

SPELLCRAFT 191

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Chapter 191: The Elite Tournament Begins

Ciara's sweet tone contained playfulness and mockery.

He wanted to reply her! Jerry wanted to rise to his feet and declare how things would be different this time and how he would ensure he rose to the realm of the Rankers—just as they both swore back then!

However... he couldn't speak.

"Just give it up... and stay where you are. You can't reach me anymore."

With those final words of hers ringing in his ears, Jerry's petrified body remained frozen as Ciara climbed to her seat.

'I... I couldn't say anything...'

Did he still have doubts? Was that the reason he couldn't stand up to his resolve?

There was no way of confirming that now. However, words were cheap. If he truly wanted to show his determination, all Jerry had to do was win!

"I can do this..." He whispered to himself and stared at the stage.

It was currently vacant, but soon... the chaos would begin!

'I'll win! I'll make sure I climb the ranks!'

And once Jerry did that... they could both achieve what they swore—he and the Second Seat!

"Welcome, everyone, to the final day of the Inter-Class Exchange!!!" Klaus Tallman declared in his usual booming voice.

Everyone in the hall was used to his mode of speech and they were already smiling in anticipation for the Moderator to continue his words.

"The matches we'll be having now... will be a bit different from the previous ones!"

Of course, everyone was already aware of this fact.

For six days, the Exchange had proceeded smoothly, advancing from the preliminary matches to the Finals.

Having concluded the Final rounds the previous day—in which the champions received prizes and public declarations—it was now time for the most anticipated moment.

The Elite Tournament!

Thirty students, one ring—the ultimate clash between the best of the best within Ainzlark Academy was now upon everyone and the spectators couldn't contain their excitement.

"In the previous matches, the contestants advanced from the Preliminary Matches to the Finals, but, for the Elite Tournament, that method will not be used."

Silence filled the Hall.

"There will be no form of 'advancement' here... only a simple exchange between representatives of each Class." Klaus further explained.

Judging from the silence enveloping the auditorium, and the uneasy glances the students gave one another, it was clear that their Moderator would need to explain a bit more for them to completely comprehend what he meant.

Of course, Klaus already knew of his task—and so he opened his mouth to break down the information.

"We will be having only ten rounds, in which a representative of each Class—Upper, Middle, and Lower— will be participating in. Since there are thirty Students, that means three will be contesting in each round."

A slight 'oohhh' leaked from the crowd as they slowly began to understand.

"As always, the selection will be random and the final decisions concerning the champions of each match will be left entirely up to the Judges above."

For a moment, the students looked at the floating platform where the Senior Lecturers were, and after a few moments, returned their gaze to Klaus.

"Normally, to indicate fairness, the Elite Ten are meant to fight in accordance to their ranks..."

That meant that the Elite Rank 10s of each Class would climb the stage to Duke it out, and the victor would emerge as the best among all three.

This would occur for all ranks. However...

"... To create a more 'unpredictable' match, we've decided to randomize things."

Klaus had chosen his words carefully, but the obvious intentions behind them registered in the minds of those who were attentive.

Jerry, for one, frowned the moment he heard that. What their moderator was simply trying to say was that in a fight between Elite students of the same rank, the obvious winner would be members of the Upper Class.

The others might as well have been fodder!

So, by randomizing the contestants, the matches could become more interesting in the sense that a more powerful Lower Class Elite would fight lesser ranked Upper and Middle-Class students.

If that was the case, students of the Lower Class, and even the Middle Class, had a chance against the superior members of the Upper Class.

But, in the end, how much water did that philosophy hold?

Ultimately, it was just another way of making the lower classes look bad. In essence, even when pitted with higher-ranked Lower Class Elites—if the Upper Class still won it, would only serve as a boost to their ego... and would badly damage the prestige of the Lower Class.

The same idea applied to the Middle Class.

Jerry was seething with rage, but he controlled himself.

Rather than fight on equal grounds, the tournament aimed to make it appear as though they favored the weaker party, while in actuality...

'It doesn't matter! I just need to win!' Jerry shook off his annoyance and focused on the resolve he had cultivated for so long.

"Ah, it's hopeless."

"Welp, time for another ass whooping."

"I just hope I don't get matched up with a tough opponent."

"What does it matter? I'll just surrender immediately."

"There's no point in fighting."

"True that."

The other members of the Lower Class Elite Ten exchanged comments of assumed defeat among themselves—so shamelessly for that matter.

As one who sat on the same row as them, Jerry felt mortified beyond description. What was the relevance of being an Elite when one's mind was so weak?

These people wouldn't even bother representing their Class well!

But, he was different!

It wasn't like Jerry was one who took pride in his abilities, neither did he think of himself as a special individual or 'the chosen one'.

No, he just... wanted better!

For that reason alone, the boy was going to push himself forward and achieve his wish... no matter what he took.

"The randomizer will begin now. So, everyone, remain glued to your seats and keep your eyes peeled!"

A large screen appeared above the auditorium as names appeared on three rows and began changing at rapid speed.

Whichever names appeared on the rows belonged to those who would climb the stage to begin the match. In essence, it also served as a countdown to the glorious finale of the Inter-Class Exchange.

Jerry gulped and watched the list in anticipation and a bit of nervousness. At long last... the time had come!

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Chapter 192: Disgrace

[First Round]

— Zeke Klein (Upper Class)

—Renny Sherly (Middle Class)

— Tom Hollyberry (Lower Class)

[Contestants Get On Stage!]

Jerry gulped in relief, partly because he wasn't among those who would get on stage, and also because... of the people on the list!

Zeke Klein was the Sixth Seat of the Rankers—the same rank he had among the Elite Ten.

Needless to say, he was extremely strong, and Jerry knew very well the disparity between them both.

If he had gotten picked with him, the chances of him winning and fulfilling his goals were slim. Of course, he realized that this meant he was secretly wishing to be paired against weaker opponents, but, Jerry didn't care!

Among the Elite Ten of the Upper Class, none could be considered weak by his standards. He would still be facing challenges no matter the opponent that came his way.

At least, if the enemy was of a low Rank, the chances of winning were higher!

'Damn, even the Middle-Class Elite is of Rank three...' Jerry gave another gulp.

As for the Lower Class Elite, he belonged to the lesser rank of their group—number seven. It was fairly obvious how this would pan out.

Following the name on the list, the respective students stood from their seats and walked to the stage.

It didn't take long for the large, round, platform to occupy four persons—three contestants, and the moderator.

"Are you guys ready?" A voice echoed.

It was an unnecessary question, but the students all responded with nods.

Jerry glanced at each of them.

