

## **SPELLCRAFT 1261**

### **[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)**

#### **Chapter 1261: Taking The Initiative**

"On this day, we mourn the death of two allies. Two friends."

Serah spoke up, her voice accounting for everyone present.

Even the Constellations who did not possess mortal thoughts or emotions could feel the solemn mood resonate within them.

They gave a moment of silence for the grief to set in.

No one uttered a single word, not until the minute mark had elapsed, and everyone could finally sort out the deaths within their minds.

Of course, the deaths affected some more than others.

However, the general consensus on the matter was that this was a tragedy.

One that could not happen again.

"What should we do next?" Kuzon asked, his attention on the Constellations, but his question was also directed at his fellows.

"The effects of Gerard and Z'ark's existence erasure have been slowed down, but it'll eventually catch up to reality. Before that happens, we'll have to stop Legris... permanently." Serah responded to Kuzon, equally shouldering the resolve he had burning in his eyes.

A couple glances at the faces of everyone present showed they were mostly on the same page.

"Stopping Legris won't automatically make it so that the existence erasure would be halted. It's simply to prevent any further loss." Ana added, flexing her glasses once more.

Everyone stared at her at this point, and she decided to elaborate her point.

"Aether receives the souls of the dead and uses those to recreate new life. That's what Jared explained to me. Legris keeps killing people and causing them to cease existing. Without those souls returning to Aether, the balance of life and energy will be affected."

At this point, Aquarius broke the silence of the Constellations with a sigh.

"You are right. The Aether Tree is dying, and without the souls sustaining life... reality could collapse."

The grim possibility resonated deeply with everyone who heard it.

A couple of them even gulped.

"That is still a possibility of the far future. We must act to ensure that never happens." Pisces echoed out, swimming in its massive bubble of water.

"We just have to be precise."

The unfortunate matter with the Constellations was that they were bound by the Unwritten Laws, and as such, could not reject adherence to the laws of the world and their existence.

And so, they couldn't stop the existence erasure, even if they wanted to.

"How can we be more precise? What else can we do?" Kuzon suddenly burst out, his fists clenched in repressed frustration.

"We were doing our best to train, to prepare for the inevitable battle ahead, and he suddenly showed up..."

Everyone's face darkened the moment Kuzon mentioned that.

"Legris came here and almost killed all of us. You also said it yourself... nowhere is safe from that madman."

"So what do you suggest?" Aquarius asked.

"The only thing we can do at this point. Strike back at Legris, and doing it on our own terms!"

Once Kuzon said this, murmurs began to echo within the blank plane.

Mortals spoke in hushed tones, and a few Constellations whispered to one another.

"Your proposal is reckless, to put it lightly." Aquarius spoke out.

"But it's efficient. If we aren't proactive, then we lose this battle!"

Even Kuzon knew how absurd it was for him to suggest going after Legris after all they had just experienced, but he had his reasons for doing so.

"Legris took the risk to invade this place. We still do not know his true reasons, but he ignored the risks and dived head-on to the conflict to achieve his goal."

Sure, they weren't immortal like Legris, and perhaps they weren't as strategic as he was.

However...!

"If we do not take the initiative now, then we run the risk of either being attacked, or Legris progressing even further with his plans."

If they were caught by surprise again, it would spell doom for them.

Their powers would fail them, and they would be sitting ducks.

"The best way to win is to attack. And we have to attack now! That's what I think."

Once Kuzon finally settled down, he looked around him and was met with mixed reactions.

"Are you sure this isn't just your frustration speaking?" Aloe, who had been silent for a while, asked.

"Perhaps I speak from frustration. But that doesn't change the validity of my words." Kuzon sharply responded.

"I agree with Kuzon."

This time, it was Edward who spoke.

"Every time, Legris has always had the upper hand. That's because he is more proactive and we are reactive. If we do not actively hunt him down, then wouldn't that repeat the same cycle?"

"What if this is exactly what he wants? What if he wants to goad us into attacking him?" Lemi spoke up, her voice low, but not inaudible.

"Every second Legris is out there, potential lives are being lost, and it will cause a ripple effect to the lives that should be born in the future. If we do not act quickly, we'd be risking all of those lives!" Aurora sharply responded.

"But if this is what he wants, wouldn't that mean we are playing into his hands? I do not want to seem heartless here, but if we are being pragmatic, our lives need to be safeguarded since we are the ones Jared entrusted to bond with the Constellations and defeat Legris."

Everyone turned to Beruel, who had uttered those words. While it seemed very cold, it was rooted in logic.

However, logic was not the only driving force for action.

"So what are you suggesting?" Serah asked, stepping forward as she folded her arms.

"We should defeat Legris, but only after millions, if not billions more potential lives are lost?"

No one responded to Serah. Not even Beruel, who had a reasonably logical position.

"There shouldn't be a debate on this. I don't understand why we are arguing about this when the answer is obvious." She stepped forward, looking at the Constellations.

Aloe, Lemi, Beruel, and whoever else was on the opposing side, only sighed in resignation as Serah took charge.

"We are going after Legris. That's the only way forward."

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### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1262: The Work Must Be Done**

Silent agreement echoed in the blank hall once Serah made her declaration.

Even those who had taken the logical or opposing side knew that deep down they also desired to stop Legris as swiftly as possible.

"If we are smart about it, we should be able to stop him from whatever he is planning." Serah added, turning to Kuzon, and then to Ana and Lemi.

"We have strategists among us. Plus, we have the infinite wisdom of the Constellations. All we need is appropriate power and the path we need to take... and we will charge into battle."

The Constellations instantly knew what Serah was trying to say.

"You want us to select our Hosts now?"

"That's right. The Trials were meant to be used by you all as metrics to see if we qualified for your power. I don't know about the others, but I have proven my worth already." She responded, now staring at each and every one of her comrades.

"While the Trial was ongoing, none of us called it quits, and even when Legris attacked, we braved the storm of his unpredictable invasion..."

Serah smiled at this point, her brows narrowing to show serious resolve.

"I'd say we are more than ready!"

The faces of everyone brightened up at that moment—with the only exception being Lemi.

Rather than smile and nod like the rest, she had a guilty expression on her face.

Perhaps that was because she knew how lazy she was during the trials, and how she didn't even face Legris throughout his invasion.

Out of everyone present, wasn't she already disqualified?

"We also need to strategize on his to track him down, and what to do when we find him." Kuzon added, taking a step forward as well.

"To be able to do that properly—especially the latter—we all need to be fully aware of our abilities."

In essence, for the sake of the mission's success and the overall efficiency of their task, the Constellations had to choose their Hosts quickly.

"I see. We will need to discuss among ourselves before reaching a final consensus." Aquarius said.

"Is there anything else?"

"Shouldn't we wait for Jared?" Maria's voice suddenly echoed in the hall.

