

SPELLCRAFT 131

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

Chapter 131: Observation

Damien Lawcroft stood a distance from the forest and keenly watched it.

Judging from his unmoving gait and his intense focus, one could almost mistake him for a mannequin. Well, the grumbles he made gave him away, and these grumblings didn't cease.

The other Lecturers stood apart from him, intentionally avoiding being in his line of vision. When Damien was like this, it was best to leave him alone.

Just like the students could see a magical indicator to display the time, the Lecturers could also observe all that was happening with the very same medium. It was a two-way channel.

"Hmnm. It looks like it has started, uh? This is going just as I expected."

Damien's eyes ignored the trash who had a few Familiars hovering around them and focused on those he deemed worthy of his attention—students like Stefan Netherlore and Maria Helmsworth.

They had at least a hundred Familiars hovering around them, all brimming with intense light.

This could only indicate that they were the cream of the crop. Damien's terrible mood began lifting as he saw the talented students he had set his eyes on display the desired results.

Other students, especially members of the Upper Class had many Familiars around them too, a few dozen at the very least.

Middle-Class Students had a good number too, most of them had about twenty flickering lights around them.

Damien didn't care for the Lower Class, but his eyes went to them after observing the rest. As supervisor, he still had to monitor the trash, even though he expected nothing from them.

"Tsk, as I predicted. Trash will always be trash."

It was a miracle to see three Familiars hovering around those in the Lower Class. Yes, it was that bad. Most had just a single drifting Familiar drawing close to them, and judging from the intensity by which they burned, Damien Lawcroft already surmised that these were weak souls.

'The Familiar are probably just desperate and looking for a place to reside in.'

In essence, the students were fodder, not worthy of notice.

'How about that cheeky kid? Jared Leonard, was it?'

Damien's eyes scanned the large magical screen displayed in front of him and searched for the troublesome boy who got on his nerves the most. Even among the talentless, this kid had the gall to have a mere White Mana Core Grade and still apply to their institution. If not for his suspiciously perfect scores, there would be no place left for him in the Academy.

'There he is!' Damien grinned as he watched Jared closing his eyes shut in meditation.

Not a single Familiar hovered around him.

'That kid... so not even the desperate ones want him?!'

Damien was astounded by how one could be so unfortunate. He knew Jared was a good-for-nothing, but not to this extent. It was difficult to tell due to the distance, but the supervisor wasn't even sure Jared was doing 'The Call' properly.

'To think someone as shameful as this got into this Academy... it makes me sick!'

He had already filed an interrogatory report to the Academy's board concerning an investigation of Jared's admission. Damien was determined to thoroughly scrutinize his entry into Ainzlark, and if he found as much as a loophole, he would exploit it and make sure Jared dropped out by all means necessary.

Trash wasn't allowed in a fine place of learning such as Ainzlark, after all.

It wasn't just Jared that had no Familiar surrounding him. Damien spotted two other students who had no light surrounding them. One had very blond hair and looked like a child while the other had auburn hair, looked incredibly built physically, and had a determined look on his face even as he closed his eyes.

'... Must be a Martial Artist.'

To think that three students had severely failed in attracting any Familiars... this had never happened before!

Even the Inepts, who used Artificial Mana Cores, had at least one or two Familiars circling them.

'The Artificial Cores we provided are just at the base form of the Yellow Core Grade... to think these students are worse than that. This is absurd!'

As he had always thought, Lower Class scum were not worthy to be grouped with the more talented students. They would only stunt the growth of those with more potential and hold them back. This was the whole rationale behind the Class System in the first place.

As Damien Lawcroft made these condescending thoughts, his eyes moved in the direction of the Lecturer in charge of all the failures, Neron Kaelid. He expected the man to display even a slight hint of panic due to all his students failing miserably.

However, much to his disappointment, Neron showed none of such emotion. In fact, the young-looking man displayed nothing but a stoic outlook on the whole thing.

"Tsk, he hasn't changed!" Damien clicked his tongue while whispering under his breath.

The dissatisfied supervisor decided to ignore both the pathetic students and their Lecturer. Rather, he would focus on his pride and joy, observing the choice they made and greet them as they came out of the Oasis!

Unknown to Damien, however, Neron was not feeling terrible within himself. He wasn't disappointed, he wasn't worried, he wasn't anxious. No, Neron Kaelid was brimming with pride.

Why?

Because he figured out what Jared and his two companions were trying to do!

'That crazy kid! He can already control the flow of his internal Mana Particles! He's drawing in all the excess Mana and trying to advance his Core!'

Neron's eyes darted to the remaining two students who did the same and surmised that their actions were most likely influenced by Jared.

In essence, these oddities were doing what others hadn't even considered and were doing it at a level that wasn't possible for their age.

'I'm excited! Jared Leonard, Anabelle Frederick, Edward Karl... show me what you'll do!'

Even though his facial expression was being controlled, his heart raced and his muscles throbbed. These students were growing to be monsters, and once as a witness, he couldn't wait to see what kind of creatures they would become as soon as they emerged from the chrysalis.

'Show me, Jared! No, show everyone! The power you wield!'

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

Chapter 132: The Fifth Core

It was so hard!

I could feel my blood vessels pulsating. Even the tiniest bit of error could prove fatal. Absorbing such dense energy was very risky and required the utmost level of concentration. It was fortunate that I was currently in a quiet location, else there would be no way to achieve such a degree of focus.

My little body struggled to contain the energy it received, sending it to my Mana Particles which were charged up and energized to an unfathomable degree. Quickly, I controlled the fast current of Mana Particles and guided them in the direction I wanted.

Where would my fifth core be? It had to be one of the most critical and overlooked parts of the body.

'My back!'

Yes, that was the best spot for my newly forming Core. While offensive abilities were useful for Mages, defense was equally important. To achieve balance in my body, having a readily available Mana Core for defense was pertinent!

As I forcibly directed the torrents of mana to the center of my back, surges of pulsating energy enveloped me.

It grew more and more uncontrollable, but I didn't relent. As the energy flowed, I pushed it to the back.

'No... it's too much!'

Realizing that the distribution of energy was slower than my absorption rate, I needed to do something to balance things out.

There was no way to reduce the absorption rate since the mana was too dense and thick to be contained. It was like a busted pipe or a dam that was overflowing.

'Should I cancel the whole process? No!'