The Upper-Class boy was famous for his specialty in lightning Magic, and could cast very quickly. Even though the Lower Class Elite had an affinity for Water—and in a way, could use that to his advantage—the gap in skill was too wide to allow that.

Jerry didn't really know the ability of the Middle-Class Elite, but regardless... the contest had the rank of third in his Class for a reason.

That meant he was strong.

"Ready..." Jerry was roused from his thoughts by Klaus' voice.

The moderator had already totally stepped off the stage.

That was a testament to how extreme the match would turn out.

"... Begin!"

Bursts of mana climbed as the pressure of a blood-curdling match filled the Hall. People cried in shock and excitement as they stared wide-eyed at the stage for the clash to commence, when suddenly...

... A voice peaked.

"I surrender!"

The battle-tensed atmosphere instantly receded and for a moment, the world seemed to pause.

Someone had just given up... right when the match started!

This was the tournament of the strongest in the Academy. No weakling was among those who contested. If it was a First Years' match, no one would be surprised, but this... was something concerning!

In a match among the best of the best, there was no way anyone would be so weak-willed as to surrender without even trying—or so they thought...

Who could have done something so ridiculous?

"I surrender... I'm out." The voice came again, and Klaus had to climb the stage to stop the match—at least until whoever forfeited left the stage.

The crowd, though dazed for a moment, finally found the source of cowardice among the three fighters. The shameless boy had already raised both hands in surrender, so it couldn't have been clearer to anyone who watched.

Of course, it was the Lower Rank Elite—Tom Hollyberry—who threw in the towel.

The boy's shameless smile seemed to show a bit of nervousness and fear, but his will to come out of the fight unscathed far outweighed any of those expressions.

"Tom Hollyberry is out of the match. Please leave the stage." Klaus spoke blandly.

His eyes showed no energy, no excitement—this was a sharp contrast from the usual energetic boy.

The frail Lower Class student nodded and began leaving the stage with zero hesitation. The crowd stared in silence for a moment... and then the jeers came!

"Boooooo!!!"

"What a loser!"

"He's a Lower Class, after all..."

The audience, clearly irritated by the boy's cowardice, slowly diverted their blame to the entire Lower Class.

"Urgh!" Jerry felt a sting within him as he covered his face slightly, in shame.

He, an innocent and fired-up student, had been caught up in a colleague's cowardice. Of course, Jerry had already expected this much.

In the face of strong adversaries, the weak crumbled—the same could be said especially for those in the Lower Class who didn't even want to try!

As Tom Hollyberry returned to his seat, he flashed a relieved smile and crashed on his buttocks, getting comfortable.

"Haaa... I was scared for a moment there. What if the moderator hadn't stopped the match?" He murmured.

It appeared the boy was more concerned about his safety than the disgrace he had brought upon the entire Lower Class.

"Welp, you could have just run off the stage if worst came to worst."

"True. I plan on doing the same if a surrender doesn't work out."

"Let's just pray I don't get paired with a Martial Artist. Those guys are quick on their feet. Before I can even get the chance to surrender, they could..."

"Hey, what's wrong with Martial Artists?!"

The other members of the Elite Ten simply ignored that their fellow had just disgraced them and laughed it off, discussing among themselves like nothing happened.

Jerry knew quite well how they were able to even do such a thing.

'They're all planning to throw in the towel!'

He sighed, completely ridding himself of anger. There was nothing getting upset would do to help him.

He had already known this much before coming for the tournament—that there was no one he could count on to have his back among his peers... no one but him!

Even if the others gave up before trying, he wouldn't dare.

It was thanks to the cowardice of others that the Upper-Class Elite Ten had managed to hard the title of Rankers all to themselves. But, that would soon change!

All he needed was one win... just one turnaround...

... And then the winds would begin to blow in favor of the Lower Class once more!

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Chapter 193: Vast Difference

"Winner, Zeke Klein from the Upper Class!!!" Klaus declared.

The audience roared in amazement and cheers. Of course, they did! For such a splendid match, anything less would have been an insult.

The arena was still crackling with electricity, and charred marks filled the stage. There was no glamorous destruction thanks to the enhancements added to the platform beforehand, but the remnant scars on the floor proved enough of the match's intensity.

Of course, it was inevitable that an Upper-Class Elite would win, but it was still a bit of a shock—no, downright unbelievable—how poorly the Middle-Class Student fared.

There was too large a gap between the two that it felt like a Third Year was fighting a beginner. The way Zeke easily won against his opponent, using his destructive lightning blasts to counter all areas before the Wind Mage could get any closer was impressive.

And so, after only a few minutes since the start of the match... the victor was announced.

'Damn it...!' Jerry gulped and gave a shivering thought.

He shuddered at the thought of actually fighting such a devastating fellow... and the Zeke guy was only top six!

What if he fought against someone who was of a higher rank? Would he stand a chance?

It wasn't like Jerry wasn't aware of his strength, but...

"Next, we have..." Klaus Tallman announced, forcing the boy's head to bob high in order to see who would be chosen next.

To Jerry's relief... it wasn't him!

The contestants approached the stage, ready to begin the next round.

Of course, the crowd, at this point, were in a frenzy!

Never had they seen such brilliant display of Magic—well, other than a few matches among some exceptional folks in the previous rounds—none came close.

The next group of contestants consisted of two Martial Artists and a Magic-User.

Unlike the official Exchange among students which strictly divided the matches based on departments, the Elite Tournament did not follow such protocols.

To fully maximize the effects of an exciting match and simulate what actual combat was like, they pit members of separate divisions against each other.

Due to school policy, no Scholar could be a member of the Elite Ten, unless they had specialization in Magic Combat or Martial Arts.

That meant those who were in fact Scholars, needed to be able to fight!

Among the Rankers, there was only one Scholar, and among the thirty Elite students in Ainzlark, five belonged to the Scholar Department.

That showed just how few academically driven students were among the strongest in the school!

The fight about to unfold, however, had no Scholar among the contestants.

Jerry diligently observed as all three were about to fight.

He could perhaps learn a thing or two from their exchange!

"Begin!"

It only took a few seconds—no, probably just one—for a voice to screech out.

"I give up!"

As expected... it came from none other than a member of the Lower Class!

"I give up!"

"I no longer wish to participate!"

"I surrender!"

"I forfeit!"

No matter the kind of language used, those words essentially meant the same thing, and they came from the same group of people!

That's right! The Lower Class Elite Ten!

Out of the six matches that had occurred so far, the Lower Class Elites had forfeited every single one.

It was no longer a surprise when they raised their shameless hands to declare their intention to surrender.