Her question was perhaps the most pertinent, considering how almost everyone in the room had the same thoughts tucked at the corner of their mind.

It was a question that caused everyone to fall silent the instant they heard it.

"Jared came up with this whole method to stop Legris. Shouldn't he be here while we make such a monumental decision?" Maria further asked.

If it was Jared, surely he would be able to give a more accurate analysis of the situation and even proffer a more advantageous strategy.

"I think we should wai—"

"No. We can't." Kuzon interrupted Maria with his words.

"Why not?"

"Were you not listening thus far? There's no time. The very reason we decided to be proactive was so we wouldn't just sit around and give Legris the advantage once again."

Kuzon felt his tone was a little harsh, but those words had to be said.

"Besides, we don't know when Jared is going to arrive. Rather than doom the world while waiting for his arrival, it's better we are proactive." Ana added in a sigh.

"Even you, Ana? You really think Jared would delay that long, even with all that is at stake?" Maria asked in slight disappointment.

"I believe Jared knows how severe the situation is, and he's working on a solution on his end. We just have to wait and—!"

"Wait and what? Let Jared handle everything, as usual? Don't you think we've burdened Jared enough? All this time... he makes the plans and shoulders the burdens... every time... all the time..."

Kuzon's brow was furrowed in slight rage. His words did not come from a place of envy or inferiority.

No, it was consideration.

"I'm tired of leaving it all to him. Even if it's just a little, I want to ease his burdens. That should apply to everyone here."

Kuzon looked around him, and he smiled a little.

"Isn't that why he assembled us as a team? So we could do things that he couldn't? So that we would be able to contribute when he wasn't around?"

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but everyone present knew they were inferior to Jared in both intellect and power.

But...

"We are still his allies, and we are still his friends! We need to act like it!"

Despite everything that Kuzon said, Maria was not satisfied with their current position.

She turned to Serah, almost as if begging for her intervention.

However, even Serah would not take her side.

"Jared did not wait for Neron before chasing after Legris, did he?"

The moment Serah said those words, something within Maria ached.

"Even though Neron is reasonably strong, and this mission would be much easier if he was participating... Jared understood that we couldn't just wait around while Legris was causing so much havoc."

"Neron left behind a message! He clearly intended for Jared to go on without hi—!" Maria tried to offer a rebuttal.

"But what if he didn't? What if Neron said nothing? Would Jared have made a different choice?"

Maria fell silent, unable to respond to that query.

"I have asked myself that question for a while now, and there is only one answer that comes to mind..." Serah said in a whisper.

"No. He wouldn't have made a different choice. Jared would keep moving forward."

Considering how much Jared respected Neron, and how close the two were, he was still willing to take action without Neron.

It was all for the sake of the world.

"We should follow Jared's example." Serah finally posited.

She walked closer to Maria, placing her hand on the young girl's shoulder. A softened expression was on her face, and it was clear that Serah wasn't saying this easily.

"I'm sorry, Maria... but we need to get rid of Legris once and for all."

If Jared was present, it would certainly be much easier. But right now, he wasn't.

And everyone had to accept it.

"The work must be done..." Serah smiled softly.

Her crimson eyes met Maria's azure ones, and they both nodded in understanding.

"... Even if they have to do it without Jared."

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### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1263: Prelude To Amalgamation [Pt 1]**

In a dark world, devoid of life and hope, a man sat on a chair.

The chair was mangled and twisted, like a cluster of tree branches sewn together to form an ugly chair.

Not only did it look uncomfortable to sit in, but it was immensely unattractive and wretched as well.

Still, this man that sat had a smile on his face as he remained on this throne of his, obscured by the darkness that surrounded him.

Then...

"You're back."

... He finally spoke.

He lifted his gaze to the two people that now approached him.

One was a young man who had long dark hair, while the other was a beautiful maiden with pure white hair—both existing as sharp contrasts of each other.

"Yeah. We are."

"And we brought the goods."

As Stefan Netherlore and Ciel spoke respectively, they carefully stared at the countenance of the man they were reporting to.

The wide grin on his face made him resemble a fiend rather than a man.

"Um, Legris... that's quite a scary smile you have on your face." Stefan made this observation public, and Ciel nodded in agreement.

"Ahh... my apologies."

Legris rose from his twisted throne, and the moment he did so, the twisted thing faded away into obscurity.

"I still don't know why you sit on that thing. It looks so uncomfortable." Ciel murmured, and then sighed.

"Oh, it is. It's very uncomfortable. But I suppose that's why I like it so much." Legris smiled, his dark coat clinging tightly to his body.

"That discomfort... It reminds me of why I can't get complacent. You could say it keeps me on my toes."

This response of his was followed by a slap on the face by Ciel, and an emotionless reaction from Stefan.

"Ahh, you wouldn't get it. Anyway, let's return to the main topic." Legris shrugged slightly.

The crux of the matter...

"Just so you know... we were barely able to meet the quota."

"It was especially difficult when you began rushing us towards the end."

As Ciel and Stefan kept up their excuses, Legris dismissed them with a slight wave.

"I also used more power than I predicted, so I can't blame you all. Everyone has really become stronger than last time. It's quite scary, to be honest."

"How many were you able to eliminate?" Ciel swiftly asked, not even allowing Legris to breathe before showering him with curiosity.

"Just two. The remaining run amok." Legris sighed, watching as Ciel's facial reaction slowly devolved into one of disappointment.

She even booed him and pouted, causing him to grasp his chest a little as he feigned being hurt by her reaction.

"I worked hard, you know...?" He murmured.

Doubtful stares greeted him, causing him to sigh this time.

"Let's just get to the point, shall we? Let me see the goods."

As if materializing it out of thin air, Ciel brought out a multicolored orb. Stefan followed suit and brought out his own as well.

The orb seemed like a ball made of glass, with energy of varying colors clashing and merging within it.

They stretched their respective orbs toward Legris, and he took them both for observation.

Once more, the wide and twisted smile on his face made them shiver slightly.

However, none of them commented on it this time.

What would be the point?

"Haaa... this is it! This is what it's all about." Legris spoke to himself, caressing the orbs with so much satisfaction that he seemed to be drooling.

Engrossed in the beauty and pristine nature of the orbs, but more importantly, the energy that was trapped within them, Legris' wide eyes reflected their bright colors.

It was no surprise or mystery; he was pleased.

"By the way... how was Maria?"

"Huh? Did you say something?" Legris snapped out of his trance as he stared at Stefan.

"You mentioned how you fought everyone. That means you met and battled Maria as well, right?"

"Yeah...?"

"So I was asking how she was. How was Maria?" Stefan asked once again.

"If you're asking about how strong she has become, then she's quite impressive now. But I think you're currently stron—"

"I don't care about that. I don't really want to know how strong she has become. I just want to know how she is doing..."