I had come too far to turn back now! Time was meaningless for me since I had no idea what the clock said. My concentration was too deep to bother about my surroundings other than the mana that consumed my body.

There had to be some other method... something I could do to tame the power overwhelming me!

Suddenly an idea arrived, and while it would be difficult to execute, it boasted the most effective solution to my dilemma!

'I didn't think an opportunity like this would come so soon, but I guess it's time!'

I was going to advance my White Mana Cores to a higher Grade!

Advancement required lots of Mana Particles, something I had in excess at the moment. Thanks to controlling the flow of Mana within me, I was redirecting all the particles to my forming Core. However, the energy was too much.

'If I loosen my hold on the Mana Particles, some will naturally flow towards my other Mana Cores since they serve as Mana Magnets!'

Using this logic, I only controlled some aspects of my Mana Particles and allowed the others to move in the direction of my brain, heart, and spinal region—the nape of my neck.

Of course, I prevented any from touching my primary Mana Core since I had to ensure that it remained white no matter what! It proved difficult, but I was able to redirect any Mana Particles nearing my stomach region to my back.

"Huu..." Heavy breaths leaked out of my mouth as I could feel my body wet from perspiration.

'No, focus!'

I was feeling it, the burden had lessened, now replaced by tingling sensations emanating from the various spots in my body where my Mana Cores were situated.

The Cores resonated with each other, giving me newfound strength and I could feel myself slowly acclimating.

'This feeling... this is it! I'm doing it!'

My back tingled as the swirling orb around it fully manifested, giving me a surge of excitement in return. I felt completely overwhelmed by the power that had just unfolded within me, but I controlled myself some more.

'It's not over yet! I have to continue advancing!'

It wasn't greed, rather, it was efficiency.

I was probably never going to get a chance like this again! I had no idea how long had passed, but it was probably still within three hours or I would have been interrupted by now. Being able to make a Mana Core within such a short time was simply incredible, no, unbelievable!

But, it was a testament to the amount of effort and expert control over Mana that I had. I had been doing this since I was a baby, after all.

If I had some time left, it only made sense for me to take advantage of the surrounding Mana and promote my four Cores.

Looking at each of them through meditation, most of the Cores had reached a slight Yellow State, but it wasn't enough. I needed more! My newly formed Core was still white too!

It would take more grueling work, but I was prepared!

"Huu, finally..." I opened my eyes to the beautiful sight before me.

Even though I had never left the Oasis, it felt like a strange land compared to the inner recesses of my body. It took a while for me to completely adjust to the change in environment, but I controlled my breathing and the tense spasms of my body.

My stiff neck made a cracking sound as I raised my head to check the time.

"2:41 PM, uh? Time is almost up..." I sighed a little.

My eyes looked around and I saw that I was the only one left in the Oasis. The balls of light that represented the Familiars had also ceased their dance and were lingering around, most likely waiting for their return to the pool.

There was little time left, too little to call a bunch of familiars, form a contract with just one, and leave the grounds. I was certain the staff who were most likely watching the whole thing from afar had already concluded that I would fail... well, Neron was probably an exception.

A wide grin formed on my face as I made up my mind. I didn't have time to skin through the Familiars that would gather around me the moment I made a Call.

'Instead of a Call, I should do something else... how about...'

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

Chapter 133: Resonance

It was unorthodox, I hadn't seen a single book that talked about this method. However, after carefully considering my options, it was bound to work in theory.

I sluggishly moved my tired body and rose to my feet. Every joint and muscle within me ached severely, as I thought it would. My tummy growled in hunger, but I neglected the pangs.

As I moved, I slowly got closer to the pool, so clear and white, like a crystal. The swirling within the clear glass surface was mesmerizing, but I maintained focus.

'As long as this white surface is here, the Familiars that have come out can not go back in until the allotted time is up...'

That was why a great deal of them still lingered in the area even though they appeared to be practically done with their business.

I was the only one left, and so far no Call had come from me. They must have already given up on gaining a Host and would probably have to wait until the next year.

However...

'Judging from the swirling within this pool and the glimmering colors within, there seem to be more Familiars inside...'

They just refused to come out.

'All the impressive Familiars would have probably been taken by the talented students, and I am not interested in leftovers.'

The ones that piqued my interest were the beings who didn't even bother to find a Host among our batch of students. I could only think of two reasons why.

One would be that they were lazy or uninterested in a Contract with a Host.

As long as they remained in the artificial Mana core, they had a home, so they were probably comfortable with that.

The second would be that they had a great deal of pride. For a Familiar to refuse searching for a Host and not respond to the Call of any of the students, it meant that the Ego making them up was quite huge.

The bigger the Ego, the better the Familiar!

A grin formed on my face as I noticed even more time had passed. Only fifteen minutes were left so I had to hurry.

This was a risky venture with an unconfirmed success rate.

Deducing the fact that no one else was here, it meant they had all succeeded, one way or the other, in gaining Familiars. It would be a bummer if I was the only one who failed.

"Let's do this!"

I sat on the grass directly facing the lake just inches from my body. A little push would make me fall into it, no doubt. Now closer to the source of the vast mana that I had exploited to better myself, I was grateful for not being so close while I absorbed it.

'At this distance, the Mana would have been too much for me to handle... I would have gone into Mana Shock.'

I reached out my hand, limp and tired, stretching it toward the glassy surface of the lake. I made my movements slow and calculated, watching out for any warning from the staff that I was violating some sort of rule.

'Nothing, uh?'

Damien Lawcroft also didn't mention my actions as a violation of any rule, so that meant I was well within my rights.

My hand moved more swiftly now and I made contact with the glassy surface of the lake. It felt sturdy, as I predicted. It was cold too.

Shaking off my perception of the white barrier, I focused on my next action.

No matter how hard I tried to 'Call', I was probably never going to obtain the attention of any of the Familiars within the lake. Only the ones nearby would flock to me, and it would be a pain to sort them all out.

This was why... I would need to resort to this!

'Mana Resonance!'

In an instant, four of my five Mana Cores shone, resonating with one another at the very same time. Instantly, my Mana was leaked out of my body and all gathered on the hand that touched the lake's barrier.

Like shockwaves rippling through water, the Mana I released served as a probe and distorted the swirling water in the lake.

