Suyin complained while the guard could only apologise.

There wasn't much he could say when this was Miki's command.

"What part are you struggling with?" Alice asked curiously.

"Everything. Reinforcing the walls are fine and all, same with making weapons if needed. But the issue is transporting it as well as forging the required components. Some of the parts are annoying to make and even with a bunch of blacksmiths, I doubt they have the power to make something complex like that.

"I'll need a bunch of my machinery." Suyin scratched her hair.

It's not like she didn't want to help but doing everything within half a day's time was going to be annoying.

"Did you forget who's here?" Alice pointed at herself.

Suyin blinked her eyes.

Snapping her finger, Alice created a second portal.

Since they were already linked to the machine that keeps their memories intact, the coordinates that she needed was already there.

Making a second portal was easy.

Suyin froze. Not the puppet but the real Suyin.

Sat in her chair with her legs crossed in a crude manner, she looked to her left and saw a Alice and co staring at her.

"Care to give me a warning before you open a door next to me?" Suyin's smile twitched.

"My bad. But if you want, I can open a few of these for you to transport your machinery here. As for the forging... I can handle some of it as well if you want. I still remember the techniques used by the Lord of the Forge. Anything complicated that requires a lot of power outside of machinery, I'll sort out." Alice offered.

"The f*ck. Since when can you forge as well???"

"Since my time in the north." Alice shrugged.

"What can't you do?"

"A lot. But what do you think, would it be possible if I helped out?" Alice asked while Suyin folded her arms.

"Hmm... the work time is a little tight but if we got a cheat code like you, I think it'll be manageable." Suyin grinned.

With portals at their disposal, transport wasn't an issue. The question now was if they had enough material...

Chapter 939: Scouting The Nightmare

Miki listened to the report while watching portals open across her city. There was a slight frown on her face but she didn't say anything.

The issue of transport was sorted.

So long as Alice was being fed the crystals, she'll be able to maintain the shortcuts.

Materials were being delivered far ahead of time and evacuation was also being assisted.

Based on the current speed of their work, everything should be sorted within 3 hours give or take. The only things left to do would be to actually reinforce the walls and upgrade the weapons.

Was it handy? Yes it was. Very much so and as much as Miki didn't want to admit it, they needed this kind of break.

However, now that Alice has revealed herself, questions will begin to float around.

Why didn't they use portals before? Why couldn't they have done this earlier.

Or in the future, they may ask where the portals are.

No doubt after this battle, she'll have to make a public announcement letting them know about what had occurred.

Hell, even the people outside were being transported to safety.

Massaging her head, Miki let out a deep fatigued sigh.

"Perhaps you should take a break before the battle captain. We need to make sure you are at your best after all." Her assistant suggested but Miki shook her head.

"No need. I'm just stressed about the press that I'll have to face after the battle."

Hearing this, the assistant smiled. Even though Miki didn't say it, this was the most optimistic she's been for a battle despite the enemy numbers.

Whether she wanted or not, Alice's arrival has given her a boost in confidence. Especially when Alice will help regardless of what she says.

"Don't hold back on the materials that Bai Suyin needs. Used as much as you can. She won't be here for long so we should take advantage of this as much as possible."

"Understood. I will pass down the order." Giving Miki a salute, the assistant left the room while Miki watched as the entire city mobilised through the portals in order to carry out their tasks.

###

"F*cking sh*t..." Alice complained while someone was changing out the crystal placed next to her.

A technician hurriedly replaced the drained crystal at her side. The moment a new one connected, a new tether of energy was attached to Alice's body, causing her to jolt from the sting. A numbness that spread across her body.

Alice took a deep breath and exhaled.

During combat, this wasn't an issue since she's only opening the portals briefly into the Void, allowing any attacks to be swallowed up and be disposed of.

But this wasn't the case right now.

For the portals she has to open in Grand Cathia, each one had to be big enough to sustain moving large quantities of people or material.

Keeping on up was fine.

Two? Easy.

Ten might be a bit rough but Alice was confident that it could be manageable.

But opening more than twenty across the city was seriously draining her energy!

It was akin to holding open the jaws of a starving beast trying to eat her.

"Just keep this up for now. We're moving all the materials to where we'll need stuff to be done as well as speeding up evacuation. Once it's all been sorted, you'll be able to focus on forging some of the more annoying pieces I need." Suyin said while analysing a blueprint of the city's defences along with where the attack would be the heaviest.