For a moment, silence reigned in the dark realm.

It was an awkward moment, with Legris confused on what to say and Ciel being absolutely disinterested in the topic.

"I-I see..." Was all Legris could mutter.

"Never mind. It was just a fleeting thought. Pay it no mind." Stefan shrugged.

This was the first time in a while that Stefan had shown such emotion, but it was soon clouded over by his usual cold and aloof expression.

The conflicted expression on Legris' face made it clear that he was considering addressing Stefan's question, or at least further understanding what he meant.

However...

"So what now, Legris? You have all this energy... what next?"

Legris smiled the moment he heard that, snapping out of the brief moment of consideration he had towards Stefan.



"It's finally time to begin the [Amalgamation]." He responded, drawing both orbs that were in his respective hands close to each other.

The balls of energy began to react as they neared each other, displaying sparks of immensely concentrated power.

As soon as they touched each other, both orbs began to absorb the other until the two became one.

A single orb, slightly bigger than both energies, but far more powerful than the sum of their parts, now rested in Legris' right hand.

He stared at it with deep hunger, and then uttered more words.

"Now that the two of you have stolen enough Aether for me, I can supply the deficit with the Nether in my collection."

Chuckling lightly, Legris gave his twisted grin and nodded at his conspirators.

"With the both of them at my disposal, I should have more than enough energy to begin."

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### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1264: Prelude To Amalgamation [Pt 2]**

This had always been the plan from the start.

While Legris was distracting everyone, he would sneak in his two allies into the Constellation Realm and make them steal the energy for him.

'I had to blend them in with their surroundings, so I mimicked the effects of [The Tower] Arcana and tweaked some aspects of it to make the Spell [Nowhere].' Legris smiled to himself.

Using that, he was able to mask the presence of his Tēō allies, making it so that they would go largely unnoticed.

However, it was still possible for them to be detected—especially by troublesome Constellations like Aquarius.

That was where he came in.

By causing so much chaos that could not go unnoticed, he diverted all attention to him, and all the panicking Constellations were too bothered about trying to stop him and protecting their wards that they failed to notice Stefan and Ciel.

As a result, they were able to obtain as much energy as he wanted them to.

All without any interference.

'And now, with both of them farming enough energy for me, I can finally begin [Amalgamation].'

Having allies made all of this possible, and he could now see the appeal of strong individuals like Neron and Jared sharing bonds with those much weaker than them.

'I couldn't have pulled this off without them.'

Then, there was one final thing that tugged at him at the edge of his mind.

Something he would have left there if not for Ciel opening her lips to ask him.

"What of Jared Leonard? Was he among the ones you were able to kill?"

That name made him twitch a little, but Legris only chuckled in response to the silly question he was asked.

"Of course not. I was only able to kill fodder. I didn't even encounter Jared... thankfully."

With how much trouble everyone gave him, he could only guess how far Jared would have pushed him if he was present.

"Oh? Where was he?" Ciel asked.

"He probably went into seclusion. Knowing his personality, he's currently developing a method to eliminate me for good. That was both the worst case and best case scenario."

"What do you mean by that?" This time, it was Stefan who spoke.

"If we hadn't taken the risk that we had, then Jared's decision to go into seclusion would have been the worst case scenario. He would have probably been able to succeed and corner us before we gathered sufficient energy, thus ending this whole thing in his victory."

That was checkmate.

Fortunately, he and his allies decided to take the far riskier option.

"Now that we have all we need, and Jared is still working with the previous time frame in mind, we have the advantage. In essence, while he is stuck training, we can advance our agenda." Legris smiled.

"Hence... the best case scenario."

It was almost hilarious how their chances of success or failure hinged on a 50-50 possibility.

"Fortunately, we are on the winning end."

Ciel gave a wide grin, while Stefan's expression remained constant.

"So, what do we have to while you commence this [Amalgamation]?" The white maiden asked in excitement.

Out of the trio, she seemed to be the most energetic.

Her desires would soon be fulfilled, after all.

"Ahh, yes! This is the most sensitive part of the plan, so we have to be the most cautious and proactive at this juncture."

The smile on Legris' face soon faded away, replaced by an expression of sheer seriousness.

"[Amalgamation] has to occur in some form of reality, which means I can't do it here, where it's safe."

The reasons were difficult to explain to his allies, but Legris understood his powers and the process more than anyone else.

'Everything here will be absorbed, so it's impossible for me to begin it in this place.'

"I'll be at my most vulnerable once [Amalgamation] commences, and since I'll be in reality, it means I can be attacked by Jared's allies." He said in a sigh.

This was perhaps the weakest link in his plan.

'Being in a state where I am unable to act is certainly the worst. However...'

"You'll have to defend my chrysalis while I am undergoing my evolution." Legris stared at the two before him.

This was the part where they shined the brightest.

'There's no escaping or circumventing this process. This is the major reason why I needed powerful allies, to begin with.'

Without them, everything he had built this far would fall apart.

"Understood." Stefan nodded firmly.

"Can we take them all, though? You said they've all gotten stronger." Ciel asked.

As her valid question reverberated across the dark world, Legris gave a small smile.

"It won't be easy. But, don't worry. You'll have help."

As Legris said this, silhouettes began to emerge from the pitch black ground behind Ciel and Stefan.

This caused the two to swiftly react and face the apparitions that suddenly manifested.

"These will be your colleagues..." Legris' voice echoed as the two witnessed the entities born from darkness, and how they slowly approached.

They were all familiar faces.

"Gerard. Z'ark. Hero Zephyr... and the other strong foes we have encountered during our journey together." Legris declared.

These beings barely resembled their previous forms. They were all corrupted by darkness, pale and blackened by Legris' dark power.

"All nine of them will support you. That makes ten who will serve as my guards while I undergo [Amalgamation]."

Something about the math didn't add up, so Stefan brought it up almost instantly.

"Shouldn't that be eleven?"

"No. A total of ten is fine. I have a different task for you, Stefan." Legris smiled at the young man before him.

"Do you not trust me to guard you?" Stefan asked, narrowing his gaze slightly.

"That's not it. Haha!"

As Legris chuckled at Stefan's question, tense silence filled the room.

"Your task is just as important. Think of it as collateral... a contingency, if you will."

After a brief period of saying nothing, Stefan finally nodded in agreement.

"Okay."

"Perfect!" Legris beamed in relief and satisfaction.

With all his cards present, and his plan aligning to the perfect point, it was finally time to initiate his final phase.

"Let it begin."

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1265: When Darkness Surfaces**

I could see nothing.

I knew nothing.

Everything came and went, like a blur, washing over me as I remained in the dark.

Within my chrysalis, I held my breath and awaited my rebirth.

Still, I had one lasting thought that endured despite my submersion into power.

'Everyone... I'm coming soon!'

