

SPELLCRAFT 511

SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

Chapter 511: Silver Lining [Pt 2]

I had ensured that all Arcanas in my possession were used at least once in the battle against the Demons.

This was because I wanted to bait the enemy by showing the cards I had up my sleeve.

Of course, they couldn't be so sure that the four I displayed were all I had in hand, so that meant they would be coming for me sooner or later.

It was now certain to me that the enemy had a certain Magic Ability that allowed them to observe our actions to an extent. Perhaps that too was the work of an Arcana.

'No. I can't restrict myself to think that. It could be Original Magic, or maybe a Magic Item.'

Either way, they must have seen the Arcanas in action.

If they were done finding the others, we would be next for sure.

'If they also reach a deadlock, or are almost done with their pieces, they'll probably think we have the rest...'

At this point, I knew I was playing with fire--considering how they had managed to pull one over from under me the last time.

But, I wasn't going to back down.

'I'll just be smarter and stronger next time.' Clenching my fist, an image of Legris appeared in my head.

We would meet one day.

'When that time comes, Legris...' My eyebrows furrowed in determination.

'... I won't lose!'

"Subtracting the four in our possession, there are eighteen Arcanas left."

Legris had told me that they gathered seven already, back when we had a showdown at Ainzlark.

I didn't think he was trying to misdirect me then, but there was no way to be absolutely sure.

Counting [The Devil] Arcana, as well as a few others that they could have probably picked while we were distracted, it was most likely that they had already gotten at least ten.

'Ten Arcanas... that's scary!'

I wondered why such a group chose to hide in the shadows despite how powerful they were.

No one would be able to stand a chance against 10 Arcanas.

I wasn't sure about Neron, but everyone else would lose badly.

'Or are they avoiding something? Is that why they've been in the background for so long?' I was in a dilemma.

It would be in my best interest to find out more, but we were pressed for time in the other departments.

"That means there are about 8 Arcanas left to discover. If we hurry and gather those before the Organization can, then we can gain the upper hand and thwart their plans."

Since they weren't going to reveal themselves, all we had to do was smoke them out.

As for their members....if I used Legris Damien as a standard for all twelve seats, then we were in quite a pickle.

'But, since Damien Lawcroft was a member, probably at least a lower seat member--after all, he was in charge of the Royal Capital--that meant all their members weren't as scary as Legris.'

I just wished I had more information.

"The enemy holds most of the cards now--both literally and figuratively. We can't afford to be sloppy, but we must also tread with caution."

This time, Aurora raised her hand for a question.

Was it expected?

'Well, of course!'

"How do you plan on going about finding the Arcanas?"

I smiled, nodding in a cool manner.

"The truth is that I've been doing some background work before now. During the war, I made contact with two members--Legris and Damien Lawcroft..."

I successfully placed trackers on both sides, allowing me to get a good idea of their locations and any conversation going on around them.

"Legris found my trackers right away and destroyed them... but that was simply a misdirection. I knew he was smart and powerful enough to prepare for that too, so I simply used that as an extra."

The true tracker was embedded in the Arcana he had with him.

'If there's an Arcana I'm most familiar with, it's definitely [The Devil]. In my past life, I had done extensive research on the thing so I could successfully develop the Miasma Generator.'

Plus, thanks to my special constitution, I was the only one who could get very close to the thing and study it for very long.

Thanks to that, I understood the structure and pattern well. It was one of the reasons I was able to get the hang of making my Miasma Cores self-sustaining.

"I embedded a monitoring code in the Arcana. So, it'll lead us directly to the Organization, give us enough information to kickstart our new objective, and we'll be able to finally have a headstart for once."

As for Damien Lawcroft, it seemed he was finally making his first move after a week had gone by.

'He's heading East. Is there anything there? Maybe their headquarters... or maybe the hideout of another member of the Organization that he's acquainted with?' Either way, I was going to wait it out until I was ready to harvest my rewards.

"Once again, we need to team up to combat this new shadow that is descending upon us. I ask for everyone's help and their unconditional cooperation."

An Organization that was malevolent enough to intentionally sacrifice an entire race for their objectives... that was gathering Arcanas so steadily...

'... They're going to be tough. Tougher than anything I've faced until now.'

Fortunately, I had many capable allies now.

'Currently, I've told Neron, Aurora, and Jane my true identity. Serah doesn't need to know for her to complete her tasks effectively, and in due time, I'll reveal it to more people as I see fit.'

It was also time to consider evolving the current concept of Magic that everyone was practicing.

This wasn't a time to be hoarding knowledge, but I had to ensure that the enemy didn't get their hands on the techniques and information I had, else they would become even more dangerous.

'Even Neron kept his technique secret for a similar reason.'

Still...

Since I had shared my Arcanas and secret identity with my trusted allies, I was supposed to have more faith in them and entrust more into their hands.

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Chapter 512: Tough Call [Pt 1]

In the just-concluded war, many people exceeded my expectations and were prime for an upgrade.

'Maria, Ana, Edward, Ciara, Jerry, even Ivan.' They had all done exceptionally well.

I also needed to teach Lemi more about her current abilities.

'So much to do, so little time...'

And, yes, there was one other important thing I had to attend to.

Considering the challenges ahead, it was better to rip the band-aid off as soon as possible... for their sakes and mine.

'It's time I reject the girls!'

This was going to be one of my toughest ventures yet.

"Pfffttt!!!" Jane laughed once again, most likely because of my girl problems.

"Tch."

Everyone else looked confused about her outburst and my glare. It was none of their business, anyway, so I decided to conclude the meeting.

"Thank you all for coming. Hopefully, we meet again in more favorable conditions."

Though we had a good time together, it was finally time to return to our homeland.

Of course, long-distance communication would be a necessity, so this wasn't necessarily goodbye.

"This meeting is hereby adjourned."

I would have asked Jane for some girl advice, but she was a weirdo.

I'd really just be shooting myself in the leg if I dared to enlist her help.

For one, I doubted she had feelings for someone. Secondly, she was obsessed with Magic. Lastly, she could be very blunt and inconsiderate.

The girls I was planning on talking to were Freya, Maria, and Ana. I didn't know how the number got to three, but I had to nip it in the bud before it became a bigger problem.

And, because of that... I decided to go for Freya first.

'I've known her the shortest. She's also an Elf, so I hope she doesn't take this too badly...'

