

SPELLCRAFT 51

Chapter 51

“Don’t even think about it!” I grinned, activating the special trick I had prepared beforehand at that very moment.

ZWOOOOPPPP!

The ground melted, shifted, and quaked all at the same time.

The sudden movement of the stage caused great astonishment for everyone, especially the target.

This offset Legris’ stance, entirely ruining his focus. His body wobbled as he fell. Nearing the ground as a result of the imbalance of the earth, he quickly pulled himself together and regained his posture, but by the time he achieved this, the terrible mix of three Basic spells, now at the Intermediate Stage was already before him.

In less than a second... it would hit!

‘What are you going to do now... Sir Legris?’ My mind rang.

That very instant, in the blink of an eye, just as I expected, Legris used his second hand to counter the destructive whirlwind before him. He released a mana wave of superior quality, nullifying the spell. It was most likely a powerful mana disturbance spell, since anti-magic didn’t exist.

FWOOOOSH HHH

In an instant, my spell slowed down and dissipated after a couple of seconds. Though he succeeded in stopping my spell, as he did with the others before mine, it was clear which one gave him the most trouble.

“Good grief... this kid. Just what are you?” Legris Damien grinned, looking at me with greater interest.

I shrugged, asking him how long I had spent on my exam.

“Well, let’s see...” He muttered, not sure himself, since he was caught up with the excitement that he forgot to count.

However, an exam as important as this was bound to have a timer, so by using a spell, he revealed a giant ticking clock that floated midair. It was large enough for everyone to see, so we all raised our heads to see what it said.

“This is...” He muttered in surprise.

Everyone in the room had the very same expression. Absolute astonishment.

“Two minutes, five seconds... that’s amazing!” Legris remarked, looking at me with amazement.

However, my expression instantly dissuaded him from flattering me with his words. That was because the elapsed time was a disappointment to me.

“I wanted to be done in exactly two minutes. It appears I need more practice...” I muttered to myself.

There was a need to analyze the combination from scratch and figure out a loophole that I could exploit to quicken the effective use of the spell.

"I'd say this is plenty impressive, Jared. You cast intermediate magic at such a young age!" Legris interrupted my thoughts.

He must have sensed my dissatisfaction with the results and attempted to smoothen things. His efforts were in vain, though, since I was never going to settle for less.

"I just cast three Basic Spells and merged them to give that result. It can't be qualified as intermediate magic, per se." I responded.

Legris wanted to argue with my logic, but this wasn't the appropriate place to further discuss such matters since we had a massive audience watching.

"D-did you see that?!"

"This is crazy... no, impossible!"

"How can this... is he really an entrant?"

Many speculations coupled with loud murmurs echoed across the hall as the student who once looked down on me began to stare in amazement and awe.

Of course, I couldn't avoid the suspicious gazes of some who simply couldn't accept the results and thought I had used some form of trick to cheat.

Those who thought along that line were bound to be brain-dead since everyone had already been informed about the strict monitoring of our exams. Besides, no mere trick would be enough to trick someone of Legris' caliber.

'In the end, it's just plain envy, eh?' I reasoned.

Legris Damien saw how rowdy the hall had gotten due to my spectacular display and quickly took action to restore order.

"A-ahem."

As soon as Legris cleared his throat, everyone fell silent, hearing the sound reverberate across the hall. No one dared to speak the moment a Senior Lecturer like our examiner signaled the end of the murmurs.

Now turning to look at me, Legris smiled and told me what he had said to the others who had their turn before mine.

"Jared Leonard. 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."

I nodded, bowing slightly as I left for the door that awaited me exactly as Jared declared. As I moved away from the stage, I turned back to grin at Legris.

"I told you, didn't I? That you couldn't handle it casually. Looks like I was right."

Legris shrugged, still giving me an amused look. He wanted to respond, but he held back for some reason. Still, it may have been petty, but I felt good impressing someone of his caliber and rubbing it in his face.

“When next we meet, I promise to show you something more interesting.”

Upon saying this, I left for the door. Legris remained silent, which was a pity. I was hoping for a cool comeback. Opening the door that led to what appeared to be a long hallway, I began making my way into it.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp sensation reverberate within my head. It felt as though a strange sensation was invading my inner senses, but I couldn't do anything to stop it.

~I'll be looking forward to it, then.~ Legris' voice sounded in my head.

My eyes bulged instantly. He used Mind Magic to communicate telepathically with me, an impressive feat.

I didn't know if what he established was a one-way channel, or whether I could respond to his message, but I still have my response within my thoughts.

‘Good. Till we next meet!’

Grinning widely in anticipation and excitement, I made my way down the hallway, shutting the door behind me.

As Legris Damien summoned the long scroll to call upon the next examinee, his mind still trailed back to the one he just tested.

‘That boy... Jared. Who is he, exactly?’

Chapter 52

In his entire life as a Magic-User, this was a first for Legris.

For him to be so flustered as to play directly into the hands of a child. It was so embarrassing, yet refreshing.

‘He was able to cast three different spells of varying elements at the same time. No, four elements. He used that earth spell at the last minute to offset my balance...’ Legris thought to himself.

Jared's quick casting, effective use of his spells, and fluid combination of multiple spells to form a different yet more powerful result were outstanding.

The boy was exceptional in every way, which amused the examiner even more. Unfortunately, Jared was about to meet his final challenge which would prove difficult for even him.

While he had conflicting thoughts concerning the matter, there was nothing Legris could do concerning the examining process. A question of utmost puzzlement rang in his head as he called the next entrant for testing.

‘Why... why does that kid have a White Core Grade?!’

The passage I passed through was meant to be dark, but the glowing stones affixed to the ceiling made it very bright.

As I walked in absolute silence, only hearing the clacking of my heels while moving in the empty space, I mulled over what I would do in the last stage of the exams.

I had passed the first two flawlessly, no, exceptionally. However, this last part would prove difficult. The existence of my two extra Mana Cores wouldn't be an issue, since the only detection method available even with modern magic was limited to the primary Mana Core which was situated in the stomach region.