>FWUUUMMMM<

I felt a shift in the atmosphere, like the very air around me vibrated. It only lasted for a few moments, and then it disappeared.

'Huu, I'm done... now, let's see your response!'

The technique I just used, 'Mana Resonance', was only possible when a person had very high proficiency in Mana Manipulation.

It was achieved by pulsing one's Core through the area to reveal one's presence and also to detect the presence of others.

In a place with zero visibility, Mana Resonance was useful since allies could spot one another. High-Level Resonance made telepathy between two individuals possible—even without the use of Spells!

All I had done was to use all four of my Mana Cores to resonate my intentions into the deep. It was a hassle to deliberate on a Bond Contract between myself and a prospective Familiar.

Instead of going back and forth with offers and counter-offers, it was best to simply give out my contract offer.

I achieved this with Mana Resonance!

'Now, let's see which one among you will bite!'

For a moment, silence prevailed.

I received no response.

Five seconds passed. One minute passed. Three minutes passed. Five minutes passed... not a single feedback!

'Shit! Did I make a mistake!' My eyes bulged as panic began seeping into me.

With less than ten minutes left, I was already on my last straw. Should I have just settled for the ones available?

Fortunately, I was worried in vain.

I saw four balls of light ascend from the swirling pool beneath me. They seemed so pure and unsullied, even as I viewed them from behind the glassy layer that separated us.

Red

Blue

Green

Ashen

These creatures, no, souls, popped out of the pool and went past the white barrier.

My eyes widened more in surprise as I witnessed their splendor. They had an appearance unlike any other.

Their shapes resembled tiny sparkling beings made up of flaming lights in their respective colors. Their shapes were humanoid, having larger heads compared to their bodies. I saw eyes too, two round indications on their faces... and these four approached me closely.

My eyes weren't deceiving me!

There was no way I wouldn't know these creatures—what kind of Familiars they were!

It appeared staying behind and trying this method was worth it, after all. Before me, floated the most unique of Familiars—having the title of the original Bond Souls.

Wisps!

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

Chapter 134: Is That A Wisp?

Wisps are peculiar beings, even among familiars.

They are often referred to as the original Familiars, and that is for a single reason—their natural state as souls!

Unlike other Familiars who were once living beings that died and became Bond Souls, Wisps have always had the appearance of Souls. Having no physical body, to begin with, they are the real deal, authentic Familiars who never age and still have the total pieces of their memories and Egos intact.

They do not get corroded with the passage of time...

"T-these are... Wisps!"

Four of them floated around me, donning different colors! It was amazing to imagine that my intentions had resonated with not just one, but all four at once.

'I didn't expect this!'

My Resonance conveyed the Contract I intended to make, and just like a bid, I expected those who were interested to show themselves.

One of the terms I placed was 'First Come, First Served'. I only had room for four Familiars, after all.

Suddenly, I felt my mind grow hazy. Like a fog slowly creeping up on me, my vision blurred and my strength was just about used up. I only had a few minutes left.

Did I currently have what it took to contract with four Wisps?

"I'm glad you answered my Resonance. Unfortunately, my power is all used up. Please, lend me your strength now. I shall offer you a place of abode... the most comfortable kind!"

The creatures of light drew nearer, and I could hear a humming sound emanating from them. Having studied these unique beings for some time, I knew what they were about to do.

"Human."

"Do you deceive us?"

"Is it possible that you truly possess multiple Cores to house four of us?"

"Prove your worth."

As I heard their voices echo in my head, my mind grew foggier. Usually, Familiars would be more cordial, but I was dealing with proud beings here. I needed to be smart about my next move.

"You are Wisps, are you not? Why do you not resonate with me and find out?"

After I managed to say this, silence prevailed. I stared at each of the floating beings tiredly, waiting for their decision.

>ZWUUUNMMMMM!!!<

I felt a vibrating frequency within me. It was like every part of my body was being thoroughly searched, and I knew why. The Wisps were confirming my assertion by resonating with my Mana Cores.

"Very well."

"You appear to be speaking the truth."

"Who would have thought, though... a human possessing this many Mana Cores."

"It's a good thing we decided to come and spectate out of curiosity. The others didn't believe you... looks like they missed out on a rare sight."

Judging by their words, I had to deduce that the reason my Resonance was unanswered was due to doubt on the part of the Familiars. They must have thought I was merely bluffing and not worth any time. Speaking of which, time was running out, my stamina as well. I needed to hurry!

"Now that you have seen my Cores, do you believe me now? Form Contracts with me!"

Silence pervaded the area once again.

"Human."

"You mentioned having a suitable home."

"Your Mana Core is merely at the Yellow Core Grade."

"Do you believe it is worthy of us?"

"Do you know of our status? How dare you."

Now they were mad! What arrogant little pricks these Souls were. Wisps were strong, but not by a large margin. Many Familiars, who were once legendary beings, outstripped them in both power and Mana potential.

The reason for their pride was due to the fact that they were Original Familiars. If I wasn't so desperate, I wouldn't need to go out of my way to cajole them. The benefits I offered went both ways.

"Do you not know, o' Wisps? Having four Mana Core Grades to house four of you, I intend to specialize them in the Magic attribute that you all possess. That makes it the most suitable home for your respective personas."

Immediately after I said this, the Familiars suddenly emitted a brighter ray of light, causing me to nearly go blind.

"What did you just say?"

"Do you mean it?"

"Resonance shows that you don't seem to be lying."

"Why would you do that?!"

While Familiars were searchers of residences to live in, some were extremely picky concerning the types of Mana Core which would house them.

Mana Cores become specialized the higher the Grade, and while the basic use of other magic is possible, one's specific attribute would be sure to be more pronounced when using related spells.

For Familiars, the more attuned the attribute of a Mana Core was to their own attribute, the better the home would be. Since the proud ones preferred comfort, they sought those who had similar attributes... but it was extremely rare to find an individual who had exactly the same attribute as the Familiar.

Why?

Mages generally preferred versatility. If one had specialization in Fire Magic, it was clear that they would seek a Familiar who had a complimenting ability, probably wind, to increase the mage's power. No mage would intentionally pick a Familiar that could do the same thing he could. It would be a waste!

That was why these Wisps were most likely surprised by my offer.

"I will make my specialty the same as your attributes. Fire. Water. Wind. Earth. Four of the basic elements. I have enough Mana Cores to do that!"