We met in the Royal Garden, and the atmosphere betrayed my intentions.

The lush flowers, the pleasant aroma, and the gentle breeze that wafted around us. Surely, this was a location meant for confessions and not rejection.

Still, I had prepared myself before now. There was no way I could turn back.

"Freya, I..."

As she was tending to the flowers, caressing them as one would do to a pet, she looked at me with an eager smile.

"Yes? Go on."

My heart was pricked by her statement, but this was the time to stand my ground. It was for the best!

"I'll be leaving for my Kingdom tomorrow, and... I just wanted to say... about what you told me that time..."

"Okay...?" Her voice trailed as she left what she was doing and looked squarely at my face.

One of her eyebrows was raised, and the tension instantly skyrocketed to an unimaginable degree.

"W-well, I don't feel the same... I'm sorry..." In my own roundabout way, I was done with the rejection.

All that was left was for Freya to perhaps slap my face and cry off, or break down in front of me.

No matter the outcome, I was bound to feel terrible.

'I'm sorry. This is the only wa—'

"Uh? What the heck are you talking about?"

Freya's voice sharply returned my mind to reality, and even I was a bit surprised by that response.

"Eh?"

"I mean, what are you talking about? Is it what I said about liking you? Why can't you just say that? Jeez, are you really that much of a wuss? Looks like I misjudged you."

'O-ouch...!!!' Freya's words cut through me like a knife.

Now that I thought of it, she was Aurora's daughter.

Back in the good ol' days, her mother used to pick on me too. Why did I even get involved with the daughter?

"I-I see..." Were the only words I could say after recoiling from the emotional damage.

I couldn't even meet her gaze because she was currently staring at me condescendingly—almost as though I was dirt.

'Why did I even decide to be considerate with her? Crazy girl! It feels like I'm the one being rejected!'

Welp, either way, it seemed like everything still worked out. I just had to take the win and call it 'Mission Complete.'

"W-well, then, I guess this is it. I'll see you around." Sharply turning from the girl, I quickened my pace and decided to vanish from her sight.

"W-wait! Who did you choose, then? Lemi?"

"WHAT THE HECK!?!!" I didn't know when I shouted, once again facing Freya.

What gave the impression that I was even trying to get romantically entangled with my own daughter? What sort of disgusting pervert would I be to even do something like that?

"So, that's a no? That's a relief."

What was that for? Did she really have leftover feelings, and would be jealous if I picked her cousin over her?

"Thank goodness, she doesn't have to be with a wuss like you. Honestly, despite your valiant acts in the war, you're pathetic as a man."

More emotional damage coursed through me as I stared at the smiling Elf with a hurt expression.

'W-why? Why do you feel the need to do this?' I couldn't comprehend it.

"Then, maybe Maria? Or someone else you have back home?" She continued, looking at me with a curious gaze.

Women were hard to read when it came to stuff like this, and while my instincts were telling me she still had feelings for me, I wasn't arrogant enough to believe them.

'She has moved on. That's good.' I smiled, recovering from the battering words she had given earlier.

"None of them, Freya." I smiled slowly, looking at the young Elf beauty.

'To be honest, if I was to choose at this moment, it would be you...'

From a logical point of view, she was the best choice.

Not only were the others too young, but they didn't have too deep a connection to my past life.

Not only were the Elves close to the Fairies—by that, I meant Jane—Freya was also cousins with Lemi, my daughter.

Aurora and I had a history as well, and the Elf Kingdom was a way more conducive environment for me.

She was a perfect candidate.

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Chapter 513: Tough Call [Pt 2]

'I even saved her life, so she's bound to have a deep connection with me...'

However, that was simply based on my logical deductions.

Emotionally speaking, it was a different ball game entirely.

There was no way Aurora would let me get close to her daughter, considering what I did to Emilia in the past.

I couldn't even attempt something like that in good conscience.

'I don't want to hurt those I care about anymore...'

Maybe I had a thing for Elves, but there was a limit to my foolishness.

Since I couldn't guarantee any progress in a relationship, it was better to steer away from complicated romantic affairs.

"I see. Well, then... I guess I'll see you tomorrow. When you're leaving." She smiled.

It was somewhat distant, but I was in no position to point that out.

"Alright. Thank you." Upon saying that, I took my leave, refusing to turn back another time.

'Bye... Freya...'

"He's gone already, Lemi. You can come out now." Freya sighed.

Slowly, a Half-Elf popped out of the bushes, scattering leaves all around as she emerged.

Some of the green, pink, and yellow flora remained on her hair and she had to shake it vehemently to get rid of them all.

"Well, I guess our bet is null. None of us could get him in the end." Lemi murmured, drawing close to her cousin.

Both girls seemed to be doing well for a moment, even smiling at each other with passionate expressions.

However, a second later, their expressions told something else.

"FREYAAAAAAA!!!"

"LEMIIIII!!!"

Both girls jumped at each other in a tight embrace as they cried.

It was the first time they had been rejected. Considering their looks and status, no male Elf would dare reject their feelings.

Perhaps it was worse for Lemi, because this would be the first time she felt so invested in a man. Just when she thought of giving love a try, her heart was shattered into a million pieces.

"And I'll be having training with him for a while. How am I supposed to look at him?!" Lemi wept, rolling on the floor at this point.

"You think it's easy for me too? Mom is going to letting me handle a lot of delegate functions, which means I'll be seeing him often too. Ah, this sucks!!!"

The girls cried, even more, letting their pent-up frustration out.

It was a truly sad moment for the two lovely girls... and one could only hope that they found a genuine lover in the future.

At the very least, someone who wasn't scum... like Jared Leonard.

'I sensed Lemi hiding in the bushes back then. Was she listening to our conversation?'

The thought of the Half-Elf actually having feelings for me crossed my mind, but I instantly blew it away.

'NO WAY! DON'T THINK ABOUT IT!'

Lemi's face was exactly the same as my late wife, Emilia's.

Anytime I looked at her, I was reminded of the woman I loved. It felt as though Emilia was watching me.

'How can I think of something like that?!'

It was not only cringe, it was dangerous for me.

Merely having a thought of the both of us together... made me run mad internally.

'Another girl... my daughter, with my wife's face...' I shuddered.

I just couldn't imagine something like that.

NO WAY!

While there were lingering regrets concerning how I handled the situation with Freya, I could do nothing but move forward.