The other two, located in my brain and the base of my neck respectively, would not be noticed in the slightest.

The problem, however, was that a White Mana Core, especially one as pure as the one I possessed meant the Magic-User was weak and untalented since they couldn't use higher levels of magic.

'Tsk!' I clicked my tongue in annoyance.

No matter what I thought of, none of them would be effective in the coming test. Realizing there was nothing I could do about it, I decided to let the thought go and simply participate in the test.

'Hopefully, my other results help.'

I could finally see an opening at the end of the deep tunnel after moving for about a minute.

The next aspiring student must have begun his spell by now. Did that mean I would be done with the third stage before he would walk down this passage?

There was no way to find out.

'Let's do this!' My mind rang.

At the end of the hallway was another door, similar to the one I used to enter from the start.

I opened the door and got myself into a white room. It was tiled all around and had a glimmering brightness that made me cringe my eyes.

"Welcome, examinee 458. Please come closer." A voice broke through my stunned state.

I slowly opened my eyes, getting used to the sudden brightness after transversing the hallway. Taking in the sight around me mode steadily, I was finally able to see everything surrounding me.

It was really an empty white space, save for two other things present apart from myself.

A woman clad in white stood beside a massive black orb. The large ball was nearly as tall as the woman and had a glimmering dark shade to it.

"U-um, okay..." I replied, my voice trailing as I drew closer to her.

Upon closer inspection, I analyzed the woman better. She donned a white lab coat and had glasses hinged evenly on her face. Her long dark hair flowed to the back of her neck and the stern expression she gave indicated she was in no mood for any dilly-dallying.

Now before her and adjacent to the black orb, I gulped, locking eyes with her jet black ones.

“Stand before the orb and place one of your hands on it.” She said, holding a book and pen in both hands, most likely to record the results my test would bring.

I nodded and obediently went to the orb. Taking a short breath, I placed my right hand on the black orb and suddenly it started reacting to my touch.

Feeling my whole body twitching as the mana flow within me throbbed, my stomach especially felt hot and the mana in the core within me swirled.

SHIIIIINNNNGGG!!!

A sharp glow of white light spread across the dark orb and it transformed from its original state, taking on the color of my core.

“Oh? A pure white Mana Core at this age? This is the first I’ve seen...” The woman muttered, writing some things in her book.

Her words made me embarrassed. Even though I knew my decision not to advance my core grade was the correct one, having someone like her give a condescending remark about it was nothing short of mortifying.

‘Welp, it’s not like I can lecture her on the importance of a pure core.’ I reasoned.

“You can remove your hand now. The third stage of your exams is over.” The woman said, not bothering to give a second glance at me.

“You may leave.”

Her fingers pointed to a door at the far end of the room, opposite where I came out from. She still refused to look at me, most likely due to her disgust for my lack of talent. However, I wasn’t done with her.

“Er, excuse me... I have a question.”

The woman raised her head from the book she held and stared at me blankly.

“What is it?”

“Could you tell me more about how this third test works? Both the first and second stage examiners explained the criterion for the test, her you told me nothing.” I smiled, giving her a very endearing look.

However, I was sure she could sense that beneath my sweet smile was an air of attitude caused by the displeasure I had with her reaction toward me.

“Tch, cheeky brat.” She whispered under her breath.

Chapter 53

I ignored the woman's statement and awaited her explanation.

"This orb is called the Core Grade Detector. As its name implies, it measures your Core Grade and exactly displays an image on its surface." She began after sighing at the pointlessness of exerting energy in explaining something like this to me.

"This test is meant to reveal the state in which your Core grade is. Usually, potential students possess a large quantity of the yellow color already dwelling in their Mana core, while a few others have complete Yellow Mana Cores."

"Ah... I see..." I muttered, looking at the orb for the second time. The white color it donned began fading away as it regained its black look.

'It most likely reverts to its original form after some time...'

I looked back at the examiner, but she had a peculiar expression, engaged in a thought of her own. Her face looked hesitant for a moment as she made a passing comment.

"Though, there are rare cases of people showing up with a higher core grade... like that girl. Who would have thought she had gone as far as a Blue Core Grade..."

Of course, she whispered that last part. Fortunately, my hearing was very good and I picked up what she said.

My eyes bulged slightly when I heard it. To think someone at the level of examinee would achieve a Blue Mana Core Grade! It was a truly remarkable achievement indeed.

'Could it be...? She said it was a girl. Then that means...' My thoughts trailed.

It had to be Maria Helmsworth. She seemed to be the only impressive person who had finished the second stage before me. To think she was this much of a genius!

"I see. Thank you for informing me." I smiled and bowed slightly.

Turning to the exit, I walked gracefully to leave the white room. The woman's gaze returned to her book, not bothering to give me a second glance.

I could sense the presence of the next examinee close to the room. It appeared over three minutes has passed already.

Opening the door in a hurry to leave, I was met with another hallway. What was with these people and hallways? Also, how large was this hall anyway?

As soon as I stepped into the hallway, I felt a strange sensation course through my body. I didn't recognize it at first, but as I followed the cleanly carved and brightly lit path, I realized the reason for my strange sensations.

"Time... the time magic isn't as effective here."

I could feel the effectiveness of the spell reduce drastically.

A smile formed on my face, realizing where I was headed. This hallway was quite short, compared to the other one and within a few seconds, I was out of it, arriving at an open space.

“Oh...?” A short air of awe escaped from my lips.

My eyes picked up all the glittering lights and the exquisitely designed place. The hallway connected to the rear of an extremely large hall. It was nearly as huge as the symposium. With several thousand chairs arranged in rows and columns, I met a couple hundred people already seated and waiting impatiently.

“So, this is the waiting area...” I whispered, taking a step forward.

My eyes darted to the most convenient place to sit, and I eyed a good position on the far end to the left. It appeared not many people were there, save for a boy and girl.

The rest were a considerable distance from the pair and were all engaged in discussions. It was another reason why I decided it was best to pick the conveniently free space.

‘It’ll be bothersome to engage in conversation at this point...’ I reasoned.