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Within the Constellation Realm, the surviving eleven members of the team were surrounded by the 12 Constellations.

Like small entities before massive pillars of power, so was the sight that played out.

At this point, they were mostly done contemplating, or rather deciding, on the path to take on the issue of their target.

However, before anyone could reach a solid conclusion, something happened.

Something... ominous.

"W-what is this?!"

The first to detect anything was Aquarius.

Her eyes would have widened if she had any, but her voice depicted the precipice of shock.

Not long after she sensed the ominous occurrence, the other Constellations began to realize what was happening as well.

"T-this is... no... already?!"

The mortals were surprised by their actions, but not for long.

~BEEP!~

~BEEP!~

~BEEP!~

A blaring alarm rang from Ana's watch, causing her to swiftly take note of its cause.

The moment she looked at it, her eyes widened as she loosened her jaw in shock.

"Is this what I think it is?" She gasped, her brows creasing in worry.

"What's the matter? What's going on?" Kuzon asked, his face resonating with the worry that Ana was experiencing.

Serah and the others also had similar reactions.

The fact that the Constellations had been able to sense something that made them so stunned, and Ana was also able to detect something that drove her to worry, meant that it was a serious event.

But what was it?!

"You were right, Kuzon. We need to act fast." Ana murmured, her eyes still fixated on her watch.

Before she could utter the reason why she thought so, Aquarius decided to speak.

"Legris has appeared in reality once more, and this time he seems to be within a cluster of power. Power I have never once experienced gathered in any place but one."

Silence greeted Aquarius' words, until Serah interrupted with her words.

"Where?"

For a moment, it seemed the Constellation would not answer, but after a brief moment of decorum, he responded.

"The Root."

Surprises filled everyone's faces instantly. How could Legris appear in a cluster of power that rivaled the Root itself?!

"He also seems to have allies with him. He's currently within the cluster of power... like a cocoon." Aquarius added.

No matter how anyone sliced it, the situation was already looking grim.

"It's his endgame. I was wondering why he attacked alone, but isn't there a possibility he was using his allies to absorb energy undetected while he distracted all of us?"

Lemi's words resonated with everyone, and it was at this point that they realized just how much they had been played.

"That means he's in the final phase of his plan, right? We have to stop him or else—!"

"Calm yourself, Edward. We need to know what we're dealing with first. We need a proper strategy too, or else it's just going to go like last time." Serah swiftly interrupted.

Everyone within the blank realm recognized how skilled Legris was at strategizing. There was no way he didn't foresee their interference with his endgame.

"I really don't want him to achieve whatever goal he has if it involves power comparable to the Root."

Kuzon's words resonated with those who heard him, and they all nodded in agreement.

"In the end, what we have to do hasn't changed. We need your help, Constellations. Is it possible for you to get rid of Legris before he completes whatever process he is undergoing?" Kuzon asked, now turning to Aquarius.

She shook her head gently.

"No. We cannot do anything. I have already tried, but the 'nothingness' he has shrouded himself with makes him immune to our interference."

Once more, everyone was reminded of the limitations that encumbered the Constellations.

"If you can't interfere with him, how can we hope to stop him?" Aloe asked, her face depicting a tad more worry than the others in the room.

At this moment, the Constellations were their strongest Allies. If they couldn't do anything... then who could?

"Martial Arts seem to work on Legris for some reason, right? Perhaps it's the same in this situation." Lemi swiftly spoke up, gathering more and more from what she had listened to thus far.

"Why else would he put guards to protect him if he wasn't vulnerable? If we employ our most powerful Martial Artists to strike him directly while the rest of us deal with the guards, we might stand a chance."

Her suggestion made a lot of sense, and it caused most to bob their heads in approval.

Eyes fell on Edward, and partially Kuzon. Serah also sighed, raising her hand to show she was interested in joining.

If three of them would go on the straight offensive to Legris and whatever he shrouded himself with, then they stood a chance against the full manifestations of his plans.

"How many guards did he employ?" Lemi asked Aquarius.

"I am unsure. His powers are affecting my ability to properly detect their numbers."

The moment Aquarius said this, Lemi clicked her tongue in annoyance.

'Useless...' Her thoughts trailed.

"What was that?" Aquarius asked, her tone instantly showing how she had most likely heard what the Half Elf had said deep within her mind.

"A-ah... nothing! I apologize!" Lemi swiftly yelled, laughing awkwardly.

"Hmph!"

With Aquarius thankfully overlooking Lemi's blunder, the latter clutched her chest and sighed in relief.

"We are still yet to discuss or undertake the most important element we require for this plan to work." Kuzon declared, staring at the Constellations that surrounded the eleven.

"Kuzon's right." Serah stepped forward, her brows furrowed in sheer seriousness.

"You all need to choose your Hosts now."

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### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1266: The Host Selection [Pt 1]**

Silence filled the blank room as Serah made her declaration.

She spoke with a firm tone, one which many would consider disrespectful.

However, it was only a testament of her resolve.

There was no time to squander, and she was going to be risking her life to protect existence from whatever Legris wanted to do.

There was no way she could tolerate any hesitation on the part of the Constellations.

She wanted decisive action from them too, and she wasn't alone in this desire.

One after the other, the other members of the team stepped forward and joined her in this declaration. Their faces reflected equal resolve, and while a few were nervous, they stood their ground.

'This is no time to show weakness. We've been training for this moment!'

Serah did not know about anyone else, but she was more than ready for the power they would bestow on her.

'And if it will bring me one step closer to stopping that monster... then I won't accept NO for an answer.'

Aquarius fidgeted slightly once she noticed the thoughts and gazes of the mortals on her and the rest of her siblings.

She recognized precisely what drove the mortals to behave in such a brave manner, and she realized she could no longer deny them the rewards for their struggle any longer.

Besides, they truly needed all the help they could get.

"Very well. But we still need to deliberate on—"

"Is there really any need for that?" Virgo interrupted Serah with a sigh.

It caused the head Constellation to look at her with what could only be recognized as a frown.

"Virgo has a point, though. We could all just make our picks. It's not like it really changes much." Gemini responded.

"Yeah. We all have our varying tastes, so there's hardly going to be a conflict of interest." Pisces added.

In the end, Aquarius' desire for a bureaucracy was not necessary.

"Haaa... fine! Make your pick." Aquarius sighed, waving her hand in resignation.

"You should pick first, Aquarius. You're the oldest and strongest, anyway." Virgo swiftly added once more.

"W-what?!"

"I agree!"

"Me too!"

"The honor should go to you!"

Several, if not all, of the Constellations made it so that she had to choose her Host first.

"Of course, if you don't want to pick anyone... you can always waive your right." Virgo's sly smile radiated across her pure face.

"What's your concern anyway, Virgo? You already have a Host, don't you? Stay out of this!" Aquarius spoke in mock annoyance.