"I'm not cursing at them! I'm cursing at how many portals I have to keep open!" Alice replied through gritted teeth.

However, both Alice and Suyin knew that wasn't the reason the technicians were afraid.

Even without an ability like Cayla, they could sense how much energy was being emitted by Alice right now!

Each time they approach to swap the crystals, their alarm bells were warning them of the danger!

Should Alice even target a fraction of the energy she was using towards them, they would be torn apart like being thrown into a blender!

It didn't matter how many safety procedures was in place, just approaching Alice felt like a death sentence.

"Anyways, you mentioned studying from the Abyss Lord of the Forge earlier. What can you forge exactly?" Suyin asked curiously.

The man who created the number series, powerful weapons with effects that border on relics. Anyone would die to get their hands on one of his equipment.

In fact, she even copied Sigurd's naming system with her own stuff, attaching numbers onto her creations.

It was a little embarrassing to say but she was a big fan. They were responsible for different aspects of creation yet she aspired to be like him. Creating masterpieces that everyone would desire.

"Well he showed me a few things and asked if I wanted to be his successor. Obviously I said no since-"

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU SAID NO!" Suyin shouted, jumping over and grabbing Alice by the collar.

"Huh???" Alice blinked her eyes in surprise.

"This is the Lord of the Forge we're talking about! The only one in this world who can forge master pieces on par with relics and yet you turned him down?!" Suyin's heart bled.

Such an opportunity... wasted in such a manner. Alice had spoken about it before in brief detail but never mentioned she rejected his invitation!

"Okay okay stop shaking me." Alice was getting dizzy as Suyin calmed herself.

"I needed to go elsewhere so I can't exactly stay and study under him. Plus, I had him promise some equipment to me so it should be fine."

"You could've learned the secret behind crafting numbered equipment though..."

"I mean that's probably more to do with his Sigil and authority more than anything. But setting that aside, I saw his forging techniques with my own eyes. A little bit of prep will be all I need to craft some stuff. I can probably even reinforce the equipment we have now." Alice adjusted her shirt while Suyin jumped down.

"I guess that makes you a half disciple... What a waste." Suyin lamented.

But if Alice didn't want to succeed the Lord of the Forge, what else could she do? It's not like she could forge Alice to study under Sigurd.

###

It took a few hours for all of the evacuation to be complete with Alice consuming crystal after crystal to keep the portals open.

But once the evacuation was done, she was allowed to stop.

The city had become silent.

The countless stalls now empty.

All that they could hear were the rumbling of machinery and industrial hammers reinforcing their defences.

In the distance, a deep purple started to bleed into the sky. A sign of the approaching army.

With her no longer being needed as a battery, Alice stood upon the walls and looked out.

Elias volunteered himself to help with the medic squad since casualties will no doubt appear on the battlefield.

Suyin was still preparing blueprints for the stuff she needs while instructing people to get the materials ready.

Alice was simply waiting for orders since there wasn't much else for her to do.

And since that was the case, she decided to do a bit of scouting.

[Alright, I think we're ready to send out a drone. I've linked everything up to make sure we don't get hit by any kind of backlash if we get discovered.] Cayla gave Alice a thumbs up as she nodded her head.

Snapping her finger, a droplet of blood appeared in front of her.

Little by little, it began to leak with blood dripping against the floor, transforming into a mirror like surface.

Within the mirror, eyes made from blood blinked to life.

Alice had to admit, it was a creepy looking thing but it was handy.

A layer of blood washed over her right eye, connecting her vision to the eyes within the mirror.

Immediately, her view was fractured as information flowed into her mind.

The link was established and Alice shattered the mirror, sending the fragments flying towards the distant purple haze.

Since it was connected to Cayla, Alice could see the strands of Nightmare energy pouring out from the sky. This quantity was far greater than what the Sentinels were outputting.

And if that was the case...

'Why aren't they attacking yet? Or are they waiting for the full army to appear?' Alice wondered with a slight frown.

As always, there was the option for her to made the first move, to attack the enemy before they could attack.

But something felt off.

The enemy was gathering an army that could easily wipe out a city yet they're still waiting.

Almost as if they wanted the city to put up a struggle.

Why?

Was it to foster their desperation?

If so, it would certainly explain why such a large army was being amassed.

She tried to get closer in order to get a better look. Yet the veil of Nightmare energy prevented from entering. A natural barrier against Abyssal energy.

Snapping her fingers, violet flames burst out from each of the eyes as she hoped to burn away the Nightmare energy.

