

SPELLCRAFT 601

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

Chapter 601: The Draconic Warrior

"N-no way... it's you!"

As Asa observed the being's appearance, especially his face, he had no doubt in his mind as pertaining to this stranger's identity

There was no way someone like him would be forgotten by the young boy.

"Y-you... you're Lord Vaizer, aren't you! Vaizer the Azure Dragon Of Crimson!"

Upon hearing this statement, the horned man stopped in his tracks and observed Asa. A smile crept up on his face instantly.

"Oh? It seems I have yet to be forgotten by my people."

Asa couldn't believe his eyes. He was standing before a legend... one who was said to be unrivaled before his father became Beast King.

An invincible Beast King in his own right... Vaizer the Draconic Warrior!

"T-this is Vaizer?" A hushed voice proceeded from Aloe's lips as she stared at Asa, and then at Maro.

If Asa was right, and the men indeed responded to that name, it would mean his identity was the former Beast King. However, that would also mean...

"... He's a member of the Cult."

Asa snapped from his awe and glanced to his side. He noticed his comrades glaring at the one known as Vaizer, and it also started to dawn on him too.

"A-ah, sorry guys." The boy muttered, flushed with slight embarrassment.

"Hahahaha! It looks like you know already. Very good. It makes this much easier and less awkward."

Once the Beastfolk before them erupted in laughter, the three had to give all their attention to him.

Not only because of the dangerous energy he emitted, but because of the dangerous task he must have been entrusted with... the Arcanas.

"Just give it up. You can't win." He, having noticed their hesitance, responded with a wide grin.

His sharp teeth went on display, and a very bloodlusted gleam flashed from his eyes. Anyone could tell he meant business.

His sudden appearance, the immediate execution of their clones, and now his demand. It was plain to the three at this point.

"He's the one, all right. What should we do, Maro?" Aloe glanced at her most reliable partner when it came to these things.

However—

"I... urgh..."

"Maro!"

The man collapsed. Fortunately, Aloe had noticed sooner, and she was fast enough to catch him.

She swiftly held his body, feeling it shiver in her grasp.

'He... I see, the Mana Pressure.' Her eyes widened upon realization.

Maro was the weakest among everyone in the room, in terms of Mana quality and Magic ability.

'Why didn't I realize sooner?' The young woman bit her lip slightly.

"He fell rather quickly. Just how weak is he, to be affected by my Mana Pressure already?" Vaizer's response angered Aloe, but she maintained her cool.

Placing the man's body on the ground, she covered him with Light Magic. Not only would her Mana protect Maro from the adverse effects of the pressure, but it would allow him to recuperate.

"I don't know why you bother with dregs like that. He's weak, you know? I can sense that you're strong, at least. Why waste time on someone like tha—?"

"Would you shut up, please?" Aloe Vida's lips curled up in a dangerous smile, and her eyes sharply glared at the draconic beastfolk.

It felt like she was slowly snapping, and Asa beside her could also sense the same thing. The look in her eyes made it obvious—so much so that it scared the young one.

'Miss Vida is upset. I've never seen her upset.'

The young lady stepped forward, her focused eyes remaining on her target.

"You're a feisty one. Very well. I also believe in letting abilities do the talking, however..." Vaizer's eyes narrowed as his grin widened.

"... I can promise you loss of you fight with me. You're not strong enough to—"

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

In a flash—literally—Aloe lunged at her opponent.

Light surged from her body as she transcended the barriers of normal speed. With her fist thrust to give a deafening punch, she poured her Mana and—

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The environment echoed in shock, sending the echoes of the impact flying all around. The shockwaves devastated the area of impact—ice shattered and broke apart like rocks.

"Haha, see? Not strong enough!" Vaizer's voice surged through the air as he caught her blow with ease.

Even if his surrounding quaked due to the pressure, he seemed completely fine. He hadn't even budged from his position in the slightest.

"I gave you your warning. Now... it's time to make good on my word."

"Y—"

Vaizer made his move—much faster than Aloe could perceive—and sent his blow flying in her direction.

In one swift attack, he aimed to blow her head apart, killing her instantly.

"Die."

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

A sudden gust appeared beside him, and his body was slowly enveloped in thick ice.

"Huh?"

Fortunately, this distraction allowed Vida to break free, quickly retreating backwards.

>SHWOOSHH<

She seemingly teleported back to her previous position, only to meet Asa appearing from thin air as he undid his invisibility.

"Thanks for back there." She whispered to him.

Of course, Aloe meant what happened to Vaizer earlier. Asa had a specialty of using Ice and Water Magic. Sure, he was a Beastfolk, and they generally didn't utilize Magic.

