

SPELLCRAFT 161

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Chapter 161: The Round Of Martial Arts

Klaus called the three contestants for the Martial Arts Division, bringing them out to the stage.

Edward, along with Xavier Denmark and Eben Lustriel—students from the Middle and Upper Class respectively—all climbed the platform for contesting, facing the moderator as he spoke the rules.

"You will now pick lots. Your placement in the battle will be determined by the numbers you have chosen." Klaus declared, bringing out their tags from his breast pocket.

The students conceded and took their respective tags from Klaus. Once each of them had gotten one, the adult amid them instructed them to open the folded piece of paper and view the contents within.

"State the number written in your tags!"

The students could most likely make a guess concerning the relevance of their respective figures and obeyed without hesitation.

"A" Eben Lustriel said.

"B" Xavier Denmark muttered.

"C" Edward Karl Leon, my comrade, finally retorted.

"Good. Edward, leave the stage for the two of them to have the first round." Klaus stated.

The boy did as instructed, but I could see an impatient flame burning in his eyes. He most likely wanted to be first, yet he had been shifted to the last to fight.

Well, it was only a matter of time anyway. With this line of thought, I cast my gaze away from Edward who stood at the sidelines, and focused on the two who were about to fight.

As usual, weapons were provided for them, and coincidentally... both of them had swords for weapons.

The Middle-Class student had a broadsword, well versed in its strength and cutting-edge swiftness. As for the Upper-Class elite, his katana was wielded with elegance. It was way longer than the broadsword, but its thin layer seemed so fickle that it could break upon impact with the opponent's sturdier tool.

"Begin!"

As soon as Klaus commenced the exchange, both contending students became a blur and charged swiftly at each other. They both took their Martial Arts stances and moved their bodies in like-manner.

The broad-sword wielder, focusing on strength and speed, fortified his legs and twisted his body to generate enough force that would break concrete.

Mana leaked from his body, further enhancing his power. Pressure filled the hall and I was certain the technique packed great strength. With such a powerful striking attack as the first strike, it appeared the Xavier kid was not planning on holding anything back due to the nature of his opponent!

As for Eben Lustriel, his nimble body sharply transversed their distance, grabbing his blade with both hands. His sharp gaze was focused on Xavier, rather, on a particular spot on the boy's body.

Mana burst out of the elite, causing the one that manifested from Xavier to look like a small pond compared to a bustling ocean. It would be enough to break a person's fighting spirit, but since the boy was already in 'the zone', he didn't let go of his broadsword and swung it with all his might.

The look on his face was as of a hopeful prayer that his attack would connect.

>VWOOOOOOSSSSHHHH<

The blade neared Eben at a frightening rate, enough to make anyone's heart stand in excitement. Unfortunately... it missed.

Eben lowered his height at the last minute, cleanly avoiding the strike that nearly missed his short hair, while still gripping his Katana with both hands.

With the window of opportunity presenting itself before him thanks to the opening Xavier currently had, Eben moved even closer for the kill.

I watched his lips move in a whisper and deciphered the words that came out of them.

"Great Swallow Fountain Strike...!!!"

In a flash, even for me, I saw the katana's edge move in a swift diagonal line. The swiftness was completely transient, not even making a sound as it instantly achieved its goal and caused the wielder to twist before rising at the opposite end of his opponent.

The moment the strike concluded, that was when a sound burst forth.

"Guarkkk!!!" Xavier gasped, both in shock and pain, falling to the ground in defeat.

'Oh, wow... a single hit, uh?' I smiled in anticipation.

The boy, Eben Lustriel, had a very swift blade technique that was also powerful enough to render someone who was coated with Mana unconscious in a single hit.

That was one impressive blade technique!

"Winner, Eben Lustriel!" Klaus declared.

The moment this announcement was made, I heard a thunderous cluster of shouts echo from all across the hall.

The sudden noise caused me to wonder what the big fuss was, especially since the audience had been silent in other victories. Increasing my heightened perception, I began listening to the whispers around and probed for more information.

"I can't believe I got to see such a magnificent Technique!"

"I couldn't even see it! The movements were too fast!"

"That's the famous Swallow God Fountain School for you. They're not one of the Three Great Martial Houses in the Kingdom for nothing."

Once I achieved what I wanted, I returned my hearing to normal.

'Oh? So that's how it is...' An amused smile spread across my face.

So, Edward's next opponent would be someone who came from another well-established Martial family. The only difference between the both of them was thY Edward's Martial heritage was completely unknown.

But, if he was to clash with Eben, the chances of his techniques being recognized would soar. He could one day revive his Martial School!

I was certain the boy would take this chance for sure.

"Next, Edward Karl Leon. Please come to the stage."

The staff members, who lingered around, carried the fallen student away from the stage and gave him treatment while Edward climbed the platform.

His eyes were only focused on his opponent, Eben, as he took every step.

Now a couple of distance from each other, both boys were caught in a staring contest, with Klaus being the middleman.

"Ready... Begin!"

The moderator got off stage and went in the direction of the fallen boy, most likely to ensure he was ready before the third match commenced.

Whether Edward won or lost here, he would still have to fight with Xavier Denmark in the third round.

He could choose to forfeit the match and obtain an easy victory with the Middle-Class fodder, but I knew my comrade's personality more than anyone.

He wasn't going to quit!

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Chapter 162: Swallow God vs Blade God

"I witnessed your match. Your sword packs quite the punch... but it won't do you any good against me..." Eben Lustriel spoke calmly.

The match had already officially begun, but none of the contestants moved an inch from their positions.

"Your blade is swift, I can see that... and your use of Mana is exquisite. But, who's to say I can't match it?" Edward fired back.

Both of the boys, having great pride in their respective Martial Techniques, glared at each other as they gripped their weapons.

Edward's sword, as usual, was a regular blade. It took the form of a longsword, having an average build and quality. This was because, in the boy's Martial School, no matter the form of the blade one wielded, if they mastered the technique properly... the results were basically the same!

"You should forfeit and fight in the next round. You have a better chance against the other kid." Eben pressed on.

"Why don't you forfeit instead? You've already won a round, so you qualify."

I smirked at Edward's smart remark.

"Surely, you jest. My blade must not know defeat nor surrender." The elite's response came with a chuckle, as though Edward's words were not even worth considering.

"Then there's nothing more to discuss. We'll be facing off again in the Semi-finals, so there's no need to avoid fighting you."

With this statement, both boys now began taking their battle stances, reflecting their Martial School's fundamental techniques.