My smile broadened as I stared at the glowing beings. With my strength fading, I could only put on this facade for a minute longer, but I had to remain strong. If I passed out here, the contract would never be signed and I would lose my chance.

"So, what will it be?"

'Please say yes! PLEASE!!!' I screamed internally.

"You intrigue me, human."

"You are quite impressive."

"Having a Core dedicated to me does sound appealing."

"And we get to have one another as neighbors..."

My body throbbed, muscles ached, and I knew it would only take some seconds before I blacked out.

"Very well. You have won us over... we will sign the contract on one additional condition."

'Tch! What now?!'

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

Chapter 135: Bonding

With only a few seconds left before everything totally went blank, I eagerly expected the favorable response of the Wisps... until they told me of an additional term to be included in the Contract.

'Tch! What now?!' I growled in impatience.

"What do you want?"

The round eyes of the four creatures narrowed, as though they were squealing in delight.

"It's simple."

"All you have to do is promise."

"Promise to never discard us."

"You just never resort to a Bond Break."

I swallowed my saliva.

They knew about Bond Breaking? Of course, they did! Unlike other Familiars who were mere vestiges of their former selves and had their memories corroded with the passage of time, Wisps lived for very long and had no such factors limiting them.

They would not disappear without a Host, but they still sought one as a means of accomplishment and comfort.

The fact that they wanted to add this factor meant that they had no intention of leaving me if we Bonded. The implications of this term meant I couldn't even resort to the forceful dissolution of our contract later on. It would be permanent in the true sense.

In essence, I was stuck with them and they were stuck with me.

But, I had no qualms with that!

"Hehe... very well. You win. I'll agree to that. The fact that you're here means you also agree to my Contractual terms, correct?"

"Wise choice, human."

"Your terms are reasonable."

"It appears we have found a good host."

"You shall not regret this decision."

"Now that the terms are all agreed on... let's get this show on the road!"

The Wisps all charged at me and I braced myself for impact.

>SHUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU<

Hisses of burning energy coursed through me as I felt my Mana Cores absorb the Familiars. Like two different forms of liquid combining, they fused with my cores with such fluidity that the flow was not disrupted.

It was my first time, so the strange sensation brought about by Bonding with four Familiars made me spasm violently. If I had enough energy, I would have screamed as a result of the overwhelming force.

I was certain no one had ever accomplished this before. Usually, a person could only Bond with one Familiar. It was trite.

However, having five different Mana Cores, I had the option of Bonding with multiple Familiars. I chose four this time around because I hadn't found the right candidate for my Primary Core.

I wanted something more powerful than Wisps, something more unique than anything people would possess, something that didn't have an equal.

There was no way to find such a Familiar in the Academy... which was why I had to be patient. Once I was done with my studies and got the opportunity, I would sojourn in search of my true Bond, the one who would dwell within my main Core and grant me absolute power.

'This... means... I succeeded... right?'

My mind was going blank, and I knew there was nothing more I could do to keep myself conscious. All the criteria for passing the Ceremony had been fulfilled, so I did not need to exit the forest.

The Staff would come to get me, and I was going to inform them of the Bonds I contracted with when I woke up later on. That meant, for now, I could relax.

"Huu... this has been... quite a ride... uh?"

And so, everything went dark!

"Incredible. He really did it!" Neron beamed as he watched Jared Leonard collapse on the grassy plains.

Every single staff was surprised by the sight. If only anyone had seen their faces when the four Wisps appeared before Jared and hovered around him, they would have noticed that the Lecturers all dropped their jaws in shock.

Even the proud Supervisor, Damien Lawcroft, was off his hinges. His eyes spasmed in surprise and he certainly didn't seem pleased by the development unfolding on the screen.

After everyone had left the grounds, leaving only Jared, Damien was gloating in satisfaction. He even had enough momentum to laugh out loud and openly mock Jared, hoping to spark some sort of reaction from Neron.

Unfortunately, Neron, being a master of his emotions, didn't give anyone the satisfaction of seeing through him.

Damien was trembling a little. Not only had Jared gotten the attention of four Wisps, but the four seemed to have contracted with him... something that would have been impossible through normal standards.

"That kid... something fishy is going on here!"

Neron didn't appear fazed, though. It was unclear whether he was actually excited for the child or he was simply unimpressed. However, upon closer observation of his thoughts, the answer became clear.

'I knew it! Jared, you... no wonder you can perform Magic so seamlessly and you have such knowledge. Even being a White Mana Core Grade, you still outdo your peers!'

Neron had had his suspicion for some time, but with nothing definite to point at, he couldn't make them out to be more than just his thoughts.

However, that all changed now that Jared had displayed his ability to contract with four Wisps. No individual could do just that, with the exception of one other... and Neron knew who that person was.

Himself!

'So, he has a White Core, but he can perform multiple spells at once and contracts with four Familiars, he's oddly like me. Hmm, I didn't want to jump to conclusions before, but it has to be the case!'

Just like him, Neron knew Jared held a secret concerning the use of the White Mana Core... and that he possessed something no one else had.

'He has multiple Cores!'

With this thought firmly established in his mind, Neron's stoic expression broke into a pleased smile.

There was no way he could deny it now. Even though he had told Jared that he would only take him in as a disciple if he impressed him during the Inter-Class Exchange that would take place in two months, Neron was having a change of heart.

'No wonder he was so confident... so this is it, uh? Very well, you have my attention.'

Jared was bound to be a monster that would surpass all his peers. Neron knew that much, considering the fact that he was the same.

'Show me what you've got!'

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

Chapter 136: Host and Familiars

"U-urgh..."

My voice was hollow as I opened my eyes to see the ceiling.

It took a few moments for me to fully grasp my current predicament, but I silently processed it. With empty eyes and strained breaths, my lips curled up in a slight smile upon realizing all I remembered was not a dream.

'I did it, uh? I got myself four Familiars!'

That wasn't the only good news. My Mana Cores, with the exception of my original, had advanced to the Yellow Core Grade, each accumulating enough to put the best highest Yellow Core Grade student in any class.

These were all things worth celebrating.

Unfortunately, my body was in no state for festivities. Thanks to pushing myself well past the limit, and depriving my body of the appropriate nutrients after going through such a tasking procedure, this much was expected.