The crowd had long grown tired of booing them and had now come to look at them with disdain. For all they cared, this was no longer a match among three Classes, but among two.

But, could it really be called a match?

Despite the Middle Class' unyielding effort to try surpassing those of the Upper Class, none had come out victorious.

Win after Win... everything went to the Upper-Class Elite Ten!

The current scores were like this;

Upper Class— 6 Wins 0 Losses

Middle Class— 0 Wins 6 Losses

Lower Class— 0 Wins 6 Losses

Since forfeiting automatically meant a loss, the Lower Class took on the same position as those who had actually been fighting with all they had, but still ended up losing—the Elites of the Middle Class.

In a way, one could say the Middle Class was no different from the Lower Class.

They were both overwhelmingly placed at the losing end, with no sign of victory!

Jerry clasped his hands together to keep them from shaking as he saw the list surface again. Would it be his turn now? The boy's heart thumped uncontrollably, not knowing what his fate would be.

>GULP!<

Finally, the names appeared... and for the first time since the lists began surfacing, Jerry did not sigh in relief. No, it was the opposite actually.

His eyes widened in shock, perhaps a bit of fear. Sweat dripped from his face as his dry lips smacked against each other. He forced himself to swallow the nonexistent saliva in his throat as the names registered in his brain.

[Seventh Round]

— Ciara Epilson (Upper Class)

—Roy Lesryio (Middle Class)

— Jeremy Elly (Lower Class)

[Contestants Get On Stage!]

Jerry's name was not on the list, but the people who would now contest piques a great deal of his interest.

The Middle Class and Lower Class contestants were surprisingly both of the first ranks respectively.

Was it coincidence, or a glitch in the randomizer?

How could two students who had the highest rank compete on the same stage? That was a recipe for disaster!

Still, that wasn't Jerry's major concern.

The one who caught all of his focus—at least ninety percent of it, to be exact—was the Upper-Class Elite who had already stood and was making her way to the stage—

—Ciara Epilson!

She was the one who would be fighting in the next round.

The gasps and shrieks of the audience were so deafening that Jerry could barely hear his own thoughts.

What was on his mind? Was it excitement as well? Was the boy looking forward to seeing how much Ciara had grown after their last exchange?

Perhaps...

... But a stronger feeling crept up in his heart. It was fear!

How much stronger had she gotten ever since the last time they actually interacted? Well, Jerry would soon see.

What frightened the determined young boy, though... was whether he would still have the courage to continue after experiencing it!

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Chapter 194: Unrivaled Talent

"I guess it's my turn, then..." Ciara whispered to herself as she stood.

A bright, mischievous smile ran up her face as her slender body swayed to climb down the stairs.

"Don't overdo it..." A voice called out to her.

It was the Rank one of the Top 10 in her Class, Fabian Lestrome Indiavel.

As she usually did, Ciara utterly ignored the boy who thought he had a say in her business and strolled down the stage, watching those beneath her also move in response to their call by the board.

For a second, her eyes frolicked and caught a glance of someone she knew quite well —correction, used to know.

His eyes were open wide at the list, and with his hands clasped together, Ciara already knew what was going on in the boy's mind.

'This guy... sigh...'

Her eyes returned to the stage and she quickened her pace to reach there before keeping others waiting.

Ciara had her favorite blue ribbons tied around her hair, and her brown hair was the very definition of elegance.

One could say she resembled a princess, even though she was a mere commoner.

The only thing that distinguished her from the dregs was her prowess in Magic.

She was, above all others, an unrivaled genius!

Not even Fabian, in all his Majesty, had achieved the rank she had when he was in his Second Year. The highest he ever reached among the Rankers was the Ninth Seat—the very bottom!

One could have alluded this to the fact that the alumni who were Rankers then were stronger than the current set. A bit of that could be said to be true.

Still... no one could dispute the fact that her achievement broke the records of Ainzlark, only below a certain someone's.

This very same girl now climbed the stage—her opponents, the strongest in their respective Classes.

To be fair, anything less wouldn't suffice!

As always, Klaus conducted the match and was about to initiate its commencement.

For a moment, Ciara glanced at both opponents. While the Middle Class one looked extremely nervous, the determination in his eyes told her that he wouldn't back down.

As for the Lower Class pig that casually stood, it was clear he had no intention of fighting.

His stature was actually nothing like a pig's. On the contrary, the boy was fairly built and even had a charming face. Perhaps he didn't want any harm to befall the smooth skin he had cultivated for god knows how long.

But...

'Tch...'

... Before Ciara, he was nothing more than a pig.

'I should punish him a little...'

"Ready...." Klaus' voice steadied, and the Lower Class Rank 1 already cleared his throat, preparing for surrender.

"Fight!"

"I sur—"

Before he said any more, the boy was assailed by an unexplainable feeling coursing through his body.

The strange chill made him unable to utter a single word as his body vibrated. He began to spasm, shaking as though afflicted by a nonexistent cold.

"Guarghhhhhh!!!" The boy suddenly screamed.

He gripped his head tightly and bellowed in nonexistent pain.

No one had assaulted, at least it didn't appear so.

Yet, why was the supposedly strongest of the Lower Class crying like a frightened child? Well, the answer dwelled in the girl who smiled at him—her eyes brimming with blue light.

No one could have guessed, and only those who truly knew her could understand the terrifying thing she had just done.

... Original Magic!

"Phantom Pain... how does it feel?" Her soft voice purred as she moved closer to the screaming boy.

"Aaaaarghhhhhh!!!"

The Lower Class Elite was too afflicted by the sheer agony going on in his mind that words couldn't escape his mouth.

He wanted to plead!

The boy desperately wanted to beg!

If his lips could move, he would surrender immediately.

Unfortunately, he couldn't!

Only pain coursed through his body—that was what his mind told him.

For the onlookers who watched, they only saw three students on the stage—one who gave shrieks like a madman; one who simply stood by and watched, looking equally confused; and finally, the only one who seemed perfectly comfortable with it all.

Her steps were slow, intentionally ensuring the boy suffered as much pain as he could before she reached him. The glow in her eyes warbled, and her glossy lips curled up even more.

'This should be enough... I don't want to break him...'

With that, her eyes stopped glowing, and the boy gave up... consciousness.

He fell from where he stood, hitting his head on the hard ground in a slump. Silence filled the Hall and the surprised onlookers could only state at one another in a query.

Only a few people seemed to know what was going on—about two from the crowd, and a couple more from the side Elites.

Even then... their reactions showed that they still couldn't completely comprehend the depth of the girl's abilities.

"Erm, Moderator... this one can no longer fight. Could we call someone to take him off the stage?" Ciara smiled innocently at Klaus, who had just been staring in nervousness.