"Now, then, why don't we have a warm-up session?"

As soon as he made this statement, Edward pressed a foot on the ground and caused it to crack instantly. Before this was evident to others, it shattered even more, giving Edward enough force to propel himself forward.

>BOOOOMMMM!!!<

With his heightened speed, even without using Mana, he approached his opponent.

"W-wha—?!" Eben appeared dazed by the quick pace by which he moved, quickly steeling his blade so he wouldn't be caught off-guard.

>FWOOOOOOSHHHH<

Edward swung his blade, creating a slash of mana through the air. The blue-colored crescent burst of energy raced at Eben, who easily parried the strike with his Katana's edge thanks to his own Mana control.

>BOOOOMMM,<

Edward's charge resumed, and in a flash, he was right in front of Eben, who was also in stance, ready to use his signature move to one-shot Edward as he had done previously.

In a silent stroke, the brilliant katana danced, diagonally slicing through the target as in the first match.

Edward would lose consciousness and fall flat on the ground!

... Or so it was meant to be.

>CLANG!<

The Katana was stopped from even grazing Edward, thanks to the boy's sword blocking the strike.

"W-wha—?!" Eben gasped in astonishment.

Such a thing had probably never happened to him before! That a peasant practicing some unknown Martial Arts would be able to block his attack.

"I asked you before... who's to say I can't match your blade?" Edward smiled.

"Y-you...!!!" Eben slightly lost his composure, giving his opponent the right chance to strike him down.

>SKRRRIIIIIII<

Edward completely parried the katana that was still on his blade, sending Eben's body flying backward, giving it an opening.

"This is the end!"

Instantly, the Blade God successor doubled the Mana he had on his body and concentrated a huge amount on his blade. The pressure that was building on the stage, while in merely the fraction of a moment, was enough to make my hair rise.

'This is a big one!' My mind rang in excitement.

His opponent was currently open and right in range. A single 'Form' of the 9 Fundamental Precepts would be enough and, judging from Edward's stance, I could guess the one he was going for.

The blade ascended, covered in the deep color of highly-concentrated mana, ready to be discharged at any time.

>VWOOOOOOOOOMMM!!!<

It was truly the end!

"I-I forfeit!" Eben's words rang out.

At that very moment, Edward hurriedly halted his descending blade from moving any more.

>WHUUUSSHH!!!<

All the air around and behind Eben evenly parted, sending a wave of pressure dancing on the stage. I could see the elite student nearly shivering in response to the blade that would have hit him if he refused to surrender.

Sweat dripped from his face and a look of both fear and frustration burned in his eyes.

Whether he accepted it or not... he had lost—miserably, at that!

The audience was certainly not expecting this, as gasps escaped their mouths. It must have been so shocking that a no-name Martial Artist would completely obliterate someone who was an elite.

Sure, it could be argued that Eben was overconfident and severely underestimated Edward's abilities. However... a loss was still a loss!

"W-winner, Edward Karl Leon!" Klaus stuttered in his declaration, most likely also surprised by the outcome of the match.

The moment the victor was decided, Edward withdrew his sword that hung in mid-air, inches from Eben's shoulder.

"It seems your blade has finally known defeat..." The winner's voice trailed as he walked away from the unmoving loser.

I could see the satisfaction that played on Edward's face. It was a sharp contrast to the one whose expression screamed of frustration and pure hate.

"D-don't think for a second that I have been defeated! I only forfeited the match!" Eben's voice rang out in a feeble attempt to justify himself.

Edward didn't even bother looking back on the utterly disgraced contender and shrugged casually instead.

"Get off the stage. I need to fight my next opponent."

I nearly cried out in joy once I heard the extremely cool response of my pupil. It was so... manly!

Eben could no longer disgrace himself anymore, so he simply had no choice but to leave the stage with his head hung in the shame of losing, no, even worse—surrendering to his opponent.

It was quite a funny sight!

The last contestant, Xavier Denmark, climbed the stage with his broadsword, looking quite unnerved as he faced Edward.

"Do you not want to surrender?" He asked.

After seeing the fight that just unfolded, what sort of fool would still want to fight instead of surrender?

Well, he was standing right on the stage!

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Chapter 163: Disparity

"Do you not want to surrender?"

This question seemed to play within the mind of the nervous new challenger. A hint of hesitation showed on the boy's face, but soon after, it disappeared entirely.

"N-no! You may be stronger than me... and you are most likely going to win this match, but... how can I call myself a man if I don't face you with everything I've got!"

His response seemed to strike a chord within Edward.

"I've come this far! I might as well see things through to the bitter end!"

Edward smiled upon hearing the boy's statement. It was most likely a result of kindred spirits resonating due to their similar ideals.

"Very well. Come, Xavier! I shall fight you as a warrior and a man!"

I rolled my eyes at the sight. Only an idiot like Edward would appreciate pointlessly fighting once loss was inevitable. I only saw it as foolishness.

Edward's sword style wasn't something the Xavier boy could understand and even learn if they crossed blades, and it would most likely be over in an instant, so what was the point of the battle?

Pride? Ego? Chivalry? It was all inconsequential anyway. The stronger one would win, and there was nothing anyone could do to change that!

"Winner, Edward Karl Leon!"

As expected, it was a pointless match.

Edward finished everything in a single hit, refusing to hold back. I was certain he did this out of respect for the opponent's resolve, but what was the point? The boy fell unconscious with a single hit!

Edward moved closer to Xavier and nodded in what I could only deem to be respect. He raised his sword and made a loud declaration.

"You are by far the greatest opponent I have fought since the start of this Exchange!"

The crowd gave gasps of shock and his words sparked controversy among everyone who heard.

What of Eben Lustriel whom he fought earlier? Compared to his great Sword Arts, this competitor was merely fodder, yet he had the gall to declare him the greatest?

The shocked and displeased spectators whispered in gossip, sending hushed noises permeating the hall.

'Gah! That idiot!' I winced, rubbing my head in embarrassment.

Why did he have to go that far?

Still, though, I had to appreciate his conviction to an extent. Whether his actions were right or not, the fact that he stuck by them no matter what... that was what made Edward a true Martial Artist!

Looking at him now, as he raised his blade and smiled in his declaration, the boy reminded me of Gawain Lenard. He was a man who loved booze more than I did, and relished in promiscuity. Yet, he never once denied his actions.

He proudly confessed his love for wine and women, showing no shame at all. In the same vein, Edward was flaunting his flawed way of thinking and not feeling the least bit sorry about it.