However, after Jared had observed his talents and the special Null ability in his possession, he decided to teach him some Magical arts.

Fortunately, he had an affinity for it.

"No problem. But you have to be very careful, Miss Vida. This one... he's very strong." The person Asa was referring to was Vaizer, who simply stood still and broke apart the ice that seemingly chained him down.

If the boy hadn't used his Null to blend with the surroundings and attack Vaizer, there was no way he could have succeeded.

'He won't be so easy to catch next time.' Asa also thought.

Things had just gotten much more difficult.

"I'm sorry... it's because of my selfishness that—"

"Miss Vida, please stop." Asa gave a slight frown.

For a moment, the young lady was stunned. It had been a while that Asa had shown her this face.

'... Asa?'

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Chapter 602: Burning Rage

"The one at fault is that guy. Former Beast King or not... he's the enemy." Asa's hand was pointed at Vaizer, but his gaze was still on Aloe.

Intense emotions surged from him. Both agitation and excitement. Slowly, a smile crept up on his face.

"Let's stop him together."

Silence proceeded the boy's proposition, but not for long. After all, the emotion he gave off was infective.

Aloe tapped the boy's shoulder and gave a sweet smile of appreciation. It would seem she was back to her normal self.

With a gleam of delight in her eyes, and her confident grin spread all over her face, she faced their opponent.

"You're right. We'll have to do this without Maro, but..."

"Yeah..."

Appearing to be like mother and child, but now partners in the same cause, Aloe and Asa stood side by side, staring at Vaizer like predators.

"Let's take him down hard."

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

The ground beneath the two shattered as they launched themselves at the previous Beast King.

He stood, transfixed to his positions, but his eyes trailed their every movement. To normal people, they must have been imperceivable, but they weren't much fast to him.

>WHOOOOOMMMM!!!<

Both, from the left and right, sent powerful hits at Vaizer, but he caught them instantly. He sighed, thinking there was no point to the challenge.

However—

"Uh?!"

The one called Asa slipped past him and instantly appeared underneath him, freezing his body more.

"What are you—??"

Before Vaizer could say another word, flashes of light appeared above him, sending down rains of Light Spears.

"Ah..."

With ice impeding his movement and destructive light darting at him, there was a deadlock he couldn't escape.

"... Are you mocking me right now?"

At least, that was what they thought.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

A burst of blue light sent everything in Vaizer's path flying away. The indescribable surge of power blew Aloe away, sending her crashing among the icicles that hung from the ceiling.

"Miss Vida!" Asa, unaffected by the blast due to his Null state, swiftly ran away from his opponent.

"Pathetic." Vaizer gave his verdict.

The young boy was still in his Null state, so the draconic beastfolk couldn't see or sense him.

However, having felt the ice attack cease, he determined that the boy went after his partner. The weak banding together with the weak... it truly was pathetic to him.

As for Asa, he ran to the site of the crash until he saw Asa slowly descend from the debris and destruction.

"I'm fine, Asa. Thanks for worrying."

Asa reappeared, nodding with a smile as she returned to his side.

"You were right. He's tough. Looks like I'm going all out."

It didn't seem like there was any other option at this point.

'He has a great deal of Mana. His physical abilities also exceeds mine...'

The only advantage they had was that Vaizer was unable to use Magic, making him susceptible to it.

"It is said that he's a Martial Arts master, though." Asa interrupted Aloe's thoughts, almost as though he read her mind.

"A-ah, thanks for that."

A true Martial master could match a skilled Mage. Jared had once told them that, so Vida took it into consideration.

Things looked much more difficult once she made that consideration.

"How did your father beat him then?"

So far, he seemed very powerful. It would be nice if they knew a weakness of his.

"I... father told me he just beat the hell out of him. He was weaker than him. That was all." Asa whispered.

While possessing immense skill in Martial Arts was important, a person with far greater power could simply blow you away in one shot. That was how Gerard had beaten Vaizer.

He was simply far stronger.

"Interesting subject you have going on there." Vaizer's voice echoed from where he stood, and he slowly began approaching Asa and Aloe.

"Bringing up Gerard... the brat I lost against. He's still the Beast King, right? I wonder how much stronger he's gotten..."

The moment Asa heard this, his face instantly morphed into that of rage.

"Shut up! As if you're not aware that he's dead! You people blew up our city!"

"Eh? Really?" Vaizer's face morphed into that of surprise.

He stopped dead in his tracks, and the look in his eyes showed genuine shock.

"He's dead? What kind of joke is that?"

This surprise—whether fake or real—just enraged Asa even more.

