

One sighting became two. Two to ten. And ten to hundreds. Res was not alone when she saw the fluffy, white tail of a mysterious being flee from the corner of her eyes. It begged her to follow but she was not like a child to be lured away.

Even with her filtered eyesight, she was able to tell that something was terribly wrong. Jury was attending the Amalgam's Summit, so there was no reason for her to be here. Not only that –

*If that's the White Rabbit, then how am I able to see it?*

– It had somehow revealed itself to a 40-year-old woman.

Her senses were on high alert now. Every hair on her body was raised as commotion began to brew within the flock of children behind. Thinking quickly, Res turned to the group and shouted at the top of her lungs:

“Stay together! Don't let anyone go anywhere! Aster!” Her gaze was drawn to the skies as the guardians of her group touched their ears, immediately mobilizing the nearby Ateliers to cordon off the area.

“Y-Yes!?”

“Relay a message to the Amalgam! Something's here!” Res, in that moment, fired an electric beam from her eyes, splitting the air in half.

The scent of ozone lingered as civilians roaming this vacant strip ran for their lives after seeing such a destructive display of power.

*That should get Cer and Ber's attention –!*

Suddenly, a flash of white passed her again. This time, it went straight for the children. Before she could even react, the children began speaking to themselves as the guardians were at a loss for words at what to do.

It was clear that the children saw the exact same thing as her, as their eyes focused on the entity that phased through the guardians, its tail wrapped around her leg like a spool of wire.

“IN FRONT OF YOU!” Res shouted, her eyes shifting from red to a glowing gemstone blue as the sound of conflict rang in the neighboring streets.

This was accompanied by the sound of rapidly growing hysteria, undoubtedly caused by an Impuritas attack. However, it was considerably less than she expected. Rather than terror, the screams alluded to loss, for it were mothers that shrieked.

“I-I don't see anything!”

“What the fuck is happening to the children!?”

“Keep them gathered in the middle!”

“Don't just – GAH!?”

A man was thrown to the side by Res who came charging in to take matters into her own hands against Jury's doppelganger. She never had a good look at its face, but the silhouette alone undoubtedly belonged to a child-like version of the person she arduously respected.

Just as Res was about to touch her; the tail unraveled and before she knew it –

***“Why resist me?”***

An innocent voice spoke in her head.

– Her body was swiped away to the side like she was no more than an insect.

“HOW DID IT –!?”

Her body crashed into the storefront, breaking through several walls before she appeared on the other side where she reclaimed her composure by thrusting her claws into the ground.

“... In a split second it intervened with my lunge. A *split second*. That kind of reaction time exceeds Moons...”

*Was it prepared? Did it know I was coming? No. Even if it did, it couldn't have swung its tail in such a stupidly short amount of time.*

Surrounding her were the mobilized, combined forces of the Ateliers that began moving people away. Adventurers from a nearby Guild could also be seen joining the fray, likely from an order given by the Guild itself.

Children were amongst the evacuees, but none displayed any abnormal signs from what she could tell.

It was as if that entity was targeting her group specifically.

This was confirmed as she saw the tail beckon her again from the other side of the hole.

“Just what do you want from me?” The ground cracked as her hands dug deeper, her back arching animalistically.

Res couldn't afford to allow confusion to overcome her. The children were in danger, and this alone was more than enough of a reason to focus. She leveraged her claws to throw her straight back through the hole, this time prepared to fight this unreasonably powerful entity.

However, by the time she made it back, she watched as the children were dragged into holes made specifically for them. They laughed, giggled, and waved at the entity who kept its back turned to her. Its hair was so long that it reached down its ankles and was messy compared to Jury's straight hair.

Aster was among those who were unaffected. She clutched onto Stella who was not yet affected, for she couldn't see this entity thanks to her blindness. But she could see that the entity had its gaze locked onto Stella, intending to drag her into the unknown.

“Stay... Stay away!” Aster could see it too strangely enough.

*... But she's unaffected. The children... Don't you dare...*

[Galvanic Current].

“MAKE ME GO THROUGH THIS SHIT AGAIN!”

Res' speed dramatically increased as electricity clad her body, with her rage known to the false Jury. With the children out of sight, and with the guardians now huddled away to protect Aster and Stella, who were the only remaining ones standing.

[Electric Lance]. A concentrated beam of electricity struck the back of the entity, causing it to fling forwards just like how it had swatted Res away.

Res did not relent. Beam after beam was sent its way, obliterating everything in its path as the entity bounced, rolled, and crashed through the vacant strip. Houses collapsed on the side as its contents spilled into the street, creating a massive column of fog that was instantly dispersed by another dangerous beam.

“Go!” Res ordered. “Get them away from here while I deal with that thing! Aster! Let them know that it looks just like Jury! That... is probably an Aberration.”

The guardians didn't complain or ask just what was going on. They complied immediately and began escorting the two away as Ayel led the charge. Worry filled Aster as she wondered if Res would be alright. But more than that was Stella who could tell that something was terribly wrong with Res if even she could see it.

Over thirty children were swallowed, and there was nothing they could do to bring them back. One of the guardians desperately attempted to reach into the hole but their arm was instantly eaten from the shoulder down, leaving them screaming in pain.

They ran through the hole in the walls and were immediately collected by a passing Justicer upon reaching the other side.