Even if both their philosophies had dangers hidden in them, their spirit was admirable.

'That idiot... oh well, this is his path, after all!'

A Martial Artist must be one with pride, as well as a practitioner of the art of shamelessness!

Those were the words of my close friend, the Greatest Swordsman in the Eastern Kingdom—Sword God, Gawain.

As I relished in my thoughts, Edward left the stage and Klaus continued his announcement.

"We will now begin the Scholars' round!"

The Scholars' round elapsed and, as expected, only the Upper Class and Middle-Class students were able to qualify.

I had no doubts on the matter since they were obviously the ones with the greater talents in the art of Scholarship.

Anabelle was an exception, a rare gem to be found in the Lower Class, but I doubted anyone would be stupid enough to falsify their skills in order to intentionally be placed in a Lower Class.

After the Scholars' round, the Second Years took the stage.

Their baffles were fiercer than ours for the most part.

Since they also had a number of talented students, the Spells and skills they displayed far outstripped the performance we showed.

I had already realized, since yesterday, that there was a wide margin between the abilities of the First Years and Second Years.

Of course, after watching and watching, I arrived at the conclusion that I would be able to defeat any of them—whether in Martial Arts or Magic!

Scholarship was no question at all, so I didn't even bother comparing myself with the noobs of the craft.

The skill and experience of our seniors were not the only things that were different about their round and ours.

The battle and results of their contest were incredibly one-sided! It was almost too painful to watch!

The Magic Division, Martial Arts Division, and even the Scholarship Division!

The matches were either won by the Upper-Class students, or those of the Middle Class!

It made me nearly feel pity for my Lower Class seniors—how they were put down despite their miserable efforts at victory.

It was a painful reminder of the difference in status between those of higher rank, and the bottom-feeders.

In the end, of the eight who advanced to the Semi-Finals in the Magic Division, all five of the Upper Class were present, and three Middle Class were included. Of the Martial Artists, one Middle Class, and one Upper-Class student made it through.

The same also applied to the Scholar Division.

The only reason the Middle-Class Students were even present was because all the number of the Upper Class had been exhausted. Their spot was more of a consolatory prize and not the actual thing.

As if that wasn't enough, the matches got even more brutal once it was time for the Third Years to compete.

I had never seen such a one-sided battle in Ainzlark Academy—such great disparity between talent! Even though I could sense great hard work coming from the side of the Lower Class and even Middle Class, the Upper ones still dominated!

Of course, those known as the Elite Ten were not to participate in the matches until the final day, but still... to think this was how large the margin was!

It made me extremely sick to my stomach and anger began appearing in my eyes.

'This... something is fundamentally wrong about this!'

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Chapter 164: The Semi-Finals

I left the hall that day with a bad taste remnant in my mouth.

Of course, I had achieved victory —same as my allies—but the sickening feeling of the current state of Ainzlark couldn't let me completely rejoice.

Anabelle and Edward were a bit surprised by the way I was acting, I could tell by the numerous glances they stole at me and the signals they gave each other, but I chose to ignore them.

'Something needs to be done...'

While the segregation of the talented from the mediocre seemed efficient at first glance, in the long run, the Academy would produce poor students and release them from their gates.

In the first place, talented and skilled individuals would always be fewer than the collective in any society—Ainzlark was no different.

By separating them from the others and determining the roles of everyone, the Academy was sure to exponentially increase the power and status of the Elite, but also significantly reduce the potential of those who weren't as skilled.

The lack of balance, as well as the damage to be caused the longer this method remained dwelled on my mind. It had to be eradicated.

Unfortunately, my feelings of dissatisfaction would have to remain just that... at least for the time being. I wasn't stupid enough to imagine effecting real change with my current capabilities.

'I need to amass more power, more knowledge, more status... and more connections!'

That was why this Inter-Class Exchange was so important! Using this platform to gain more recognition for myself and my allies would be sure to benefit me in the future!

I wasn't willing to get anything less than first place!

The third day was even tenser than the previous one.

Less people were seated among the contestants, and the spectators had an air of anxiety and expectation that pervaded the Hall.

I took a good look around me, counting the number of those who qualified to this point.

For the first years, a total of twelve—same as the other years. That left a total of thirty-six contestants!

"Welcome to the Semi-Finals, everyone!" Our energetic moderator shouted, spurring the already-excited crowd on.

"Congratulations to those who have made it this far! For those who couldn't, there's always next year!"

I rolled my eyes, wondering why Klaus seemed to intentionally leave out the Third-years who lost and would most certainly never get another chance again when he gave his consolations.

"I will now be stating how the events of the Semi-Finals will go!"

This time, we all listened attentively.

"Due to the uneven distribution of members in a Class who have passed the Quarters, for the Magic Division, we'll be having a form of elimination match!" Klaus declared.

'I knew it!'

It was evident that since we were having an 'Inter-Class Exchange, fighting against members of the same Class wasn't allowed. As a result, they probably intended on balancing out the number of competitors from each class for the Magic Division.

"This elimination match will serve as a preliminary round before the main Semi-Finals. First Years Magic Division, step forward!"

Taking it as our cue, Anabelle and I stood up instantly and made our way down the stairs. I saw the excited, bored, anxious, mellow, etc. looks on the faces of those I would be contesting with.

All seven of us who passed climbed the stage, standing before Klaus for our briefing. We were officially eight, though. I represented two people.

"Only four of you will be coming out of this preliminary round. Two from each Class."

Since only Upper Class and Lower Class students were present, it was a fair deal. It also meant that Ana and my participation in the Semi-Finals were more than guaranteed.

"You'll be facing automatons in this round. The one who is capable of defeating as many automatons as possible within the time limit will advance to the main match."

I smiled at the simplicity of the competition. Still, there was a question on my mind.

"I have a question. Will we all start at the same time?"

Klaus responded with a 'Yes'.

"But, I'm currently representing two people. How would that be fair?"

While I had an understanding of the compromise the moderator would have reached concerning my case, it was still a good thing to make things clear before the contest began.

"After everyone is done, you'll be given additional time to represent your second identity. Is that fair enough for you?"

I nodded, turning to Ana with a wink.

It wasn't really an important matter for me to win the second round since I had already decided that both Ana and I would be making it into the Semi-Finals.

The problem was who would emerge victorious among the Upper-Class members. The most possible choices would be Kuzon and Maria. They were geniuses above all others. Stefan stood a chance, but I still felt like Maria was superior.

