

SPELLCRAFT 41

Chapter 41

“G-grandfather...?!” I mumbled in disbelief as the carriage took me further away from Anabelle.

She smiled lovingly at me, waving me goodbye. I was too stunned to reciprocate her energy, waving only in a stunned state.

While her answer explained a lot of things, it caused even more questions. To think my own grandfather had been my tutor for so long, and I was left unaware.

“Mum calls him Alphonse... I called him that too. Other than the slight display of affection they displayed once in a while, I couldn’t sense any kind of family bond...”

Still mumbling to myself, I looked at the book she had given me before I entered the carriage. Rubbing it slightly with my hand, I calmed myself. There had to be a reason for me not knowing of it.

After I calmed down a little, I looked out the window and caught one final glimpse of Anabelle, as well as the few members of our household that saw me off.

The rest of them were busy taking care of the mess that Liliana’s death caused, as well as investigating similar incidents that might have occurred in other areas.

My farewell was not as exciting or emotional as expected, however... this much was enough.

Soon, the manor began shrinking in size as I drifted further from it. Perspective made everything appear very little, and my mother vanished from sight. Smiling at myself, I retracted my head from the opening of the carriage window and sighed.

“Huu... I’ve become quite emotional, uh?”

Shrugging off the sentiments welling up within me, I refrained from taking unnecessary thoughts.

“The book... let’s see what Alphonse’s gift was... or should I call him Grandfather now?” I whispered.

No, that would just feel too weird.

Opening the brown leather book, I saw a letter on the first page. The envelope had a red seal affixed to it, making me slightly curious. Only nobles and distinguished families used such seals.

‘If I remember correctly, Anabelle is from a very distinguished magic-based family. I suppose it’s true that Alphonse is her father...’ I reasoned.

I impatiently opened the envelope, curious about its contents. As expected, a letter was within. The parchment in my hands was made from very exquisite material, and the texture was soft, as well as firm.

I stretched it out so I could read the contents of the letter Alphonse sent. Looking through it, I smiled in nostalgia, reminded of my tutor.

~ Dear Jared, how have you been?

I'm sure by now you're on your way to the academy since my letter will arrive late. Knowing Anabelle, I'm sure she'll only give you in the morning, on your way to the academy.

Sigh, that woman...

I trust you've been well. It hasn't been very long since I left the Leonard Household, but I already miss you and your mother.

There are a few things I wish to tell you, so make sure you read attentively.

Firstly, my gift to you is a book which contains several mixes of drugs, concoctions, and medicines. There are also poisons and harmful mixtures there, so be careful.

You showed an interest in the formula for curing your mother's Mana Shock, and knowing you, it won't stop at that. To further assist in your research, I decided to give you this compilation of records that I made myself.

I figured it would be better than just any old spellbook.

As for the second thing I have to reveal. It is something Anabelle might have addressed, but in case she hasn't, I should explain it in length. Jared, I am the father of your mother, as well as your grandfather.

It wasn't as though any of us intentionally tried hiding this fact from you, but you never asked. The reason you may not have noticed this is because of our family customs. Our relationships take on many forms, depending on achievement and circumstances.

Anabelle once addressed me as father, and I called her daughter. However, that changed once she became a fully-fledged Magic User. and got my recognition to be a comrade in the art. That's why we now use our names to address each other.

As for why I never addressed you as my grandson and didn't demand you to treat me as a grandfather is because I was brought in as a tutor, and had to act in such a manner. After your training elapsed, I recognized you as a fellow Magic-User, so there's no need for us to address ourselves in such a manner.

It's funny how our family relationship never defined us throughout our stay together, and even after.

If you take a good look at your name, Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth, my name exists there. This is because my Magic-Oriented household's name is the Alphonse Household, and my true name is Alphonse Gerald IV. We decided to hand over my daughter in marriage to your father as a result of an alliance between both households. As a symbol of our alliance, our family's name was incorporated into your family's name.

I certainly hope this has answered some of the questions you may have concerning things. While I know all I have said may be too much for a child your age, I know you are a special child, Jared, and do not need to be treated like a normal boy.

I certainly hope you act in a manner that makes both households you hail from proud.

As a pupil who passed under my wing and as my beloved grandchild, I certainly hope to hear of your exploits in Ainzlark.

Take care of yourself, Jared. ~

After reading everything Alphonse said, I had two thoughts. The first was that this was a darn long letter!

'He could have told me all this during one of the times we goofed off. This is a lot to take in so suddenly, damn it!' My thoughts rang.

After taking a few moments to sort through everything I read, a smile formed on my face.

The second thought I had after reading his letter was that of gratitude.

"I'm happy for this, Alphonse. I'll be sure to do my best!" I grinned, a deep fire of determination burning in my eyes.

Chapter 42

The journey to the Ainzlark academy was estimated to take five to seven days on carriage, even in good weather conditions.

The reason for such a long lapse of time was because of the distance of our home from the school's location.

Even though our family was a renowned noble family, a Duke's one to be exact, our territory was quite far from the big cities in the Eastern Kingdom. How crazy was that?

That was why my father often had to spend a great deal of time away from home, since it was inconvenient I'd he kept commuting from his territory to the bustling cities, where his attention was mostly focused on.

I had no idea the cause of such an anomaly, but since someone had to manage the vast lands far away from the Kingdom's hub, my father's noble lineage was placed in charge of it.

I didn't mind much, though. It was thanks to this that we hardly had guests come over, and even though I was already 12, I hadn't for once left our territory.

As a shut-in such as myself, what more could I ask for.

Well, those days were over now. The real world awaited, and though I had read enough about them in books as well as heard stories from Alphonse and Anabelle, going into unfamiliar territory gave me the chills.

Using detailed maps of the Eastern Kingdom, the path we would be taking was already plotted out. The inns we would be staying in were also decided.

It was at times like this that I wished teleportation magic existed. Well, it did... but using it could only allow the magic-user to transverse short distances. It was also very rare and complex.

'Ah, plus mana consumption...'

Perhaps this would be solved once I grew more as a Magic-User. The thrill of solving so many problems welled up within me as I smiled to myself in ecstasy.