Fortunately, I sustained no permanent damage, and I was most likely in an infirmary. After taking a good look around, I confirmed my assumption.

'Six Mana Cores is the limit for my body currently... but that doesn't mean I should push it!'

Human beings were like rubber. Our base form was not the limit, and we could continue stretching and increasing in power. However, it would be inadvisable to keep any piece of rubber in its stretched state for too long or to push it to the point of its elastic limit.

'I shouldn't have six Cores within me, even if I can. There has to be a balance, else I'll just be overtaking this body...'

That meant one thing—for now, I had reached the limits of my Mana Core growth, at least in quantity. I could still increase the quality.

"Ah, maybe I overdid it a little, though..."

I was fully recovered, having only slight aches here and there, so it wasn't necessary to remain in bed. But, seeing that no one was around to interrupt me and that the place was quiet, it was the best time to manifest my Familiars.

Closing my eyes and maintaining a steady breathing pattern, I entered a meditative state and connected with my four Mana Cores that had the Wisps dancing within.

'As expected, they've gotten accustomed to the Core...'

While a Mana Core may appear little to humans, once Familiars contracted with a Host and entered it, the Mana Core was basically like a whole world to it.

The better the Core Grade, the larger the world would grow. Currently, thanks to the quality of my Cores, their sizes were each as big as my family's manor back home.

I was certain that the Familiars wouldn't be uncomfortable for a while. But, now wasn't the time for leisure. Now that I had contracted with them, the next step would be to begin enforcing our agreement.

>SHUUUUUU<

Infusing the Mana within my cores, I manifested the four Wisps locked within, causing mist-like energy to leave my body and appear above me.

One after the other, the wisps took form. They used my mana as catalysts and manifested in the normal plane even if their main bodies remained in my Core.

"Well, well, well..."

"Looks like you're finally awake."

"Who would have thought you were that exhausted when we contracted with you?"

"Pfft."

The image they took on was identical to how they originally looked like, plus their voices brought back memories. Now that I had more clarity, I was able to recognize the Wisps better.

The crimson one had a rough-looking face, and judging from its attitude and tone, it was most likely the fiercest of them all.

The blue Wisp was the one who spoke very few words.

The green one had a playful and free-spirited charm about it.

As for the ashen one, an earth attuned Wisp, it had a serious demeanor and spoke very bluntly.

"I'm happy you were all worried about me." I smiled sarcastically and the Wisps made flustered expressions in response to my comment.

"W-wahh?! Who said we were worried?!"

"Fool."

"Ehhh?"

"If you were that weak, we wouldn't have agreed to the contract."

Did they not notice my sarcasm, or were they just airheads?

Either way, while it was nice and all to get along with one's familiars as well as crack jokes with them, it was also very important for a Host to assert his dominance in the relationship.

"Well, you are now officially my Familiars. I hope you understand what that means.

"Duh."

"This guy thinks we're airheads."

"We know that much."

"Do not underestimate us."

They all spoke, one after the other, as though they could read one another's thoughts. Maybe they could, or perhaps they had lots of spare time practicing their lines.

Their statements seemed condescending, though, like they did not acknowledge me as the dominant figure in our relationship. This was why I was surprised by the next thing they did.

Each of the floating wisps bowed their brimming heads and showed respect. With joint speech and a reverent tone, they rendered their speech to me.

"Master... you have proven yourself worthy of our power. We officially declare ourselves as your Familiars."

As soon as I heard this, I smiled—both in pride and also relief.

It would have sucked if they forced me to use the Bond Contract to dominate them. I wasn't keen on keeping my trusty Familiars bound by fear.

"Very well. I accept your vows. I shall also prove myself to be an able master to you. Mark my words, you three. Soon, you shall all have more neighbors. You shall witness as I grow stronger and you shall all grow stronger with me. I shall show you things beyond your understanding, and together, we will arrive at the hidden truth... The Root of Magic itself!"

These emotion-filled words echoed across the room, my unwavering will remaining intact.

As I concluded my speech, I was greeted with silence... and then...

"Pfft!"

"Puahahaha!"

"Our Master is quite the funny man!"

"Do you overestimate yourself? How interesting."

Shaken by the mockery of those who had called me their master just a few moments back and swore their allegiance to me, a slight tingle of hurt permeated my heart.

As their laughs radiated the room and they danced gleefully in the air, I comforted myself with a tiny thought.

'Damn you guys... I should have dominated them, after all!'

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

Chapter 137: Visitors (Pt 1)

The Wisps kept dancing and giggling around me, like flies on a pile of dung... okay, that wasn't a very good analogy.

It was too distracting, watching them play with each other. Still, the sight was wonderfully cute that it caused a smile to form on my face.

'If I only had one core, this wouldn't be possible...'

They all looked so happy, being able to interact with their fellow Wisps this way. For Familiars who Bonded with their Hosts, they basically had no one else to relate with except their master. If such a host was cold-hearted and neglectful, the Familiar would suffer loneliness.

At least I was comforted with the fact that even if I was busy, these fellas would have each other.

Suddenly, the four of them halted in their play, their brimming bodies glowing brighter than usual

"Someone's coming!"

"Run!"

"Hide!"

"Run and hide!"

Instantly, they all lunged back into my body, returning to their respective Mana Cores. It was adorably how they fled, but I wasn't surprised that they were able to sense someone's presence, something I hadn't been able to.

'Well, I suppose I haven't completely come out of it yet...'

A knock interrupted my thoughts—it was light and gentle. I quickly sat up, resting my back on the crown of the bed I lay on as I expected my visitor.

>CREEEEEAAAACCC<

The door opened slowly and the person in front of it entered, not even waiting for me to give permission. Upon seeing the face of my visitor, though, I acknowledged that there was no need for that.

"Professor Neron Kaelid... it's a pleasure to see you."

My words may have been an act of courtesy, but my smile was genuine. Of all the people I wanted to see first, he was the first candidate.

"Looks like you're all better now. You got treated with a restorative potion and were placed here to recover."

Neron found a seat at the edge of the room and brought it closer to my bedside. Seating on it, the young man stared at me keenly, as though trying to see right through my smiling expression.

"A-ah, is that so? That's a relief, then. I'm sorry for the trouble I caused."

"Oh, that's all right. You're in the Academy, after all. Your safety is our top priority." His words sounded the moment I concluded mine.