It was a shame, though. If the boy got cut out before I got the chance to fight him... that would leave a bad taste in my mouth.

'You better qualify too, Stefan! Even if you have to puke blood.'

"Now, then, as per the rules... you are not allowed to hurt anyone purposely during this round. You are also not allowed to attack an automaton that has already been engaged by another student. You are to focus solely on subduing as many opponents as you can. The use of anything other than Magic is strictly prohibited... this is a competition to test your Magic skills, after all."

We all silently listened to Klaus as he spelled out the regulations. They were all well within reason.

"Do you all understand?"

We responded positively, and after Klaus confirmed our understanding of the regulations, a huge timer was set above us, visible for everyone in the Hall to see. We were given a minute to subdue as many automatons as possible!

As everyone readied themselves in their respective positions, me included, the earth beneath us rumbled and holes began appearing all over the stage. It was as though the tiles that made them up were sinking. Replacing the tiles were beings that sprang up from beneath the dark hole.

They were automatons—our foes!

"Get ready... Begin!"

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Chapter 165: The Automatons

Automatons are dolls made from solid materials, but can move in predetermined patterns embedded in their Magic circuits.

Unlike Golems who possess only Cores, Automatons—while having different shapes and sizes—have internal structures similar to humans. Their Mana Circuits work together with their Mana Core, granting them automated mobility.

This allows them to move in pre-recorded patterns, a feat impossible for Golems. The advantage of using Automatons was the efficiency of their use.

A Mage could employ the use of several automatons in battle or the completion of several tasks. However, for Golems, one would manually need to control them.

Of course, there were also downsides to these constructs. For one, they couldn't simply be created with ordinary magic, unlike Golems. Only specialized Mages could utilize spells to conjure them, so most Automatons were industrially made with normal materials and were made functional through the use of Mana Cores embedded in them.

Another disadvantage was the cost of production. Unless a Mage was specialized in the creation of Automatons or it was being mass-produced, the average mage couldn't get access to them.

This was why Golems are a more common aid for Magic-Users.

Ainzlark Academy was a prestigious institute, so none of those downsides affected them. Not only did they have very powerful and specialized Mages, but they had the facilities and necessary know-how to make Automatons without any difficulty.

A grin formed on my face as I saw scores of them appearing in the very large arena. The shape of the constructs was akin to humans—having the same amount of limbs and other body parts.

Of course, their color and specific appearances were nothing like regular people. Having black complexion, most likely due to the material used to construct them, and blank faces, they seemed like wooden marionettes.

'That material... it must be the same as the one used for the weapons throughout the Exchange...' My thoughts trailed, observing the metallic gleam that covered their bodies.

"Begin!"

Once the moderator announced this, the Automatons spurred to life and began moving rapidly. Their metallic feet made barely any noise thanks to the impeccable design of Ainzlark, impressing me even more.

>WHOOOOSHHH!!!<

My body, enhanced by magic, sharply moved across the arena as I decided to catch my first prey. I couldn't just waste my time admiring the beautiful creations, now, could I?

I conjured multiple water balls and ice balls, aiming to stop the Automatons in their tracks.

If they were wooden, I would have gone for the fire element, but I was certain basic Fireball spells wouldn't be enough to completely stop these artificial beings.

"Eat this!" I launched dozens of water balls at several Automatons, thereafter using the cooling quality of the ice element to harden the liquid that covered them.

This slowed down their movements considerably.

"[Ice Lance: Intermediate]"

I multi-casted, creating several spears made of the freezing element. The Automatons could not evade my assault with their current speed, allowing me to accurately pierce the weakest links in their bodies—their necks.

>FWOOOOSHHH!!!<

In an instant, I defeated over thirty of them.

'Hoo, this is fun!'

Excitement began welling up within me as I saw even more of them coming out of the holes that spawned them endlessly. The Automatons weren't made to be difficult, but their sheer numbers could make anyone lose heart.

The fact that these constructs never ceased to spawn and they kept advancing in their numbers was enough to overwhelm many. But, I didn't even pay heed to any of the other contestants and focused solely on enjoying myself.

'Automatons didn't exist in my past life! It's one of the more recent innovations!' My head rang in excitement as I prepared the next sets of spells.

This time, I would try lightning!

Based on the difficulty of the Automatons, they were similar to High-Tier Basic Golems. Unlike Golems whose movements were unpredictable as a result of being remotely controlled, Automatons followed set patterns.

This made their difficulty lessen.

They also didn't use any special abilities except spit out energy blasts that could easily be defended against. Once they got closer to us, the constructs would attack with hand-to-hand combat, but it was best not to even let them draw near.

'This is kind of a simulated lesson!'

Magic-Users, when confronted with multiple opponents, must know the right course of action to take.

While conserving one's Mana in order to handle so many opponents at once was practical, there was an even better solution to this current predicament.

'Overpowering the enemies with extremely powerful magic to blow them all away!

With the time limit set to one minute, that was the best option, no, the only option!

"Let's do this!"

Quickly creating several spell circles as a result of my multiple Mana Cores, I brought out sparks of electricity from them, raising the cast point above all the Automatons that surrounded me.

"[Lightning Fall: Intermediate!]"

>KRRRRRAAAKKKKKK!!!<

In a flash of powerful light and a roar of explosive thunder, the brilliant whitish-blue sparks descended and tore through the metal bodies of my targets.

The constructs danced, almost as if they were in pain. Their bodies grew stiff, and sparks flew from them as a result of the overload of energy on their circuits.

I watched as the Automatons' joints broke apart thanks to the pressure of the lightning strike, and they began exploding one after the other.

>BOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

By the time I was done, charred grounds surrounded me as smoke emanated from them. The shattered bodies of the Automatons littered the ground, much to my satisfaction.

I didn't count how many I had just defeated, but it was certainly no less than fifty.

I looked above me to check how much time was left.

The moment I spotted the time I grinned in satisfaction. My face returned to the stage where I saw others, from the corner of my eye, fighting with their spells.

Some were conservative, some were reckless, while some casually pummeled through the metallic army.

A small crowd had already started forming in front of me as well—Automatons marching toward their destruction.

'Twenty more seconds, eh? Let's see what else I can do!'

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Chapter 166: The List

"Time up!" Klaus declared.

The moment his voice registered, all the students stopped whatever they were doing.

All the Automatons around also ceased movements, hanging their heads low as though the power on them had been cut off. The hole where they spawned from also ceased to bring forth anymore.