He knew exactly what she had been doing, but, as per the rules, he couldn't interfere.

Plus, there was that special order he received from the Judges, so his hands were basically tied.

Even when he heard the loud cry of a student he was supposed to cater to as a Lecturer, he powerlessly watched until Ciara had gotten her fill of satisfaction.

"Y-yeah. You're right..." Klaus climbed the stage and reluctantly responded to the girl you g enough to be his daughter —probably.

Responding to his call, the medics arrived and carted the unconscious big away.

Seeing as the Middle-Class student had yet to give up, Klaus concluded that the match would proceed and once again exited the stage.

Now, only Ciara and her opponent, Roy Lesryio, remained.

'Hmm?' The girl's eyes darted in the direction of someone who stared at her with such intensity that it felt like his eyes would burst wide open.

The boy's name was Jerry!

His breath now seemed to be heavy, and his clasped hands shook. Clearly, he was shaken by Ciara's display, but the girl didn't seem to mind.

Rather, something seemed to glint in her eyes the moment she saw him.

'So this isn't enough, uh...?'

A smile, more twisted than the one she had before, formed on her face as she stared at her opponent.

'... Maybe I should show you something a bit more special, Jerry. Once you see this...'

A bit of her white teeth showed and she completely turned to face Roy, who was already preparing his Spell.

'... You'll realize how foolish it is to even dream of catching up to me!'

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Chapter 195: Mage Mode

Tension was high, as everyone seemed to hold their breaths while watching what would unfold next.

Surprise, confusion, and anticipation clashed among the audience.

In silence, they waited for who would make the first move among the two remaining contestants—Ciara Epilson or Roy Lesryio.

As if responding to the inner thoughts of the audience, the latter sprang into action immediately.

With the sleight of both his hands, several torrents of wind appeared, enveloping his surrounding with the raging element.

In a flash, these torrents whirled and became twisters, higher than two adults placed atop each other. If it were only one, that would be understandable, but the whirlwinds that formed were double!

>WHOOOOOSHHH!!!<

Two fairly large tornados whirled and made their way toward Ciara, who stood before them—clearly undaunted.

"Hmph!"

She stretched out one hand and cast her Spell to counter.

Torrents of equal, no, greater proportion grew out of thin air—faster than the ones Roy had summoned—and made their way toward the ones that charged at Ciara.

Two against two, the whirlwinds clashed and sent waves of chilly air flying across the stage.

Screams of the audience rang aloud as they felt the harsh breeze blow from the far distance where the strong spells clashed.

>WHUUUUMMM!!!<

After colliding for a few seconds, Ciara's spell prevailed and now charged at Roy.

Of course, the boy, who had already seen this coming, prepared an earth Spell to shield himself from the weakened twisters.

A wall arose from the platform completely defended against the double whirlwinds until they vanished with distant whispers.

Once he realized his barrier had served its purpose, Roy brought it down since the wall of stone impeded his vision.

It wasn't like a wind spell that provided a translucent barrier—this was earth, after all.

Making the right call, Roy was a bit hesitant to bring down the wall since Ciara could have been preparing for that window of opportunity to strike, but he took the risk.

If she shot something else at him, he had something else up his sleeves. With that in mind, the wall crumbled, revealing both students standing on stage.

To Roy's surprise, Ciara had not moved a single inch from her location. She also didn't seem to be casting any obvious Spell. Her eyes twinkled with a bit of mischief, though, same as her lips.

This told the nervous boy that something was amiss.

"Well, I gave you a chance to show me something interesting..." The goddess of Ainzlark Academy called out to the boy with a lackluster expression.

He could only gulp in response.

"... As expected, it was a waste of time."

Ciara wasn't surprised, though. This was how much the guy had been worth from the start.

"I'll be using this opportunity to make you a scapegoat... to show a particular someone something beyond both your capabilities."

Roy wasn't sure what Ciara was talking about, but he had already resolved to see this fight to the end the moment he climbed the stage.

Unlike the Lower Class cowards, those of the Middle Class valued their honor above all things.

If one of them acted like trash now, it would only sully their name.

'Bring it!' Roy snapped within him as he also began preparing a powerful spell on his end.

'It seems she's not making a move because whatever she wants to do is big... and if it's big, it'll take time!'

Using this line of reasoning, Roy thought he had time on his hands and went for one of the most destructive spells in his arsenal.

'I can do this... I just need to cast faster than she can—'

"Mage Mode..."

>VWUUUUUUUSSSSHHHHHHHHH!!!!<

In an instant, faster than Roy could even complete his sentence, a massive gust of energy surged from Ciara's location. It was so unreal that anyone would doubt their eyes!

The wave of blue energy circled the girl, causing whatever was left of Roy's composure to completely vanish.

Sparkles of light shrouded the girl on stage, and her outfit slowly changed.

The ribbon she had on slowly turned purple, and blue earrings appeared on both ears. Her eyes glowed brighter than ever, and designs ran through her attire.

A caped robe also appeared behind her and the most amazing thing also materialized in front.

A book!

No, not just any kind of book... this particular object floated and was doused in blue energy. Not only did it emit faint glows of Mana, but the concentration of energy it had was enough to make anyone shriek in terror.

This book was known as a Grimoire, and the current attire Ciara currently donned was known as a Magerobe.

These two objects had one thing in common... they could only belong to fully-fledged Mages.

Of course, Grimoires and robes were—by nature—Magic Tools, and could be used freely by those skilled enough to handle their power.

But, one of the rules was for students not to use any form of Magic Tools in combat, so where did Ciara get these items from?

The answer was not known to many.

But, the few who realized what was going on gasped in utter disbelief. Not many knew she had reached a level strong enough to achieve this feat, but with what currently unfolded before everyone, the truth was made clear.

—Mage Mode!

Just as Original Magic was hailed to be the ace of any experienced and powerful Mage, this concept was equally esteemed.

Mage Mode was a state of enlightenment that very few Mages achieved. Those who did, however, experienced boosts in their Magic abilities that raised them at least one Level above their usual state.

So, if an Intermediate-Level Mage used Mage Mode, they could temporarily gain the abilities of an Advanced one.

If an Advanced Mage achieved this, they could even go higher and reach the level of...

In essence, it was extremely critical, and very rare to be seen. The ability to transcend one's limits belonged only to those who had studied and trained hard enough to obtain this power.

Yet...

Yet...

YET... why did this girl, barely even fourteen years of age possess such abilities?!

It was groundbreaking!

"Y-you... what are you.... w-what is... t-that..?!" Roy was already staggering backward, giving in to the primal instinct that assailed anyone once they couldn't understand something.