"Sure... sure..."

The rest of the Constellations backed off as well, leaving Aquarius alone with her thoughts.

It was finally time for her to decide.

No one could see her expression, so it was difficult to understand her thoughts on the issue.

The only one who knew what was on Aquarius' mind...

'Haa...'

... was Aquarius HERSELF.

'... What should I do now?!' Her thoughts echoed in a panic.

Currently, the Head of the Constellations was in a dilemma.

For eons, since her birth, she had never fully settled on a Host—temporary or permanent.

However, all of that changed during the Legris invasion.

Due to the circumstances, she had to create a temporary Bond with a certain human... and that completely altered her position in the entire concept.



As someone who had kept her streak for so long... finally losing it in such a way felt a little unfulfilling.

The tension had worn off, and an emotion similar to regret began to kick in.

But... other than that feeling... something else manifested.

It rose from Aquarius' very depths, an overwhelming sensation she could not ignore.

... A longing for more.

'I want to feel that again. Becoming one with someone...'

It was almost like she was addicted to it, despite only getting a taste.

'Now I know why everyone keeps having Hosts despite the repercussions.'

It was an euphoric feeling with an irresistible allure.

Aquarius understood all of that now. As such, her desire for a Host was at its strongest at the current moment.

However, this presented the major issue she had.

'None of them are compatible with me!'

The kind Aloe, the mature Beruel, the strong Serah, the gentle Maria, the pragmatic Kuzon... heck, even the immensely intelligent Ana and Lemi.

None of them were her type.

None except someone... the one she had bonded with the first time.

'No! Anyone but her!' Aquarius nearly cried internally—though that wasn't even possible—as she stole a glance at Ciara Epilson.

Even at the moment, she was distracted by the Jerry boy beside her.

Aquarius held no strong opinions on Jerry. In fact, she thought he was weak. Yet, Ciara kept clinging to him... and it was puzzling.

She couldn't understand the girl at all.

'She doesn't respect me. She has no regard for anyone but that man, and... and...'

Before Aquarius could go any further in belittling Ciara, she remembered their encounter.

The memory flashed in her mind almost instantly.

~Fine! I'll do anything to save my friends! Let's do this!~

Those were the words Ciara uttered when push came to shove.

'She was also able to be calm under pressure, and she recognized the situation almost as soon as she was shown.'

Before Aquarius realized it, she began to notice Ciara's positives. And then, slowly, she became enamored by the young lady.

She no longer stared at her with a look of disgust or annoyance, but that of curiosity.

Almost like a man would look at a wild rabbit and desire to understand why they acted in such savage manners despite having endearing qualities as well.

'I can't deny it any longer...' Aquarius sighed to herself.

"... I want her."

As soon as Aquarius pointed at Ciara, the entire room descended into silence, and the hosts of Constellations let out joint gasps.

This was a miracle! It was something unprecedented under the heavens.

Aquarius... THE Aquarius... had finally chosen a true Host?

And it happened to be with the girl she seemed to detest most of all?!

"N-NO WAY!"

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1267: The Host Selection [Pt 2]**

"N-no way!"

"N-Nani?!"

"She really chose someone?!"

"Impossible!"

"M-masaka!"

"Unbelievable! I can't believe this!"

One after the other, the Constellations spouted words of shock that stunned everyone present.

This was a momentous occasion, one that deserved to be recognized through all of reality.

However...

"We are currently facing a massive threat to the world. Can we all focus, please?"

The moment Aquarius said this, the noises caused by her surprised siblings slowly went into a lull.

She sighed in relief, happy that her embarrassment could finally be diminished.

However...

"I knew you would get addicted after one try, Aquarius. Congrats, big sis."

... Virgo was not done yet.

Her sly smile once again betrayed the purity she was meant to display. The way she winked so sensually made Aquarius nearly give out.

The humiliation she was experiencing was too much to bear.

However, as someone who had been present since everything began, Aquarius tapped into the deep recesses of her patience and endured.

"Let us proceed." Aquarius managed to croak, taking her eyes off her naughty little sister.

"Ciara Epilson, you have the right to accept or reject my offer. What do you say?"

Even though Aquarius said this calmly, she was panicking within.

The last time she had tried suggesting something, Ciara completely ignored her and focused on Jerry.

What if something similar happened again? What if Ciara didn't want to be her Host?

What would she do then?!

'No one else is compatible with me here! I don't want to have to settle. No... I won't settle no matter what!'

If Ciara didn't accept her, then she would have to—

'Should I force her? Ah... no, I can't...'

In the end, she had to make her own choice.

That was the right thing to do.

"You're the strongest Constellation, right? I have no reason to refuse!" Ciara's response was genuine, but it also stung Aquarius a little.

If she wasn't the strongest, would Ciara's answer have been different? She couldn't help but think down that line.

"Besides... we made a pretty good team last time. It would be cool having you as my Familiar."

Upon hearing this, Aquarius' heart leaped a little.

Just a little.

"A-ahem! Likewise. I look forward to working with you."

Ciara broadened her smile, and even though Aquarius had no such facial features... she would be smiling if she had one.

For a few moments, there was silence. No one uttered a word—almost as if waiting for Aquarius and Ciara to be done with their staring contest.

"Alright, alright! We can initiate the Bonding Process once we all choose our respective Hosts." Libra spoke, stepping forward.

"It'll be annoying if we do this in order of strongest or weakest since that line is pretty much blurred with the rest of us." They added.

Unlike in Aquarius' case, where everyone recognized her as the most powerful, the rest of the Constellations existed on a similar level.

They had differing areas of jurisdiction, but their levels remained on the same tier.

"If no one objects, I'll choose my Host now." Libra raised one of their six hands and pointed it in the direction of one.

"Aloe Vida. I choose you."

For a moment, no one spoke. Aloe's face was etched with some measure of shock, but she controlled herself.

Then...

"Libra, you cheat! You knew I was going for her!"

"No wonder you quickly wanted to pick!"

"I should have known!"

A few Constellations complained, but Libra shrugged and looked at Aloe with a smile.

"So... what do you say?"

Aloe remained quiet for a while, and then she nodded slowly.

"I would be honored."

Her response caused Libra to smile and nod as well.

"Same as me."

Libra walked away after their brief exchange, looking at the few Constellations who were still complaining.

"You can also choose her. There's no rule against someone having more than one Constellation as a Familiar, you know?"

This was only a joke, though.

Every Constellation knew how immensely possessive they were.

They would never choose to share a Host with another Constellation, talkless or more than one.

The only exception to this was Neron.

He had three Constellations as his Familiars, a feat no one else had achieved in the entire Aether Tree.

But, that was only possible because of who he was—a Singularity

The most special being in all of existence.

Having three Constellations at his side was only to be expected.