“Hehehe...”

It’s funny how long five days can be when all you do is sit in a carriage. It was very tortuous, and my butt ached so much.

We rested every once in a while and made stops to stretch, but a greater deal of our time was spent on the road.

To pass the time, I read the book Alphonse gifted to me. It was very interesting, and I couldn’t wait till I applied all I was learning practically.

Still, there was a limit to merely reading and being unable to practice what was being learned.

The urge to practice disturbed me greatly, but I calmed myself with meditation. Since the carriage wobbled every now and then, it was very difficult forming my fourth mana Core. The process was slow as heck too, so I decided to give up on the venture.

The days moved slowly, but steadily, and finally, on the seventh day, we arrived at the city of our destination.

“Young master, here we are... the Academic City, Ainzlark.” My coachman said to me with excitement.

I could tell that even he was relieved we had finally arrived at our destination. Other than myself, I felt more sorry for him, since he would be in even more hurt managing the ride.

Well, my two escort guards were also to be considered, but they were mostly silent. It was almost as if they weren’t even with us in the carriage.

‘They must be following orders...maybe...’ My thoughts trailed.

Still, laying eyes on the beautiful city before me, I couldn’t help being in awe as a result of its beauty.

Our carriage was greeted by the large city walls, totally unlike anything I had seen in our territory. This was a big place. We had passed by other cities on our way here, many of which were amazing too, but this was on another level!

“A-Amazing!” My voice leaked out.

Back in my days, such large structures were hardly seen, except in the palace, but my eyes saw several tall buildings within the city.

Not to act like a country bumpkin, but it was still so incredible!

‘Sure, it’s been 528 years since I died, but to think so many things have changed!’ I beamed.

The security at the city’s gate looked quite troublesome, but my coachman was able to secure our entry with no difficulty at all.

As we passed by the city's gates, I laid my eyes on the beautiful landscape of the city. It was truly a wonderful sight for the eyes.

I looked out the window and saw a bustling city life. Structures such as cafes, many libraries, chill spots, shops of varying kinds, so many new things I hadn't seen back home and even in the past.

As I took more exciting gazes around, my coachman interrupted my jumbled thoughts.

"Shall we head straight for the Academy, Young Master?"

Upon hearing what he said, I ceased my sightseeing and appropriately comported myself.

He must have noticed my interest in the city's structure since he bothered asking. As much as I wanted a tour of the place around, it would be selfish of me.

'Everyone must be tired at this point...'

Thanks to my discomfort on the carriage and requesting so many breaks, it took us seven days to reach Ainzlark when it would have taken us way less. I couldn't impose any more on these people.

"Yes. Let's see where I'll be studying." I smiled.

The Coachman nodded. Maybe it was my imagination, but I could swear that the man heaves a sigh of relief.

Moving at a steady pace, since we were in the city, our carriage trailed across the main road tiled with luxurious stones. The streets were clean, and the people around gawked at our grand entry.

After turning for some routes, we headed down a straight path to the massive structure that I realized was the Academy. I had seen many drawings of the place, but since it was my first time gazing upon the place in person, I was nearly breathless.

Even from our distance, I could tell that this was beyond a doubt the best Academy in all of the Eastern Kingdom, Ainzlark Academy!

Chapter 43

Ainzlark Academy.

When considering the epitome of power and ability, a person had to possess some form of education in whatever art or craft they possessed.

As the institute that stands above every other in the Eastern Kingdom, where I hail from, Ainzlark is the dream of anyone who aims for the top.

And there I was, standing before the gates of such a prestigious place.

Having such a magnificent, shiny white surface, the large gate leading to the Academy resembled a castle on its own. The towering building seemed to touch the clouds as the white gates stayed before it.

A flight of stairs leading to the gates was cleanly arranged, waiting for us to climb.

My coachman halted the carriage as we approached the gate, making a turn by the side so the horses stopped moving. Since it was directly beside the stairs leading to the higher platform where the gate was, I had no difficulty getting off.

As soon as I got down, the two guards who served as my escorts did the same and walked beside me.

The Coachman nodded affirmatively at me and I responded to his courteous expression.

“Have a safe and productive time, Young Master” He said, before driving off with the carriage.

I was certain the guards would meet up with him at a rendezvous point after escorting me as far as they could to where I would be spending the next few years.

Upon reaching the gate, we were met by elite guards. They were three in number, two holding swords and a single one dressed in garb. From his outfit, I already deduced him to be a Mage, and a very skilled one at that.

For only three personnel to serve as guards of such a prestigious place, it clearly meant they weren't ordinary.

After showing them the Deed and Seal of my noble family, as well as the Enrollment Offer letter already requested gotten the Academy, the guards gave their approval and allowed me in.

With a sleight of hand made by the mage among the three guards, a remarkable phenomenon occurred. I watched the gates open as a result of whatever magic the mage cast. A glimmer of faint light emanated from the bars, causing them to rise and granting us access within the Academy Compound.

“You are to head directly to the Admissions Processing Department. Keep walking straight down this path, you can't miss them.” We were told.

The guards nodded, not offering a single word, while I offered my thanks.

Upon entering, we were greeted with yet another marvelous sight. A vast compound with several buildings across the area. A large fountain stood erect at the center of everything, while several structures made the huge place hardly vacant.

As we walked down, following the instructions given, I couldn't get enough of the sight. Still, it was strange...

While I spotted a few individuals, the Academy was not as packed as I imagined it to be.

‘Maybe I'll ask them at the Admissions department...’ My thoughts trailed.

Just as the guards said, we were able to spot the Admissions Processing Department easily after taking a few moments to walk down the straight path.

The building stood out well, greatly furnished from the exterior and having the signpost clearly telling whoever passed by of the business they performed.

The interior was even more impressive, greatly decorated to appear plain, yet exquisite. The room was also large, having only a few desks and a counter where we approached.

“Good afternoon, how may I be of service?” Our attendant, a middle-aged man asked with a sincere smile.

“Even their service is satisfactory...” I reasoned, wondering if there was any flaw in this educational system.