Most of the examinees prattled on the kind of spell they used, their fears of being rejected, the kind of mana core grade they had, etc. I found such talks boorish and irrelevant.

I could have chosen to pick one of the seats at the rear, where no student had filled yet, but that would just paint me out to be a weirdo. I needed to blend in, but avoid any conversation that would needlessly wear me out.

Looking at the many empty seats to the left uninhabited by many, except two, I made up my mind.

‘I should go there, after all.’

Gliding through the rows and columns, I made my way to the spot and sat on one of the empty seats, making sure I was a few chairs apart from the other two.

That way, we wouldn’t need to engage in any form of fruitless discussion. Fortunately, the both of them appeared to be silent, so I doubted they would even bother to-

‘W-wha-?!’ My mind rang as I took a closer inspection at the two people I was seated beside.

One of them was Maria Helmsworth! I hadn’t seen her face clearly before seating since my mind was more occupied with so many things, but to think I made such a grave error.

I suddenly realized why many chose not to sit there. They gave the prodigy her space, and by now, though it was too late, I could sense the numerous gazes of the students converging on the girl.

‘Shit! Why did I choose to sit here!’

Now, I felt even more uncomfortable than before. In any case, I just had to wait things out and make sure I remained inconspicuous.

‘That will prove difficult, though...’ My mind trailed.

I could already feel them, the gazes of many piercing my small frame. I felt like their glares would consume me. So many bit their lips in jealousy and made whispers, wondering what I was doing under the genius girl's radar.

All I wanted was a short moment of silence, yet it appeared even that dream would be shattered.

CREAAAK!

I heard a chair rattle from someone rising from it. My eyes darted to the source and saw the boy who sat beside Maria leave his own seat by her side and draw nearer to me.

'Oh, damn...' I heaved in anxiety.

I had selected this seat because I wanted to avoid a conversation, yet he was drawing closer to me with his gaze directly fixed on my seat.

'What does this guy want?'

Chapter 54

"Hey." The strange boy flatly addressed me.

I had intentionally avoided his gaze, but that was difficult to do now that he was standing directly in front of me.

Everyone's eyes had shifted from Maria and were now locked on us, I could feel it. The most convenient option for me would be to ignore him and pretend I didn't hear in hopes that he would take the hint and scam.

However, that would be rude, and if I did that with the attention of everyone so fixated on us, it would create a terrible impression on not just me but my family. As someone who learned etiquette to the highest degree attainable for my age, I couldn't smear my family's name.

'Plus, I intend on making friends in this place eventually. It wouldn't be good if I give a bad first impression and come off as snobbish.'

"Hey." I finally responded after a grueling series of internal interrogations.

I lifted my eyes to view the boy who addressed me and locked eyes with him. He had a gentle smile plastered on his face, but the lad couldn't fool my eyes. For some reason, the boy was hiding a deep glare underneath his nice demeanor.

"Could I ask for your name?" He asked.

I was now a little skeptical about telling him my identity, especially since it seemed like he had malicious intentions. However, I had already come this far anyway.

"I am Jared Leonard."

My flat statement seemed to provoke a surprised reaction from him and even those around me.

"From the Duke Household of Leonard Alphonse Sereth?" He calmly replied.

I responded positively.

His eyes seemed to ogle my body as if sizing me up. A wider grin appeared on his face, morphing the nice expression on his face into that of a condescending look of disgust.

"I see..." A voice leaked out of his curled lips.

Feeling the air around us change, I decided to quickly change the topic.

"What about yours?"

The boy seemed a little flustered that I was asking such an obvious question. I felt more piercing gazes and heard gasps emanating from the rest of the students.

'What's going on? Am I supposed to know this guy?' My thoughts trailed.

"Oh? I see. It's understandable that someone like you may not know who I am." The boy said with a mocking gaze.

"My name is Stefan, from the glorious house of Netherlore Zenith."

My eyes widened slightly as my memory picked up an image. Slowly, I came to remember his identity. During the exams, he was the only other student that performed adequately well apart from Maria.

I wasn't really focused on his appearance since he didn't have any striking features other than the fact that he was handsome.

To think he was the one who spoke to me. The fact that the kid was seated beside Maria proved that he was also considered a magic prodigy. After all, no one gave him scathing glares for choosing where he sat.

"It seems I have jugged your memory." He smiled, drawing closer to me.

I eased my back on my seat to create even more distance between us, but it was no use since he moved even nearer.

"I'll make this nice and simple, so listen well..." He whispered, intentionally reducing the volume of his tone so only I could clearly hear him.

What was he going to say? I had a fair idea.

"I'm going to need you to leave this place immediately... you're making me and Maria over there uncomfortable. You understand, don't you?"

Just as I thought. He was playing this card. I already assumed that everyone avoided seating anywhere around them due to respect and awe. However, it was also because of fear. They didn't want to cross the most powerful geniuses in the room.

'This guy... is he really threatening me right now?'

It was laughable to the point that I leaked a chuckle, despite trying my hardest to contain my amusement.

Stefan, as his name was, drew away from me as soon as he saw me chuckle and gave me a deep glare. Apparently, I had just insulted him.

"I am being polite right now. Leave, and there will be no issue." He narrowed his eyes at me.

'Pfft! Is that supposed to be scary?'

For me, it was no more than a child's tantrum. He couldn't be any older than I was, yet the air he commanded made him think of himself as superior.

I turned my head to my right, seeing the girl that sat a couple of seats away from me. Her striking beauty was still something that impressed me. Turning back to Stefan, I asked a simple question.

"You say I am disturbing the both of you, correct?"

"Yes." His glare deepened as he answered.

I smiled and nodded, rising from my seat. The little brat appeared pleased by my actions, not suspecting my next move.

Swiftly gliding past him, I moved to my right and approached the goddess everyone seemed to fawn over, Maria. Stefan's eyes bulged, surprised by my audacity. However, before he could come over to me and give his reaction, I leaned closer to the girl and asked her a very simple question.