After all, the deed was done already.

'All that's left is Maria... and Ana.'

These two were the most difficult, but if I was to pick, I'd go for telling Maria first.

Maybe it was because she was close by, and it was best if I settled things before we got to the Eastern Empire.

'To be honest, I wish I could just send a rejection letter...' But that would be very rude of me.

Besides, unlike Freya who was very upfront about it, Maria never said anything about having feelings for me.

It was the same for Ana too.

'That means I'll have to reject them in a roundabout way... maybe tell the girls about my intended celibacy.'

With that in mind, I searched for Maria.

'Since I'm on a roll, I shouldn't waste this momentum!'

'How did it come to this?!'

I was currently in Maria's room. Yes, the room of the girl I was about to reject.

This was even a worse location, compared to the garden.

"You can sit there." She pointed to her bed, and I did so obediently.

'I'll be hurting her feelings. The least I could do is this...'

With that, I waited on her bed as she sat beside me.

It became a comfortable atmosphere once I adjusted to it, and the bed was quite nice too. The only problem was the watchful gaze of Maria on me.

It felt like she was staring widely at me, but I couldn't turn my head to meet her gaze.

Was it guilt, or...?

'Why is my heart beating so fast? This Maria...' I sighed internally, composing my thoughts as I slightly looked at her.

"So, what's the matter?" Her calm voice cascaded on me, causing steam to rise from my heated face.

'Stay calm, Jared! Look, the girl is calm!'

Maria was always calm. Her expression remained cool and collected at every moment.

Perhaps that was why I thought it would be easier to talk to her.

But, having those cool eyes look at me so causally when we were on her bed... it just gave me an unsettling feeling.

"I... have something to tell you." Having taken the first step, I decided to proceed without holding back.

'I've hurt enough women. I can't let my weakness get the better of me!' As that resolve coursed through me, my lips parted and words surged forth.

"T-the thing, is, Maria... I—"

"Hold on. I have something to say too... can I go first?"

As her words tickled my ears, I looked at her with surprise.

'Eh?'

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Chapter 514: Maria's Forwardness [Pt 1]

My eyes widened as I, for the first time, fully looked at Maria's face.

It looked sort of the same, but her cheeks were slightly flushed and her eyes were full of determination.

For some reason, due to the darkened ambiance of the room, she was looking far more mature than I initially thought.

'I guess she wants to confess.'

Was this good or bad? I wasn't sure.

But, if she was to confess at this moment, wouldn't it be easier for me to reject her? I mean, she was only sending signals before. It wasn't concrete enough to warrant a 'No'.

But now? If she expressed her feelings, I could just tell her the truth about mine.

'Alright. I'll let her go first.'

"Maria, you can—"

Before I finished, her hands slightly landed on my cheeks, caressing them slowly.

"You're hot..."

'Eh?' I initially didn't understand what she meant by that—or why she was touching me so intimately.

'Her hands are cold... and she's shivering a bit. Is she alright?'

I raised my hands to hold hers, definitely to remove them from my body before it was too late.

However—

"Your cheeks are so hot..." Maria moved closer to me.

"... Are you alright?"

Her face was too close, causing me to turn away, sharply causing her hands to fly away from me.

'Oh crap! Why does she have to go this far? Does she not realize what she's doing? As the adult here, I should put an end to this.'

"Actually, Maria, I—"

As gently as the breeze, yet as swift as lightning, Maria's lips landed on mine. It was too fast, and truly... I couldn't explain how I was unable to react to someone slower than me by every standard.

'W-wha—?!'

Maria kissed me, returning her hands to my cheeks as she pulled closer.

'N-no... I can't. This is wrong. I can't!'

My body was weakened for some reason, and I slowly throbbed as I raised my hand to push her away.

But, Maria must have seen this coming since the next thing she did was push me backward, causing my stiffened body to fall on the bed.

'N-no!'

Even though our lips detached, I felt in even more danger because of my new position. My eyes widened once they witnessed what came after my descent.

Swiftly, Maria positioned herself atop me and looked at me from her higher angle.

To be honest, she looked so attractive, and I could feel something rise from within and beneath me, but I focused squarely on what I had to do.

'You're terrible, Jared. What's wrong with you!'

"The truth is..." Her whisper was cool, and her wide eyes watched me without blinking even once.

"... I'm sixteen now. My birthday was a few days ago."

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

"That means I'm a legal adult..."

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

"So, even though going any further with you would be considered a sexual assault on my part, I..."

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

>THUMP!<

She drew her face closer and kissed me once more. At this point, my body didn't even offer any resistance, and I closed my eyes.

Her lips were warm, unlike her hands, and it would be the first intimate kiss I had in this new body.

Oh wait, my mom stole my first kiss. And second. And third.

That woman really went overboard.

But, when considering things romantically... Maria was my first.

"I like you, Jared," Maria whispered, detaching her lips from me, but she was still atop me on the bed.

"I know you don't feel the same about me now, but that's okay." She smiled, causing my heart to ache.

So, she knew! She knew about it, so why was she doing this?

"I don't plan on letting that stop me."

What was this? The look in her eyes was dangerous. I gulped and felt perspiration slowly surface on my glowing skin.

"I won't give up, Jared. I want us to be together... a-and w-we can get mari—I mean, together. So we can get together." It seemed like she stuttered at some point, but her confident expression told me she wasn't feeling the least bit anxious.

'But this... isn't it going too far?'

I was sweating at this point, and so was Maria.

Things were getting too steamy, but, for some reason... I didn't hate it.

"I won't force you to accept my feelings now, Jared. But, I'll be waiting. At least, when you complete what you have to do... I'll get your answer then."

Once again she smiled, and I felt her body rest on me.

"So, please... just remember this..."

Her face returned to a calm expression, making my heart beat faster, considering she could have such a reaction despite the situation.

"I have dibs."

Dibs? What? I didn't understand half of it, but it still made my body tingle.

"Understand?" Her soft voice danced in my ears.

I truly did not know when I nodded in response.

"Great." She finally let me go, returning to her side of the bed.

"Haaa... haaa..." My breathing was coarse, and I thought my mind would be driven to the edge of insanity.

'Crazy... Maria is crazy!' As I remained laid on the bed, those were the only thoughts that manifested in my mind.

"You said you wanted to say something. What's the matter, Jared?"