"Joke? You dare call it that? Your Cult blew us all up, and you're acting surprised like you didn't know!" Asa was seething with pure anger at this point.

His family, everyone he ever loved had been snuffed out in an instant. All thanks to the Nether Cult, no doubt. Yet... yet...!

"Relax, Asa. Jared never exactly confirmed that the swordsman was from the Cult." Aloe tried pacifying the boy.

"B-but, who else could it be? They're the only ones with a grudge or whatever!" Asa was slowly getting calmer, but the anger in his eyes remained.

"Did you say just a swordsman? He took out your City?" Vaizer's eyes narrowed, and he appeared to be in thought for a while.

Aloe felt a bead of sweat fall from her chin as she tried to imagine ways which they could use to ensure victory.

"Did the swordsman have long auburn hair, by any chance? Long auburn hair and a blue dress?"

"H-how do you—? Yes... if you mean a kimono, then yes. Seems like you know him. So the perpetrator was from the Cult, after all." Aloe Vida spoke, trying her best to observe the opponent and his surroundings

What she noticed, however, was an ever-growing frown on his face.

"I... wanted to fight Gerard again. I wanted to crush him this time. With my newfound power, I was going to crush him in front of everyone." Vaizer whispered.

The burning gaze in his eyes only seemed to strengthen as his piercing gaze took in both Aloe and Asa.

"To think 'he' got to do that first... damn it!" True anger spread across Vaizer's countenance.

Though the reason behind his rage was questionable, he was just as—if not more—angry as Asa had been.

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Chapter 603: Clash Of Will

"This is frustrating... so frustrating..."

Vaizer began recoiling from the terrible news he heard, not even focusing on his foes as he had been doing since the fight began.

'Now's my chance!' Aloe's thoughts snapped.

She didn't know how long it would last, and if Asa could keep up with her speed, so she decided to go solo.

'Pour as much Mana as I can... condense it... I only need one strike!' Aloe prepared herself.

The heat emanating from her body melted the surrounding ice and golden flashes sprang forth from her crouched form.

Before long—

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

Moving as the fastest thing in existence, light itself, Vida coated herself with the golden energy and traveled to Vaizer with such speed and pressure that everything around her shattered.

The ice broke apart, melting in the process. The wind pressure pushed Asa back, causing a storm brewing in her wake.

As concerned as she was, she did not have the luxury of turning back or being distracted for even the slightest second.

Her mission took utmost priority.

>VWOOOOOOOSSSSSHHHH<

With the pressure she built from traveling with such speed, as well as the highly concentrated Mana she had condensed on her palm, the brave young woman prepared for her strike.

"Hey..."

'Huh?' Vaizer's voice danced in her ears, and her body suddenly trembled.

Her unshakable, unwavering action, found pause.

"... I'll be killing you now."

Aloe realized that if she got any closer to the opponent, it would prove extremely deadly. No, it was perhaps too dangerous already.

She needed to step away... and fast!

'Those eyes are filled with bloodlust. I can't...' Once again, Aloe's defensive instinct kicked in, and she found herself retreating back to Asa's position.

She lost her chance.

"Damnit..." The young lady whispered, glancing at an oblivious Asa.

For all he knew, she had only flickered for a moment. That was how fast she just went.

"You made the right choice. I would have killed you if you stepped closer. But, it doesn't matter. All you've done is prolong your life for a few more seconds." Vaizer declared.

Asa still didn't understand what was happening, but his glare remained toward Vaizer.

"This news has greatly saddened me. I have something I need to do now, so I'll be ending the both of you quickly. Hopefully the Arcana appears after that..."

Aloe knew their opponent meant no joke. They had to give it their all now.

"Mage Mode. Fusion Mode. Original Magic." Aloe murmured, transforming instantly.

Asa infused his Mana around his body, granting himself heightened abilities. Unfortunately, he wasn't in water, so his aquatic form couldn't help much in this situation.

However, with his current state and the Null form he now manifested, he could at least put up a fight.

As for Aloe, she now took on the appearance of a goddess—similar to a blinding sculpture of golden brilliance. This, of course, was the consequence of using her Mage Mode and Fusion Mode.

A Special Grade Mana Core floated on her shoulder, and about a dozen more Mana Cores floated around her. The Special Grade Core served as some sort of sun, and the extra Mana Cores took on the similitude of stars.

This was a result of her Original Magic: Aurora Vidalis.

Darkness instantly enveloped the space around, and the brightness of her lights glimmered even brighter than ever.

"Follow my lead, Asa. You can use your senses to follow me and the enemy. Do what you can to keep up."

"U-understood!" Asa whispered, though he knew Aloe couldn't hear him in his current state.