Our faces were close, and I could see the clear sparkles in her eyes. They seemed slightly bigger than usual, perhaps because she was also surprised by my effrontery. I ignored the flustered reaction she gave, Stefan's increasing rage, and the angry stares all around me.

"Am I disturbing you?"

My voice reverberated across the vast space surrounding us, and the question rang ever so deeply in everyone's head. It was the ultimate insult to the one who proposed that notion in the first place, and he was already beside me, ready to give me a fist to my face.

'Childish...'

I dodged Stefan's jab and grabbed the arm he flung at me. Swiftly twisting it with absolute precision, I rattled his joints, causing him to yelp in pain.

"Arghhhh!"

Chapter 55

"Arghhhh!" Stefan yelled, taking a few steps back in recoil.

His eyes winced in pain as he grabbed his throbbing arm which I released as soon as he screamed.

"Don't overreact. I made sure I was gentle. Your arm is fine." I said calmly to the boy who writhed due to the throbbing sensations coming from his bones.

"You bastard, how dare you-"

“My, my... won’t you mind your language, Sir Stefan Netherlore Zenith?” I accentuated my tone, giving a deeper meaning to my words.

For a noble to speak so vulgarly, surely it was frowned upon by many. Stefan became flustered by my words and gritted his teeth in annoyance. However, now the boy knew he couldn’t make any careless move against me.

Turning back to the seated girl who silently watched our little exchange, I repeated my question.

“Am I disturbing you?”

Her lips were tightly shut and her eyes affixed on my gaze, but I had no intention of backing down. I kept drawing my face nearer until she was willing to answer my question. She made no attempt to stop me even when our faces were merely inches apart.

Her eyes depicted curiosity and wonder. The true expression of a child who was witnessing something amazing for the first time. It was innocent and pure, but I also had what I wanted from the girl.

An answer!

“N-no...” Maria finally said, looking away from me.

Her voice, though mere whispers were enhanced by the amplification spell I had activated beforehand. This caused everyone in the room to hear her response.

Gasps emanated from everyone the moment the prodigy’s answer reverberated across the area, realizing the implication of her words. Maria herself was surprised by the volume of her melodious voice, looking at me with suspicion.

A smile of victory formed on my face as I ignored the stare she gave and looked in Stefan’s direction. He too had heard Maria’s response.

“Apparently, this young lady doesn’t think I’m disturbing her.” I grinned, moving closer to Stefan.

“Y-you...” He growled.

Walking past him in an elegant stride, I returned to my seat and made myself comfortable. The audience was beyond amazed by my audacity, but as the mobs they were, none of them made any comment other than whispers and gasping sounds.

“You’ll regret this, Jared Leonard. I can promise you that!” Stefan said in a low, threatening tone.

If I was a normal child, perhaps I would have been a little scared and begged for forgiveness. After all, it profited nothing to have an enemy within the Academy.

However, if I was like that, I wouldn’t have begun this venture in the first place. A part of me was excited to see what the future held for me and Stefan. It would serve as side entertainment for my life in Ainzlark.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I ignored Stefan’s scathing glare and decided to relax my mind.

Unfortunately, even that was cut short by yet another interruption. The murmurs suddenly took a spike in tempo as more hushed sounds filled the hall.

'Urgh, what now?!' I thought in irritation.

Focusing my senses with enhancement magic, I decided to listen in on their comments.

"T-that's him! It's Jared Leonard!"

"Ooh! I wish I was here when the clash between him and Stefan started!"

"You saw it too, right? His performance in the second stage of the exams!"

"Stefan doesn't stand a chance!"

My body twitched as soon as I heard those talks spread. The people who were instigating and spreading the comments were the ones who witnessed my performance in the arena.

'Isn't it too soon? I mean, not even ten minutes have passed since I entered this hall, and yet there are so many people talking about me-'

My thoughts were interrupted by the recollection of the time normalcy in this waiting room. Since time was accelerated for the exams and flowed normally here, more students would be entering the room in minutes.

"Ah, I see..." Words escaped my lips as I sighed.

It made better sense this way, anyway. It would be unreasonable for everyone in the waiting room to wait for several hours for the others to conclude their exams. This way, only a few hours at most would elapse before we got to conclude the exams for the day.

'Plus, the results will be released today. That's why there's a waiting room in the first place.'

We just had to wait it out.

More importantly, it seemed the ones who were singing my praise began talking to those who glared at me with annoyance for my audacity in seating close to two geniuses.

Public opinion slowly changed as soon as people heard what I had performed. Initially, no one believed it, but with more than a few dozen witnesses saying the same thing, it was impossible to dismiss.

"He's also a genius!"

"No wonder he sat beside those two!"

"Amazing! It seems we misjudged him."

"He must be on par with Sir Stefan and Miss Maria."

However, those who saw my grand spell weren't satisfied with merely placing me in the same class as the two prodigies.

"Are you kidding? He's on an entirely different level!"

“I bet he could best them both in magic! That guy is too OP!”

I sighed in my seat, wondering what these idiots gained from singing my praise. Weren't they the same people who mocked me moments ago? Yet, now they painted me to be a god or something.

‘Welp, their image of me will be shattered once the results are out...’

After all, since Mana Core Grade determined one's status in Ainzlark Academy, it was obvious where someone with a pure white Core would belong.

For people who were so easily swayed by what they saw or heard, it was clear their attitudes would change the moment they discovered my Mana Core Grade.

‘These guys are out of it... they're not the kind of comrades I desire.’ I reasoned.

I slightly opened my eyes and saw Stefan return to his seat beside Maria, still wearing a scowl on his face. The Maria girl was slightly glancing in my direction with unwavering curiosity.

There was no way the both of them couldn't hear what everyone was saying about me and them, but just like me, they ignored the crowd.

While our first impressions of each other weren't the best, if it was those two, especially the Maria girl, I wouldn't mind being friends with them.

‘Let's see how it goes...’

Chapter 56

Just as I expected, we only had to wait for about two hours before the hall was full of all the examinees.

The door where everyone came from vanished the moment the final student came out of it, stunning everyone.

We all sat on our respective seats, though no one neared where I, Maria, and Stefan sat. Since there were plenty of other seats to choose from, they didn't mind taking up other positions.