My body jumped when I heard her voice. Slowly glancing in her direction, I found her looking stoic, staring at me blankly.

It was almost as if nothing ever happened. If not for the sweat trickling down her body and mine, one would think we were just waiting in awkward silence.

"I... uh... I'll tell you next time."

"Oh, okay."

Logically speaking, I was supposed to outrightly reject her now.

But, after she had gone so far to express her feelings... there was no way I could do anything at this point.

Maybe it was bias, or simple nostalgia. After all, Emilia was the same with her forward approach.

I had a weakness for that sort of thing, and it didn't help matters that Maria was now a legal adult.

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Chapter 515: Maria's Forwardness [Pt 2]

The last strand of reason had snapped.

The gentle and calm girl I pictured turned out to be more aggressive than I expected.

There was no way a passive individual like me, at least when it came to romance, could win against her.

'I guess I'll just wait it out, then...'

Hopefully, by the time she realized how focused I was on Magic, she would let me go.

'Or, once the time is ripe, I'll tell her the same answer as I wanted to say today.'

It was cruel to let her wait for so long, but this was what she wanted.

'Still, what is this unsettling feeling I'm having? It's almost as if... I'll change my mind later on?'

Nah! That couldn't be it.

Magic had to be the only path I could dedicate myself to. There was no second-guessing it this time around.

"Ah, look at me, all sweaty. You're sweaty too..." Maria's voice rang in the air, bringing me back to reality.

"Y-yeah. I guess you're right."

"I have the perfect solution for this." She grabbed my hands and looked at me with the same stoic face that gave me shivers.

'No. No. No. Not again!'

"We should shower together."

"I'm sorry, I should get going now!" Before I could even consider the allure of that invitation, I rose to my feet and made my way to the door.

"I was just joking, Jared. Did you really consider it? Did you picture it in your head?"

'No! Stop it!' I mean, I did picture it... a little bit, but still.

I glanced at Maria, and her sweaty body suddenly had a certain attraction to it. It caused me to shut my eyes instantly.

"N-no way. I'm going now. Get ready for tomorrow."

"Sure. Take care of yourself."

Once she said that, I rushed out of the building and ran off.

'I can just teleport. Why am I running?!' My thoughts were jumbled, but once I came to myself I used Magic to leave the area faster.

It made me wonder why I didn't just teleport earlier when things were getting dangerous.

Could it be... that I actually wanted something to happen?

My brain shut down and I was just overcome by instinct? Me?

'Curse you, sweet adolescence!!!'

With that last thought, I vanished.

"D-did it work...?" Maria murmured to herself, looking a bit worried.

The truth was that, despite her very forward front, the girl was panicking inside.

Her heart was beating extremely fast, and throughout everything she put Jared through, her internal self was in a frenzy.

The reason for that was simple.

"I did as you said, Miss. Serah... but I'm not sure if it worked..."

Maria was advised to take this route by Serah Crimson herself.

Not only was the woman her mentor when it came to Magic, but the young girl currently looked up to her in love as well.

After Serah and Neron made a public display of affection on the battlefield, Maria had grown to respect her even more.

In her desperation, she had asked her mentor to show her the way.

Serah was overjoyed to teach the innocent girl, especially after she realized that Maria had now come of age.

"Don't worry, girl! I've got you covered!"

And so, the Grand Mage scripted the entire scenario for her protege.

That's right! Everything Maria did was not of her own free will.

She only acted in that manner because Serah had promised the guaranteed effects.

'I... Jared... what if he thinks I'm dirty, or lewd?'

Initially, Maria was against the plan, considering the role she had to play as the seductress.

But, once again, Serah encouraged her.

"Strong men love straightforward women. Jared is too dense to take these kinds of bold steps. It's up to you to do it! Believe in your mentor's words"

Maria had decided to trust Serah, so she went along with the plan.

Well, it wasn't all bad.

"His lips..." Maria rubbed her lips as she remembered how it felt to kiss Jared.

The entire moment was burned into Maria's head, and she replayed every scenario in her mind.

Maria couldn't help but feel so flushed with embarrassment.

"What have I done? What have I done? What have I done?"

What if Jared got freaked out and decided to distance himself from her?

It would be crazy.

'No, calm yourself, Maria.'

Why was she doubting the advice of her mentor?

Neron Kaelid and Jared Leonard had a lot in common, so the truck Serah used would also work on Jared... right?

Maria gulped and tightened her fist. Her expression displayed the resolve not to back down any longer.

'I was his first! I have dibs!'

Besides, this whole venture was so she could mark her territory on Jared.

Maria had ensured that she mixed her sweat with his as they rubbed bodies.

She also kissed him and breathed on his skin—all according to Serah's specifications.

'I've marked him as mine!'

Surely, Jared and every girl he would encounter after this event, would understand.

"I should shower now... I wonder if I smelled..." Maria didn't think she did, but how was she so certain of Jared's opinion?

The young girl rose from her bed and looked at the part where Jared had slept on. A portion of his sweat remained there.

After staring at it for some time, Maria made her decision.

'I'm taking this sheet back with me!'

She then went to freshen up in the bath. Replaying the scenes that just occurred in her mind, Maria licked her lips and submerged herself in the water.

"I can't get it out of my head!"

I was currently with Jane, in her office.

Aurora and Neron were present as well—being the only ones who knew of my identity as Lewis Griffith.

"Thinking about another girl this time? Jeez, how the mighty has fallen." Jane Ursula murmured, obviously dissatisfied with my behavior.

But, how could I help it? I was only human, after all.

"Okay, let's get back to topic," Neron said, his voice commanding enough presence to bring us back to the last discussion we would be having before parting.

"Yes. We've said many things already, but there's one thing I have to mention... and it's an alert I received not too long ago."

Everyone's eyes were on me, and to be honest, I was surprised by the current situation myself.

I knew it would happen eventually, but this was too soon.

"Damien Lawcroft is dead."

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Chapter 516: New Player

"Really? That's a surprise. Wasn't he supposed to be our beacon... or at least a clue to the rest of the Organization?"

The first to speak out of us four in the room was Aurora.

Perhaps because she was the most naive, or Elven innocence still clouded her thoughts.

"It wasn't guaranteed that he would bring concrete results, in the first place."

Damien Lawcroft was most likely a low-ranked member, and according to the hierarchy, he probably wasn't privy to a lot of information.

That made his value lessen in my eyes.