“Yes. I would like to begin my studies within this Academy. All the necessary processes have been sorted out.” I said, bringing out the documents I had shown the guards.

Upon receiving what I gave him, the middle-aged man scrutinized the Seal of my household and the deed containing an introductory letter from my family. Most importantly, I also had the Academy’s Enrollment Offer Letter with me.

“Hmmn, these are all valid...” He muttered, rubbing his cleanly shaven chin.

I was a little surprised by the reason he was so flippant about the validity of the documents. Even the guards didn’t take any special process in ensuring we weren’t with any counterfeit.

‘It’s not impossible to try pulling a fast one on establishments like this... why aren’t they more serious about investigating if my documents are valid?’ I questioned internally.

The man attending to us must have read my expression, since the next thing he did was smile at me and nod slightly.

“If you’re wondering why we aren’t being a little more serious about investigating the genuineness of your documents, it’s because there is no need to.”

I was a little stunned by the man’s words. Fortunately, he proceeded to explain himself.

“The letter sent by the academy is made from a special kind of parchment that can only be gotten here and is enchanted with a secret Spell, changed every year, with only those in the know who are aware of it. As such, no one can duplicate them. The moment I came into contact with the letter, I already knew it was valid.”

“A-ah...” I slightly let out, a little embarrassed that I didn’t think of that.

“Plus, the seal of your noble family carries similar properties. Even if the form is replicated, the magic signature can never be. As a result, we know you are the genuine article.” The man smiled.

Impressed by his words, I nodded in response.

“I see. Forgive me for doubting your security and observation skills.”

“No, no. It’s no issue. I’m glad you took an interest. Most wouldn’t even be bothered about it.” The middle-aged man said.

Afterward, he brought out a form and told me to fill it out. Information such as my name, age, family, Mana Core, and the likes were requested.

I filled the form quickly, making my mana print where it was indicated, and returned it to him.

He placed his hand on it and chanted a spell silently, duplicating the form into two identical copies.

“Here, take this and hold onto it well.” He said, giving me one of the copies.

“Hmm? What is this for?” I mumbled.

Chapter 44

“It’s a means of identification. After all, this letter you received from the Academy is a mere Enrollment Offer document, it doesn’t mean you have been wholly accepted yet.” He said.

I nodded.

Anyone could understand that much if they studied about the Ainzlark Academy. It was one thing to be offered Enrollment, and it was another to be fully enrolled in the Academy.

“That’s right. The entrance exams are coming up, so this is for that time. As a participant, that is your means of identification. Since you’ve shown me all the relevant documents, you do not need them anymore. That alone is enough.” He added.

“I see...”

Observing the form closely, I saw the date of the exams printed on the back. It was barely a week from now.

“You have good eyes. That’s right, you still have a bit of time before the exams actually take place. That means you’ve arrived too early.”

‘Oh? That must be why everywhere isn’t as crowded as I thought.’

“It’s good that you arrived early and got this process over with, though. Others have come before you, but most usually arrive when it’s a day or so before the actual exams.”

The middle-aged man made a dissatisfied expression, indicating he thought those kinds were troublesome. I didn’t blame him, though. The crowd and pressure were bound to increase at an unbelievable rate since so many wanted their processing done at the last minute.

“I’d advise you to head over to an inn and wait things out. If you have any further business to attend to, also do so. In six days, return to the Academy to take your entrance exams. The venue has been given on the form, so there’s no confusion.”

“Thank you, I appreciate this.” I smiled at the kind gentleman.

He nodded politely.

“Now then, you may have these back.” The man said, returning the documents I submitted to him.

Upon collecting them, I took a few moments to observe them and make sure nothing was tampered with. After I was done, I handed everything over to my escorts, keeping the form within my breast pocket.

“I believe our business here is concluded. Well, then... you should be on your way.” The middle-aged man said.

I smiled, looking at him with a little bit of interest.

“Would you mind telling me your name?”

My sudden question caused the stares of the other workers who sat at their respective positions.

For a brief moment, silence filled the room. Even the man I addressed was a little flustered by my question. After taking a brief moment to consider, looking at my confident eyes, he gave in.

“My name is Legris Damien.” He said.

“Thank you. You know already, but it’s common courtesy to return an introduction. I am Jared Leonard. It’s a pleasure.”

He bowed his head slightly and I did the same.

“Well then, excuse us as we take our leave,” I said, walking out of the office with my escorts.

We left the building which was yet silent, but I was not bothered in the slightest. My guards were the same, so it was no new thing.

“Young Master, the coachman has already gone to secure the appropriate inn for you. Since it’s a trustworthy place befitting of your repute, we will be heading there now.” One of my guards said while we walked back to the gate.

It was a shame I was leaving such a beautiful place so soon, but I would be back.

“Ah, I see. Let us go, then.” I smiled, glancing a little in his direction.

From the corner of my eye, I noticed the second escort looking a little peculiar, almost as though he wanted to say something.

“What’s on your mind?” I asked with slight curiosity.

He remained mute, slightly shaking his head. I didn’t know whether he was just being shy or rigid, but it still felt weird. I already had an idea of what he wanted to say, though.

“You’re curious about the reason I behaved strangely in that office just now, right? I spoke more than I should have, treated someone with a far lower status cordially, and even requested for his name. You want to know the reason why, right?” I asked.

After taking a few moments of hesitation, the guard nodded his head.

A smile formed on my face. Maybe my guards hadn’t noticed it yet, but there was no way that man could fool me.

“The answer his simple... that mere attendant... is very strong!”

A smile formed on my face as the gates were opened for us, allowing us to exit.

‘Legris Damien... I’m not going to forget that name.’

“Hahahaha, what an interesting fellow!” The man called Legris burst out laughing.

This slightly startled the people who worked around him.

“Sir Legris, come on. Please control yourself.” One of the workers made a slightly upset comment.

“The reason we even allowed this farce is because you said it wouldn’t disturb our work.” Another commented.

“Sigh, I knew this was a bad idea.” One other worker slapped his hand on his face.

“You guys are no fun at all!” Legris Damien beamed energetically.

What was the reason for his good mood? It was none other than the young man who had just left.