WHOOOOOSSSHHHH

A sudden gust of wind enveloped the area in front of all seats, the central podium. The moment everyone felt the string atmosphere building up, they ceased their prattle and directed their faces to the front.

The wind swirled around a single spot on the stage for a few seconds, and seeming to materialize from within the small hurricane was a person clad in a luxurious suit.

He was different from anyone we had seen previously which disappointed me a little. I was sort of hoping to see Legris Damien again.

Fortunately, I didn't remain disappointed for long. As though popping out of thin air in a puff of smoke, three more figures appeared on the podium.

Two men and a woman! They were stationed behind the first man who appeared and had somehow changed from their varying attire into full suits as well.

'Our examiners!' My mind rang as I beamed, seeing Legris among the people on stage. It was a large hall, but there was no one in the massive room who couldn't see the distinguished people who had arrived. Since the platform was elevated, we all had to raise our heads slightly, but without a doubt, we could all see them.

"A-ahem..." The man who appeared first and seemed to be in charge of this session coughed slightly.

His voice echoed across the large room, enough so that everyone could hear him clearly.

Following the sound of his voice was silence. Absolute silence that seemed to stretch for miles without end.

Finally, the very same man who caused the silence broke it by gracing us with his words.

"My name is Desmond Lawcroft. I am the head of the examination board for this year. In other words, I am the one who determines those who are worthy of this Academy for this examination!"

His voice carried such power and vigor that I wondered just what kind of position this man held other than the head of an examination committee. The man, Desmond, must have been a general who commanded troops due to the confidence and authority he exhibited with each word he spoke.

"I welcome you all to Ainzlark Academy. However, as you all know, none of you can be admitted into the true academic grounds until you are deemed worthy of passing with satisfactory results."

My eyes subtly glanced across the hall as I noticed several of the examinees sweating and gulping. They were already anxious after hearing what he said. Just moments ago, these people were chatting energetically.

However, it was now dawning on them that most of them weren't going to even make it to the true Academy and be admitted. About a hundred alone were going to be chosen from four thousand. That was beyond harsh!

'How certain am I that even I will...' My thoughts trailed, slowly giving in to the disparity of the situation.

However, I quickly snapped myself out of the dangerous thoughts I was having. There was no way I could lose after coming this far!

"Before announcing the results, there are a few things I would like to explain. It could also be useful for those who will not pass this time around..." Desmond Lawcroft began.

"Firstly, Ainzlark Academy is a prestigious institute deeply rooted in Magic. However, many seem to have the misconception that Magic is all there is to this Institute."

This generated quite the confused expression from people as they stared at one another, trying to decipher the words of the man who spoke. What else would a magic academy be known for?

"There are three major departments within Ainzlark Academy. The Magic Arts Department, an obvious existence. There are also the Martial Arts Department and Scholar Departments."

I grinned the moment he said this. Of course, I knew this much. Alphonse wanted me to register in Ainzlark as a Scholar. However, I found that unacceptable since it was the oath I had followed in my previous life.

“You have all applied for the Magic Art Department, and out of over 5,000 examinees, only 1,350 individuals applied for the other departments. 4,000 of you all chose the Magic Arts Department, no, even more than that number. However, the cap for examination for every department is 4,000, and so the others who applied late had to choose other departments to gain admission rights.”

As I listened, I could already guess what our dear speaker was trying to tell us.

“Only a hundred of you will be chosen today. The rest will be sent home. Many of you here have attempted this exam more than once, a good number have done this a couple of times, and yet will still fail. At this point, you should all face the harsh truth. Not everyone has what it takes to study and practice Magic!”

His words were harsh and straight to the point, but he was right. It was better for those who kept trying in hopes of one day achieving success to stop while they could. Even if by some miracle they made their way into the Academy, the school was another hell on its own where the talentless were left behind and those with superior abilities rose to the top.

Instead of unnecessarily trying to reach what was beyond them, their energy could be better used elsewhere.

“However, do not despair. I am of the firm opinion that no one is born talentless! Everyone has a specialty in one thing or the other. Even if your affinity with magic is low, there are still two other departments to enter within Ainzlark. We will welcome you to the Martial Arts Department or the Scholar Department, both of which are respectable fields of study!” Desmond Lawcroft declared.

His words may have been too much for others, but it was easy enough for me to understand.

Instead of staying stuck in a game you couldn't win, it was better to switch lanes and achieve greater heights in a race that better suits you.

‘Smart words... now, then, let's see what awaits us as examinees for the Magic Arts Department!’

Chapter 57

“Now then, we shall reveal the results of this session of examinations to you all.” Desmond Lawcroft declared.

We all held our breaths, knowing that a majority of us wouldn't make the cut. No semblance of the confidence I previously had appeared as a silent fear lurked within my guts.

GULP

“I have the list of those who passed the exams here with me. But, to make it easier for everyone to understand... I shall display the results for everyone to see!”

It was amazing that the Academy had already compiled the results so quickly and had determined the winners in the series of tests we passed through. However, when considering the fact that they could

use magic to manipulate the flow of time, it was no mystery as to how they arrived at a conclusion so quickly.

Silence filled the air as we all awaited the moment of truth, watching Desmond bring forth a scroll from within his luxurious suit. The piece of parchment seemed to have been buried within a pocket within the inner recesses of his jacket, and him bringing it out meant the conclusion of the whole matter was at hand.

Of course, none of us could see the contents displayed on the scroll due to our distance. Besides, the list was facing Desmond directly. Since we were all seated opposite him and faced him directly, there was no way we could see anything written on the scroll.

'How does he intend to reveal the results, then...?' I asked myself, refusing to take my eyes off the mysterious man for even a second.

Desmond's mouth suddenly opened from the tightly shut form they had taken and he appeared to be mumbling something under his breath. From the way his lips moved, I realized the man was chanting a spell.

This lasted for a few seconds, and then-

SHIIIIIIINNNNGGGGGG

Light shone suddenly as a wave of energy burst through the room.