However, it was a different matter if Damien could lead me to another member of the Cult.

"If we could rope in more than one member, that would have been epic."

That was why I was very disappointed to notice his death.

"How did it happen?" Neron calmly asked.

"Well, I initially lost the visual and auditory functions of the tracking Magic I kept on him. Not long after, the Magic registered him as dead."

Whoever the culprit was, they were able to disable certain functions of the tracker, but they didn't completely nullify it.

Was it that they couldn't, or they simply chose not to?

I was overwhelmed with curiosity.

"Well, his last-recorded location is in the far Southeast—close to the edge."

I had sent a few Automatons there to confirm the status of Damien Lawcroft, and they were already on the scene.

>VWUSH<

A large window appeared before all four of us, displaying the footage that the Automaton captured, with Magic.

"This is..."

"Incredible..."

"Hmmm..."

As I stared hard at the sight on the screen, I couldn't help but feel an unsettling emotion, as well as a strong sense of foreboding.

Whoever the culprit was, it wasn't anyone I was keeping tabs on.

Was it the work of the Nether Cult? Maybe they wanted to silence Damien? I had thought that before seeing this footage.

However, I had no idea what to think at this point.

"Three corpses... and the attacker doesn't seem to be any of them," Neron murmured.

He wasn't wrong.

There were definite footsteps of the culprit leaving the scene, leaving the three dead people in his wake.

Damien Lawcroft was among the three mutilated corpses; alongside someone resembling a Fairy, and a Crimson Demon—surprisingly.

Of the three, Damien's body seemed the freshest. The other three appeared to have been dead for longer.

"The charred marks on the floor... they died by electric charges. That one, in particular, was scorched to death..." Neron pointed at the Crimson Demon.

I was surprised. None of these were within my expectations.

"Is it safe to assume that everyone in this footage has a connection to the Organization?"

"Most likely. But, we'll have to investigate the building thoroughly."

"If they're all a part of the organization, though, it begs a lot of questions."

"Yeah... for example, why is there a Fairy among them? or a Demon?" It was like Jane read my mind when she spoke.

We had previously assumed that the Organization was comprised of humans—since Damien and Legris were the members we had ever seen.

However, with this in sight, our whole logic about their group changed drastically.

"I'd recognize those wings anywhere, even if it's just fragments..." Jane continued, narrowing her eyes as she murmured.

Her wavering gaze told me she didn't want to say any more, so I didn't press the issue. It wasn't the most important matter at the moment, anyway.

Besides, I could read her thoughts whenever.

"A Crimson Demon, uh? Demons are also members? If that's the case, why would they agree to the plan of using their entire race as bait?"

The whole reason why the Demons were vanquished was because of the Organization. If a member of that Race was affiliated with them, it meant he was also complicit in the plan.

"He must not have had any attachments to his people."

It was the same with Damien Lawcroft—how he was satisfied with selling out the Eastern Kingdom for more power and authority.

"Damien's death was unprecedented, but it wasn't a total loss."

At least, this way, we understood more of what we were dealing with. The enemies were more diverse than I initially thought.

Still, this new player troubled me even more. Who was the mystery person, and what were their intentions?

"Are they hunting the Organization Members? Or maybe they're a rogue member. Either way, the individual must have some degree of power, considering three powerful beings have been killed so one-sidedly." Neron spoke, narrowing his gaze.

Though we couldn't be certain that the person in question didn't receive any injuries, the bodies of the corpses showed they were merciless in their methods of killing the Organization Members.

It simply showed the kind of brutality the stranger possessed.

"I'll do some investigation on my end. Bottom line is, we should all be careful."

My instincts were telling me that things were going to get very dangerous from this point onward, and I didn't like the feeling that there was a powerful player somewhere that was not within my knowledge.

"At this point, the Organization is our primary target... but they might not be our only enemy," I said, and everyone nodded.

To be safe, and also to achieve complete victory, it was best to return to the drawing board and perfect my strategy.

My last encounter with Legris had shown me just how far behind I was.

'I lack too much information. That means I'm at a disadvantage...'

But, if things went according to plan, the tables would soon change.

"Ah, I forgot to ask because of the surprising situation, but Jane..." I stared at my Fairy friend.

"How's the progress concerning Soul Project: Omega?"

She shrugged at my question, so that meant it was moving steadily.

"It will take some months before we reach optimal performance, but it's going smoothly for now. It would help if we worked on this side by side."

As much as I would love that, many other things demanded my attention.

"Maybe another time."

>VWUUUSHHH<

Creating a portal that linked me to the scene of carnage, I prepared to depart from everyone in the room.

"I guess I'll see everyone in the Kingdom. Till then."

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

Chapter 517: The Castaway

[Hours Earlier]

"Haa... this is so frustrating!" Damien Lawcroft growled as he walked through the dry forest.

It had been a week since his humiliating defeat at the hands of Jared Leonard, and he was still not over the loss.

Still, he was smart enough to know when to retreat and when to retaliate.

At this point, it was time for the former.

"I better stay low-key..."

It was for this very reason that Damien had not made any noticeable move all week. He no longer had any influence, and his network had been cut off thanks to Jared's plan.

The man had no idea what his enemies were planning, so he trod carefully.

'I had a feeling they would have found my base, so I decided to teleport to my auxiliary safe zone.' White fog escaped his nose and mouth as he exhaled the cold air.

It was quite cold in the SouthEastern edge of the world, but not unbearably so.

Damien's Original Magic worked like a switcheroo. He could exchange positions with any object he had marked.

Of course, depending on the distance needed to be covered, it took a great deal of Mana.

Still, when it came to escape or even combat, it was a very handy ability to have.

That was the only reason he was able to escape, after all.

"I can see it. It's in view." Damien smiled, finally emerging from the thickets and dried branches that surrounded him.

He had finally reached his destination—The Base assigned to him by the Organization.

"I waited a week before coming here, waiting for the heat to die down..." However, from the looks of things, they never found out about the existence of this place.

That was perfect.

Every member of the Twelve Seats had territories assigned to them, as well as their Base.

Not only could the Bases connect to one another, but they also had camouflage functions, Magic defenses, and several assault functions.

It was a state-of-the-art structure that was said to be designed by one of the members of their Organization.

His name was Beruel—an Upper Seat, or so Damien heard.

'Let's get this over with.'