“What an interesting kid...” He muttered.

“Is he really? He seemed just like any regular noble to me. His mana wasn’t too impressive as well.” Someone made a passing comment.

Legris grinned at the one who said that.

“Oh? So that’s what you think. Well, I can’t say I blame you. That was also what I thought as well. However, that kid... not only was he curious as to our criteria for judging genuine documents, he was also wary of the Enrollment process, objectively scrutinizing his documents when they were returned to him.” Legris said.

The workers looked at each other. True, those were peculiar traits, but that wasn’t enough to prove the boy special.

“As much as he tried to hide it, I could also tell... he was probing at my strength! That lad is more than he seems.” Legris added.

“True, he even asked for your name, Sir Legris.”

The middle-aged man nodded, excitedly snapping his fingers.

“Exactly! He’s the first to do all that!”

Legris had taken a keen interest in the child he just met, however, despite all he was just shown, there was one thing that stood out the most.

“Still, to think he’s a pure white Core... at this age... Awakened at 7 Years... and from the Leonard family that hasn’t produced a Magic-User in over 200 years. Interesting...” Legris Damien muttered, still stroking his chin.

‘No matter, we will meet soon again, Jared Leonard. Let’s hope you pass the exams...’

“Now I have one more thing to look forward to!”

Chapter 45

As expected, the inn had already been secured by my coachman, and the establishment was a pretty decent one. Since I didn’t want to raise too high a profile, we rented two rooms. The rooms were fitted

for two people, so one of my guards shared one with me, while the other was occupied by my coachman and the second guard.

It was clean, spacious, and most importantly... quiet!

'The next six days should be over in a breeze.' I grinned, taking a seat by the study that was located in a corner of the room.

It appeared the inn owner thought of everything.

Just as expected, the days went by quickly. Fortunately, the guards were usually outside or in the other room, patrolling and keeping a safe distance from mine while respecting my privacy.

We only slept in the same room at night, but for the rest of the time, I was granted total freedom within the little space I was given. Food was provided for me after a thorough inspection by the guards in case of poisons, but I didn't mind.

It was for my protection, anyway. Of course, I also checked the food for poisons myself. The more I familiarized myself with the book Alphonse gave me, the more I came to respect medicines and also regard poisons.

Using my alone time wisely, I spent it accumulating knowledge and circulating the mana within me on a few occasions.

After most of the days passed, I decided to take a break from seriousness and enjoy myself a little, though for me research was also enjoyable in certain ways.

"I would like to take a look around the city," I explained to my guards.

With the next day being the Ainzlark Entrance Examinations, this would prove the best time to explore the city of Ainzlark. After all, things would get busier after I got into the Academy.

As expected, it was an exciting place. The Academic City Of Ainzlark.

During my studies, I came to realize that this city was the third-largest in all of the Eastern Kingdom. The first was the capital, and the second was the merchant city. The Academic City took third place and stood as one of the firm grounds for the Kingdom's power.

As such, it was easy to deduce why I was so thrilled by the experience of burning the sights of every activity around into my eyes. Of course, this wasn't the only reason. My guards maintained a considerable distance from me in order not to draw attention to myself.

'Good grief...' I sighed.

Enjoying the evening breeze cooled the excitement that had built up these past couple of days since tomorrow would be the big day. I was going to savor every moment.

However, this tranquility didn't last long.

"Tch, out of the way, plebian!" I heard someone say from behind me.

Before I could even turn around to see who the stranger was referring to, he bumped into me, no, it was more like a push.

Not caring at all about my well-being, this person used his weight and shoved me to the side while hurrying his way.

My eyes darted behind me and I saw my guards glare from a distance. With a sleight of hand, I signaled to them to stop displaying their animosity.

They obeyed, and I quickly comported myself, once again walking down the busy road.

“It’s no big deal... it would be childish to fret over something of this level,” I whispered.

Judging from his demeanor, he was most likely one of the people Legris Damien spoke of. It was evening, yet some students like him hadn’t gotten their forms for tomorrow’s exams.

With that fleeting thought, I continued my walk and soon returned to my chamber. Even with the unpleasant interruption I had, it was still an enjoyable experience.

“Now then... I wonder what tomorrow will give me...”

It was outstanding, to say the least, the examination venue. A very large building, resembling any educational structure for learning. Yet, this was merely a single hall in the whole Academic grounds.

The guards couldn’t escort me any further, so we had to say our goodbyes by the gate. Of course, since I had made it this far, all that was left was getting into the main Academy itself.

“You should all head back home,” I said to them.

After all, if I gained admission, I would immediately get lodged into the residential halls, and go through orientation, and I was most likely not going to step out of school grounds for a while.

“B-but, Young Master... we should stay until the exams are over. Just in case-” One of the guards tried protesting.

“In case what? I fail?” I smiled.

Such an inconceivable idea being even being considered by an attendant of mine... It was absurd! I was shocked and flushed with embarrassment.

“N-no, that’s not what I meant.” The flustered guard muttered quickly, bowing his head.

During the short time we spent together, I made sure to converse with my attendants as much as possible.

‘They’re good kids... they just have poor communication skills...’ I smiled, looking at things from my perspective.

Both guards decided to place their faith in their Young Master and promised to depart to the manor.

With the Academy's security and my assured victory, there was no need for them to stick around. My eyes caught the multitude of people entering the examination hall, so I knew I couldn't be caught loitering for too long.

"Now then... I should go in as well."

"Welcome, everyone!" A very loud and clear voice boomed.

It filled the large hall to the point that no one could claim they couldn't hear him. Even from my seat at the very top of the seats arranged in a circular format, I could hear every single word he uttered.

'Sound magic, maybe?' I reasoned.

The hall appeared to have many stories from its exterior view, but upon coming inside, it had a different interior. There was only one word that described the place in which we all sat.

A colosseum!

Chapter 46

It was a colosseum!

The moderator, whoever he was, was standing at the center of the large stage, while everyone else watched from their seat roundabout the arena.