—FEAR!

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Chapter 196: An Elite's Nightmare

It took every ounce of courage for Roy not to raise his hands to surrender.

Every hair on his body stood as his arms twitched. Unable to resist the urge any longer, he was about to give in to the pressure and—

"Don't even think about it... if you know what's good for you." Ciara interrupted his actions.

"Eeeekkk!!!" Roy shrieked.

From her piercing gaze, the boy knew she was serious. Remembering the awful state the Lower Class Elite had been after attempting to surrender, Roy lost the will to raise his hands.

If he so much as tried... would he also be assailed with the indescribable pain the previous guy experienced.

"Just stand there and be a good target. You can choose to struggle too. It makes no difference..." Ciara smiled at her foe.

Could he even be called that at this point? All she saw when she looked at the trembling figure of Roy... was complete fodder!

The girl, already completing her transformation, now stood on her spot.

No, she wasn't standing... her feet were no longer on the ground. Ciara was now levitating, a couple of inches from the ground, but her effortless display at it showed that if she wanted to... the girl could probably go even higher.

This was the effect of the Magerobe she had on. It had the automatic effect of granting flight to the wearer, and all her other ornaments weren't for show.

All her senses had been enhanced and the girl's defenses were so high that nothing under her current Magic Level would leave as much as a dent on her.

If this wasn't the very definition of overpowered, what was?!

"If you won't come to me, then I guess I'll just finish things off..." She softly commented, and her fingers slightly moved.

Instantly, with even less effort than last time, wind began concentrating on a single location.

Unlike before where two whirlwinds appeared, this was just one tornado... yet...

It was so big and wide that it nearly ascended forty meters into the air. The width was also nothing to scoff at.

From where everyone sat, they felt the pressure.

It was so shattering, so disturbing, that even those who weren't fighting her were clenching their teeth in fright.

Ciara Epilson had so easily created an Advanced Spell—albeit in the Lower Tier.

>FWOOOOSHHH!!!!<

The whirlwind roared, growing even larger by the second as it drew closer to the frightened boy.

In front of such an unbelievable spell, the Trump Card he had seemed like child's play.

The most Roy Lesryio could do was create an Intermediate Spell ok the Highest Tier, but that practically drained all his Mana and took too long to cast.

He had been thinking of resorting to a weaker version of the Spell to save time, but even if he went all out, how could he compete with his opponent's power.

The obvious choice was to retreat!

But...

"Don't you dare back away Roy!"

"Stand till the very end!"

"Don't give up!"

...The voices of his comrades reached him.

Usually, if a person heard this, they would be invigorated and more prepared to fight, but Roy only clenched his teeth.

'Those idiots!'

They weren't the ones on the stage so it was easy to wag their tongues.

In face of such insurmountable pressure, how could he—in good conscience—still hang on?

The only reason he hadn't thrown in the towel was because of the fear of what Ciara would do to him. Her eyes were so focused on him that the boy felt like he would pass out just from fright.

Unfortunately, his mental resistance wasn't that fickle.

If he chose to forfeit, Ciara would inflict the same pain upon him as she did the other contestant. As if that wasn't bad enough, the tornado Spell he wanted to avoid would also assail him.

That would be double jeopardy!

Could he really take that risk? In that case, the only option left for the boy was to brace himself and conduct himself like a man! He would lose, but as the top of his Class, he had to stand tall!

The only option was to remain on the platform till the very end!

'In that case... I better reduce the damage as much as I can!'

Roy, having made his choice, steeled his heart and poured all the mana he had into the ground.

[Earth Fort: Full]

The highest defensive Spell in his arsenal that barricaded him with sturdy walls—that was the best he could resort to... or was it?

"I'm not done!"

Even if it was little, and it came at the cost of the last ounce of Mana he could spare, Roy Lesryio created a wind wall that would also serve as protection.

"Haaa... Haaa..."

Now having heavily, the boy was satisfied that he had fought his best and waited for what would happen.

Even if the Spell would ultimately hit Roy, these Spells would at least protect him a little bit... or so he imagined

>SHWOOOMMMM!!!<

The Wind Spell he used as a barrier broke, and the earth wall that covered him shattered apart in an instant, as if being torn to pieces.

At first, Roy couldn't understand... until he took a closer glance at the aftermath.

Ciara's whirlwind had swallowed the rocks whole, adding them to the rapid twister that had now grown to an unfathomable degree.

It was... beyond belief!

"I-is this... even a Second Year...??!" The boy asked himself.

From what he saw, Ciara had already reached the level of a fully-fledged Mage!

Why, then, was she in this school? Why was she fighting him? Why did she inflict him with such fear and powerlessness?

With no answer, Roy waited to get blown away, torn to shreds, crushed, or whatever was his fate at the hands of Ciara's Spell.

"Winner, Ciara Epilson!" A voice sharply interrupted the march, and Ciara's whirlwind was canceled at the same time.

Surprise filled the air as eyes darted to the center of the stage to see Klaus Tallman already there.

He had stopped the Spell and had also declared Ciara the victor, all in the span of seconds!

If not... well, the results could only be left to one's imagination.

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Chapter 197: Staying Resolute

"What?" The girl—Ciara Epilson—gave a slight look of irritation to the moderator who gave her a piercing gaze.

The slight flicker in her eyes seemed to be inviting some form of trouble, as though she dared the man who was teetering at the edge of impatience and caution.

A second of silence was established between the both of them before the girl finally lost any will to further an argument and quickly calmed herself.

"I think that's enough, don't you think?" Klaus sharply answered, though in a remotely quiet way—almost as though he whispered.

"Hmph!"

"Whew..."

Following their short exchange, Roy crumpled to the floor, happy to have been saved, and the crowd roared in celebration, having the outstanding match etched in their brain forever!

Of course, it went without saying who the victor had been.

"Winner, Ciara Epilson!" Klaus declared.

That was one more win for the Upper Class, making a total of seven victories.

More cheers rang out from the audience as Roy struggled to stand on his wobbling legs and exited the stage.

Since Klaus Tallman had interrupted the march, having seen that a competitor was unable to further the match, that meant the Middle Class had lost. Of course, even without the rules to serve as a guiding principle, the mere sight of the match was enough for the audience to determine who won.

"WOHOOOOOOOOOO!!!" The students of Ainzlark cheered for their goddess.

The winner, Ciara, remained on the platform for a little longer even though her contestant had left.

Her eyes were locked on a particular someone among the other competitors that sat in the elite seat area.

'See? Can you do that?' Was what she thought as her eyes were clearly locked with Jerry's.