It worked to a certain degree however...

[Pull back. Any further and they'll probably launch a counter.] Cayla warned as Alice nodded.

She noticed that the moment her flames came into contact with the veil, the entire mass of Nightmare energy seemed to twitch. All of it was connected and trying to invade it without being detected was impossible.

With no other choice, Alice retreated for now while created a portal next to her. It was time to forge some of Suyin's weapon parts.

Chapter 940: Artificial Focusing Circle

Stepping through the portal, Alice arrived at the smithy underground. The people were a little surprised to see her but seeing as how she was controlling the portals, they decided to stay silent.

With everyone rushing to complete their tasks, they didn't have the leisure to question why a small girl had just appeared in the smithy.

Compared to the surface, the temperature sure was much higher. Stuffy even as some of the air began to warp in the distance.

There were cooling vents and so on but it's clear that this heat was needed in order to work with some of the materials.

She could see the giant industrial hammers slamming down. Each strike causing sparks to fly. Hunks of metal that required two to three people to carry.

The furnace blasting at full power in order to melt down the materials and heat up certain crystals.

The creation of alloys and carvings being applied onto red hot pieces of metal.

No one was standing around idly, not even the machines.

Suyin stood in the centre, giving out commands of what she requires and even testing if some of the pieces were good enough.

She had brought in her own machines and connected it to the main body of the factory, teaching the people how to use it in order to manufacture some of the parts she would need.

Noticing Alice's arrival, Suyin glanced over.

"That was fast, finished scouting already? So what's the verdict, think you can nuke them before they arrive?"

"It's a coin toss. I could certainly try but I don't know what kind of consequences there are to doing so." Alice shrugged.

Hearing this, Suyin could already guess that Alice noticed a bad reaction between her powers and the Nightmare energy.

They're gathering their army slowly so no doubt they'll have some form of defence in place.

And that defence is warding off Alice from blindly attacking.

"How are the modifications coming along? Still need me to forge stuff?" Alice asked curiously.

Suyin nodded her head.

"Some of the crystals are too tough for the fire here to melt down. Even some of the blacksmiths are struggling. We need enough output and control to heat the crystals gradually before forging the crystals into a core." She handed Alice the blueprint of her weapon.

Raising an eyebrow, Alice scanned the blueprint before turning to Suyin.

"A little ambitious don't you think? Isn't this a little early to be putting a prototype to the test?"

Suyin grinned.

"Ah~ I knew you'd get it. I've already finished the calculations and when else am I going to get material as good as this? As long as the cores are finished, the weapon should function just fine." Suyin chuckled.

She didn't write down what the cores are used for, their purpose.

Yet by looking at the full blueprint, Alice already figured out their use.

They were artificial focusing circles.

When Alice prepares a large attack, natural amplification circles manifest to focus her attack at one target. They redirect and enhance the flow of energy.

What Suyin sought to create was an artificial replica of that in order to boost her power into the next threshold.

She had seen how durable the Sentinels were. If she succeeds in creating these cores, she might have a weapon that can stand toe to toe with them.

In this moment, Suyin felt like she was in a flow state. The ideas burning through her mind, the blueprints she could bring to reality so long as this core was created.

One theory turns into reality, the doors of possibility are swung wide open!

Seeing the excitement in Suyin's eyes, Alice couldn't help but chuckle.

Even as a doll right now, her eyes were as expressive as always.

Handing the blueprint back, Alice created a hair tie and pulled her hair into a pony tail.

She clipped her bangs back so they didn't get in her eyes.

With a snap of her finger, a blood curtain surrounded her as she quickly changed into a sleeveless tank top.

Her outfit wouldn't be suitable for forging after all, the material might get caught on fire.

"Are you forging or are you trying to steal someone's heart?" Suyin whistled seeing Alice in this outfit.

"Oh haha, very funny. Now where are the crystals? I'll need a bit of space if they're tough to melt down." Alice chuckled while giving her arms a slight stretch.

"Over here." Suyin jumped down from her table.

Leading Alice towards the centre of the forge, she gestured to a pile of crystal ores piled together.

They could see a few men trying to melt it in the furnace but to no avail.

No matter how much the fires roared, the crystal refused to heat up.

Alice folded her arms and activated Cayla.

She could see the streams of energy surrounding the forge.

How the blacksmiths tried to enhance the flames with their own Sigils but the crystal warded it off.