Everyone felt the rush of energy and was captivated by the sight that was displayed as the pressure subsided.

Above the head of Desmond Lawcroft was a large panel that glowed brightly. It was so clear, sharp, and bright that no one could miss it.

The panel that took the form of a long list stretched as high as the tall ceiling, revealing its contents. With our eyes all moving to the bright list caused by brilliant clusters of golden light, we marveled.

'This is... light magic...' I beamed.

He must have used light refraction to display the figures and letters that appeared on the long panel. It was no mean feat, considering the details put in it.

Everyone's eyes bulged as they saw the results as well as the meticulous details placed in them. The scores gotten from each round, and the parameters for judging the examinees were also given. Also, only the top 100 who made the cut were displayed on the long panel.

Instinctively, my eyes darted to the very top of the list to see who had taken first place. It was no surprise to see who it was.

Maria Helmsworth!

My eyes trailed to my side as I took a short, subtle glance at her. The young girl's eyes were entirely focused on the list and seemed to be scanning through it.

'She should have seen her name... what is she looking for?' I thought to myself.

Her eyes were determined, though, as though frantically looking for something but not seeming to find any semblance of what she sought.

Looking away from Maria before I got even more curious about what could pique her interest other than the fact that she scored the highest, my eyes went back to the list.

Reading the contents word for word, I scrutinized the parameters placed therein.

[AINZLARK STUDENT CANDIDATES LIST]

~1st Place~

Name: Maria Helmsworth

Age: 12 Years

1st Test Score: 91

2nd Test Score: 95

3rd Test Score: 100

Total Test Score: 286

Mana Core Grade

Mana Core Grade Concentration: 100%

{You Have Been Accepted As A Student Of Ainzlark Academy}

[.]

It was amazing no matter how many times I thought of it. Was this what it meant to be a genius?

Her Mana Core was Blue, and not just that, but it had a total concentration of a hundred percent. Usually, once a Magic-User advanced their Magic Core to the next grade, it took a gradual process.

So, if a white grade core became yellow, the yellow grade would slowly saturate the core until it became a hundred percent in quality. Only when it became a hundred percent could it be possible for the Magic-User to completely utilize the full capabilities of their Core Grade and advance to the next Grade.

Usually, people her age would still not have achieved a hundred percent concentration in the Yellow Core Grade. She was a genius beyond the normal level!

Presently, I had a total of zero concentration of the Yellow Core Grade and was still a pure White Core. It didn't bother me, since that was what I wanted, but even with my knowledge and talent in internal mana manipulation, I doubted it was possible for me to reach her level at my age.

'So terrifying!' My mind rang.

I felt my stiff neck refuse to take a turn so I could take another glance at the prodigy. It made sense why everyone was so crazy about her.

Quickly shaking off the thoughts about the girl, my eyes went down the list and caught yet another interesting character in second place. Well, it was inevitable, since the two were a pair.

If the first was Maria Helmsworth, the second had to be Stefan Netherlore!

~2nd Place~

Name: Stefan Netherlore

Age: 12 Years

1st Test Score: 97

2nd Test Score: 89

3rd Test Score: 85

Total Score: 271

Mana Core Grade

Mana Core Grade Concentration: 10%

{You Have Been Accepted As A Student Of Ainzlark Academy}

[.]

‘Oh? Not bad! I suppose his arrogance wasn’t for nothing...’ I smiled with an impressed reaction.

Chapter 58

It appeared Stefan was more skilled in theory, so he got higher in the first stage of our examination. In fact, I wasn’t expecting anyone to score so high, but he surprised me.

His other results were equally impressive. Not on the level of the genius girl, but remarkable nonetheless.

I turned my face to take a quick glance at him, expecting a snotty and confident look but was met with surprise instead. Stefan donned a stoic and cold look, as though trying to wave off the results displayed before his eyes as no big deal.

His eyes displayed a coldness that depicted that the results were to be expected, but I sensed something deeper within them. Was it frustration? A little bit of internal anger seemed to swirl within the icy cold shade in his retinas.

‘I see... did he want to get first place?’ I smiled to myself, finding his conflicting emotion a little funny.

Turning back to the screen, I looked at the results of the one who scored third place. It was a little underwhelming, a huge drop from the pedestal raised by the first and second.

~3rd Place~

Name: Ivan Smith

Age: 13 Years

1st Test Score: 79

2nd Test Score: 64

3rd Test Score: 60

Total Score: 203

Mana Core Grade

Mana Core Grade Concentration: 85%

{You Have Been Accepted As A Student Of Ainzlark Academy}

[.]

Well, I couldn't complain, since those two were regarded as geniuses. It was only natural that they would be leagues above the rest of them.

'This Ivan guy must actually be a pretty impressive person...' I reasoned.

If he had applied in a different year when the first two weren't present, he would have achieved the top spot. It was a shame his accomplishments were overshadowed by prodigies.

A smile formed on my face as I looked at the 4th place, having a total of 201 Points, not too far off from the third. My eyes trailed down and I noticed the 6th position downward, memorizing their names and scores while skimming through them.

They weren't too eye-catching, and their numbers were closely tied. It felt pointless even checking, but I did so anyway. It was a good way to get to know my new classmates.

After finally making it to down number 99, and then 100, I completely exhausted the list. A wry smile formed on my face.

Of all the names and numbers I carefully analyzed... my name wasn't among any!

Was it an error? Who knew. I was certain I carefully memorized the name and scores of everyone from the 6th position below after looking at the upper ones. I expected my name to have at least appeared in the lower regions of the list, but there was nothing.

My amused, calm smile slowly began fading as my lips twitched. Still, I maintained a calm disposition. It wouldn't do well for me to be so flustered at such a moment.

I could hear countless murmurs around me, and the entire hall was in an uproar as many whose dreams were dashed made sobs of anger and frustration.

I could easily join them and cry at my failure, but I wasn't so pathetic as to do that. What was going on exactly? Certainly, out of everyone who I scanned, they were all of the Yellow Core Grade, possessing at least 30 percent concentration!