He was surprised, though, with the way the environment had instantly darkened.

Usually, it took a while before Aloe's Special Grade Mana Core swallowed up the light in the vicinity.

However, this time it was instant!

'Could it be due to the many Mana Cores that are shimmering around her like stars?' He wondered.

Unfortunately, he didn't have the time to think about Aloe's mysterious growth. More pressing matters bothered him.

'I have to keep up! I have to—!'

>WHOOOOOSSSSHHH!!!<

As Asa was still trying to gather his resolve, Aloe sped right past him. He couldn't even see or sense her the slightest until she was far gone.

Like an afterthought, he decided to give chase. Though Aloe was clearly stronger and faster than he was, Asa reckoned that there were still certain things he was useful for.

'I... can help!'

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>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!<

The brilliant sparks of blue and golden light caused by Aloe's clash with Vaizer were sent across the area.

More of the surroundings collapsed, and the icy ground beneath them melted. Waves of pressure filled their vicinity as they exchanged more blows.

Aloe used her multiple Mana Cores to send beams of light in Vaizer's direction as she created a study light saber to utilize.

"Tch!" Vaizer, coated in his energy that shrouded him like Dragon-like scales, deflected the blows.

Unfortunately, he wasn't too slow—or rather, he wasn't as fast as before.

>WHOOOOOMMMM!!!<

Aloe Vida's blade came crashing down, breaking the scales of protection he donned.

"W-wha—?!"

Before he could say more, her Special Grade Mana Core appeared from behind and emitted the most dangerous gleam of light.

"[Grand Ray Blitz]!"

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!<

The draconic beastfolk was baptized in a devastating explosion that evaporated the ice, water, and everything else around them.

Aloe darted back, readying herself for nother round. Surely, that wasn't enough to stop her foe.

'Thanks to my current state, we're evenly matched in speed.' Aloe analyzed within herself.

If she was being honest, she was a bit faster. Unfortunately, Vaizer's senses were sharp, so his ability to react appropriately made them an equal match.

The problem was elsewhere, though.

'He's stronger. His durability too...' Aloe Vida noticed the mist clearing, and right at the center was an unscathed Vaizer.

He was completely, and off the charts unharmed.

His outfit was gone, though, except for a small portion of his undergarment.

He stepped out of the devastated vat of evaporating liquid, a deep glare manifesting on his face.

"Annoying fly. I'll end this quickly."

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Chapter 604: Sizzling Transformation

>SHWUUUUSSSHHHHH<

An intense amount of energy swirled around Vaizer, and his body suddenly transformed to a larger state.

He took on the form of a beast, and his gleaming scales covered his entire body. In a flash, he grew a long tail, his horns grew larger, and wings sprouted from behind him.

Not only had he grown larger, but his form was different. The only thing human-like about him was his bipedal nature. Other than that, he was now a completely different being.

'That is... Beast Transformation!' Aloe acknowledged in silence, wondering what she would do next.

Vaizer had become an apex of beasts, worthy of being titled the strongest in terms of power and prestige.

That's right, his current form... was that of a Dragon!

"His abilities have risen even more. This will be tough..."

Aloe proceeded to enhance herself with Magic, hoping she would be able to keep up. Even with her Original Magic slowing everything down, she was still at a loss. Just how fast was this person?!

'I'll have to take more!'

"Hey, human..." Vaizer's deeper, more authoritative tone rang out.

Aloe found herself shudder a bit when she heard the Dragon-like being speak. It rattled her down to her bones.

"... I'll be killing you now."

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

Vaizer lunged at Aloe, and despite her Aurora Vidalis, he was still plenty fast. As he approached, she wondered the best approach to take.

'Stall for time? But then what? I don't want to trouble the others unless I'm aware that he can't be handled. What should I do?'

Asa was meant to assist her, but she couldn't entirely rely on his help. Ultimately, she had to make an active choice.

'But... can I win? Do I stand a chance?'

Suddenly, a memory flashed in her head and she collected the words of a certain Automaton.

"You lack enough violence." Those were the words of Gawain when they fought back in training.

Jared had also told her something similar, saying she was 'too conservative.'

Her fighting style was always centered around using her speed and excess Magic abilities to defeat her opponents.

However, it wasn't like she engaged the opponents violently. She preferred using her wits, or even one-shotting them. An attempt to struggle in a head-on clash, until there was a final victor, had no appeal to her.

In the past, she was different. But, everything changed after suffering a miserable and painful death at the hands of the demons back when she was a dorm supervisor.

It was since then that she felt repugnant to excessive violence and the meaningless struggle centered around it.