"A total of five thousand three hundred and fifty students obtained a form for this exam. A huge number of you are here to be admitted into this prestigious institute. However, you must understand... that of so many people gathered here, not more than a hundred will ever see the inner walls of the main Academy."

This was met by a shocking response from the audience. We were never told this, not even in the texts and prospectus given out by the Academy.

However, if one was really observant, this much was to be expected. As the best of the best, clearly, Ainzlark Academy would only aim for the most talented and powerful. Still, one thing caught my attention.

The moderator mentioned over five thousand people registering for the exam. However, from the calculations I made of the seats and their arrangements, there should only be a total of four thousand gathered here at the maximum.

'Hmmn... maybe there are other batches...' I reasoned.

If that was the case, then why didn't they split the crowd more evenly? Four thousand people participating in the first batch and a thousand plus in the second... that seemed uneven.

Perhaps there was a special way they used to split the batches that I wasn't aware of. Well, this was Ainzlark Academy, I couldn't exactly expect something normal.

"Now then, I should inform you of the requirements for this exam. Of course, there are three major stages you need to pass before you can be admitted."

Another outcry of surprise filled the air as thousands of students expressed surprise. Even I was a little surprised by this.

'I only know of two tests...' My thoughts trailed.

"In the past years, we implemented two stages to pass. The written tests and the magic proficiency tests. However, after a slight educational reform within the Academy, from this point on, a new test will be given which will determine not only your admission into the Academy, but also your status once you've become a student."

My eyes bulged as I listened. This was new, but not entirely unreasonable. I had already expected some discrepancies, so it wasn't too much...

"The third test will be the Mana Core Grade Proficiency test!"

My jaw instantly dripped and the heart that was calm moments ago nearly jumped out of my chest.

'WHATTTT?!!"

Of everything the Academy would pull, I wasn't expecting this!

"Remember this aspiring students, there is no such thing as equality in this world, especially when it comes to magic."

As I heard the moderator, while he didn't directly say it, I understood what he meant. The third test was the most important since it would determine one's status in the Academy. Plus, with the talk of inequality, I would be foolish to expect any leniency in this test.

I had come into this place with absolute confidence. However, what remained were merely shards of the guarantee within my heart.

After all... I possessed a pure White Mana Core Grade, and in a test that tested one's proficiency based on that decisive factor, it could only mean one thing for someone like me.

'I'm screwed!'

"Now then, without further ado, we'll begin the first phase of the test." The moderator beamed, not even giving me enough time to sort through my thoughts.

The man snapped his fingers, creating a loud clicking sound. I winced a little reacting to the sudden noise, however, my eyes suddenly caught something in front of me.

"This is... a piece of paper...?" I muttered, looking at the clear white sheet in front of me.

"You should all have received pieces of paper, one page each, correct?" The mod announced.

My eyes darted across the room, beside me, beneath, across the other side, and true to his words, everyone had indeed received the same piece of floating paper like me.

'With the snap of a finger... impressive...' My thoughts trailed.

Or so it would seem. However, it was a simple trick once you figured it out. To think the Academy resorted to such petty methods to impress students.

“You are to pick up the paper before you. Written on it is a simple question. The paper is enchanted and responds to mana. You don’t need a pen to write. Use your fingers and answer the questions written on the paper before you.”

Everyone mechanically obeyed his instructions, picking up the paper to read the questions. Sure enough, his words were true.

“I would desist from engaging in any form of malpractice since this place is being monitored entirely. Also, the questions assigned for every examinee are different and the time allocated for this stage is five minutes!”

The bewildered students expressed their displeasure concerning the sudden rush of information. However, the moderator wasn’t even going to give anyone room to breathe.

“Your time starts now!”

Everyone instantly buried their faces in the paper allocated to them and answered the questions in the way they knew best.

I paused for a moment to analyze all that had occurred. If Ainzlark Academy had taught me anything, it would be that I was never to expect anything simple or straightforward from them. This written test was no different.

‘The flow of mana within the body is something any magic-user can sense. However, controlling that flow from one’s mana core is a different story entirely. To do that, you need to be focused and calm...’ I reasoned.

The reason why no pen was provided was to test our apt use of mana in answering the questions given. The questions weren’t all that difficult for anyone who studied well.

That meant the true test was the ability to keep one’s cool while focusing on mana usage in correctly answering the question while being under the pressure of time.

‘It all adds up. When you think of it that way... the first stage becomes very easy to overcome!’ I grinned.

Five minutes? Ha! How laughable.

“I won’t even need one.”

Chapter 47

[Exam Question]

~ As aptly as possible, citing the appropriate authorities, give a recount of the Mana-Soul Theory.

[Begin]

“Five minutes? Heh, what a joke! I won’t even need one!”

“Okay, time’s up!”

Before anyone could protest the moderator’s abrupt words, the paper they all desperately wrote on vanished.

“That’s the end of the first phase of the exams. I hope you were all able to answer the questions properly.” He said cheerfully.

Though he appeared happy, many of the examinees weren’t. Looking around, I could see many uneasy faces full of tension.

‘It’s none of my business...’ I sighed.

The fact that I was able to complete my task without any issue remained my primary concern. The only thing I had to worry about was the next phase of the exam.

“I won’t be the one handling the next aspect of your exam. As such, I shall be taking my leave after introducing him to you all.”

Suddenly a gust of wind began gathering in the arena, drawing the attention of everyone, even the distraught students to the vast stage before them.

“Taking charge of the second round is none other than one of the Senior Lecturers within Ainzlark Academy... Professor...”

My eyes bulged as I caught the sight of the man who appeared from within the tendrils of wind on the stage. He was one other than-

“... Legris Damien!”

The thousands of students all burst out in surprise as they all had similar expressions of shock at the sight of their second examiner.

“Nice to meet you all.” Professor Legris Damien greeted, smiling at everyone with his usual cheerful grin.

I was at a loss for words, yet I couldn’t help but let out a slight grin myself. I knew he was no ordinary man... but to think he was a senior lecturer. That was shocking beyond belief!

“I suppose it’s more accurate to say ‘its good to see you all again,’ after all, you have all met me at least once.” He added.