Did I get disqualified because of my Pure White Core Grade? Was it a mistake to refuse to go by the norms and make separate cores instead?

“Tsk!” I clicked my tongue in dissatisfaction.

This was truly very unpleasant...

~Why are you looking so glum?~ A voice suddenly flashed into my mind.

My eyes widened as I recalled the sound coming from my mind. The sensation felt so familiar that I couldn't forget it even if I wanted to, and I could recognize the person speaking from anywhere.

Darting straight to the platform that stood above the students, my eyes captured the one who just used Mind Magic on me!

'Legris Damien!'

His face had a calm smile written on it, a surprise to me. I had thought he would be disappointed by my failure to gain something as simple as an admission. However, he didn't seem to be fazed. Rather, he was looking at me like I was the strange one.

~You should check the list again~ His voice sounded in my head again.

'Again? Why?'

I couldn't fathom why he would want Mt to engage in such a fruitless venture. Was it to add more salt to my injuries? I didn't make the cut, yet he wanted me to look at the names of those who did?

'Are you mocking me Legris?' I thought to myself in slight annoyance.

However, having nothing better to do, I humored him. My stiff neck rose as I checked the list starting from below. I couldn't turn them anywhere else, afraid to look at those around me.

I could feel countless eyes poking me, nearly driving me to the point of madness, but I pretended not to notice. The murmurs grew more intense, but I didn't dare enhance my hearing to hear what it was about.

If I could make a good guess, the talks about me that would be passed around were most likely mockeries and jests.

After the impressive display I showed in the second test and daring to seat among the geniuses, I still failed.

'Shit...'

I shut off my hearing, refusing to listen to the comments of everyone around me that were bound to be scathing beyond recovery. Even Stefan and Maria were staring at me. I felt like I would die from nervousness, but I kept my focus on the panel above me.

From number 100 upward, I scanned through the list, still not finding my name. It was a foolish venture, but I continued. Was it due to the false hope I had that by some miracle I would see my name there? If so, then I was truly pathetic.

Skimming through the names, I passed number 50 and kept ascending, feeling my hopes dwindle and die out.

I reached the top 10 and my despair grew larger. The creeping fear of failure that had hidden itself was already rearing its ugly head, ready to completely devour me. I knew it in my heart... this was the end.

7th Place... not me!

6th Place... not me!

5th Place... 5th Place... 5th Place...

My already tired eyes began widening in surprise as the dying hope within me began shining bright. Countless thoughts invaded my mind as I struggled to understand.

However, upon reading it over and over again, I understood. Truly, without a doubt... The 5th place... was mine!

Chapter 59

~5th Place~

Name: Jared Leonard

Age: 12 Years

1st Test Score: 100

2nd Test Score: 100

3rd Test Score: 1

Total Score: 201

Mana Core Grade

Mana Core Grade Concentration: 100%

{You Have Been Accepted As A Student Of Ainzlark Academy}

[.]

My jaws nearly dropped and my eyes nearly popped from their sockets the moment I laid eyes on my result. Slowly, my memory returned as I remembered skimming through the 5th position, already assuming it wouldn't belong to me.

'Why did I not even notice...?' I thought to myself.

Perhaps I had been so used to my name that I had unintentionally passed it. Maybe I didn't think I would get that high in the first place. My confidence had been stunted by what was going on around me, so I had lost composure for a moment.

The reason I skipped it didn't matter anymore... what was important was that I passed!

A grin formed on my face as I looked in Legris Damien's direction. He gave a short smile and nodded slightly. I was relieved and happy he had told me. Though no rule prevented him from telling me directly, no one would go out of their way for a mere entrant, especially one with a core like mine.

'So, you're still looking forward to our next time, uh? Very well... I won't disappoint you!' My lips curled up in a wide smile, happy to the point of tears.

I had finally passed one of the hurdles I could never attain in my past life... officially studying magic, not as a scholar, but as a Magic-User.

With my mind relieved, I loosened my ears, and floods of sounds entered. The murmurs of people which I had ignored came rushing in to the point which I couldn't ignore anymore.

"A-Amazing! He got perfect scores on both first and second tests!"

"I told you, you guys weren't there when he performed his spell! That guy is a beast!"

"But what's with his Mana Core? Why is it still white?"

"You think there was an error in grading him?"

"Ainzlark wouldn't make such a silly mistake."

"I don't understand. How could he... don't tell me..."

"Yeah, I think so. He probably cheated. Maybe he's with a magic artifact that allowed him to pass the test or something. There's no way a White Core Grade could achieve what he did."

"So, in the end, he was no big deal, uh? That's too bad."

"Let's just avoid him..."

I sighed as I heard the public opinion of me drift from favorable to the opposite. We're these people stupid? This was the most prestigious institute for learning Magic, yet these fools had the notion that I somehow cheated.

Were they so desperate to refute the achievement of someone with a White Core Grade? Their minds just couldn't accept it, so they went for another impossible answer instead.

In any case, I didn't care anymore. As long as I had gotten in, that was all that mattered at this point.

"Hey, Jared Leonard." I heard a voice coming from beside me.

Recognizing the voice clearly as well as the rude tone that the owner used, I rolled my eyes as I slightly tilted my face toward Stefan's location.

His face once again surprised me. He didn't have the usual haughty expression as before. Instead, a deeper glint of frustration was evident in his eyes. Those eyes told me one simple fact... he was angry.

"How did you do it?"

His voice had a slight hint of emotion attached to it. Was he curious about how I was able to get so high in the test while having a White Mana Core Grade?

"Well, what can I-"

"I'm not joking around right now!" Stefan snapped.

It was only for a moment, but his arms twitched as he formed a fist. The boy was really beating himself up internally. He had lost overall to Maria, but he was still on top in the first test. That had provided him with enough comfort to accept his second place.

However, not only had I gotten a perfect score in the first stage, but I also managed to trump the girl who surpassed him in the second test. In essence, I just proved myself to be better than them in their specialties.

That was a slap on their faces.

“It’s a family secret...” I smiled amusedly at the young boy.

Stefan fidgeted the moment he heard those words and glared at me slightly.