Unfortunately, here she was again, confronted with something similar.

'But... I don't know for sure if I can win or not.'

Had she really ever pushed herself to the limits with her current strength? She was overflowing with so much power, far more than ever before.

'More... I can have more!'

It wasn't impossible to reach out for more. Her growth so far had always been about surpassing her limits.

There was nothing stopping her from doing the very same at the moment.

"I'll do it. I'll give it my all!"

And so, Aloe decided to finally do what she had been avoiding.

"Come!" She was going to face Vaizer head-on!

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The clash of the gold and azure beings sent a destructive wave spreading across the area. The icy dungeon parted and everything around them melted in moments.

"You... stopped my blow?!" Vaizer was stunned beyond words.

His bloodshot eyes widened upon realizing his target's head was still intact. She was meant to have died by now!

"Haaa..." Mist-like breath proceeded from Aloe's parted lips.

Hot steam surrounded her, and her golden ambience radiated even further.

It was brimming with unbelievable energy and heat.

Her eyes were completely covered in white light, and so were the insides of her lips and nostrils. Every fiber of her being had transformed into light—pure and true.

"... It wasn't that a big deal, after all." She whispered.

Vaizer felt the sting of her insult. Did she just refer to his blow as not that big a deal?

No, she really didn't.

Vaizer misunderstood Aloe's words.

To be frank, her body was still in shock from receiving that hit. It had damaged her, no doubt.

However.... what of it?!

"You won't be killing me, Vaizer." Aloe's tone warbled as she crunched her fist in preparation for a well deserved payback.

Currently, Aloe Vida's form allowed her transcend the limits of a human body. She was faster than the concept of pain, and every damage received was too slow to manifest on her form.

After taking in so much light from around her, leaving nothing but darkness around, Aloe had gone past the limits holding her back.

She was currently light energy at its purest!

"You bit—"

Faster than he could perceive, much faster than anyone could comprehend, Aloe casually dug her fist into Vaizer's face.

She didn't struggle, neither did she intend to move quickly. It was just a casual jab.

Vaizer's face sizzled, burning up due to the amount of heat that plastered itself there. He was unmoving though, simply transfixed in his position.

Then, in a flash—

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

The Dragonoid was sent flying.

Shockwaves were sent, clearing everything—even the debris. The large auditorium collapsed, revealing the frosty environment surrounding the dungeon.

The entire structure was already melting at an abnormal rate.

"Gurk... you... what did you do?" Vaizer groaned, feeling his body throb in shock.

He was already outside the Dungeon and all he could see for miles was a snowy storm. Heaving heavily and seeing his misty breath, he picked himself up.

'Just now... I didn't see her. I just felt myself move, and... what is this?' Vaizer felt the scales on his face crack.

Just... what in the world was happening?

Suddenly, the being of absolute light manifested right above him. She was glimmering like the sun in the absolute darkness that accompanied her.

Everything slowly became swallowed by night, leaving her as the only source of light present.

The ice around began melting, and the snow stopped raining. They sizzled and evaporated instead.

'She... what has she become?'

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Chapter 605: The Power Of Justice

Vaizer found himself speechless as he witnessed the magnificence of Aloe Vida.

Around her were sparkling Mana Cores, numerous in number like little stars.

The larger, special grade Mana Core was on her right hand, and her right hand held what seemed like a scepter.

A crown of glory floated on her head, sharp on the edges like a razor-like halo. The mere presence of Aloe made everything around he melt, and other than her, the entire area was a dull grey.

'I... what's going on here?'

Vaizer felt stuck. He could hardly move. Even his heart felt like stone.

He was hardly moving.

"Don't bother. I took your speed. The motion around has been collected."

Currently, the only one who could really move was the overpowering entity above him.

'Isn't that unfair?' Vaizer found himself thinking.

He couldn't even speak at this point.

"Tell me, Vaizer. Is this the best you can do? I want to experience more."

It sounded condescending, but Aloe Vida wasn't being arrogant at all. The fact that she was able to grow into something so spectacular because of a challenge.

Her current state had now overcome that barrier, and now...

... She desired more.

'The arrogance!' Former Beast King Vaizer growled internally.

As a matter of fact, he indeed had a trump card. He was still learning its workings since had been bestowed this power just recently. However...

'It looks like I'll have to use it, after all. My Arcana.'

>SHIIIIIIINNNNNNGGGG!!!<

A bright glimmer surged from Vaizer—something that shouldn't have been possible. It radiated with him as the focal point, thus restoring color to his body.

"Haaa, much better." The dragon beastfolk grinned, feeling his body return to normal.