"Hoo... that was fun," I whispered.

Klaus told all of us to gather in a row while snapping his fingers to jolt the Automatons back to life.

Once they cocked their heads and began moving again, the constructs moved in the direction of their spawned site and fell into the hole they came from.

I watched as the last of them disappeared from sight and, shortly after, the tiles that vanished earlier returned to their spots. It was as if the holes that were spread across the stage never existed.

"Congratulations on making it this far. The results will be announced shortly, but before that, I will clarify that there was no bias in recording your scores."

From his tone, I could already guess that the list was going to be quite controversial.

"Every Automaton has an 'Image Capturing' Magic embedded within. This allows them to capture the identity of whoever defeats them before they are rendered unfunctional."

Klaus further explained that each Automaton transferred the information of those who defeated them to the records before they were vanquished, leaving an accurate testament to determine the winners of the round.

"Your faces, body structures, and even outfits, have been registered the moment you entered the ring. So, it is safe to say that all the information is one hundred percent accurate."

I smiled in amusement, watching how Klaus diligently explained the process in order to ensure no doubt remained on our minds.

'Even if you guys cheat us, it's not like the students have any power to change the results... that is if we even find out, to begin with...'

Still, his efforts were admirable.

"Before the final results are displayed, I believe Jared Leonard was supposed to have two turns. Please get ready for your second—"

"Forget about that. I concede!" My voice interrupted the moderator.

Klaus nodded immediately, fortunately choosing not to probe further into my decision.

"Now, then, the results will be displayed now..." Klaus pointed at the screen that once showed the timer of the Automatons subjugation.

A different panel was now displayed, showing a list of names as well as numbers beside them.

I focused my eyes on the list to completely immerse myself in its contents.

[AUTOMATON SUBJUGATION RANKING]

[1st Place]

—Kuzon Midas: 300 Automatons

[2nd Place]

—Jared Leonard: 298 Automatons

[3rd Place]

—Anabelle Frederick: 208 Automatons

[4th Place]

—Stefan Netherlore: 119 Automatons

[5th Place]

—Maria Helmsworth: 118 Automatons

[6th Place]

—Ivan Smith: 89 Automatons

[7th Place]

—Rias Lendertale: 56 Automatons

[8th Place]

—Nil

[END OF INFORMATION]

A frown formed on my face as I noticed who was the lead among all of us.

'He surpassed me by just 2 kills? Shit! I should have taken the subjugation more seriously!' I gritted my teeth internally.

I had no idea why I felt so frustrated by the result—maybe I just didn't want to lose.

Still, it was as though this match was foreboding how the Finals would go down.

There was no way I wanted to lose to anyone!

"A-amazing!"

"The Lower Class guys got both second and third positions."

"Stefan scored above Maria?"

"What's with that large gap?"

"Oh, shit! This is amazing!"

My hearing picked up several murmurs among the crowd. I sighed and took another look at the list, grudgingly looking past the first position.

I didn't score too badly, and I was proud of Ana for trailing directly behind me. The most surprising aspect of the list was who got fourth place.

'Stefan really beat Maria?'

No, I didn't believe it. Especially taking a closer look at the points they both earned. Maria scored one point lower than Stefan, and I had a feeling it wasn't just pure coincidence. If I had to guess, it would be that Maria actually...

"Why did you do it?" I suddenly heard Stefan's agitated voice.

My eyes subtly moved in his direction as I saw a dissatisfied look on his face. He was glaring at Maria who maintained her usual cool.

"You intentionally scored below me, right? Why?!" He hushed, clearly upset at the girl.

'Oh? So that's how it is...' I smiled softly.

"What proof do you have that I did that?" Maria finally responded, sort of giving herself away by her reply.

'Pfft.' I nearly laughed in amusement.

"Y-you... you're always like this! Why do you always hold back because of me? Is it because you think I can't keep up with you, or what?" Stefan said again.

A hint of pain reflected in his eyes. I could sense inferiority oozing from him, something that spurred on his anger.

"Stefan... that has nothing to do with this..." Maria whispered in a very soft and gentle tone.

Her eyes suddenly moved in my direction, stunning me a bit. Before I could remove my eyes away, she had already noticed J was watching.

Fortunately, she didn't seem to mind at all. No, now that I thought of it well, this girl had always been strange in that way.

Stefan seemed to follow her gaze and his line of vision reached me as well. I saw his scowl deepen, as though asking me 'What are you looking at?'

It was too late for me to pretend like I wasn't observing their conversation, so I simply ignored Stefan and kept looking at them. This seemed to annoy the boy even more, though.

"You want to fight him, don't you?" Maria's soft voice suddenly seemed to cut through our tensed silence.

Stefan's face sharply turned to her, as though trying to protest the matter.

"Then use this chance I've given you to do so... it won't come again."

Her tone seemed to contain a bit of seriousness, especially in the last phrase, before she finally fell silent again.

I saw as Stefan gritted his teeth and clenched his fist powerlessly, unable to argue any longer.

"F-fine..." The boy's voice weakly trailed.

"... I understand..."

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Chapter 167: Stefan Vs Jared

"Alright, now that you have all seen your results, it's time to announce the ones who will be proceeding to the Semi-Finals."

We all knew what Klaus said was only for formality since everyone could already guess who would be advancing.

"For the Lower Class, we have Jared Leonard and Anabelle Frederick. Please step forward."

Ana and I moved from the usual row and took a few steps forward.

"For the Upper Class, we have Kuzon Midas and Stefan Netherlore. Also, step forward."

The two matched our pace and stopped exactly on the line where we were.

"The rest of you are automatically removed from the match. I want to congratulate you on making it this far, and encourage you to try harder next year. You have all done well."

With a smile on his face, Klaus dismissed everyone else, leaving only four of us who passed on the stage.

"I'll now be explaining the rules of the Semi-Finals. It's quite simple." He began.

"You'll be having one-on-one matches with your selected opponent. This selection will be chosen at random, and you will fight until the other party either gives up, loses consciousness, or is unable to fight any longer."

We all understood this much.

"In the situation where only the members of one Class manage to secure victory, the judges will consider the two matches and determine which of the Class member will need to step down for a member of the losing class who is most deserving." He further explained.

'I see... I understand...!' A smile formed on my face.

Even if the Upper Class won both rounds, they would still only choose one member of the Upper Class and one from the Lower Class to face off in the finals. Since it was an Inter-Class Exchange, the matches had to be between two classes at least.

