

What transpired over a few hours within the Escape translated to a week in the real world. It was to be expected. After all, the White Rabbit was an Aberration of what was the equivalent of a deity of time. The White Rabbit may not consider itself as a deity, but in truth it was as much of a God of Cognition than Elysia.

The meaning of Cognition was as simple as 'the mind'. It was not known how they were able to interact with people and see their memories, but she guessed that it was probably a version of Jury's [Time Seer] that let her peer into the Nex that dwelled in people's hearts.

Ultimately, they had made a powerful ally. The children that disappeared across the Nex Megalopolis returned all at once. Families and friends rejoiced at their reunion with loved ones they believed were lost forever. As much as there was relief, there was also a surge of anguish.

It was always the people of the Outskirts that suffered in the Nex Megalopolis. Seeing the Ateliers intervene for the first time resulted in a mixed response. However, the consensus was positive because their gratitude was pointed at a different body.

The Head. Black Doves spread the news that the Head was the one who ordered the rescue. White Doves mentioned the Head and Time Reverberation on occasion when people questioned why there were black-haired healers now.

Confidence in the Ateliers rose as a result. People were still wary and wondered if this was one time thing. Others believed it was the beginning of something great. They knew of the Ateliers wars that often resulted in the annihilation of civilians. To see them work towards a unified effort was another source of hope.

And that was the biggest take away from the ordeal. Hope.

The motions of change were felt as subtle reverberations. It shook the rust clean off the gears of the Ateliers. The Head had invigorated them. The question now was: how long would this last for?

The Head was the all-encompassing body that sat above the Ateliers. This much they knew. If they were able to summon them at a whim, then one could only imagine how powerful that person must be. A being that commanded the Ateliers of the deities from the Nexus.

It further fueled people's reverence of the Nexus.

Time Reverberation also became a hot topic thanks to the Healers. The symbol of a snake coiling a syringe was replaced with Time Reverberation's insignia. It was accompanied with a large white feather, whereas the Black Wings wore a black feather to further differentiate them.

Reparation efforts were already concluded. The damage caused were easily mended by Caldera Industries. Broken pavements and sinkholes were filled in less than an hour. Ruined streets and collapsed homes were returned to their original state.

All buildings of the Nex Megalopolis were required to have their blueprints documented and checked with the Guild and a few relevant Associations. There was a certain building code to

allow structures to withstand the frequent tremors as well as distant emerging Dungeons. It was why many buildings were still intact, whereas only those within proximity of a Dungeon or saw conflict were damaged.

Of course, not just anyone was allowed to build on a plot of land within the Nex Megalopolis. People with appropriate knowledge and credentials were allowed to and were part of the Brick and Mortar Association which mostly ran these checks.

The crème of the crop was of course taken by Caldera Industries. But not all of them, though. Some of the best remained in the Brick & Mortar Association – one of thirteen major Associations of Elysia, with their headquarters being in the City of Diamonds.

“One thousand three hundred and five confirmed dead. Sixty missing. Hardly a statistic.” Umbra recited uncaringly; her voice carried by the roaring winds as the Behemoth set course back to H10.

Aboard were the Beholders, the healers, Atelier personnel, Moons, and prisoners. These prisoners were to be brought before a High Judge who wielded the Justicia Scale to weigh their sins. They were not petty criminals, but those that sought to commit atrocities during the pandemonium.

Petty criminals were dealt with locally. These ones were usually killed on the spot. The discretion lay on the shoulders of Peace Flock and they determined them as irredeemable. As such, boarding the Leviathan was a fitting punishment.

However, things were changing. The Leviathans were to be the trains of the Repenters. This meant that who would be damned to one was to become a Repenter. The line of whether they deserve it or not was blurred.

The justification was the demand for Nex.

Marionette dragged a prosthetic finger across the iron bars that held a hundred of these people. Their joints were connected to a steel string that held from the ceiling like puppets. Blood dribbled from every orifice as Black Wings could be seen patrolling the prison compartment, injecting them with healing Serums to keep them alive.

Muffled whimpers left their sticked mouths.

“Nearly all was caused by the Eye of the Head.” Marionette harped, pulling strings from her sleeves, sounding like the haunting screams of thousands. “Such beautiful threats. It’s as though the Amalgam is after my heart. He... he... he...”