Everything about him felt great, though the environment was still a faded dark color.

"I didn't think I'd have to use this. But, I guess it all worked out in the end."

His opponent, Aloe Vida, scrunched up her face in slight confusion.

"What's going on? I can't take away your 'motion'... how?"

"Hehe, it's simple... though you don't need to know that."

Vaizer's secret weapon, his Arcana, was the only thing that could make something like this possible.

'With [Justice], I have the ability to turn any unfair situation around. If my opponent is stronger, I can bring us to the same level. I didn't use it before because there's no point...'

Despite the Arcana in his grasp, Vaizer knew he couldn't completely utilize its phenomenal power. The best he could do was simply turn his body's situation around, granting him a fighting chance.

Now that he was no longer stuck in slow motion, and his opponent could not interfere with his ability to fight, he was in a far more advantageous state.

'This much is enough... I'll crush you!'

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!<

In an instant, Vaizer launched a fiery crimson breath at Aloe Vida. The intensity scorched the air, sending a trail of devastation in its wake.

Aloe simply stretched her scepter, completely nullifying the strike.

In an instant, it completely disintegrated.

"Not bad!" Vaizer was now in the air, directly behind her.

As he launched his fist, she flipped her scepters edge and used it counter.

"I should be much faster than you, yet you can keep up?" Aloe murmured.

"Hehe. Speed is relative, after all."

The Arcana [Justice] was making things fairer, and that only meant Aloe Vida's advantage was slowly disintegrating.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the only thing that was vanishing.

"U-urhhh..." A sharp pain suddenly surged through her heart.

Her body suddenly began throbbing helplessly, giving Vaizer the perfect chance to launch a follow-up strike.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!<

Aloe fell to the ground in a loud crash, crating a crater of cold, rocky debris.

Her light transformation became undone, and she was in a half conscious state. Her tone slurred as she struggled to keep her eyes opened.

"Hehehe... Hahaha... I should be asking you now, human. Is this the best you can do?" Vaizer declared from his height, now descending to the crater where Vida helplessly lay.

As soon as his feet touched the ground, he kicked the paralyzed woman, causing her to fly a far distance ahead.

Swiftly, he followed her, giving another deafening blow that sent her falling straight to the ground.

>BOOOOOOMMMM!!!<

Now standing atop her body, like the victorious one he was, Vaizer grinned in victory. He had, once again, triumphed.

"This is the power of [Justice]!"

Aloe Vida's eyes were closed at this point, and there no longer remained any strength in her to fight back.

She was spent.

"You weren't a bad opponent. I relished the fight."

Vaizer was in a great mood. Thanks to his battle with Aloe Vida, he had realized something critical.

'With the power of this Arcana, I can defeat just about anyone.' So long as [Justice] was on his side, wasn't that simply the best?

He would always win!

"I didn't think it was possible before, but now... I'm certain! I can finally rise to the top!"

Even though it was ambitious of him, Vaizer thought of the first person he would challenge.

'The First Seat. He stole my prey from me. How dare he...'

It is said that power makes one drunk. That was probably what afflicted Vaizer, as his hubris started making him generate thoughts grander than he dared to imagine in the past.

"Now, then... to finish you." He stared down at the helpless woman.

After he was done with her, he would kill off the others and hope the Arcana would appear.

'Come to think of it, I haven't seen that little shrimp in a while...'

As Vaizer's thoughts trailed, he noticed the lady beneath him stirring as she smiled weakly.

'Why is she smiling? I won, didn't I?'

"I... did it..." Aloe's voice trailed.

The beastfolk, still in his draconic form, was confused. He was the victor, and she was the defeated. Yet why did she seem awfully pleased with herself.

"... Mission complete." As she made that final statement, Aloe Vida fell unconscious, leaving Vaizer with nothing but confusion.

"Still thinking you're better than me after losing? This bit—"

>BZZZZTTTTTTZZZZ<

Suddenly, a strange sensation pulsated throughout Vaizer's body. His entire being felt numb, and then... what came next...

... was PAIN!

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Chapter 606: Unseen Teamwork

"Arrrrghhhhh!!!"

Vaizer's scream pierced the air as he felt his body being assailed by uncontrollable energy.

It felt like all his nerves were tangled in a twisted knot.

His veins and arteries seemed to have exploded uncontrollably, and everything in his insides were in a frenzy.

'W-what is—?!' Vaizer's eyes bulged as he felt everything tear apart from within.

"H-huh...?"

His entire body became paralyzed too, and he found himself losing control over all mobility and sensory functions.

His vision blurred and his ears rang. His brain pounded, and everything simply felt WRONG!