He needed to contact a colleague as soon as possible.

Now that he was compromised, he needed to report the details of what he knew to the Organization. Surely, the information in his possession still guaranteed his value to them.

Damien had no idea what happened to the Demons since he had been isolated for a week, but they were most likely vanquished.

With their demise, it was clear that the Organization needed more allies—especially someone who had a close encounter with the enemy that caused the Demon side to lose.

Damien smiled, intending to leverage on this to once again solidify his position among their ranks.

'They can't kick me out! I won't allow it!'

Since his position in the Eastern Kingdom was practically nonexistent, the Organization was all he had.

'I've been trying to reach that bastard, Legris, but he's not responding!' Damien gritted his teeth.

For a moment, he considered the fact that the Organization had turned its back on him, but after approaching the Base and realizing that he was still recognized as a member, Damien's worries dissipated.

The Base in question looked like a cabin from the exterior—but it had a much bigger space within.

Usually, no one would be able to spot it—or even get close to the thing. However, since it was Damien's Base, his Magic resonated with the building, allowing him entry.

The cabin door creaked open and he gently made his way inside.

Damien did not bother to look around for caution, considering that he was assured of the Base's functions.

Once inside, Damien took in the warm atmosphere surrounding him.

He first appeared in the reception area, and then he could spot the stairs leading to the bedroom from where he stood.

'Haa... this is much better.'

His backup structure was nothing this grandiose.

The interior of the base was impeccably tidy and beautiful.

The lacquer walls seemed fresh—forever preserved so by Magic. The Carpets appeared brand new, the same as every furniture around.

Damien would have loved to rest or take in the sight even more, but there was something more urgent that warranted his attention.

"I had better contact someone."

Since Legris was the 9th Seat, and he was the 10th, it was protocol that Damien contacted him first.

However, Legris had somehow blocked off all contact with him, making that route impossible.

'I'll just jump straight to the 8th Seat, then!' With this in mind, Damien moved to the center of the room and pressed his hand on the floor.

A large Magic Circle manifested, glowing purple as if warbled with ominous intensity.

>BZZZTTTTZZZZ<

Suddenly, the Circle crackled and buzzed, deactivating soon after.

"W-wha—?! Why didn't it work?"

Damien had never experienced this issue, so he was somewhat surprised by what was going on.

'Did they really cut me off...?' Sweat began to appear on the middle-aged man's face.

"I should try agai—"

"Don't bother." A voice echoed in Damien's ear, causing him to jump in shock.

>VWUUUSHHH<

Transforming into his Mage Mode while Fusing with his Familiar, Damien took on a dark blue glow and donned a Mage outfit while holding a crooked wand.

He pointed his sole weapon in the direction of the voice, wary of the stranger that invaded his haven.

"I've been waiting for you for a while now. Say, a week? It's a good thing you're here now..." The voice was calm, and the clacking of a person's shoes echoed.

Damien could feel his body shaking despite being in a powerful state.

'I can't do this! I'll just run!' Instinct caused the prideful man to activate his Original Magic, aiming to flee.

However—

"I don't think so."

>BZZZTTTTZZZZ<

Instantly, the effects of whatever Magic Damien wanted to cast became null. No, it was more like the man didn't have access to it any longer.

"W-what did you...? Who are you?!"

As Damien was still wondering who the mysterious person was, two bodies plopped on the ground.

They looked familiar, yet the devastated state of their bodies caused Damien to fake a few moments before recognizing them.

'12th Seat and 11th Seat?!'

What could this mean? They were both dead—brutally so at that.

"Who the hell are you?!" Damien Lawcroft raised his voice once again.

"You're so noisy. Be quiet."

Just as the voice sounded, the flustered man realized he couldn't utter a single word.

His lips couldn't move, causing his eyes to widen in shock.

"Mmph!" Taking a sudden step backward, Damien accidentally tripped, forcing him to get a closer view of the corpses of his previous colleagues.

That was when the emotion he had been trying to push down finally erupted.

FEAR!

"MMMMPPHHHHH!!!"

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Chapter 518: Golden Emergence

The clacking of shoes sounded, and an individual finally appeared from the shadows.

He had a wide smile on his face, and the cool demeanor he exuded was befitting of someone of his caliber.

Even the aura that oozed out of him made Damien realize that he was special.

"You know, it makes sense that you're one of them..." His voice was calm.

Even though his golden eyes stared coldly at Damien's pathetic form, the person's smile didn't fade.

The young man's golden hair swayed, a portion of his face covered by it.

His outfit resembled a traveler, but they were all extremely well-made Magic Items—befitting of royalty.

"... I never liked you very much back then too."

'Y-you—!!!' Damien's eyes seemed to ring out as he looked upon the face of a boy he recognized.

The most exceptional student he had ever seen in his Instructing days at Ainzlark... Kuzon Midas!

"Well, now that you've performed your role well, there's no further reason to keep you alive."

"MMMMPPHH!!!" Damien struggled to speak, realizing that his life would come to an end if he didn't say anything.

"Looks like you want to say something. Alright then, speak."

"Puah! T-thank you very much for—"

"Speak."

The young man's eyes narrowed further. It was condescending beyond description, but Damien didn't have the luxury of complaining.

"A-ah, why don't you spare me? You're after the Organization, right? I-I can help you. They betrayed me too. They used and threw me away. I have no loyalty to them. I help you. So... what do you say?"

It was a classic betrayer move, but Damien had run out of choices.

His Original Magic didn't work, and, for some reason, his entire body couldn't move. His only chance of survival was for—

"Pfft. You're so pathetic, it's hilarious."

Damien had expected some resistance, but not this.

"I don't know which is funnier. Your desperate desire to live, or how ignorant you are."

Damien's fear was temporarily disabled by an entitled rage that he felt anytime he was looked down upon.

"You didn't realize this, but someone put a tracker on you—most likely to trace your location. If I have to guess, I'll say it's Jared's work. It could also be Neron's, but I'd still go for the former."

"W-wha—?!" Damien's rage was completely submerged in an ocean of shock.

"Look at your face. You're so stupid, aren't you?"

Damien didn't understand how anyone could have placed a tracker on him without his knowledge.

'H-how...?'

"Don't worry, though. I disabled it. There's no need to get those people involved in my business."

Damien was still trying to comprehend how he had been hoodwinked when a hand suddenly tapped his shoulder.