The aspiring students now grew more uncomfortable, shifting in their seats. It was clear from their reactions that most of them had treated him with disrespect during their encounter.

‘Huu... this is why one should be careful of their conduct.’ I thought to myself in relief.

“Now then, without wasting much of our time, it’s time to begin the second round of the test. The requirements are quite simple, really.” Legris Damien said, looking at the moderator beside him, and gave a slight nod.

The moderator nodded back, saying goodbye to everyone present. With a snap of his fingers, he vanished from our sights, leaving only Legris Damien in our presence.

“The purpose for this second round, as most of you already know, is magic casting. As students of Ainzlark, it’s important that you’re capable of utilizing mana and at your age, a certain degree of skill is expected of you.” He explained.

Everyone was absolutely silent, realizing they were in the presence of one of the most distinguished figures in the entire Academy.

“You will each step forward for a demonstration and launch your most powerful or effective spells at me. I shall judge your abilities based on the Academy’s criteria. I certainly hope you do not disappoint me.”

And so, taking advantage of the wave of unease affecting the voice of the students, Legris raised his hands slightly and a long scroll appeared in his grasp. The scroll stretched for quite a distance, indicating whatever was written there was quite long.

“These are the names of everyone present here. I will be calling you one after the other, so make sure you come quickly once your names are called. Since we do not have much time, you only have three minutes each to show me your worth.”

Many people’s eyes bulged. Three minutes was far too short for them to display their full capabilities. However, in the presence of such an awesome figure, who could complain?

Even though the environment was tense, I had no idea why my heart was palpitating at such a rapid rate. It wasn’t anxiety but excitement. Somehow, I was looking forward to my turn.

‘I can’t wait... to show that guy what I’m capable of!’ I grinned.

Still, something bothered me. Calculating the time allocated was three minutes, we were four thousand in the hall. No matter how one looked at it, there was no way we would be done by the end of today even if we didn’t completely use up three minutes.

‘What’s his play?’

However, just as I was making my thought, I felt Legris’ gaze shift to me. It was only for a moment, but our eyes met and he smiled at me.

I returned his gesture, feeling a little intimidated by his strange action. It was almost like he could read my mind.

“For those wondering if there will be enough time to test you all, you do not need to worry. Time is all we have bountifully here!” He declared, addressing everyone.

His voice caused some people to make peculiar faces, as though not realizing that time was not going to be enough in the first place. As they struggled to calculate, everyone began to realize that we were too many to grade in a single day.

“This hall is enchanted with a special kind of magic. Time in here is considerably slowed down. So, you do not need to worry. You should be able to conclude the entire exams before the sun sets.”

“F-for real?!” I beamed.

That meant they finally found a way to implement time magic as a conceptual factor. This was groundbreaking! Entirely surreal. I initially didn’t believe it, thinking it was another farce. However...

As unbelievable as it sounded, there was no reason for a distinguished senior lecturer to lie.

It was true, time was slowed down here. While I didn't know the ratio, it was still an amazing feeling, nonetheless.

"Now then... let us begin!" Legris Damien called us back into the realm of reality.

"The first is--"

Chapter 48

"The first is Maria Helmsworth. Step out, please." Legris Damien stated.

I could see the eyes of everyone bulge in shock. Their faces moved in strange ways, making me wonder if everyone knew the person Legris was referring to.

Their widened eyes were all focused on a girl who stood among the countless others seated. Not only were their eyes on her, watching every move she made, but the lips of people also began moving and I could hear those close to me make hushed statements.

"Hey, that's her, isn't it? She's... the real deal..."

"To think they would call someone like her first."

"Shit. If she goes first...no matter what I do, it'll be seen as trash!"

'Hmnn... sounds like we have us a genius here.' I reasoned, deducing that much from all I heard.

My eyes narrowed as I focused on the young girl who was already moving close to our examiner. Since she backed me, all I could see was her long flowing silver hair. Her frame was slender and tall.

Her outfit was one befitting of the child of high nobility and I could sense an air of elegance from every step she took.

She had to be from a Duke's family at the very least.

With the way everyone talked about her, and the confident stride she possessed, this Maria Helmsworth girl had already entrapped my interest. I was curious about what she had.

"Now then, as already stated in the instructions, show me your most impressive feat." Legris Damien said.

His voice wasn't loud since he was only addressing the young lady, but through the use of enhancement magic, I was able to improve my hearing and sight to a considerable degree.

'I can read their lips and listen in to their conversation.'

Now turning sideways, a distance from Legris, I caught a glimpse of her face. It was extremely beautiful. No, if there was a word that transcended that, then it would better fit the woman I laid eyes on.

Her gleaming blue eyes accentuated the clear hair she possessed. She had a pale complexion with very smooth skin, nearly like a frozen sculpture of beauty.

I quickly shook my head, bringing myself out of the trance that I appeared to be stuck in. While she was a beauty and a rumored genius, in the end, it mattered not to me. What was more of a concern would be the magic she could display.

“Since the time is short, I won’t be able to show you my best spell. I’ll compensate with one that can fit into the limit set. Is that fine?” She asked, her voice silky smooth, yet having a serious tone of purpose.

“Of course! Your time starts now.” Legris Damien remarked.

The moment he said this, the girl closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Her lips began moving rapidly, indicating she had commenced casting the spell. Judging by the speed of her lips, they weren’t normal. She was too fast.

‘She’s using enhancement magic to quicken the speed of her chanting. That’s impressive.’ I smiled.

Mana began surging from within Maria, and wind began swirling around the area where she stood. White light enveloped her and the winds became even fiercer, twisting and turning.

The crowd could feel the pressure from where they sat, watching the magnificence of her spell. Before long, the wind had already become a whirlwind of considerable mass. It was nearly ten-foot, with a huge mass that encircled Maria entirely.

“[Sylph’s Whisper]!” She declared.

The whirlwind increased in tempo and twisted faster. Suddenly, she pushed her hands forward, sending the twister to Legris’ location. The wind instantly moved from her surroundings and lunged at our examiner.

FWOOOOOSH!!!

The powerful tornado neared Legris at a frightening pace, but he maintained his ground, not flinching for a second.