Surely, he hadn’t forgotten the implied insult he gave me once he realized I was from the Leonard family. Even though my household was a prominent noble family, in the realm of magic we were laughed at.

I intended to change that!

Seated beside him was Maria. She glanced at me with her clear blue eyes, a contrast to the deep and cloudy ones Stefan possessed.

Her expression was blank, rather, it was stiff. It appeared like she wanted to say something to me, but refrained from doing so.

Even though I wasn’t even ranked first, second, or even third, why was it that all eyes were on me instead of others?

‘I suppose it was a given for Maria and the others since they must have been well known as prodigies and youngsters with potential... unlike me.’

I was a dark horse, the wild card that appeared out of nowhere and shook the expectations of everyone present.

A White Core Grade Magic-User scoring a perfect score on the first two tests, cut short only by the score of his Core itself... this was bound to bring quite a deal of attention.

However, I wasn’t averse to that. In fact, I welcomed it. What sort of fool would have potential and power but keep it to himself? To truly become great and achieve incredible feats, I needed equally powerful and talented allies.

However, no powerful ally would appreciate joining forces with a weakling. Even I wouldn’t.

“To attract the strong... I must become strong as well!”

Or, at least, appear to be.

Chapter 60

“Now that you have all seen your results... we shall now finalize this event.” Desmond Lawcroft said with a booming voice, interrupting the many sounds that permeated the hall.

“As for those who aren’t among the hundred, several doors are appearing to your right and left. Please take any of those doors and leave this hall immediately.”

‘Ouch!’ Was what I thought as soon as Desmond uttered those words.

These people were still recoiling from the shock of failing in their hopes and dreams, yet no condolences were made, not even a few moments given for the rejects to pull themselves together.

In unadulterated words, this man was telling them to ‘get the heck out!’

I heard chairs shifting and people rising from their positions obediently. Murmurs and whispers of saddened people became the new anthem in the large hall as they all went toward the several doors that suddenly appeared just like Damien said.

There were about eight to the right and eight to the left. This sped up the process of leaving the hall for this who had passed.

As I watched on, I couldn’t help but feel for them slightly. I had a similar experience when my dreams were dashed the moment it was revealed that I could never use magic. Unfortunately, not everyone could reincarnate like me. Or could they? I had no idea.

In a few minutes, the three thousand, nine hundred failures left the hall, not wanting to delay for even a second and expand their shame.

As soon as the last one left, the doors vanished and those who passed, i.e. Me and ninety-nine others, were left on the sparse seats that seemed so many now that a majority of us had left.

The hall appeared way larger than it was before since we were the only ones occupying it. I felt uncomfortable and wanted Damien, or whoever would do it, to show us into Ainzlark and have things over with, but no one did such a thing.

After waiting for a few seconds, I realized it... the evaluations weren’t over yet! Looking at the expression of those around me, it appeared I wasn’t the only one who thought that.

A wave of unease filled the hall.

“Relax, everyone. You have all passed the exams and are eligible to be students of Ainzlark Academy. That much is guaranteed.”

The moment Damien said this, the unease lessened, but didn’t vanish entirely. And that simply because he wasn’t done yet!

“Despite you all passing, the procedure of this Academy is still at play. Do you all remember what you were told before you started your first test? Yes... your scores determine your status within Ainzlark, especially your Core Grade!”

I sighed. I thought I had completely avoided that, but it seemed that this troublesome thing had come to bite me in the butt yet again.

“Tsk!”

“Ainzlark Academy works in accordance with the class system. There are 3 specific stages to transverse in order to be considered a full-fledged mage and be eligible for graduation. This will all be explained in your orientation. However, there is an important explanation that can’t wait until then... the true meaning of the class system.”

‘Here it comes!’ I gulped.

“Each Stage in Ainzlark Academy is divided into three classes. The Upper Class, for the talented; The Middle Class for those with potential; and the Lower Class, for those who are neither talented nor have potential.”

My eyes widened as soon as I heard this, and I heard equally shocking gasps from a few in the hall. Despite passing the exam, they still segmented students like this to clearly differentiate those who would rise higher in the realm of magic and those who were doomed to remain average.

This method didn’t exist in the past, neither was it recorded in the materials I read about the Academy. Considering the surprise of everyone else in the room, they weren’t aware of it as well. That meant it was a fairly new system.

“This Class System is a new policy that the Academy has adopted, and it’s highly efficient. In essence, even though a hundred of you passed, you won’t be in the same class!”

That much was a given. The bigger question in everyone’s mind was what I wanted an answer to. My eyes focused on Desmond’s lips as he uttered the words.

“While your other test results have to do with it, the major criteria for measuring the class you all belong to... is your Mana Core Grade!”

I knew it!

No one needed to tell me the class I belonged to... it was obvious. No matter what glamorous score I obtained on the first and second tests, it was inconsequential. After all, my score for the Mana Core Grade test was a mere 1!

“Your classes will be announced during your orientation tomorrow. For now, you will be taken into the main Academy and shown into your dorms. You will do well to relax while you can.”

As Damien told us a few other things, such as the provision of our daily necessities such as clothes, food, and other staple items, he rounded up by congratulating us on passing. His eyes were mainly focused on Stefan and Maria, though. I could tell.

He didn’t even glance at me for a second, even though my seat was just a short distance from theirs.

‘I guess he doesn’t care for a White Core Grade.’

As soon as he was done addressing us, he vanished into thin air, using the same whirlwind spell he used earlier. I observed the spell closely and figured out its workings. A small smile appeared on my face. Soon, I would also be able to perform such magic.

That feeling alone was enough to banish the unease and disappointment I had concerning the Class System the Academy had adopted.

I was certain I would fall into the Lower Class, and because of that, access to the privileges of the higher Classes wouldn't be granted to me.

It was such a shame indeed. But, I didn't give in to despair for a second. After all, it didn't matter what the Academy did to pull me down in the end.

'Sooner or later, they won't be able to ignore me!'

Once that time arrived, the Academy would have no choice but to promote me to the level I deserved.

I just had to be patient.