It was Kuzon's.

The young man was squatting, placing a hand on his shoulder which brought about a greater degree of pressure.

A portion of Kuzon's face was covered by his golden hair, so only one of his eyes could be seen by Damien.

It was... so cold and condescending.

"You're wrong about so many things. My intentions, and your worth."

There was something Kuzon hadn't told anyone.

His true motives, the reason he had killed two members of the Organization, and was about to kill another—without any shred of remorse.

It was all because of a certain man—a member of the Cult that he had been after since forever.

Of course, he wasn't going to tell Damien the details. Still...

"Let me ask you this. If you answer well, I could let you live."

Damien gulped. Despite the fear squirming within him, he wasn't going to miss this opportunity he had to live.

"Do you know anyone by the name of Kido?"

'Uh?' Damien Lawcroft was clueless.

Was he supposed to know the individual? He had thought his assaulter would ask him a question about the Organization, but he simply asked about a person.

"I see... you don't know him, uh? Figures. You're just a 10th Seat."

>BZZTZZZ<

Flashes of golden lightning began manifesting all over Kuzon—and then they started extending to his hand.

"N-no... please no! I can help you! I can find him for you if you want. Please, just don't—!!!" Damien began pleading desperately, feeling the absurd concentration of Mana in the flashes of lightning coating Kuzon's body.

"Find him for me? Heh..." The golden lightning finally reached the hand that held Damien's shoulder.

"... I've been doing that for 12 years now."

>ZZZZZZTTTTZZZZZZZ<

"GUARRRRHHHHH!!!"

Lightning sizzled, burning through Damien's body in an instant.

Thigh death came nearly instantly, the pain Damien felt before death was the most agonizing type he had ever experienced.

It was like every cell in his body ruptured—exploding like tiny fireworks.

And then—

>THUD<

—Damien Lawcroft met his end.

"Weak. He didn't even last five seconds..." Despite the man's enhancements that came with using Mage Mode and Fusion Mode, he was still powerless before absolute power.

"He's dead now. I might as well leave for the next location. I should at least thank him for showing me the coordinates."

Kuzon rose to his feet, his golden hair fluttering as he coldly walked past the corpse.

He had killed three members thus far, but it was nowhere close to his desired estimate.

"If this is how powerful a 10th Seat is, then Kido has to have one of their highest ranks—if not the highest..."

That was how powerful his prey was.

"Well, it seems Jared will be coming here to investigate soon. For some reason, he's also after their Organization, uh?"

Kuzon didn't care enough to question Jared's reasons, so he simply shrugged and generated another flash of lightning.

"The whole war with the Demons and the Nether Cult moving in the shadows, I've had enough of it..." With a sigh, the blast of lightning grew larger, enveloping Kuzon's immediate surroundings.

>VWUUUUUSHHHHH<

With a final statement echoing in the room...

"As long as he doesn't get in my way... it's all good."

... Kuzon vanished.

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Chapter 519: The Cult's Assembly [Pt 1]

"It's been a while, hasn't it?"

The voice that echoed in the air was friendly and jovial—almost playful, even.

However, the dreary silence that pervaded the room was unchanging.

The massive room was not as one would expect the headquarters of a cult to be. It was exquisitely designed, having chandeliers, and a lovely white design.

Murals and runes were drawn all over the wall, ceilings, and floors, granting it a very distinguished aura.

In this large hall—an expanse that couldn't naturally be measured by normal means since it was configured with Magic—a large table was set.

The table had six chairs on the right and left sides respectively and then at the forefront was a more prestigious seat belonging to someone else—someone greater.

Not all the seats were occupied, but a majority were taken.

The right end had all their members intact, but only two members occupied the six seats that were laid out before the table.

And, of course, each seat was labeled.

That was because this organization was strictly hierarchical. Even though it might have seemed like they valued equality—due to their arrangement—it was far from it.

Those at the right end were known as the Upper Seat Members, while the ones at the left were the Lower Seats.

Even then, their ranks were divided into twelve—the first six belonging to the former while the lower ones had the latter title.

All in all, the right and left-end members all had this knowledge, and so those who were superior relished that fact.

Then, what about the one who sat at the forefront? The man who occupied what seemed like a throne?

What sort of rank did he have?

"Indeed. I welcome you all." The leader's voice permeated the room.

His tone, while young, carried enough power to drive the room into perfect decorum.

Unlike the others on respective sides, he sat at the middle front, and while he looked younger than the rest of them—with the exception of one—his power and immense knowledge commanded the respect of everyone who listened to him.

Standing directly beside him was a beautiful maiden. She looked pure, and was garbed in silk white.

The lady had a constant smile on, and looked like a woman in the flower of her youth.

In any meeting they had with the Leader, he always had this lady accompany him, and while she seemed quite harmless, no one could dispute the chills she gave off.

Her power was probably in another realm as well.

"I have called you here, ten days after concluding the Demon Incursion Plan, for a few matters that warrant discussion."

"As you are well aware, we've gathered 10 of the Arcanas. Thanks to the War, we were able to secure a few, and now we know of the locations of yet five others. Our goals are now within sight."

Everyone nodded.

It was common knowledge that they had orchestrated things behind the scenes to achieve the best result.

Thanks to their inconspicuous efforts, things had worked out perfectly.

"Due to the achievements of one of our members in the events, who executed the task with absolute perfection, I have decided to promote him."

Even though no one spoke, they knew who was being referred to.

"Legris Damien, you may rise."

At that moment, one of the only two people who was seated on the left side was called forth.

He had dark brown hair and a smile plastered on his face.

"I believe no one needs to be told the endless list of his achievements. From initiating the War, to retrieving The Devil Arcana. We've benefitted a lot from this venture, so it's only appropriate to reward him for his efforts." With that said, the leader beckoned Legris to step forward.

The lanky man obeyed and moved away from his seat, drawing close to the young one. Once Legris got a few inches further from him, he finally stopped.

"The Arcana." The Leader stretched forth his hands.

His black hair and dangerously gleaming reddish purple eyes rang of danger and malevolence.

Even though he looked unassuming, everyone in their right mind knew not to underestimate his authority.

"Here it is." Legris smiled, bringing forth the card he retrieved ten days ago.

"[The Devil]... yet another piece." The young man smiled, looking at the card glimmer in Legris' grasp.