Compared to Neron, Aloe did not compare at all. As a result, the other Constellations instantly backed away.

"My turn! My turn!" The next to step forward was Taurus.

His usual rowdy personality instantly caused him to steal the spotlight, which allowed the other Constellations to back off.

This too was an unspoken rule amongst them.

The courtesy of Constellations.

"I choose you, Serah Crimson." Taurus pointed at the redhead with pride.

Contrary to what he expected, though, she had the same expression on her face.

"I see. Thank you." Was her response.

"E-eh...?" Taurus was conflicted. He had never gotten such a response before.

Anyone would jump at the opportunity to be his Host, yet what was with her lackadaisical attitude.

"I also choose you, Serah Crimson!" Another Constellation took advantage of the current situation, most likely hoping Serah would choose them instead.

It was none other than Scorpio!

"Scorpio, don't you have any shame? I already chose her!"

"Shame? What's that? Can I eat it?" Scorpio chuckled to himself.

"You snooze, you lose! She clearly doesn't think you're her type."

"W-what?! That's not true!" Taurus protested, and then a bead of sweat formed on his face.

The possibility that maybe, just maybe, Scorpio was right began to seep into his thoughts.

"T-that's not true... right?!"

"Of course, it's not true." Serah spoke up, causing Taurus' paling face to gain a bit of color.

"You're exactly my type." Her declaration caused Taurus to grin.

"See, Scorpio? Turns out I—!"

"You're also my type, Scorpio. I choose the both of you." Serah declared, arms folded.

The instant she said that, both Constellations paused and stared at each other in surprise.

"E-eh?"

There was definitely something wrong with this arrangement, and they could see it instantly.

"Um... Serah Crimson... we're the ones meant to do the choosing. Not you." Scorpio spoke out.

"Ah... is that so? Then I accept your choosing me. The both of you."

Once again, her brazen words struck them.

"Is that fine now?"

The way Serah's crimson eyes focused on the both of them, unmoving and unyielding, and the unfathomable depths of her resolve, won them over.

The two Constellations stared at each other for a moment, and then shrugged slightly.

"Fine. The two of us, then..."

This was a surprise amongst those who witnessed the event. Even if Scorpio was to agree, no one expected the meathead Taurus to do the same.

That went to show just how valuable Serah was to him.

The only thing Taurus valued was strength, and the fact that he desired Serah to such an extent only proved one thing.

Serah Crimson was immensely strong.

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1268: The Host Selection [Pt 3]**

"I choose you."

The next to speak was Pisces.

The fish-looking Constellation remained in their glossy bubble as they picked their candidate by staring right in their direction.

This time, the one chosen was Beruel.

"I am honored." The Fairy bowed his head slightly and spoke courteously.

He had not expected himself to be chosen at all by a Constellation, and so early too. He always thought he would be among the leftovers, considering his lacking abilities.

But now... having being noticed and selected by a boundless entity, he felt genuine relief and satisfaction.

Pisces said no further, stepping back until the next Constellation took their place.

Thus far, eight out of the twelve Constellations already had their Hosts—or potential Hosts—chosen.

The ones who remained were Ana, Lemi, Aurora, and Jerry.

As the four of them stood, waiting to be accepted or rejected by another Constellation, the next voice emerged.

"I choose you." This time, the one pointed at was Aurora Vindiel, the Elf Queen.

She too followed Beruel's previous example and bowed slightly in response to being chosen.

A warm smile coursed through her face, and the relief within her washed away any of the anxiety she had felt prior to that point.

"I am honored."

Capricorn wasn't the Constellation she personally desired, but they were still a Constellation.

That had to count for something.

Once Capricorn was done choosing their Hosts, the remaining three stepped forward, almost simultaneously.

There remained three people left, and three Constellations, and while the simple solution would be to assign each individual to a Constellation, reality was far from that.

Just as Serah had proven, it was possible for two Constellations to choose just one Host.

It was also possible for them to choose none.

In essence, the three who remained were equally under the risk of rejection.

"Anabelle... I choose you."

Cancer's declaration finally eliminated the silence in the room.

The crab-like Constellation's expression couldn't be properly deciphered, but something about their tone echoed with amusement.

It seemed they were enjoying the situation.

"Thanks. You won't regret it!" Ana grinned in response to her Constellation's decision.

"Oh? Bold words."

Ana smiled, nodding excessively as she stared at him.

"I'll back them up soon!"

Something akin to a chuckle escaped Cancer's lips as he nodded slightly.

"Then I will be looking forward to that."

Afterwards, he strolled back to his position, leaving the remaining two Constellations.

Tension sifted through the air as both leftover individuals stared at one another, and had the same expression on their faces.

They were sure they wouldn't get chosen.

For Jerry, the reason behind his thoughts was simple.

He was too weak.

The Constellations had made it abundantly clear that they valued the capabilities of those who desired to be their Hosts.

He just didn't reach that threshold.

'I tried my best, and I've grown stronger...' His thoughts trailed.

'Even if I do not get any Constellation as my backer, I won't give in! I will keep growing stronger!' His eyes burned with resolve

As such, despite the tense situation he found himself in, Jerry still maintained his smile... a feat that could not be said about the other one.

Lemi was trembling profusely, trying her best to hide the sweat that dripped down her skin as her face tried to conceal the immense anxiety that coursed through her.

She knew within herself how disqualified she was.

Not only did she breeze through the Trials, but since Legris never assaulted her throughout his invasion, she was never able to display her true power.

In essence, she was even worse than Jerry!

As the both of them watched the Constellations, each convinced of their inadequacies, a Constellation spoke.

"Jerry... I choose you."

Sagittarius was the one who uttered those words, and the authority with which he said them made the room tremble.

It also caused Jerry's face to warp into that of downright shock.

He genuinely was not expecting this!

"Do not look so surprised. Your ideals and passion resonate well with me. For what is power without the ideal to back it up. I shall grant you power, so show me how you will fulfill those ideals."

Upon hearing the message given by the Constellation, Jerry began to tear up.

His vision became blurry as he felt a wave of uncontrollable emotions wash through him.

He had always felt inadequate, but now... with a boundless entity admonishing him so much... how could he not smile?

"T-thank you! I am honored, Lord Sagittarius!" He yelled, bowing as low as he possibly could.

"I will not disappoint you."

Sagittarius' chuckle echoed within the realm. However, it wasn't one of mockery or contempt.

It was one of pride.

"I am sure you won't."

This exchange between both Constellation and man was awe-inspiring to say the least. Everyone present who watched them could testify to that.



Some smiled in relief for Jerry, while some were simply stunned by how beautiful it was.

But there was one who felt even worse after experiencing this.

'Is this the end? Even Jerry managed to get a Constellation despite me hoping we would be comrades.'