'W-what... I don't... understand...'

"Great work, guys." A voice sounded behind Vaizer, but he couldn't tilt his head to see the owner.

As his footsteps approached, the Beastfolk felt dread and powerlessness. A strange sense of fearful foreboding assailed his being.

"No problem." A voice sounded right beside Vaizer, and a kid appeared.

The very same kid that he was looking for!

"It took all of my self control not to react despite what he was doing, though. Look at Miss Vida's current state."

The kid seemed angry, and he was referring to the approaching footstep that became even closer.

"Haha, I apologize. I also didn't expect things to get so intense. Fortunately, we were able to get to a resolution."

The man finally appeared from behind, tapping Vaizer on his shoulder as he made his appearance in front of the paralyzed Beastfolk.

'Y-you!!!'

Right in front of Vaizer, smiling ever so confident, was the human who collapsed due his inability to withstand his Mana Pressure.

'H-how...?!'

Was he faking it? Was everything a trick?!

"I know what you must be thinking, but no. I actually fainted because of your Mana Pressure." Maro, the red-haired human laughed in slight embarrassment.

'T-then how?!' Vaizer wanted to twitch his eyes, but they wouldn't move.

"I just woke up much earlier than you thought. Thanks to Aloe's protective and restorative Spell, I was able to observe your battle for some time. Thanks to that, I was able to devise a countermeasure."

Vaizer was silent, but a lot of questions squirmed within him.

Ever since he fought his opponents, especially Aloe, it never seemed like there was any form of teamwork going on.

'What countermeasure is he talking about? Didn't they all just attack me desperately?'

"Haha, of course you'll be confused. I can't see any reaction since your face is completely paralyzed, but it's just a guess."

Vaizer was dying of shame, but curiosity still got the better of him. He wanted, so badly, to know what had just happened.

"Asa, could you help me heal Aloe?"

"I don't know any Healing Magic."

"I didn't say you did. You know what? I'll just do it myself. Watch over the prisoner."

Maro left Vaizer without explaining, and then moved over to where Vida remained unconscious.

He brought out a vial from his pouch—a Magic Item that protected its contents from being damaged, and also preserved them in their best state, while also having a vast space within it.

The vial was glowing yellow, and it was to help restore Vida's Mana so she could self-heal.

He brought out yet another vial, a potion that boosted recovery and healed the one who consumed it. As a result, Aloe's body glowed and she commenced her healing process.

"You did a good job, Aloe." Maro smiled at the sleeping young woman.

He had never felt any prouder of a partner. Not only did she risk her life, but she exceeded his expectations.

Truly...

'Well done.'

... She was strong!

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What had happened was simple, yet a somewhat nonexistent display of teamwork.

Initially, Asa and Aloe were planning on simply giving their all until they defeated their opponents.

Asa was going to do his best to catch up to Aloe and help in any way he could. He strengthened himself to the limits, and used his Null ability.

While he was trying to catch up to his opponent, though, he heard Maro's voice in his head.

All he had to do was follow a plan, and Vaizer would be defeated. He was skeptical about it, but once Aloe was connected to the three-way communication—and she agreed—Asa had no choice but to go along with it.

The plan involved Asa taking some vials from Maro—though he didn't know their functions—and splatter them on Vaizer at intervals.

He had five vials, and after a specified interval, on Maro's command, he would douse Vaizer with the next round.

Fortunately, Vaizer was too busy with his fight with Aloe to care about being splattered with liquid. Also, since Asa could simply pass through any form of destruction while remaining invisible, he was perfect for the job.

That was what he had to do.

His last vial was spent when Vaizer stood atop Aloe, in victory and the cumulative effect seemed to manifest not long after.

As for Aloe, her duty was to simply engage Vaizer as much as possible. Maro suspected the beastfolk had an Arcana so the plan was for Aloe to push him to the point of utilizing it.

If it turned out Maro was wrong, then it was still good.

Why?

Because that would only make Vaizer all the more screwed.

Once he used his Arcana's ability, Maro would know what they were dealing with and locate the position of the Arcana. Once the location was deciphered, Asa's second job was to retrieve it as soon as the enemy became paralyzed.

Sure, there was more chaos than expected.

The plan was almost ruined due to Asa's boiling annoyance as well. Fortunately, his form made it impossible for anyone to sense even his bloodlust.

Regardless, they succeeded.

Vaizer was successfully captured thanks to the new and improved Mana Shock concentrate Asa doused on him, causing his entire body function to stop.

All in all, while being extremely, it was a successful fight.

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"I bet you're dying of curiosity, aren't you?" Asa grinned at the oblivious beastfolk.