With that, she casually stepped off the stage and began making her way to her seat.

Klaus gave a sigh of relief, finally ridding himself of the most troublesome student he had ever handled.

A few students, even amid the cheers and deafening cries of the masses, muttered their differing comments under their breath.

"I told her not to go overboard..." Fabian Lestrome Indiavel gave a glare at the girl who approached without a care in the world.

"Tch..." Other members of the Upper-Class Elites expressed their displeasure purely based on the fact that the gap between Ciara and then had gotten even wider.

"..." There was one final person who had something to say, though.

His arms trembled slightly after experiencing Ciara's power, and even when she finished, the girl had stared right at him—as if to sneer at his efforts to reach an unimaginable height.

"Ciara..." He whispered.

Surely, she possessed more power than he had given her credit for. However, seeing just how overwhelmingly strong the girl was didn't change anything for Jerry.

After all...

"... I don't plan on giving up!"

The boy said this the moment Ciara brushed past him.

It was as if he was telling her with his sister's voice, not even bothering to stare at the obviously disapproving frown of the girl.

It was clear to Jerry what she had been trying to do, but he didn't need her caution or pity. He wasn't trying to prove anything to her, though the same couldn't be said for Ciara's intentions.

"I will... I will march on!"

His eyes screamed of resolve even though his body still slightly trembled due to the aftershock of Ciara's Mage Mode.

"Hmph!"

With a scoff, Ciara didn't bother giving a proper response and just returned to her seat.

Once she sat, the girl felt eyes focusing intensely from both sides beside her, but from her casual demeanor it was clear... she didn't care!

Thankfully, the tension didn't last very long as the next group of fighters was chosen.

For the Upper Class, a Martial Artist was chosen. He was Rank 3, said to be the greatest at the art in the whole school—well, among students.

How unlucky were the Middle and Lower Class students... for them to have chosen the shortest end of the stick—as short as it could get.

Immediately Klaus started the match, the opponent lunged into action, brandishing his dual blades and striking both targets—who were Magic-Users—as if they meant nothing.

The Lower Class fodder couldn't even surrender before his opponent's blade reached him—turning him into nothing but an unconscious lump in an instant.

"Winner, Gazef Raizel!"

After this, there were only two matches left.

Jerry gulped the moment he realized his fate. The only two contestants who hadn't gotten a chance to the stage were bad news, so there was no way he would be having it easy.

As he made those worried thoughts, the list was made, and Jerry saw the contestants of the ninth match.

The first name caught his eyes, causing him to nearly gasp—but controlled himself.

Was it finally time? Everyone would be experiencing such a rare sight... a match that would be considered equally phenomenal with Ciara's battle.

Finally, Fabian Lestrome Indiavel would climb the stage!

Jerry sighed in relief, happy he wasn't the unfortunate one that would be fighting.

Upon seeing their names, each contestant stood and took their position on the stage. The second most powerful of the Middle-Class students, and the second most powerful of the Lower Class, all up against the top 1 Ranker in Ainzlark Academy.

The pressure was on, and everyone could feel it build as they waited for the moderator's signal.

"Begin!"

>BOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The entire stage trembled in shock, recovering a blast that caused everyone to gasp and recoil in shock.

It took some moments for it to actually register in the eyes of many—except those with extraordinary sharp senses—what had occurred.

Even before the Lower Class trash got the chance to open his mouth, or the Middle-Class Martial Artist could draw his blade... the match ended.

This explosion—caused by the number 1 Ranker—was a mystery, and how it had been cast was too fast for most to perceive.

All the people knew was what they saw.

Ending in nearly an instant, the ninth round belonged to none other than the Upper Class... it was Fabian's victory!

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Chapter 198: Jerry's Battle

It was finally time for the last round.

Jerry could feel sweat emanate from all his pores as he gulped silently. He didn't need any list to tell him that it would be his turn next.

Having exhausted all other participants, who else remained.

He also had a fair idea of who his two opponents would be.

The Middle Class one was no issue, so the major challenge—the one that have the determined boy such a headache—was none other than the Upper-Class opponent he would be fighting.

'I can't back down now!' He steeled his face and glanced at the list stationed above the audience.

[Final Round]

— Richard Novo (Upper Class)

—Renner Lebrious (Middle Class)

— Jerry Keller (Lower Class)

[Contestants Get On Stage!]

His tensed muscles moved as he got up, moving his legs as he descended the stage.

The others trailed behind him, and Jerry could feel their dominating presence —the one at the rear was the most intimidating!

After climbing the stage and standing diagonally from one another, the three students gazed at each other.

This was the final match of the Exchange, and while it would not be as grand as Ciara's round, or as jawbreaking as Fabian's... it was still worth watching.

The match-up wasn't bad either.

Jerry Keller, top 3 among the Lower Class Elites

Renner Lebrious, despite looking like a fragile girl, was ranked 4th among the Middle Class.

Finally, Richard Novo was Rank 5 among the Upper-Class Elites, bearing the same position among Ainzlark's Rankers.

The quality was a bit lacking if one examined the other blood-curdling matches experienced, but even in this match, top-notch Magic would be displayed.

Jerry put his emotions in check, even though it would be hard for any normal guy to be calm in his situation.

Having to fade Richard Novo was going to be extremely difficult. If he was being fair with himself, he didn't think he stood a chance.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the 4th Rank of the Middle Class was also present.

Even though Renner was one Rank below Jerry, that was only in name.

Once one took into account the quality of the Classes they belonged to, and vast differences in their students' talent, it would be easy to determine which was actually superior.

But, even at that... even with the overwhelming disadvantage facing him... Jerry chose not to back down.

'All the Lower Class members until now have given up and lost in the most disgraceful way. If there could be a last stand, it had to now!

'I didn't expect a bed of roses, to begin with! It would be pointless if the opponent wasn't strong!'

With determination now burning like a blaze of fire in his eyes, Jerry spurred himself back to life and prepared himself acutely.

"Now, then..." Klaus Tallman muttered, readying his tone to begin the final match.

The audience held their breath.

Some wanted this match to last longer, so they could relish the length and get their fill of watching elites duke it out.

Others wanted the same one-sided victory—no, they even expected it!

For a few, if they could even be called that much, they had a faint glimmer of hope that the Lower Class would be able to pull off something dramatic within this last match.

It seemed too late to most, but perhaps Jerry could redeem the whole Lower Class... else they would live as the most scorned existences within Ainzlark—at least until the next Exchange in the next year.

It was quite puzzling, really.

The juniors—First Years in the Lower Class—had shown such exemplary performances that raised people's opinion of the section already deemed to be trash.