Lemi knew she was supposed to be happy for Jerry, but she just couldn't be genuinely glad he got a Constellation and she was left behind.

No one liked being the odd one out, and she certainly wasn't an exception.

"Why do you look so worried? It's hilarious." Hearing the voice of the last Constellation who hadn't yet chosen spiked Lemi's senses, causing her to nearly jump out of her skin.

"Eeep!"

"Haha! You're amusing." The Constellation then said, chucking to themselves.

Lemi's nervous gaze fell on Gemini, the twins who were conjoined as one, as they looked at her with contrasting expressions.

One was laughing at her, while the other seemed more calm.

"W-well..." Lemi stuttered.

Not only was she not going to be chosen, but even now a Constellation was picking on her.

She could feel herself sinking into new lows.

"I like you, Lemi." Gemini responded—the playful one, of course.

"Eh?"

Lemi was still stunned by this statement, but the next one shocked her even more.

"I choose you."

\*

### **[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)**

#### **Chapter 1269: The Task Begins**

Gemini had always been the most eccentric of the 12 Constellations.

Unlike each who had a set personality, they had two.

Gemini was Duality.

Hot and Cold. Light and Dark. Good and Evil. They bordered on polarizing concepts and personalities.

And so, it only made sense that they would choose someone who embodied that very concept.

"I don't particularly like you, but... you are certainly appealing."

"Haha! Don't be so mean! You're gonna scare her!"

The two sides of the Gemini Constellation conversed, one laughing and one simply maintaining an unamused expression.

It felt odd that they were one and the same, but who could ever comprehend matters that related to the Boundless ones?

"I-I see. Thank you for the honor..." Even Lemi, despite being relieved that she was also chosen, felt a little awkward addressing the two personalities.

Which of the two was she supposed to look at first? How was she meant to address them? It felt too weird for her, but she did her best not to say anything about that.

She simply bowed and smiled respectfully, hoping that would be enough.

Thankfully, it was.

The Gemini Constellation soon began to argue between themselves, causing them to completely ignore her at that point.

'I don't even know if I should be happy or not...' Her thoughts trailed.

'At the very least, I managed to land one. That's what matters! There's no way he'll think I slacked off now!'

Even at this moment, Lemi couldn't help but think about Jared and how he would be pretty impressed by her achievement.

'I didn't fall behind my peers! That's what matters most.'

And even now, with the mission about to begin, she was determined to give it her all.

\*\*\*\*\*

After the Selection Process was finalized, the Constellations began their Bonding with the respective Hosts they chose.

As a result, the Constellation Realm experienced a surge of interlocking energies.

The mortals became a part of the Constellations, and vice versa—initiating a link that transcended the bounds of concepts.

All of this, within a single moment.

"It is done." Aquarius declared, standing ahead of the rest of her siblings to represent them.

Before her, and the other Constellations, we're the eleven who would now represent them in order to defeat their world's ultimate evil.

"Serah Crimson. Kuzon Midas. Edward Karl Leon. Aloe Vida. Lemi Vindiel. Jerry Keller. Beruel. Aurora Vindiel. Maria Helmsworth. Anabelle Frederick. And... Ciara Epsilon..." She began, her voice echoing with authority and admonition.

"... Existence is relying on you."

It was still unknown what Legris' endgame was, but the nature of his power and non-existence made him a threat to anything that existed.

He could not be allowed to remain.

"We wish you all good fortune."

As the group of eleven bowed before the Constellations, they all had the same burning expressions in their eyes.

The look of resolve.

On this very day... at this very moment... the final battle to determine the fate of everything was to be held.

Who would win? Who would lose?

No one knew for sure.

However...

"We will win." Said Kuzon as he looked at the rest of his allies.

Everyone nodded in confirmation.

Whether or not they believed in the certainty of Kuzon's words was one thing, but they all shared one thing that drove them forward.

The one thing that made them move forward despite the deaths of their comrades and the despair that was most likely waiting for them.

... A fear of what would happen if they lost.

And so, like a chorus—an exaltation of the soul—everyone repeated the same thoughts deep in their hearts.

"We have to win."

\*\*\*\*\*

The cocoon of darkness occupied an entire universe.

It was a mass of nothingness.

The blackness was tightly knitted together, leaving no space exposed.

Unlike the Nether Hive, it was incomparable in size or density.

But, most importantly, it did not leak out any remnant energy—or the inverse.

Instead, like a solid block of darkness, it sat within a universe, its massive frame taking in everything.

"It's huge." Kuzon commented as he watched it from afar.

Everyone else stood behind him, except for Serah and Edward who were in his unit.

"No. It's beyond huge. This is phenomenal."

Ana was currently wearing her goggles, and they were glowing as intensely as she was glaring at the sphere.

"The good news is that it doesn't seem to be leaking any of that Inverse Energy that Legris has, so it should be safe to approach it." She added, flexing her glasses a little.

"Everything seems to be concentrated on the interior. The external walls just serve as a shell. That means we should be able to destroy it with enough force, right?" Lemi added, to which Ana nodded slightly.

Despite the good news, her worried expression remained.

"The problem has to do with what comes next. If we break the shell, we have to think about the contents that will spill out."

In essence, all of the Inverse Energy being stored within the massive cocoon.

"I can't help but think of this like a bomb. One of this size should be able to consume tons of universes if its contents leak out." Ana muttered to herself.

If they were to break the shell and interrupt Legris' plan, then they risked the very worlds they were trying to protect.

"Not necessarily." Lemi spoke up, her tone slightly more optimistic than the situation at hand demanded.

As expected, all eyes instantly shifted to her.

"We could ask the Constellations to cut off this Universe from every other Branch. By isolating it, even if the bomb goes off, it has no other universe to infect."

A small smile formed on Ana's face as she heard Lemi's suggestion.

"Pruning it off, eh? That's a solid plan."

All that was left was confirmation from the Constellations that they could indeed do that.

~Leave that to us, then. Once you destroy the shell, we'll prune out the universe.~

Once everyone collectively heard Aquarius' voice, they nodded in optimism.

"It's going to be especially dangerous for the team responsible for destroying the cocoon." Ana shifted her gaze to Kuzon, Serah, and Edward.

"You three should immediately teleport the moment you land the dealing strike."

~There's no need. I'll personally draw them out once they're done with the task. All you need to do is focus all your energy on the objective.~

Once again, Aquarius' voice rang out.

"Well, that makes this so much easier." Edward grinned, though nervousness tugged at a corner of his mind.

"We just have to give it everything we have." Serah smiled.

"So the plan has been established. We advance to destroy the cocoon. The rest of you hold back Ciel and Stefan, or whatever other challenge Legris has put in place to stall us. And once the job is done, we all get teleported away by the Constellations while the affected area quickly gets pruned."

After saying all that, Kuzon smirked.

"Pretty straightforward, right?"