Elsewhere, Galia watched the ebbs and flows of the world. She stood on the starboard side of the ship where she silently sipped on a cup of coffee. She was alone on her side of the deck, and she wore an all-knowing smile to keep herself company.

Footsteps approached her. A familiar shadow was cast in her direction. The shadow that she remembered being no different to that of a child had grown now. She could see this perfectly in the corner of half-lidded eyes.

“The past builds us. To forget it is to forget a part of ourselves. The key is to overcome it. It allows us to grasp the present. The present will allow us to grasp the future.” She monologued. It was not clear who those words were intended for. Regardless, the figure behind her approached steadily until a pair of wolf ears appeared by her side.

It was Res. She didn’t greet or even cast Galia a glance. Instead, she looked off to the side of the Behemoth where she joined Galia’s gaze.

“In my world those who controlled the past controlled the future. But the present will always be the helm of one’s ship. The past are the anchors. The future is the rugged sea. Life is a voyage no matter at what point you find yourself standing at.”

Her words resonated with Res, as well as two other figures that watched on from afar with fond expressions. In Res’ hand was a shard of her broken Lens. Galia continued as shooting stars whizzed by the skies, causing Res’ eyes to brim with fascination.

“Set your sights to the future. Because no matter where you are – or to where the tides displace you on your journey – your destination will remain constant. Let it become your compass when you’re lost. Just as she has for the last thirty years.”

She spoke like a guardian Angel. Her tone was far from motherly. It was dreary yet vivid. Her elaborate use of metaphors painted her message so clearly that Res was taken aback for a moment.

Res’ fists curled into balls as she took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry.”

Galia closed her eyes and exhaled for her.

“Apologize to those you hurt. I was only fulfilling a promise I made with your mother long ago.” She assured. “My world was as colorless as yours. I also despised red. Blue was the only color I could see eye to eye with. In the end, whether it was Yellow, Green, or Purple – red was they had in common. That was why it disgusted me.”

Her eyes opened again as she took another sip from her cup.

“Res. Are you happy?”

“I am.”

“Then smile.”

“Huh?”

“Smile. As a last memory for your mother. The Blooming Week will be arriving soon. It will be your final farewell. She’s done everything she can to protect you.”

“I’ll make sure of it.” Res broke into a soft smile as a blue tear fell down her cheek.

And for a moment, the blue lens in the palm of her hand shone with a faint light.

“... Thank you. You’ve been pulling so many strings for us...”

"I have no clue what you're talking about." Galia played dumb. Perhaps it was never really her in the first place. Regardless, Res thanked her from the bottom of her heart, now able to properly express how she truly felt. "I am quite envious of your mother."

"How come?"

"Because she has such wonderful children."

Res looked over at Cer and Ber who grinned in response. The duo then quickly made their way towards them.

"But... Mother hated Cer and Ber." Res whispered sadly.

"It was not that she hated them." Galia claimed. "It was that she didn't know who they were. The Blue Dahlia had a disease of the mind. It ate her memories away. I too was forgotten. I watched her pass in my arms on that night. I had become a stranger to her. Even in her last moment, she could not recall my name."

"Res. Do you know what her dream was?"

"No. Mother didn't speak. I don't remember her voice."

Galia then looked into the murky reflection of herself in the cup, reminiscing of a precious memory.

"Her dream was to have a family. I thought it was pitiful. I once ridiculed her for it. But now, I cannot help but think about how wonderful that dream was. A family. How nice would that be?"

She looked at the stars longingly.

"... Galia?" Res wondered if something was wrong.

Galia only smiled as the other two finally arrived.

"The musings of this old soul must be like nails on a chalkboard to your ears. I take you two are here to announce the return of the Amalgam?"

"Nope. Frost is still gone." Cer grumbled. "She's taking her sweet time wherever that Etched Coin took her."

"Behold Knalzark has been cracking his knuckles for the last twenty minutes now." Ber added. "It looks like he's getting ready for Frost to open a portal to the Dermal Layer. It should be opening in H10 soon. She never really told us what was going on."

Galia's eyes then darkened with bloodlust as she took a long, drawn-out sip from her coffee.

"Hmhmhm. Fear not."

She chuckled ominously.

"She's merely sending our friends a message they'll never forget."