"H-how did it go? And why are you here?" I decided to be straightforward in my approach.

It had been risky, but I took the chance anyway. Since I had clearly displayed my ability to contract with four Familiars while the staff watched, it was very possible that the secret of my multiple Mana Cores had been exposed.

If that was the case, then...

"We examined you and found out nothing is wrong with your body, we could also sense the Familiars within you, though their energy signature is all mixed up. Maybe it's due to the fact that no one has ever contracted that many Wisps at once..." Neron explained.

'Ah, I see...'

It appeared I was worried for nothing.

Of course, it would be impossible for them to detect my multiple Mana Cores since no one had ever achieved it. In tandem, there was no device or appraiser that could detect something that hadn't been proven to exist yet.

'A High-Class Appraisal Mage should be able to see right through me, but I don't think I'll need to worry about that for now.'

"Regardless, congratulations. You've broken the record of Ainzlark Academy's Familiar Ceremony."

'Of course, usually, a person could only contract with one, this was absolute for students in their first years. Yet, I made four mine. It was expected that I would trump the record by far.'

"The highest record before yours was three contracted Familiars. You beat it by one. That's an impressive feat."

'What? Hold on... someone other than me actually contracted with three Familiars? A first-year for that matter? That's absurd!'

I could no longer contain my shock, causing it to leak out of my face.

Neron gave an amused smile, causing me to quickly regain my composure.

"You seem surprised. You're probably wondering how that is possible, uh? It's almost like you know the criteria for getting three Familiars, and how impossible it is... but if that's the case, then how would you explain your situation?"

I gulped.

'He got me... damn!'

"In any case, your situation is indeed rare, but not unprecedented. I came here to congratulate you, but also to officially record your Familiars since you passed out before we could do that." Neron causally trailed off the intense discussion we were having, much to my relief.

"O-oh..."

"Please manifest your Bond Souls. Once I have confirmed their identities, you may retract them."

This was standard procedure, necessary for Ainzlark Academy students' records. Every student had gone through this, allowing the institute to know of their prospects. Now, it was my turn.

Closing my eyes, I infused the Mana in my Cores, speaking to my Bonds to show themselves before my Lecturer.

I could feel them resonate within me, all speaking and chattering at once.

"That human..."

"He's strong!"

"He's scary!"

"His Familiars are... how many does he..."

Their words were all jumbled and mixed so I couldn't fully comprehend them. Still, upon soothing them with my calming Mana, they settled and agreed to the task.

>SHUUUUUUUU<

Instantly, four bright lights surged from within me, revealing the Wisps I contracted with.

"Hmm, it's actually true. Seeing them up close now... they're very impressive. Four Will O' Wisps, uh? And their elemental attributes are of the basic elements, how convenient."

Neron brought out a small note and a pen from within his breast pocket, writing some things down as he mumbled to himself.

"Alright, that's about it. I should report this now that I've confirmed your information." Neron stood from the chair and returned his stationaries to their previous position.

I watched as he moved toward the door, ready to turn the doorknob. There was a lot I wanted to say to him, but I had to be careful with my words. It wasn't certain whether I could trust this man or not, after all.

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

Chapter 138: Visitors (Pt 2)

"Oh, and one more thing..." Neron bobbed his head as he turned in my direction.

"The only reason that person chose three Familiars that day was because he didn't find any other one worth his time..."

Neron's smile deepened, and from the way he narrowed his eyes, I assumed he was giving me a hidden meaning to his words.

My eyes bulged the moment I realized what it was!

The one whose record I had surpassed, was none other than my Lecturer himself.

"I look forward to the Exchange, Jared. You grow more interesting by the day. Once you become my disciple... we'll be having quite an interesting conversation."

He opened the door and gave another kind of smile.

"Looks like you have even more visitors. It's a good thing I decided to leave when I did."

I wanted to speak, but words refused to come out. So, as I watched him exit, I played a smile on my face.

He certainly was full of mystery, but that made the man all the more interesting. As for his final statement, that was a lot of crap.

'He must have sensed their presence before they got to the door and coordinated his actions well, timing it to the point that he would be leaving the moment they reached the entrance.'

That was just how scary my Lecturer was!

I retracted my Familiars, who had chosen to remain silent throughout Neron's conversation with me. They ceased their usual chatter and just watched in decorum, waiting to be returned to their Cores.

It made me wonder if they were actually reliable Bonds or just wusses.

"Jared!" A familiar voice called out to me, causing me to sharply turn in the direction of the door.

Edward and Anabelle walked in, with the latter increasing her pace with a relieved smile all over her face.

"Oh, hey. It certainly is nice to see you two."

"Likewise," Edward said with a slight nod.

He closed the door behind him as Ana rushed to my side, thoroughly observing my body with her hands and eyes to confirm that I was well.

"I'm fine, don't be so anxious." I laughed, feeling her small hands course through my skin.

Fortunately, they didn't go anywhere dangerous.

"I'll be the judge of that!"

Still fuming energetically, she maintained her touch for a few moments until she was satisfied.

"Well, looks like you're all good!"

I nearly rolled my eyes in response, but controlled myself. It was good to see them, but Anabelle's overexcited self was something I could definitely take a break from.

"You two succeeded in the Familiar Selection Ceremony, right? Congratulations."

Edward and Anabelle grinned, with the former having teary eyes. One could call it the look of gratitude and debt.

"It's all because of you, Jared. Thank you!"

Anabelle was more casual about it, but she also offered her thanks. As a result of the training they endured with me, those two had achieved a height they couldn't have dreamed of attaining in such little time.

"You two... your Mana Cores seem different. You meditated in the Oasis when the Ceremony started, didn't you?"

The both of them nodded energetically.

"We felt the surge of energy and decided to go with the flow. Of course, after seeing that you were doing it, we followed your lead." Edward smiled.

"Well, the energy was a lot, so I could only take in very little and work on it. Thankfully, I was able to reach the next Core Grade!"

It was amazing how fast they had grown. I was extremely impressed by the initiative they took.

Edward, who was currently in the middle stage of the Yellow Core Grade, had already advanced to the final stages, having an estimate of about 90 percent Yellow and 10 percent White.

Of course, I knew I wasn't being accurate, but considering the fact that I felt his Mana Core being saturated with the Yellow Core energy, it only made sense.