"Keeping all this in mind, it is advisable to display the full force of your capabilities, not just holding back," Klaus concluded.

He asked if we understood his explanation, as per protocol, and all of us responded positively.

"Good. Now, look above you for your opponents!"

We trailed Klaus' pointed finger and located the display hanging above our heads, like the list we saw earlier.

On it were our four names, and the names kept swapping with each other in a random process.

Unease rested in the atmosphere as I felt the crushing weight of everyone's expectations and tension concerning whose name would be paired with whom.

>PIIIINNNNGGG<

An alarming sound appeared, and the names suddenly ceased moving, showing us the final match-ups for our exams.

Once I saw it, I was a bit happy and a little sad. My eyes trailed to Ana and I gave her a comforting smile.

'Ana's paired with Kuzon, uh? The very guy she said she didn't want to fight... sucks to be her.'

It was somewhat the best choice, though. After all, this meant I got to fight Stefan now, and then I would most likely meet Kuzon in the finals.

I wasn't sure if Ana would back down at this point and just let Kuzon get the medal, but... I certainly hoped she didn't.

'There's nothing more to lose at this point. Fight will all you have!' My burning eyes moved in Ana's direction.

Fortunately, she was looking at me and our eyes connected. The petite girl nodded vehemently, obvious determination displayed on her face.

Leaving her direction, my eyes trailed to my opponent, Stefan.

"Looks like you got what you wanted. We'll be fighting each other." I grinned.

His scowl remained unfazed.

"Yeah. You better fight with all you have!"

I couldn't promise that, but Stefan didn't have to worry... I planned on showing him some very interesting things.

"Alright! For the first match, we have Stefan Netherlore and Jared Leonard! The rest of you, please move off the stage."

An air of excitement rang among the audience as I and Stefan moved to our respective positions on the battleground.

It didn't take long for the whole area to be rendered empty, having only our moderator waiting at the edge to announce the battle's commencement.

"Begin!" His loud voice echoed in my ears.

"Prepare yourself!" Stefan shouted, raising his hands as they both stretched at me.

'Come to think of it... this will be the first time I'll be really seeing Stefan use Magic...' I waited in observation.

Purple sparks of lightning appeared, sending the whole area into vibration. In a flash, he sent multiple lashes at me.

>SWOOOOSH!!!<

I immediately realized I needed to enhance my body in order to stand a chance against the speed of his attacks, and quickly did so.

Moving my body fluidly, I escaped the lashes of lightning he sent in multiple directions, watching as they scarred the stage we stood on.

'That must be the Low-Tier Intermediate Spell: Lightning Whip.' My thoughts trailed, wondering why Stefan refused to use anything higher.

"Come on, Jared! Are you going to keep running?" He smiled.

'Is he baiting me? Oh well, let's see what he has in store...'

Proceeding cautiously, but with piqued curiosity, I charged at Stefan with full speed. I felt the wind brush in my face, causing my vision to blur in all areas except my target.

Of course, I was still maneuvering around the lightning lashes, approaching the target at a fairly high speed.

Suddenly, I caught Stefan giving me a sly grin.

"Heh!"

My eyes widened, realizing I had indeed fallen into whatever trap he set for me. My speed was currently high, and it would take a while to dull my momentum. Whatever the trap was, wherever it would be... I was sure to fall into it!

>SWUUUPP!!!<

The ground I treaded suddenly became soft and unstable, and I found myself sinking, unable to come out of the seemingly muddy pool.

"I've got you!" Stefan beamed, having a happy and satisfied expression on his face for tricking me.

He clapped his hands together and the earth began solidifying once again, like cement. The boy meant to trap me halfway into the ground!

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Chapter 168: Jared Vs Stefan

"Guh!" I let out groaning sounds, trying to escape the cementing pool before I became completely stuck, but...

"It's too late!" Stefan screamed, electricity buzzing from his fingertips.

A giant magic circle appeared above my head, covering the whole expanse of the hardening puddle that entrapped me in an instant.

It was at least ten feet above, and the sparks of energy around it told of bad news.

My eyes returned to Stefan who was now smiling, obviously done casting the great spell about to envelope me.

"Dark Lightning Return!"

>KRIIIIKKKKKK!!!<

Sparks flew as multiple purple flashes of lightning burst out of the circle, all charging straight down.

'T-this is... High-Tier Intermediate!!!'

Before I could complete those thoughts, though, the burst of electricity connected, surging through the area of impact which generated a deafening explosion.

>BOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

Chunks of tiles from the stage flew about thanks to the sheer pressure of the attack, and remnant flashes of lightning crackled.

>SHUUUUUU< Smoke rose from the completely solidified pool of cement which had cracked apart as a result of the spell's overwhelming power.

"That was an Intermediate Spell of that High-Tier. There's no way you could have dodged it in time... especially since it caught you by surprise. Plus, lightning is one of the fastest elements there is. You're done for!" Stefan said as he approached.

Smoke filled the area of impact and the roasting smell of burning earth tingled on the nose. Based on the destruction he caused, it was fair for Stefan to assume victory over our battle, but...

"... The match isn't over yet, genius!"

Stefan jumped in shock as he sharply turned his head behind him. The pure expression of confusion that enveloped his face was such a sight to see.

"Y-you... h-how?!" He frantically yelled, beads of sweat appearing on his face.

"Look closely...." I pointed directly at the wave of smoke that ascended from the point of impact Stefan had targeted.

I saw his stiff neck slowly turn in disbelief as he captured the sight I showed him.

His back was turned at me, so I couldn't see his expression anymore, but judging from how the young boy's body spasmed, I knew he had realized my trick.

"Y-you... you dug your way into the ground!" Stefan returned his gaze toward me, gritting his teeth in frustration.

"That's right!" I sharply responded.

My body had no scratches or marks on it, making one wonder how I was able to pull off such a feat.

Once the battle started, I coated myself with an ultra-thin barrier that a person wouldn't even be able to distinguish from my actual body. I made the layer to be sturdy, though, enough to withstand low-level Intermediate Spells.

Still, I pretended to be overly cautious of his electric whips and fell for his trap, even though I could clearly see a gathering of Stefan's Mana on the ground before stepping on it.

I had thought it would result in an explosion or something, instead, I was met with a cementing pool. His lightning spell also formed above me, and I realized it would be a bit too much for my current barrier to handle.

Instead of tanking the spell, I used SPELLCRAFT to control the surplus mana around me in order to easily separate the rock beneath me, allowing me to completely sink into the ground right before impact.