Then she saw the properties of the crystal.

"Where did they even find this stuff?" Alice asked curiously.

"Don't ask me, apparently they had it in their storage for a while. They traded for it in the past due to its high conductivity when it comes to energy but couldn't melt it down at all. But if we can make use of it, it'll be perfect."

"That's my issue though. You know what my fire does, I'm starting to wonder if I'll accidentally wipe away its properties during the forging process." Alice smiled helplessly.

Since this crystal was super conductive, using her flames might erase that aspect entirely and turn it into normal crystal.

If that was to happen...

It'll be a complete waste of material.

"Why don't you take a small chunk and test it out for now?" Suyin suggested, tossing over a small crystal the size of a palm.

Catching the crystal, Alice held it up against the light and smiled.

"Alright, watch carefully then. I'll show you what I learned from watching the Lord of the Forge."

Nodding her head, Suyin had the blacksmiths make way for Alice as she approached the forge.

With a snap of her finger, the flames were snuffed out. She didn't need fire that couldn't reach her desired temperature.

Suspending the crystal in the air, Alice snapped her finger.

A blinding white spark flickered to life in front of her, drowning out the colour within the workshop.

As the spark came into contact with the furnace...

*BANG!!!

A roaring fire burst forth, violet flickers that thrashed against space itself as fractures began to appear across the air.

One spark was all it took for Alice to shatter the boundary and prepare her 'forge'.

Alice's Sigils lit up. She traced her own memory of Sigurd, the movements he made. The reasoning behind his movements.

His objective.

Clenching her fist, Alice controlled the fire to coil around the crystal. Her eyes observed the shifting of energy.

She needed to repurpose it, to change its form. What she didn't want was for the properties to be wiped out.

Control power, that's what she needed.

Within the flames, the silhouette of a dragon appeared as Tiamat's Sigil was overlayed onto her violet flames.

Colours drained and a stream of pure white fire was concentrated onto the crystal.

A swirling vortex of fire and energy.

Alice was beginning to see the flow of the material. How to best shape it, where she should strike.

Flicking her wrist, Alice transformed Void Fang into a large hammer and lunged at the crystal.

Twisting her body, she slammed the hammer into it!

*BANG!!!

The collision caused a wave of energy to erupt outwards as people who weren't prepared were knocked down.

But Alice wasn't done.

She followed up with a second strike as a waterfall of sparks erupted. Energy that should be invisible to the eye took form through the flames, weaving through the air and into the crystal.

Rather than a forging process, it looked more like a painting.

Sweat dripped down Alice's head as she didn't expect this kind of resistance from the material.

Even with this much firepower, she was struggling to melt it down.

However, with this challenge, a grin appeared on her face.

'Let's see who breaks first! You or me!'

With each hammer strike, the world around Alice seemed to shatter. Fractures continued to spread as Void energy leaked into the realm.

Then finally, the crystal started to melt.

Little by little, it was being transformed into a liquid as the edges drooped down!

Dismissing the hammer, Alice framed the crystal between her fingers as she began to condense everything into a small area.

A vacuum sucked in all the energy within the surrounding area, focusing, condensing, amplifying her flames.

***RUMBLE!!!**

The ground started to tremble as Alice clasped her hands together.

A blinking spark that even forced Suyin to look away.

By the time the light faded, a single lens now floated in front of Alice.

She succeeded.

With the disappearance of the fire, the crystal lens cooled down rapidly on its own without the need of outside interference.

Holding it with her fingers, Alice let out a small laugh and tossed it over to Suyin.

"Take a look. I think this should be perfect for you."

Suyin caught the lens as her eyes shifted to better observe the crystal.

Her fingers trembled.

Now only was the properties preserved...

Aspects of it was even heightened!

The lens that Alice had created could withstand and even amplify attacks greater than what she had initially calculated.

And this was just a small piece! What about the bigger chunks?!

"It's going to be exhausting though and I won't be able to help with the other stuff." Alice could already tell what Suyin was going to ask.

"That's fine! Just focus on the crystals, we'll sort out the other stuff!" Suyin nodded as she immediately ran over to draft a prototype with the small lens.

Shaking her head, Alice wiped away her sweat and glanced at the pile of crystals.

With this much at their disposal... perhaps she could create something for Ria.

Or better yet, she could even ask for a few chunks so that the real Lord of the Forge can make some equipment for them.

She was just a newbie at this after all.

Without any delay, Alice began the forging process for the next piece.