However, their efforts had been completely overturned by the cowardice and powerlessness of the seniors who were supposedly the strongest among their ranks.

It was absolutely pitiful, a sight for sore eyes.

And this was why Jerry couldn't back down at this point. The entire repute of his Class was atop his shoulder.

Loss was not an option.

"... Begin!"

With that, the match kickstarted.

>WHOOOOOSHHH!!!<

The sound of rushing wind was heard, and before Jerry could even make an advance toward the enemy, a massive gust pervaded the platform.

"Kyahhhh!!!" The scream of a girl pierced the tense Hall as Renner—an Elite in her own right—was tossed by the pressure of the gale, and flew off stage in a blast.

The blast seemed to be directed in her direction since her body helplessly flailed in the air without any strength.

It appeared like she was struggling, but the flow of the wind far outweighed her ability to regain composure—especially after being abruptly attacked like that.

>BOOOOOMMMM!!!<

She landed away from the stage, crashing into the ground.

Had it not been for her enhancements, the girl would have sustained grave injuries. Fortunately, other than a few broken bones... she was fine.

"Haaa... Gah!" Her helpless voice yelped as the girl tried getting up, but it seemed like her movements had been completely tampered with.

It was clear to this who watched that the Middle Class had already lost.

Amid the unbearable silence and shock that permeated the hall, a snicker could be heard from the stage.

This caused the eyes of everyone to shift from the injured girl to the merciless one who inflicted it. Even if it was toward an enemy, one could consider the act to be a hit too extreme.

"It's best to throw out the pesky fly and focus on the main pest." The boy uttered with a sadistic grin.

Everyone knew who he was... Richard Novo, a student famous as a Ranker and also a merciless Magic-User.

"Tch..." Jerry braced himself as he glared at the Magic-User who seemed to sneer at him.

In an instant, he had gotten rid of the girl who was most likely stronger than the Lower Class Elite.

Wasn't it possible to also make short work of him if he tried?

If that was the case, then why didn't he? Jerry agonized on this while keeping his focus on the target.

"If you're wondering why I took out that hitch first and left you for last, it's simple..."

The boy gulped, feeling something a bit murderous emanating from his opponent who spoke.

"The more pathetic an opponent is, the more fun it is to see them squirm as they are powerlessly subdued."

Yes, Richard was that kind of guy.

He bathed in his superiority and made those lower than him feel the crushing weight of their inferiority.

"You..." Jerry growled, ready to make his opponent eat his words.

Both of them stared hard at each other, resolved to end the Final Match in the most eventful way possible.

Unknown to both, this final match... would turn out way different from their expectations!

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Chapter 199: Uneven Battle

Both boys did not even hesitate before lunging at each other with such deafening speed, one would shiver at the sound.

>WHOOOOOSH HHH<

Jerry sharply propelled himself with Wind Magic, aiming at his opponent who had also shrouded himself with a spell of the same elemental attribute. However, unlike Jerry, who was taking the initiative to strike, Richard Novo simply ascended high above ground.

The Upper Class elite moved in such a sharp turn, like a rocket, sending a force of great intensity radiating around him. This pressure knocked Jerry back a bit as he struggled to maintain his balance, while looking at the height his opponent had ascended to.

"Being on the same level as a worm like you is sickening. The view is better from here..." Richard Novo sneered.

Currently, a wind spell taking the form of a mini twister was beneath him, circling from the boy's waist down. This was what held him up and gave him the height leverage that Jerry couldn't begin to overcome.

Richard Novo had always had a superiority complex, so this move was perfect for him. It allowed him to stare down at his opponents while attacking. Not only was he out of anyone's immediate reach, thanks to his wind elevation spell, but he could also attack from a safe distance. There was no means of fighting more suitable for the arrogant boy.

As for Larry, he was a Fire Mage by nature, albeit having diverse abilities in the other elemental attributes.

Usually, a Magic-User could use this attribute as an advantage against a Wind-based opponent, but judging from the gap in their abilities, any actions to that end would only backfire in Jerry.

'I have to do this!' Jerry's thoughts cried.

With resolute eyes, he summoned flames. They were sharp and precise, emanating from his legs, giving the boy the right boost to lunge himself forward... and higher!

Controlling his trajectory like a speeding bullet, Jerry dived into the air, aiming for his opponent.

"Looks like you've got a little trick, eh?" Richard Novo smiled, flinging his hands to create booms of winds, like torrents, to attack the fast approaching boy.

Jerry, in full on battle mode, noticed Richard's movements and already deduced an attack was coming.

>WHOOOOSSSHSHH<

In an instant, he twisted his body in midair, barely dodging the wind attack as it charged at him. The moment the spell was evaded, Jerry returned his trajectory to his opponent and charged at full speed.

"What?!" Richard couldn't believe his eyes, that a Lower Class scum had evaded his attack.

Unknown to the aggravated boy, Jerry hadn't 'dodged' his attack per se. The boy who already knew his physical and Magic limits had honed his combat skills to the peak and polished every aspect of his senses.

That was how he could deduce an attack was coming and aptly avoid it before the damage would reach him. Jerry's quick wittedness was what could allow him to have even a bit of confidence in a fight he would normally have no chance of winning.

After all, even if his opponent was stronger than him, with enough experience and practice... hard work!... he could one day catch up.

Richard Novo was an entitled boy who believed in his superiority. There was no way this guy would be much of a threat to him. At least not at this rate.

>WHOOOOSSSHSHHH<

More gusts of wind were sent in Jerry's way, but he dodged everything in an instant, closing the distance between the both of them.

It didn't take very long for Jerry to close the distance between him and his opponent, causing Richard to get a little flustered.

"H-How did you dodge them?" He muttered in disbelief.

For someone who believed that strength was everything, not taking into account practice and hard work, he couldn't comprehend how Jerry has been able to achieve the impossible. No, maybe he just didn't want to admit to it!

Jerry hardened his muscles and put all the strength he could in his right arm, while coating it with intense flames. Aiming for a clean hit, he launched his fist in a sharp thrust.

>WHUUUUSSSSHSHHH<

Jerry's attack would have dealt considerable damage to his foe, sending the arrogant idiot crashing to the ground. That is... if it had hit!

Unfortunately for the determined boy, his target was known to be superior to him... not only in magic, but also speed!

The moment his fiery fist nearly hit, Richard Novo controlled the wind vortex that held him up, causing it to move sharply from Jerry's blow. In essence, his speed caused him to completely evade Jerry's full powered hit in mere moments.

Even without sharp battle instincts, his use of Spells vastly outweighed that disadvantage.