Res could breathe a sigh of relief. But people still lived inside of these storefronts, so she was highly limited with the magic she could use. Not only that...

*... innocent people were dragged into this again because of me.*

Splattered blood could be found within the rubble. Pools emerged through mounds of stone and splintered wood. Res, however, could not see the blood.

Not even the bodies.

The CognitO Filter kept them away from entering her mind, inadvertently censoring the White Rabbit who stood idly in the distance.

***“Why are you resisting me?”***

It asked again, its voice shaking her skull as she clutched onto her head in agony.

"I don't a reason to resist a monster that preys on little kids!" Res barked, unable to find the whereabouts of the White Rabbit.

***"Why do you rely on the unnatural tools of man to chain you away from pain?"***

"Man? Mankind? What the hell are you spewing? Humans couldn't dream to make the Atelier Items." Res growled, darting her gaze around her to find the source.

***"Can you answer my question? Why are you treating me like a child?"***

Suddenly, the censorship that covered the White Rabbit faded, as if she had total reign over its power. However, she felt a presence elsewhere. One that belonged to something equally as heinous as the White Rabbit.

"... then what the hell are you if you're not a child? An Aberration of Elysia?"

The White Rabbit froze in place, recognizing that name as Res was able to zoom in to catch a glimpse of the entity's face using her [Telescopic Sight].

And what she saw was a mirror image of Jury's face. A younger, smaller, and far more innocent version of Jury. Her unkempt hair, long nails, and rugged appearance was unbecoming of an Angel.

But her senses did not lie to her. That thing was dangerous.

***"... you are just like her... always being mean."***

Unlike Jury, her hands were perfectly normal. There was no blackened claw to be found, and her tail was far more vibrant if anything. The White Rabbit reached out towards Res, her eyes widening as she uttered:

***"Let me make you better."***

"... if I can't even make myself better, then what chances do you have?" Res grits her teeth as pebbles began to float past her ankles.

Her [Hypercharged Field] slowly emerged.

***"I can do that."***

"By killing me. I know how you lunatics work." Res' eyes were filled to the brim with light as she prepared to begin her counteroffensive.

***"I can fix your eyes."***

"Get out of my head... Get out of my head!" And with one last cry, Res opened fire, declaring her stance against the White Rabbit.

The beam met its target, but it did not throw them back this time. The tip of the White Rabbit's tail blocked it as an impenetrable shell surrounded her.

"What...?"

No matter how many beams were fired, the White Rabbit remained anchored in place. She resisted her attacks effortlessly this time. Not even a strand of hair moved from its place. The White Rabbit's eyes gushed with unexpected sorrow, eventually leading her to shut her eyes as if to see the same world that Res saw.

***"... isn't it dark? This world? I... can bring you somewhere where the colors are many. A place where dreams come true. I will bring everyone to my wonderland. That way, we can be free."***

***"You just have to stop resisting –"***

Res fired back, returning to her relentless assault, the beam becoming one continuous stream. Nearby walls crumbled under the immense pressure, floating in place as a powerful current lifted them. The entire street was no longer hospitable.

Anyone that remained was already long dead.

***"... stubborn. But you have a scent of a special person on you..."***

***"Maybe they'll know who stole my tail."***

It happened in an instant. Res couldn't even perceive the movement of the White Rabbit. She appeared in front of her as a mysterious ticking played from deep within her chest. Res did everything in her power to throw herself away, but she was outmatched.

A single swing of the White Rabbit's tail sent her crashing through the walls again. But this time, she passed through multiple streets. Were it not for her upgraded suit then she would have taken considerable damage.

**Res | HP: 46,000 | 50,000**

The undisturbed masses covered their heads as the buildings exploded. Nearby Atelier personnel prevented mass casualties by catching the debris before it could crush anyone using magic. Wings blew them away, whilst others resorted to outright destroying them.

At the apex of her trajectory, Res was suddenly struck upwards, then back down at an angle as she crashed through the rooftops. Before she could even touch the ground she was struck again. She became a living pinball, unable to resist its attacks.

*A Moon... of the Nexus... I can't even perceive it anymore! Is this the strength of an Aberration of Elysia -!?*

"AAAAAAAANGH!" her neck was wrapped by the tail high above Greenbirth. She was pulled into a devastating deathroll before she was thrown down to the ground. Her body sunk into the bricked road as a crater formed around her, leaving her dazed as she tried to recompose herself.

However –

"NGH – GET... IT OUT OF ME!"

– The tip of the White Rabbit's fluffy tail produced a needle-like edge that was stabbed straight through her chest. Blood did not gush out to her shock, but she could feel something burning course through her body.

***"Go to sleep. Wake up in our collective dream. Live freely in my blissful escape."***

Res' body was rapidly shutting down. The RESIST stat of a Moon was no match for the toxin that was pumped into her body. She recalled Jury possessing such an ability too with her tail. With one final beam to warn the others, she mustered all of her remaining strength to ask her one last question.

"... Are you... Elysia? "

"No." She verbalized with her mouth this time.

Her eyes narrowed in anguish, insulted that Res would even call her that. Dark spots invaded Res' vision. She was only seconds away from succumbing to the toxin.

"Stop calling me by that name. I am me. Elysia is the evil person that took the lights out from my world!"

The world turned black.

But to Res, it was still the same world she had always known.