"The Magician. The Lovers. The Star. The Empress. Death. The Papess. The Chariot. Justice. Temperance..."

Those were the ones that had been secured already. Adding The Devil to the mix, that made a total of ten Arcanas in their grasp.

"The time is near—" The moment he reached out to touch the item, the Leader paused his statement. His body shook a bit, and then he regained his composure.

"Legris... what happened to the Arcana before you recovered it? Was there prior contact?"

"No. I took it from the source."

"Hmmm... this is a problem."

Everyone looked at the leader to see what the problem was. He was never one to overreact, so that meant a serious issue had surfaced.

"I can clearly sense someone's Mana clinging to that Arcana. It has been altered in some way."

"Mana? What in the—?!" At this point, even Legris was stunned.

"Do it." The leader turned to the woman beside him, and she bowed upon hearing his orders.

>VWUUUSHHH<

Covering the Arcana in a surge of light, she seemed to have completely purified the Card of any effects that caused the leader displeasure.

"It looks alright now." With that, the exchange went on seamlessly.

Legris handed over the Arcana, apologizing profusely for his mistake.

"It appears someone has been listening in to our conversation through the Magic planted on the retrieved Arcana. You've made a blunder, Legris."

"I apologize. Please punish me as is deemed fit." The older man bowed.

Though he appeared extremely nervous on the surface, Legris Damien's heart was racing at an abnormal rate due to some other emotion.

'Jared Leonard... you got me!'

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Chapter 520: The Cult's Assembly [Pt 2]

Legris couldn't help but shake in excitement.

He had thought he pulled one over Jared Leonard, yet the boy managed to surprise him yet again.

'He really pulled it off... he tricked me again.'

That was what made the kid so interesting... but also dangerous.

"This was the work of the Singularity, no? Why did you not kill him back when you had the chance?"

At this point, the Cult Leader was glaring at Neron.

Everyone knew that Singularities were extremely dangerous to the Cult, regarded as threats that had to be purged.

Of course, lower members like Legris didn't know very much, but the upper echelons had a better idea why.

For him to have had Jared Leonard in his grasp, yet did nothing to kill him... it was highly irresponsible and suspicious.

"I couldn't kill him. He'd just teleport away. Besides, any further time I wasted deliberating the matter would be disadvantageous for me. For all I know, he could have been contacting Neron Kaelid."

What Legris said made sense. If it came to that, then he was justified not to launch any assault.

Still, though...

"Very well. I'll accept your excuse. I am disappointed, though. Despite your great achievements, you've made a blunder that has cost us some leaks in information."

Jared Leonard had heard a portion of their conversation, making him privy to confidential Intel.

The very existence of the Cult—as well as its location—was in jeopardy.

"We could use this to our advantage, so I won't be punishing you. I'll be limiting your promotion, though."

"Thank you for showing mercy." Legris bowed emphatically.

"It's fine. Let's get this over with."

The leader looked at the seven people who were seated before him—six from the upper cadre, and one from the lower one.

Since he sought to promote Legris, who was the 9th Chair, it only made sense that he made it meaningful enough.

"I will be promoting Legris Damien to the Sixth Seat."

"Wha—?!" A silent shriek leaked out, but was instantly quelled.

It belonged to none other than the occupier of the Sixth Seat himself.

"You know what to do, Reed Sterling."

An old man, Reed Sterling himself, rose from his seat and shamefully left the right side of the table.

It was obvious what would happen once someone else took his rank. He would be demoted to one seat below him.

As such, the old man was now the Seventh Seat.

"There's no need to return your Arcana. Since we have a sufficient amount, every member will wield one of them." The Leader turned to Legris and permitted him to return to his seat.

Legris, now an Upper Seat member, moved to his new position in a gentle stride.

He gave a sly smile to the previous occupant of his seat, and then glanced slightly at the young boy who occupied the seat higher than his.

It was a familiar face that wasn't going to wear out anytime soon.

"Now, then, to another issue that warrants our discussion... it concerns your nephew, Kido."

This time, all the focus was placed on the golden-haired man in the room.

He had a carefree aura around him, and his playful smile matched the youthful glow he exuded.

Even though a few were inclined to be serious during meetings, his disposition never changed in the slightest.

But, almost no one could caution him. After all, he was...

"I apologize about that. He's probably still looking for me after all these years."

... The Second Seat Of The Cult.

"He must miss me so much." Kido's golden earrings dangled as he shook his head while sighing.

His sarcasm was met with silence, and then shortly after, the leader continued.

"Your nephew killed four of our members. I would think that it has escalated beyond your little family feud."

"It's not my fault they were easy to kill off. They're weak, you know?"

"I agree to the latter, but not the former. They were weak, but it's your responsibility to take care of family... isn't it?"

"Sigh, you're right..."

"Great. Then, nip him in the bud as soon as possible. Of course, that's when you have free time. You'll be required for a new assignment soon."

"Forgive me for saying this, but is that really okay? Four of our members are gone because of his irresponsibility, and we're just going to let it slide?" Another Upper Seat member spoke.

If not for his pronged ears, he would have been recognized as a human. But, how could he be an Elf when he had beautiful wings glimmering behind him?

Yes, this was none other than the Fourth Seat Member of the Cult—Fairy King Beruel.

"Hm? What's the matter for concern? They can be replaced, can't they?" Kido responded with a nonchalant tone.

"You... one of the people killed was my right-hand man! Sure, he was only the 12th Seat, but he deserved the protection of this Organization!" Beruel banged his hand on the table.

He was fuming as his long, silver hair flowed behind him.

"Welp. Sorry about that, but... he ded! Hahaha!" Kido laughed, once again insensitive to the pain he caused the Fairy King—no, to the Cult as a whole.

"You basta—"

"That's enough. You men just keep arguing. I'm sick of it. Can we just proceed to the meeting? I was in the middle of some research." The member at the center sharply spoke, already reaching her limit as the one clustered between the two warring parties

"Oh, sorry about that Karlia. Didn't mean to disturb you. If I stop, will you promise to—?" Kido sharply turned his gaze to the crimson Succubus beside him.

Her sultry attire was captivating, and her figure was enthralling—to say the least.

She was none other than the Third Seat Of The Cult—Karlia The Demon Succubus.

"Nope. Never ask me that again." She scoffed, pouting as she folded her arms with resolve.

No matter how anyone sliced it, she still looked cute despite feigning annoyance.