"Tch!" Grinding his teeth in frustration, Jerry turned his body in the direction of his opponent and made to lunge at him again.

'This time... this time for sure!'

It was a battle of the air, one that seemed unreal to those who watched... well, just the newbies.

As Jerry would sharply approach, his opponent would dodge, sending wind slices that would completely place someone out of commission. Of course, Jerry would evade and keep trying to get a clean strike. This kept on for some minutes.

While it looked like both opponents were at a stalemate, the truth was painfully obvious to the Lower Class elite who fought bravely.

'Shit... this is already dragging on for too long!'

Since the start of the match, he had been at full power to match Richard's speed as much as possible. That was how he was able to give the opponent such a hard time both in evasion and offense.

Unfortunately, a person could not go all out forever!

Sooner or later, they would give in to exhaustion... and Jerry was already feeling it in his body. He couldn't last much longer.

'Damn, at this rate...' He glared at his opponent who just seemed to gleefully stare back at him.

Richard, of course, knew Jerry would soon fall from exhaustion. If he just stalled for a bit more time, the Lower Class boy would naturally lose. However...

'... That won't be humiliating enough for him!'

With that in mind, Richard's mind brought up something sadistic and downright dangerous. His lips curled in excitement as he smiled at the pitiful target who was charging straight at him.

'Now, then...'

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Chapter 200: Crushing

The match had gone in a way that none would have expected!

A Lower Class elite, already known to be scum, competing earnestly against one of the strongest in the Academy. That was something unbelievable to the audience.

Jerry had somehow defied the odds and kept fighting even when the others that came before him surrendered without even the slightest bit of effort... or were simply one-shotted before they could even voice out their surrender.

Seeing Jerry engaging Richard with all he had slowly morphed the opinion of those who watched. Even though they knew the boy would ultimately lose... something about his persistence struck a chord in their hearts.

So, this was what a true battle was like?

It was due to this reason that Jerry could not give up now! So far, he had been giving his all, and was now inspiring his underclassmen. If he faltered now, how would they find the courage to advance? The boy wasn't merely looking for a way to look good while fighting. No, he wanted to do battle... and win!

That was the only way he could actually turn the dogma within the Academy around.

>WHOOOOOSSSHHH<

He charged at his opponent with that resolve, cutting through the wind as he took flight.

This time Jerry made sure he was faster, stronger... infusing so much mana into his legs and arms that he felt like they would blow up from the heat. Searing pain shot through his body, but the resolute lad endured it. It was all or nothing!

A few seconds more... just a bit more time remained!

This time... he was going to ensure he got that hit!

"That's enough messing around!" Richard Novo stated.

All of a sudden, Jerry couldn't explain what happened but, his body felt heavier than ever before.

>WHUUUUMMMMM<

Without any warning, the boy who glided through the air thanks to his Fire Magic, plummeted to the ground.

"Guh!" He groaned, trying to push himself higher, but there was no speed or momentum that could go against the weight of gravity that pushed him to the ground.

>BOOOOOOMMMM<

His body landed on the ground in a heavy thud, fracturing his knees as they crashed upon the concrete, no, beyond concrete stage.

"Arghhh!" Jerry screamed, feeling his legs snap in pain.

Unfortunately, the heavy pressure wouldn't let him bellow out, as the intensity increased even more. He fell, flat-faced on the ground, unable to freely move his tensed arms and legs.

'W-what's this? What's going on?!

Despite his inquisition, it wasn't like anyone was going to answer him, but still...

Jerry lifted his heavy head, pushing with all his might as he glared at the being who still floated above him. Richard Novo was smiling so confidently. Clearly he was behind the sudden phenomenon, but the question was... what did he do?!

"Now this is much better. You should grovel on the ground like a rat." The arrogant boy's voice rang out in amusement.

Jerry growled, desperately trying to return to his feet, but it seemed like his efforts were pointless. The more he struggled to rise, the worse the pressure got. It was like the force of the universe kept him bound to the ground.

"It's useless! No matter how hard you try, how much you struggle, you can't defy my spell, Descending Gravity!"

Jerry's eyes bulged, and at least ninety percent of the audience gasped.

This caused Richard's grin to widen more. Clearly, he was enjoying this.

[Descending Gravity] was a High-Tier Intermediate Spell, but people often believed it was higher. The reason dwelled in its inhibitive abilities that made even more powerful opponents subject to its power. Despite the name, it wasn't a Gravity Spell, but a very elevated form of Wind Magic that pressed the opponent with such descending wind pressure, they felt like they were assailed by gravity at least tenfold.

Of course, the effectiveness and range depended on the Skill of the caster as well as the Mana expended, but it was still a pretty amazing Spell.

Jerry knew all this, which was why cold sweat began appearing on his face.

Why hadn't he realized it earlier? Perhaps it was because he didn't expect Richard to have such an ace up his sleeve.

But, it was too late already. Now that he had been caught in the spell, he was at his opponent's mercy. No matter how skilled he was at using Mana and expertly engaging in combat, his actual capabilities were too inferior to Richard Novo's that he couldn't possibly resist a Spell of this magnitude.

'I should just give u...'

Before he completed the thought, Jerry's mind rang and his eyes widened like a mad man.

'NEVER!'

Grating his teeth as though he was sharpening a weapon, Jerry pumped all the strength he had into his body and pushed as hard as he could.

"AHHHHHHHH!!!!!" His screamed filled the hall.

"It's no use. You can't..."

Before Richard could finish his jeering remarks, his eyes widened in surprise and watched the unbelievable happen.

'N—no way...' He wanted to say, but withheld speech from his quivering lips.

Jerry was standing on his feet... even with the pressure pushing him down!

The boy now wore a defiant set of eyes and glared at Richard from where he was. The fire of determination had not died out yet, and even though his body barely moved as a result of the overwhelming force, it was enough to agitate Richard.

'Is it because I haven't completely mastered this Spell? Is that why he could resist?' Jerry's actions were already making Richard question the level of his skill.

'No... I was simply holding back, that's why!'

A gleam of hate appeared in the entitled boy's eyes and his mouth opened wide to fully display his dissatisfaction.

"You inferior worm!!!"

>BOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The pressure increased at a drastic rate, sending Jerry back to the ground while shattering his bones and ripping his muscles at the same time.

'GAHHHHHHH!!!!' The boy screamed internally, being in too much pain to translate his agony into words.

The ground cracked!

Yes, the enchanted surface had marks that signified that its durability had sharply declined... all thanks to the sharp increase of Richard's Spell!

At this point, it was clear to everyone that this was no longer a joke.

If care wasn't taken, then... Jerry Keller could obtain permanently impairing injuries... or even die!