I made a tunnel and swam back aboveground, a distance from Stefan, before revealing myself—completely unscathed.

Of course, I wasn't going to explain any of this to Stefan, who just stood and stared at me dumbfounded.

"I suppose... it's my turn now!" I smirked.

Stefan was powerful and talented, I had to give him that. Which was why it would be pointless and even dangerous to try stretching out the match any longer.

"You should probably go on the defensive now," I advised.

It was up to the boy if he heeded it or not.

"[Dark Lightning Storm]"

The flabbergasted boy became even more shocked by the time I revealed the trick up my sleeve.

>RUMBLE!!!<

A storm cloud formed above Stefan, darkening his vision. Instantly, torrents of wind blew, bombarding him in all areas as he tried to figure out his bearing. Even if the boy tried escaping, the whirling wind surrounding him would prove that to be a difficult task.

'It's no use!'

Combining Wind Magic and Lightning Magic to form a High-Intermediate Spell, close to the peak point of that level, the storm that had formed was going to let out discharges of lightning after forcibly trapping Stefan in its range.

I watched as he struggled, coating himself with all forms of enhancements. Unfortunately, it was nothing more than a powerless child trying to swim against the harsh currents of a raging sea.

"Guarkk!!!" He let out in pain.

As a result of my generosity, I decided it was time to end things.

"Fall!"

Instantly, the thick cloud gave off the glow of purple light, and rumbles of thunder came from within it. Stefan noticed this and looked above him.

It was too late to do anything other than receive the Spell!

>BOOOOOOMMMMMMMMM!!!!!!<

Even greater destruction than the earlier spell was caused, thanks to the focus of my lightning attack on a single point.

The ground shattered, and vibrations filled the earth. The audience seemed to recoil as a result of the brilliant flash of light and the echoes of thunder.

Finally, once the single strike hit, I dispersed the cloud, using the remnant wind to brush away the smoke that rose from the heated point of impact.

'That Spell is enough to kill, but... I intentionally delayed in the cast to give you enough time to react and defend...' I smiled, noticing Stefan's unconscious body on the floor.

He had several burn marks on his body, but none were too serious. It seemed he indeed blocked a lot of the attack in time, causing most of the damage to reflect in the surrounding areas. Still, he couldn't completely rid himself of its force.

Even as he was in an unconscious state, I saw the look of determination still glued to the boy's face. He really tried his hardest, didn't he?

"You fought well, Stefan... you fought well."

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Chapter 169: Kuzon vs Ana

"Winner, Jared Leonard!"

Upon securing my victory, I heaved a sigh of relief and began walking down the stage.

Surprisingly, I was met with the deafening roar of the crowd as they cheered in amazement. The students—especially those from the Lower Class—burst out in cheers of excitement.

A brief smile formed on my face and I relished the moment for a little while.

A Lower Class reject had defeated one from the Upper Class—and not just any kind of elite, one of the two biggest geniuses among Ainzlark Academy's First Years!

Somehow, this occurrence must have given other students hope. If a Lower Class reject could beat a genius, then it certainly wasn't impossible for others to rise above their designated spots.

I hoped this battle proved to be an inspiration to those who had lost faith in themselves and had given in to the current system.

'There's no placement that's absolute in this world! We make our own ranks!'

Once people understood, then they could soar above what they naturally deemed impossible.

So what if one was born inept? They could still excel in academics and become a Great Sage!

So what if a person was born poor? They could birth an innovation that would pave the way to wealth.

So what if a person was born powerless? They could simply claw their way into power—doing whatever it took to achieve their dreams.

In essence, nothing was completely impossible so long as a person had the will and determination! The sky allows many birds to fly, without exception. It only waited for those who dared raise their wings to take flight!

Even a chicken could climb atop the back of an eagle... and soar high into the sky!

My eyes trailed to Stefan who was already being carried off stage in order to accommodate the next contestants.

'It wouldn't hurt I'd you relied on others more...'

With those final thoughts, I descended from the stage to return to my seat.

On my way, I met Kuzon and Ana who were already climbing the stairs to the slightly elevated grounds.

"Give it your all, Ana." I smiled at her with absolute pride.

She nodded, and I could see the determination in her eyes. She wasn't going to quit at this juncture—that was what her convicted eyes told me!

Suddenly, I felt a light tap on my shoulder. It jolted my body, but I quickly kept my destabilized emotions under control.

"That was a fine match. Impressive, too..." Kuzon spoke as he drew nearer to me.

"... But, you took too long."

I gritted my teeth when he said that.

While I indeed dragged the fight longer than necessary, the purpose of a match was to gather information on the target and enjoy oneself even while achieving victory—especially if victory was assured.

From Kuzon's tone, though, he had a different philosophy.

"Watch the next match closely. If you are able to understand even the slightest bit of it, I'll consider enjoying my match with you." He gave a light-hearted smile, and once I stared into his distant eyes, I suddenly got a bad feeling.

'This guy...'

Before I could say anything in response, Klaus announced the names of the next contestants and they sped into the stage.

A tinge of regret enveloped my heart and I wished I could have at least told Anabelle one last thing before she became completely out of reach.

"... Be careful!" I whispered, looking in her direction.

I rushed to my seat so I wouldn't miss the fight that would occur.

Fortunately, immediately after I sat and looked in the direction of the match, Klaus Tallman declared it to have begun.

The crowd burst out in excitement, clearly eagerly expecting how this fight would play out.

I simply clasped my fist and observantly watched the competition very intensely—just as Kuzon had said.

'Ana is most likely going to lose against Kuzon. The only question is... how long will she last?'

Anabelle instantly chanted the moment the match began, enhancing herself to the max while also preparing a High-Tier Intermediate Spell to completely decimate Kuzon.

As I watched the fight, I nodded at the soundness of her tactics.

Ana's current limit was a 'Highest-Tier Intermediate-Level Spell'. But, since it took too long to cast, she must have decided to fire her current Spell—most likely to buy her enough time to cast her Trump Card.

So far, it was going well.

The blazing blue flame that Ana summoned above her could be felt, even from my distance. Beads of sweat formed on my face, and I wondered whether they were in reaction to the heat of the High-Tier Intermediate Magic, or I was just being nervous.

>FWWOOMMM!!!<

Ana launched the blue flames of destruction in Kuzon's direction. The giant ball of fire was at least as big as five humans put together. The name was '[Giant Dark FireBall: Intermediate]'

As I watched the flames rapidly approach its target, my eyes caught Kuzon doing absolutely nothing. This line of action puzzled me, almost to the point of disbelief. What was he up to?!