As soon as it got into close proximity to him, the vast cluster of twisting wind instantly scattered, nullified within a moment.

The scattered wind rushed at everyone in the audience, causing us to slightly shiver due to the chilly wind.

Maria Helmsworth looked surprised by the ease with which Legris dispelled her spell, but quickly got over it. Of course, I was smiling the whole time. It was a foregone conclusion that none of us present could create any spell to actually harm our examiner.

“Maria Helmsworth. The second phase of your exam has been concluded. You may leave this hall and head to the door straight to your right. You will undergo the third part of your exam there.” Legris said, pointing to a hallway far to his left and her right.

Sure enough, such a hallway didn’t exist before. However, within an arena with a time-slowng effect, a hidden passage appearing suddenly was no surprise.

Maria nodded slightly, not speaking another word as she departed to the hallway. While many may not have noticed, I saw her fists clenched tightly, most likely due to dissatisfaction on her part.

'Did she expect her power to have a better effect on Legris? How childish...' I smiled, watching her disappear into the hallway.

Her spell, [Sylph's Whisper], was a Basic one. Of course, it belonged to the highest class of Basic spells, and judging by her use of it, she had reached the point of near mastery over it. However, compared to that, her adversary was a senior lecturer. Judging from the impression I had of him, it was certain that the man could use Advance Magic as well

She stood no chance, to begin with.

"Next up, we have Mattias Desmire." Legris Damien declared, reading from the long scroll he had in his hands.

And so, another candidate appeared. His appearance wasn't too shabby, and no real attention was placed on him. This meant his skills were either mediocre or underrated.

Apparently, it was the former. Perhaps it was due to the performance given by Maria Helmsworth, but I found his spell too lacking.

Still, to my surprise, Legris didn't make any expression of disappointment. He maintained his poker face and repeated what he told Maria.

"Mattias Desmire. The second phase of your exam has been concluded. You may leave this hall and head to the door straight to your right. You will undergo the third part of your exam there."

Since the audience didn't look disappointed as well, I chalked it up to my high standards and reasoned that the boy probably also passed.

Returning to the list he had, Legris began calling names again.

"Next, we have..."

Chapter 49

Legris kept calling examinees one after the other, allocating exactly three minutes for each to display their worth.

For those who risked it and went for spells that were very effective but took too long to cast, Legris stopped them midway.

Surprisingly, he told none of the examinees that they had failed. He simply repeated what he had told everyone else and directed them to the hallway where they would be taking the third section of their exams.

'I guess it doesn't matter if they fail or not. The third phase will still be attempted by everyone...' I reasoned.

In the first place, not everyone was bound to pass the first stage, yet we were all included in the current second phase. It was most likely that our scores would be culminated and our final results from the overall achievements we made in all stages.

And so, time passed even though it was slowed down. I began to grow bored of the pathetic displays I witnessed one after the other. Other than Maria and one other kid called Stefan, I saw no one really worthy of note. It was a shame that I couldn't find anything entertaining, but patience was a virtue one learned as they grew older so I had lots of it.

Instead of focusing on others, there was a matter of utmost pertinence that I had neglected since the second round began.

'What spell... should I use?'

Once again, as though reading my mind or just messing with me, Legris Damien looked in my direction and smiled.

"Up next... Jared Leonard."

My eyes bulged as I was welcomed to the center of the arena. I stood from where I sat and made my way to the center of the arena, feeling the intense gazes of everyone around. Surprisingly, they engaged in side talks and whispered about me.

'What's this? Could it be that I'm actually famous around these parts?' My mind rang, inclining my ears to listen to their hushed words.

"Leonard? As in the Duke family Leonard?"

"They haven't produced a Magic-User in so long, and you're telling me someone from their household is here?"

"Pfft. They must truly be desperate. I wonder what method they had to resort to for their child to be here."

"He doesn't seem strong. Do you think he'll be impressive at all?"

"Even if they miraculously produced a Magic-User, there's no way he'll be as high-end as the other families who have distinguished mages in their households."

"It'll be a miracle if he could even produce an average spell!"

Hearing their scathing comments put a nasty taste in my mouth, causing me to scowl a little. While I usually wouldn't pay any mind to weaklings, the fact that their words affected the image of my family, no matter how small... was a little unpleasant.

"We meet again, Mr. Jared Leonard." Legris smiled as I appeared before him.

Seeing his face made me temporarily forget the foolish ramblings of the seated fools. I didn't know why, but I felt an aura of ease around this examiner.

"Who would have thought, uh? Should I say it's a pleasure we get to meet again under these circumstances?" I asked with a grin.

Legris shrugged.

“Maybe. Maybe not. Let’s halt the small talk for now. Show me what you’ve got.”

Even though he tried to act disinterested, I could sense it in his eyes. This man was absolutely curious about what I would show him.

The scroll he held in his hand vanished and he placed both hands in his pocket, looking at me with an air of confidence surrounding him.

“Are you supposed to be so relaxed in front of someone who’s about to shoot magic at you?” I asked.

He shrugged once again.

“It doesn’t matter. Your spell won’t have any effect on me, so don’t worry. Now, you may begin. Your time starts now!”

Even though the clock was ticking for my spell, I didn’t make any motion for movement. A smile formed on my face as I slightly shook my head.

“You have it all wrong, senior. I don’t think you’ll be able to take my spell so casually. At the very least... you’ll lift one, no, two of those hands to stop it.”

Legris appeared a little stunned as I said this. This only lasted for a moment though, as he burst into laughter soon afterward.

“You’re pretty amusing, you know? But, even though you seem to possess sharp wits, more than anyone your age, you’re merely a White Core Grade. What could you possibly hope to achieve in such a limited time that would cause me to take you a little seriously?”

His eyes narrowed at me with suspense, still stunned that I hadn’t even begun casting yet.

“Your time is passing, you know?”

“I know.” I snapped back at his reminder.

The audience stared at me impatiently, wondering what was going on. Judging from their reactions, none of them had the capability of using a simple spell for hearing enhancement in order to listen to my conversation with our examiner.

“Hey, what’s going on down there?”