As for Anabelle, her growth was the most astounding. She, who hadn't even been using Mana all her life, had already reached the Blue Core Grade during our training. However, thanks to the Ceremony's bulk of energy, she was now teetering at the edge of the Grade.

'She might reach the next Grade very soon at this rate... how amazing!'

I was certain she could have gone even further if she kept absorbing the Mana in the Ceremony, but Ana must have felt it too...

"I think I've reached the limits of my body, for now. So, I'll focus more on Spells and Mana control." She answered my thoughts on her own.

"Indeed. Edward, you've also reached a decent stage, comparable to talented students. I should focus more on your Sword Arts from now on."

He nodded in agreement.

At this point, they had their seats. My bed was big enough for a person to sit on the side, so Anabelle took the initiative and claimed the spot. Edward used the only other seat in the infirmary and made it his.

"Oh, by the way, how long was I out for?"

"Hmm, it's evening already, so I guess it has just been a few hours."

That made sense since I was restored through the aid of a potion.

'I should develop one of my own... so I don't experience this kind of weakness after intense meditation!'

"How about you, Jared? Were you able to breakthrough? Did you achieve a higher Core Grade?" With eyes sparkling like a child, Anabelle assaulted me with questions.

"No. I still have a White Mana Core Grade. I told you already, that this is intentional. I did achieve what I wanted, though."

They looked surprised by my reply, and curiosity seemed to seep in.

"It was well worth it since I got to have the ideal Familiars... I'm certain your Mana Core progress also helped in obtaining very useful Bonds."

Anabelle and Edward glanced at each other's smiled amusedly, and then looked at me with confident and proud looks. It was as if they shared a secret I didn't know of... well, they were about to reveal it to me.

"Hehehe! Edward and I got ourselves a steal!"

"That's right, Jared. We'll Manifest them for you to see for yourself"

The massive growth the pair had undergone, coupled with the confidence they now displayed, told me I was in for a treat.

'Oh? Now I'm intrigued. Show me what you caught!'

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

Chapter 139: Familiar Allies

>SHIIIIINNNNGGGG!!!<

Light enveloped both Edward and Anabelle as they called upon their Bond Souls.

'What incredible mana!' My thought sparked, watching as the beings materialized from the energy bustling from the two.

I hadn't expected the Familiars they would contract with to have a presence so strong, but I just kept on being surprised today. They manifested, and my eyes bulged in surprise and awe at the magnificent beings that appeared before me.

"T-these are—!!!"

Floating in front of Ana as her Familiar was a creature anyone would recognize, but the variant was so unique that I doubted any other student possessed one like it.

Having wings that glimmered like the ocean, and a tail serving as the replacement for legs, this strange cross-breed between a mermaid and a fairy, appeared majestically.

It wore silver and blue armor, and its sapphire hair floated, as though it was being submerged in water. The skin that showed was pale, but appeared moist. Having a flawless beauty that perfectly represented her, and sparkles of light floating around, this being was none other than a Naiad Fairy!

'Amazing!'

The rarer the type of being was before its death, the more powerful it was guaranteed to be. A Naiad Fairy was extremely rare! it was also classified as an Imperial Grade Magic Beast, thereby making the familiar also of the same Grade if nurtured well!

Generally speaking, creatures that took on the trait of multiple species had hidden characteristics and were guaranteed for evolution.

As I was still locked in my dazed state while staring at Anabelle's Familiar which was the first to appear, Edward finally manifested his. The aura of the Bond caused me to instantly turn my head and stare in Edward's direction.

What I saw was even more surprising than Anabelle's Familiar.

It had a horrifying dark aura, like a thick mantle in the night. Purple flashes sparked around the being, and I could sense the deep-seated malice emanating from it.

'This... why is such a being Edward's Bond? This is absurd!!!'

This Familiar took on the form of an armored warrior. He was clad in full dark plates, covering his body in strange metal and some fabric in loose ends. Purple linen made up the clothes that showed underneath his armor, and there were several inscriptions and designs on the raven-black gear of the same color. One would have thought this was a dark, yet noble warrior, except for one major flaw.

It had no head!

'A Dullahan!' My mind instantly rang.

The warrior's head was held by the side using one of his arms, and I could see the two crimson balls of light that served as his eyes.

The Dullahan floated, same as the fairy, but definitely had a more intimidating presence.

The Grade of this creature was way past the Imperial Grade. It was at least a Fable Grade. How did such a soul pick Edward?!

Dullahans were creatures of horror and nightmare, personifying death itself. A Dullahan dying and becoming a Bond Soul was absurd enough, but for it to choose Edward as its Host?

'How...?!'

I had to admit, though, the power level of the Dullahan wasn't as powerful as I expected from its Grade, most likely due to the fact that it must have lost most of its powers, but this was still incredible!

'It should have a mount, though... I wonder where it is...'

Perhaps that was the reason it didn't seem like the being lived up to its identity. Was it incomplete? So many questions rang in my head as I looked at both students and their Familiars.

'I thought I was lucky to have encountered Wisps, but these two have great luck too!'

"These Familiars are amazing, Anabelle, Edward! This has exceeded my expectations by far!"

Both of them broke into pleased grins the moment I said this, acting all smug about their achievements.

"Come on, Rhea. You should greet our friend. Go on." Anabelle suddenly spoke, referring to her Familiar whom she had already named.

What a smart girl.

"U-uh, I am... my name is... e-erm... Nice to meetcha!!!"

The fairy-mermaid squeaked in her melodious voice and seemed to be flushed with embarrassment.

'... E-ehhh?!'

The Familiar fidgeted in her puny form, dancing around as she struggled to form words. All the majesty she had before had now vanished. It was a bit painful to see.

"Haha, she's a little shy, but I guess we're working on it. I named her Rhea, though. She's so cute, isn't she?"

I nodded quickly, hoping it would mask the slight disappointment I felt.

Strong Familiars were often confident about their abilities, sometimes proud to a fault. If Anabelle's Bond was this timid, it made me worried for her future.

"Your turn, Perci. Introduce yourself." Edward's voice distracted me from the shameful display of Rhea.

"Greetings, young paladin. As a fallen knight, I am not worthy to abide by the chivalric code. However, I shall exchange greetings as my master desires."

It felt awkward talking to what was supposed to be a headless evil knight, but I maintained focus. It was still a knight at heart, making it extremely loyal to Edward.