Ana was already beginning to chant her next spell, the one that boasted her highest offensive capabilities.

The ball of fire would reach Kuzon in only a few more seconds, engulfing the area that surrounded him in deep blue flames. We all watched in anticipation of the inevitable... until...

>BOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The blue fireball erupted whole still in mid-air, a few more seconds until impact.

It parted, sending sparks of fire flying around and consuming the area, all except the place directly affecting Kuzon.

"What?!" I exclaimed, losing composure for a moment.

Even Edward was already on his feet, wondering what the hell had happened. We both gazed in shock and puzzlement at the sight of the flames prematurely exploding and the fact that none of the brilliant bursts of fire touched Kuzon even after.

'Ana's control over her spell is top-tier. That fireball wouldn't have erupted... unless... it made an impact with something!'

I closely observed the space where the fireball burst. There was nothing really visible, so it was most likely an invisible barrier.

No, if it was one, I would have noticed the distortion in space, plus Kuzon would need to chant before executing one—unless he used a magic item, which was prohibited in the Exchange.

This just led me to even more confusion.

'Kuzon Midas... what in the world... did you do?!'

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

Chapter 170: Shocker

"Watch the next match closely. If you are able to understand even the slightest bit of it, I'll consider enjoying my match with you."

I remembered Kuzon's last words to me before entering the ring.

'What did he do?!' My mind rang.

Nothing within reason came to mind, so that meant I had to think outside the box. Unfortunately, before that happened, the boy in question made the next step.

"I should end this now..." He muttered.

"[Shock]"

Suddenly, buzzes of purple electricity flowed on his hand, generating violent sparks. They danced around his fingertips and cackled ominously.

Watching his Spell from afar, my puzzlement increased to greater heights.

'[Shock] is a close-combat move, and can't be sent to far distances!'

Why was he using such a move when he was quite some meters away from Anabelle? The advantage of the [Shock] Spell was that it wasn't categorized into Tiers or levels. It was an independent-type Spell that varied based on the amount of mana poured into it.

Still, against an opponent so far away... how was it supposed to be effective?!

>BZZTTTTZZZZ!!!<

Much to my surprise, no, to the shock of everyone who watched, the purple bolts transversed the distance that existed between Kuzon and Ana in a flash, and before I knew it...

"ARRRRHHHHHHH!!!"

... Ana's scream filled the air.

The purple bolts of lightning roasted her body, causing vestiges of smoke to emanate from it.

Purple flashes lingered, clearly stinging her body as she writhed in pain. The girl uncontrollably for a few moments, already damaged beyond her limits, before falling to the ground in defeat.

>THUD<

Her body landed on the floor and the sparks ceased. Millions of questions ran through my mind, but my first concern was Ana's welfare.

I had defeated many people, and so had she. But, the sight of her losing so miserably and helplessly... it caused me great grief and my chest tightened.

The feeling of watching someone I cared about and nurtured be so easily overpowered by another... it felt terrible. Some unsavory memories came to my head, but I quickly brushed them away before they took a hold of me.

There were things I would rather not think about at all in this new life I had been given!

"Winner, Kuzon Midas!"

My eyes unconsciously trailed to the timer set above for all to see, and I caught a glimpse of how long the march lasted.

"T-twenty seconds?!" Edward exclaimed beside me.

His face showed shock, but I was just as surprised.

'So, this is what you meant when you said I took too long in my match... Kuzon...' I narrowed my gaze and focused on the boy who casually left the stage the moment the victor was decided.

Unlike before where cheers of victory sounded, the hall was at a decorum. Many were sure to have been supporting Ana, seeing as she was able to conjure a powerful spell with ease, and tried her best in her match.

They must have also felt devastated when Ana shrieked as she was assailed by the jolts made by Kuzon's attack.

A grave silence greeted Anabelle's loss and Kuzon's victory, and we all watched in silence as the medics rushed to take the girl off-stage.

I had no idea how much Mana Kuzon poured into his attack, but for it to have bypassed Anabelle's enhancements and sent her into a state of unconsciousness in an instant... it must have been a bizarre amount!

For a student to have achieved that within barely a moment without experiencing Mana Shock... just what kind of monster was this mysterious boy? How was he even able to transverse the distance with such a close-range spell—and so quickly at that?

My mind was in a state of panic and multiple emotions and questions flooded me. It felt like I would hyperventilate as I couldn't handle all of them at once.

"...red! Jared! Jared!!!" I heard someone call for me, suddenly bringing me out of the overwhelming state I was in.

"W-what?!" I snapped, looking to my side at the person who was shaking me violently.

Edward gave a look of relief the moment he realized I was fine, and finally, let go of my arms.

"Hoo, you didn't look like yourself back there, and you also weren't responding to my call. That was why I—"

A smile formed on my face as I saw an uncertain expression playing on Edward's face. I supposed I lost too much composure and even worried the young boy.

"Jared... I wasn't able to figure anything out during that fight. Anabelle's loss came as a shocker to me!"

The moment he said his last sentence, Edward paused, realizing something inappropriate in his words.

'Shocker, uh? Was it an unconscious attempt at word play?'

"I-in any case... did you figure anything out concerning what that guy did?!" Edward asked, still recoiling from his embarrassment.

Once his question hit me, I slightly turned my face and looked toward the stage, seeing some scorch marks on the ground. The blackened lines gave me an inkling of something, but that was enough for me to dissuade my anxieties.

"No... not yet." I smiled at my companion.

"But, don't worry... I'll get to the bottom of this... very soon!"

Edward nodded, returning his gaze to the stage. A smile played across his face and he gave a determined look.

I was certain the boy was currently worried about his best friend, but he couldn't allow that to mentally destabilize him, especially since his match would be coming next.

"Ana gave her all, just like she wanted to. It's a shame she lost, but that only means she can learn from her mistakes and move on. Besides... I know you're going to get vengeance for her!" Edward grinned, as though calming both himself as well me concerning the event that just transpired.

Somehow, his words actually worked on me. While I was a bit anxious about facing Kuzon in the finals, I took a resolve upon myself to shake off any semblance of fear.

He had utterly defeated my student! There was no way I planned on disgracing myself as a teacher.

"Yeah. You're right, Edward!" I gave a bright smile.

In my battle against Kuzon... I was going to win no matter what!