“Did the Leonard brat give up already?”

“He hasn’t even started doing anything and nearly a minute has elapsed.”

“Welp, what did you expect from him?”

Maybe some could have used magic to heighten their senses to pick up on my little exchange with the examiner, but didn’t think of it.

‘How disappointing...’ My thoughts trailed.

After a minute elapsed, I gave a short sigh, now stretching my body a little.

“Looks like your grace period is over.” I smiled.

My statement appeared to surprise Legris a little.

“Grace period?” He asked.

“Yeah. To take this exchange seriously... but it appears you won’t. Well then, don’t fault me for what happens next!”

Feeling up the three Mana Cores within my body, I smiled, releasing the mana reserves within them through my pores.

After practicing for some time, I had gotten quite the hang of it. My level of mastery was to the point that no one would be able to distinguish it from a normal spell.

‘[Spellcraft]... ‘

Chapter 50

After considering all the criteria for admission into Ainzlark Academy, I had already deduced that there was no need to worry about it.

However, with the introduction of the third portion of our exams, that assurance vanished. If my guess was correct and our final score would be based on a culmination of the three areas, I needed to do extremely well in the first two.

‘I didn’t intend to go this far initially, but... I won’t be holding back for this exam... at least not too much!’ My thoughts trailed.

To achieve the most efficient result, I had to resort to [SPELLCRAFT].

Releasing the mana from my three Mana Cores, I resonated them with the environment. Fortunately, our very surrounding was rich in mana since hundreds of people had already used their spells before I entered the stage. Plus, the hall itself operated on magic.

That meant I had a nearly limitless pool to draw from!

Synchronizing my mana with the mana present around me, I created different reactions for three of my spells.

‘I have the spell and formula in my head, I just don’t have enough mana and speed due to my mana core grade...’

That meant the only thing limiting me, as well as most Magic-Users, was my Mana Core. However, using [SPELLCRAFT], that limitation was as good as gone!

“[Sylph’s Whisper]. [Ifrit’s Breath]. [Heavenly Spark].” I chanted simultaneously.

Three Basic Spells at the same time, all at the highest caliber.

The wind hurricane that Maria had used during her round appeared in a flash. Mine was even more powerful, as all my spectators felt the breeze blow across their seats. Such was the power of my [Sylph’s Whisper]!

[Ifrit's Breath] was a fire spell that boasted the most destructive capacity of all Basic fire Spells. It took on the shape of a large ball floating high above my head. The heat was enough to send everyone sweating. The strong wind blew the heat across the entire hall, causing the uncomfortable heat to spread more rapidly.

Finally, [Heavenly Spark] was a Basic Lightning Spell, and like other spells, I cast, boasted the highest destructive capacity out of all the spells in its class.

Appearing with a roar above the examiner, my lightning stood still, waiting for the completion of my spell which would cause it to immediately descend.

With the three of the most powerful spells most people in the room hoped to achieve at my beck and call, the reactions of the examinees changed in an instant.

"W-what?!!"

"T-that is!!!"

"I-impossible!!!"

"H-how is he doing that?"

"He's using three different elements at the same time?!"

"The spells themselves are top class! And he's using three at the same time?! That's impossible!"

Of course, this much was expected of silly kids who were extremely astonished by Maria's display earlier. However, it was not their reactions I was looking forward to.

"A-Amazing... I always knew you weren't normal. But this..." He muttered, looking at what I had conjured up for him.

The surprise clearly written on his face and the unexplainable display of awe in his eyes gave me pleasure. A wide grin formed on my face as I replied to him.

"Oh, please don't be surprised now, examiner Sir Legris Damien. I'm just getting started!"

His eyes widened more in surprise as he couldn't fathom what more I could show him other than this.

Sure, with this alone I was guaranteed a passing grade higher than any that had come before me and most likely after me. However...

'This isn't enough...' My mind rang.

While it was impressive, three respective basic spells were still nothing in face of someone at Legris' level. I wanted him to truly regret his decision of treating me casually. Plus...

"It would be a waste to settle for this, anyway!"

Once again focusing my mana that formed an integral part of the three spells, I sent more power into them, and slowly, connected the three spells through a mana channel.

While invisible to the natural eyes, anyone using mana to trace the particles would be able to see it clearly.

Just like strings tying various objects, my mana tied the three spells from their respective locations.

“Let us begin.”

FWOOOOOSSSHHHHH

I sent the roaring whirlwind toward Legris, at the same time pulling [Igris Breath]’s flames to the spinning cluster of wind.

Since both of them had been tied together and contained my resonating mana, both spells merged most fluidly.

The transparent wind took in the bright orange-red flames and instantly turned into an intense whirlwind of flames.

This instantly caused everyone around to scream in pain and fright, feeling the tingles on their skin.

The fiery whirlwind increased in speed and neared Legris quickly creating burn marks on the ground in its advance.

Legris grinned excitedly as he watched the joint spell approach him. I could hardly see him due to wind pressure and the distortion caused by the heat, but Legris was certainly smiling widely, having bulged eyes.

“I’m not done!” I declared, controlling the lightning that was dormant above him.

KRRRRUUUUIIKKKKKK!!! It crackled, drawing Legris’ attention to the spell over his head.

“Fall!”

The lightning instantly descended, swiftly making its way to the ground toward its target.

Legris took this as his cue and finally removed one of his hands from his pockets and raised it to stop the spell.

‘Wrong move!’ My mind rang.

Instantly pulling the lightning using the mana thread woven about it, I changed its trajectory, causing it to mix with the fiery whirlwind.

KRRRRRRIIIIKKAAAVWOOOOMMM

Crackles and flashes of lightning from [Heavenly Spark], roaring flames of [Ifrit’s Breath], merged with the roaring winds of [Sylph’s Whisper], all woven together sped across the platform and charged at the examiner with an unexpected new speed.

Before he would descend his hand, the spell would hit. The look on his face confirmed it. He looked absolutely stunned beyond belief. However, I saw that he still had no intention of raising his second hand. Instead, he focused on the new spell, attempting to stop it with the force of his mana alone.

“Don’t even think about it!”