As simple as all of that sounded, everyone recognized how immensely difficult it was going to be.

Nothing ever really went according to plan, and there was no guarantee that this would be an exception.

"Now then..." Kuzon, as well as everyone else, turned to face their objective with pure focus.

"... Let us begin!"

\*

### [SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

#### **Chapter 1270: The Clairvoyant Laughs**

"Welcome..."

The voice was strangely calm. Its eerie softness echoed in the vacuum of space.

As the soft lips opened up to utter more words, the speaker's golden eyes radiated such warmth that it became scary.

"... I've been expecting you."

Right now, Ciel was floating a distance from the dark cocoon, her eyes fixated on the approaching group.

She had a pleasant smile on her face, and even though she was meant to be intimidated by the crowd that neared, nothing about her pleasant demeanor was tainted.

Her white attire remained stagnant as she stood still, waiting for the group to draw even nearer—until they stood a short distance from her.

"Only eight of you? I thought there would be more." Ciel smiled as she looked at the team.

She could see Maria Helmsworth, Anabelle Frederick, Beruel, Aurora Vindiel, Lemi Vindiel, Jerry Keller, Ciara Epilson, and of course Aloe Vida.

The gang was all present—or, almost.

"I see what you're trying to do. You want to distract me, or overwhelm me, with this first unit... while your specialized unit would go ahead to destroy the Cocoon." Ciel smiled, her eyes glowing even brighter.

"Am I right?"

As her question echoed in the void, a series of claps suddenly manifested.

"As expected. It seems that was a bust." Kuzon appeared, and so did Serah and Edward.

All three of them stood right in front of the other eight, their demeanors unchanged from before.

"Nothing escapes my eyes." Ciel responded. "Besides, Legris already informed me of your number and details. There's no way I could forget it if you were a few members short."

This, right here, was the weak link in their plan.

Even if they wanted to sneak past Ciel, it was impossible for two reasons.

"Your Clairvoyance and your caution..." Kuzon murmured as he sighed.

Ciel's Original Magic was [Eye Of The Wise], and it allowed her to see all things present.

In essence, perfect clairvoyance.

"I could see all of you from when you were a distance away. There's no way I would allow any of you to sneak past me."

This was where caution played a big part in.

As long as Ciel knew the group was incomplete, she would never allow herself to be distracted or overwhelmed by the rest of the team's onslaught.

If push came to shove, she would move to the defensive and try to buy time.

In essence, trying to be sneaky wasn't going to work on Ciel.

"Where's Stefan? I find it unbelievable that you'll be alone." Serah finally broke the silence.

The question caused Ciel to leak out a small chuckle.

"What's that supposed to mean? That I can't take you on myself?"

Her question was met with silence.

"The last time we fought, I was in a very pathetic state. I was drained, and in that state of weakness... I struggled quite a bit against you all." Ciel smiled, almost as if forgiving them for her disgrace.

"I admit that you've all grown stronger. You can all use Aether now, and I can sense Constellation Shards within every single one of you..."

Despite knowing all that, Ciel still had a confident demeanor.

"Still, I'm curious about how far I can go against you all..." She murmured.

Despite her ramblings, no one responded to her.

Everyone in the group already knew how pointless it would be to try to converse with someone as insane as Ciel.

Not only could they not reason with her regarding Legris' shady intentions, and how it would be detrimental to everyone, but they had learned from experience that Ciel was most likely on board with whatever twisted ideal Legris had.

This was the same woman who paved the way for the Nether's return.

She was just as evil as Legris.

"We don't have time for this. We're forcing our way through." Serah said.

It was clear that Ciel was trying to buy as much time as possible.

Stalling was not beyond her capabilities.

"Well, you're going to find that a little difficu—"

~WHOOOOOOOSSSSHHHHH!!!~

Before Ciel could conclude her words, Maria and Ana rushed towards her, their bodies glowing with pure Aether as they struck.

~BOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!~

As soon as the explosion reverberated across the vast space, Serah, Kuzon, and Edward rushed forward, their goal standing right in front of them.

As they did so, the rest of the team charged towards Ciel, surrounding her from all angles to prevent her from even trying to prevent the advance of their assault unit.

The plan had still not changed!

"We'll hold her off! Hurry and do the needful!" Ana yelled at the trio who were now racing towards the dark ball before them.

It would take their combined strength to generate enough power to take down something of such magnitude in one charge, so they had to sync their attacks.

Kuzon glanced to his left and right, properly absorbing the determined expressions of Serah and Edward, as he too strengthened his resolve.

While his teammates were doing their best in their mission, he would try his best too.

Nothing else mattered at this point.

Nothing but the mission!

"Absolute Emperor—!"

Right as Kuzon was about to transform, same as the other two with him, the most unexpected rush of power interrupted them.

~VWUUUUUUUUUOSSSSHHHHHHH!!!~

"W-wha—?!"

Shadows rushed forth, as if emerging from the black cocoon itself.

They lined up right in front of the trio, barricading their advance.

Normally, the three would have tried to force their way through.

Unfortunately... they could not try something that risky.

Not this time.

"Hahaha! It seems you've figured it out."

As Ciel's voice echoed all across the stifled space, she suddenly appeared behind the lined-up adversaries that stood between the team and their target.

Her grin widened, forming a wicked smile, as she took in their reaction to what they were seeing.

"T-this is...?!"

"No... no way..."

"He... didn't...!"

Right in front of Kuzon, Serah, and Edward, were apparitions that resembled their friends.

"Gerard! Z'ark!" Serah yelled out, calling for two of the nine shadowy existences that stood in their way.

At this point, their bodies were pale—grayed out by the corruption they had been submerged in.

Darkness clung tightly to their bodies, and they had lifeless expressions on their faces.

Clearly, these weren't the people they once were.

And what of the other seven?

Each of them had distinct looks—four women, and three men—with similar blank expressions written on their faces.

Their identical aesthetic oozed despair, and the slumpy way they acted made it certain what these were.

"Corpses. They're already dead." Aloe murmured, half in disgust with the other part holding in her annoyance.

At this point, the second group had rendezvoused with Kuzon's unit since Ciel vanished behind the undead battalion.

All nine of the current adversaries were clearly dead, yet thanks to whatever Magic was being utilized on them... they were alive.

"They have the same Inverse Energy as Legris. This won't be easy." Ana murmured.

"Why don't we play a little game?" Ciel announced, her grin only widening even further.

"Take your pick! Choose your adversaries, and fight to the death!"



Silence followed her words, as the group was still contemplating what to do.

"Defeat your adversaries and advance to your goal... is that not fair?" She asked, her eyes bulging with excitement.

No one spoke still.

"Very well. If you won't pick..." Her tone had a deadly undertone, enough to alert everyone who watched and waited.

"... I'll choose for you!"