"The name I have been granted is Percival, Perci for short. As you know, I am his Familiar, bonded with him till death do us part!"

His formal tone and reverent personality struck a chord within me, but I was still confused about something.

"May I ask a question?"

The Knight nodded its dismembered head from where it was lodged by the side.

'How is it able to do that?' I wanted to ask, but I concluded that anything was possible with Magic.

"Why did you pick Edward? You must know what kind of kind and pure soul he is... is he really the best fit for a corrupt knight as you?"

I had to inquire since it made no sense to me.

For a moment, there was silence... but it quickly ended.

"Hmm... it is because of my Master, Lord Edward's heart that I specifically approached him. While I may be like this, I possess lingering regrets as one who once trod the path of righteousness and chivalry. While I have no memories of my past, I am certain the longing to once again serve purity caused my soul to be transformed into a Bonded one."

From its king explanation, I began to understand. From the Familiar's explanation, it certainly made sense...

'I suppose it's true what they say. Opposites attract!'

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

Chapter 140: Motivation

Familiars are beings who take the form of Bond Souls, ethereal creatures made up of Mana. With the exception of Wisps, all other Familiars used to be alive in physical forms, and simply passed on—leaving their Ego behind.

As a result of this, they lose most of their memories from when they were alive, only having mere vestiges left. The major driving force of a Familiar, their core motivation, lies in their remnant attachments to the world of the living. To some, it could be a dream, to others—regret.

To each Familiar, the cause of their existence differs. However, one thing is common and absolute about all of them... they choose a Host that best qualifies for their motivation.

Familiars choose Hosts that are the closest candidates to their ideals.

As a course of instinct, the Souls most likely long for the fulfillment of the attachments they had before death.

"I see... I understand then." I responded to Edward's Familiar, who nodded at my words.

Yes, with his detached head!

'It's still weird...'

Edward, being a pure warrior, must have sparked the Dullahan's interest. I had no qualms with that.

My eyes darted toward the Naiad Fairy, Anabelle's Familiar, and saw her shrink away in fright.

Despite her majestic appearance and the powerful aura she emitted, the being was terribly shy and nervous.

"What about you? Why did you choose Anabelle?"

"Eeeeekkkk!!!" The mermaid-fairy squeaked in shock and assumed fear.

'For real?!' I nearly rolled my eyes.

"I... erm... I..."

I sighed and turned to face Anabelle, her host. If her Familiar couldn't speak, the Host should take on the role instead. With my brow raised, I questioned the young girl and demanded answers.

"W-well... Rhea said... I reminded her of someone she knew in the past... so she wants to be with me."

Once Anabelle said this, my expectations plummeted even further.

'Just for that reason? Hmm, a Familiar whose core motivation is sentiment for another... '

No matter how I thought about it, it wasn't a strong driving force! That meant the Ego of this being was little, and the room for growth wouldn't be as high as another familiar with a higher driving force.

Still, there was nothing I could do about it. Mentioning it to Ana wouldn't change anything since she seemed to be getting along well with her Bond—same with Edward.

"Well, I suppose it's time to introduce you guys to mine.

"Manifest."

Just like earlier, four bursts of light came from within me and the Wisps appeared.

"Again?"

"This is the third time now."

"Why would you call us for nothing important!"

"That man is gone... what a relief."

They resumed their chatter, making me sigh in embarrassment. Compared to the personality of my companions' Bonds, my Familiars weren't exactly model ones either.

"These four are my contracted Bonds. They're Wisps. I am yet to name them, though."

As I addressed Edward and Ana, I noticed the utter shock written on their faces. Terror, mixed with absolute astonishment!

'Ah, I forgot... they didn't know I contracted with four Familiars...'

"T-this is unbelievable, no, impossible!"

"Jared, how did you achieve this? Is this even... four Familiars at once? How did you—?!"

I raised my hand slightly, signaling the two to calm down and contr the gushing emotions within them.

Their responses were only natural. If I had seen such a sight in my first life, I would have certainly reacted with greater vigor.

'The answer to their inquisition is quite simple, but I do not want to reveal my multiple Cores to them, for now...'

I had to come up with a lie on the spot, hoping the two Familiars they summoned wouldn't rat me out.

"You all seem surprised."

"Our Master is a superior human."

"He's very special."

"We wouldn't have contracted with him otherwise!"

'Shit! I totally forgot about my Familiars! They could say something they aren't meant to!'

I had to shut them up one way or the other!

"My Mana Core is different from yours. That's why I decided to remain a White Mana Core Grade, it's a privilege only given to those with pure Cores." I managed to speak in time, shooting the floating Wisps a dirty look.

Edward and Anabelle looked stunned by my rushed response, having doubtful expressions on their faces.

'Please buy it, please buy it!!!' I prayed internally.

It wasn't technically a lie since I actually needed a White Core to perform the feat of possessing multiple Familiars. I simply omitted the parts about having four other Mana Cores.

"W-wow, I didn't know the White Mana Core Grade was so powerful!"

"If I had known, I would have remained a White Core Grade like you."

Their voices displayed surprise and more astonishment.

I nearly heaved a sigh of relief that they bought my lie.

"It's fine. That ship has sailed. Besides, you two will be sure to get stronger than any other classmate of ours. Don't worry about a thing."

Just like human Cores had Grades, Familiars also had categories of their own.

The Common Grade

The Noble Grade

The Imperial Grade

The Fable Grade

The Legendary Grade

The Transcendent Grade

Of these categories, Edward had had a Familiar belonging to the Fable Grade, same as my Wisps.

The Naiad Fairy was of the Imperial Grade, but would still be considered fairy powerful considering the uniqueness and versatility of her abilities.

In my opinion, these were extremely good sets for rising to the top. Still, I wondered what kind of Familiars Stefan and Maria ended up with. They were mostly going to be extremely powerful so I couldn't slack off here.

"Oh, yeah, I nearly forgot. Jared, those two you were speaking to earlier... they told us to deliver a message to you." Edward suddenly spoke.

My eyes sparkled with interest, but I noticed Anabelle's face darken the moment Maria and Stefan were mentioned. It appeared she had some bad blood going on with them.

"What did they say?" I asked.

"Well, it was mostly the guy, Stefan, who spoke. He said I should tell you to prepare yourself. He's going to crush you in two months."