The boy was currently holding the Arcana he swiped from Vaizer.

'Who would have thought it would be in his hair? Smart move.'

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Chapter 607: The Moon's Guardian [Pt 1]

Vaizer was dying of both curiosity and shame—not to talk of the unbearable pain that tore him apart from within—but no one was willing to tell him anything.

Not only had he lost his trump card, but he was now completely powerless. Vaizer felt like dying.

'J-just... kill me...'

"You were stronger than anything I imagined. For that, you have my respect." Asa said, however his glare only deepened.

"But, you hurt Miss Vida. That is a crime I can never forgive you for. You also betrayed your people and joined the Cult that is responsible for wiping out my friends and family... your own people!"

At this point, Asa was seething with rage.

"Maro said you'll be feeling so much pain that it would be considered unbearable. I hope that's true."
The boy suddenly grinned.

"You should suffer."

'Damn brat!' Vaizer groaned internally, watching as Asa flicked his card in the air as though it was a toy.

"Hey, Asa! Be careful with that Arcana!" Maro angrily yelled at the boy, causing him to finally cease his playful action.

"Yeah, yeah... what about Miss Vida?"

Asa knew she suffered some severe injuries, but shouldn't she had been healed at this point? Or, perhaps...

"She's completely healed, but she hasn't gained consciousness yet." Maro answered.

His tone sounded sullen, and his face also displayed confusion.

Naturally, Aloe should have awoken after her Mana and health had been restored, yet she was still unconscious.

"Could it be a side effect of that form she took at the last minute? It looked incredibly dangerous and powerful too..." The Magic Scholar murmured.

"H-hey! If anything happens to Miss Vida, you'll—"

"Keep quiet, brat. I'm thinking here!"

Once Asa heard Maro snap, he found himself keeping silent. Was he scared of the man? No. It was just...

"Y-you're lucky Miss Vida said to listen to you." With that, Asa puffed his cheeks and kept a pout.

He watched Vaizer while Maro examined Aloe even further. Neither of them knew what was going on...

... For it was beyond mere comprehension.

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"Where... am I?" A voice echoed through a vast space.

Aloe, the sole person within, wondered if the voice was hers. The question in the nervous voice, as though being stated by multiple persons at once.

Why was that so? Did it have something to do with the place she found herself in? No doubt, it did.

Around Aloe Vida were mirrors. Multiple mirrors that reflected her. They centered on the young girl's location, everything capturing several moments of her existence—from different perspectives as well.

'This place is... I can't sense anything at all.'

>SHIIIIIIINNNNNNGGGG<

A brilliant illumination appeared from above, causing the young woman to raise her head. Her eyes widened as she witnessed it falling... the Arcana she had been searching for.

"T-the Moon?" Aloe murmured as she saw it descend.

However, just as the card drew closer to her, something else began gathering.

Light particles emanated from all the mirrors around her, and Aloe felt her heart resonate with the light fragments that formed.

It started to take form, and before long, it took the shape of a woman.

She was clad in a white gown, and her flawless skin was pale. She had white hair, and a black spot under her left eye and her lip. A brilliant green glow appeared in her irises, and she put on a gentle smile.

The woman clad in white floated in the air and took hold of the Arcana, descending slowly in Aloe's direction.

'Even though she took the Arcana... why do I feel at ease?' Aloe simply watched, as though in a trance, until the woman floated right in front of her.

"You... there's something different about you." The pale woman spoke in a warbling tone.

She seemed to indicate surprise—as though something was wrong with Aloe. It puzzled the young lady.

"Ah, I don't mean that in a bad way. I just mean... your Soul has a peculiar form. You must have... reached the Root, right? Or maybe you touched it?"

"Wha—? I don't understand... what you're saying?" Aloe Vida muttered.

She was totally confused.

"Aether. I mean, Aether. You've come into contact with it. And I mean, direct exposure. Your Soul is gleaming with the stuff. You didn't notice?"

Aloe was hearing the total stranger speak about stuff like Aether as though it was common sense, but she didn't even know what that was.

"Haha, I see. You must not know what it is then. I understand. But it's such a waste, really. You could be so much more if you knew."

Aloe felt like she was missing out on a lot. The friendly nature of the woman got her curious. Plus, this was her soul she was referring to.

"C-could you teach me?" She whispered her question, not exactly confident in her proposition.

"Hmm, should I? I don't know..."

The blond young lady didn't know what to say. Her elegant, ghost-like conversation partner didn't seem to particularly mind. Perhaps she could insist?

"Your Mana must be increasing at a steady rate, right? I'm sure your Soul pumps out more Mana than usual, and your Mana Core— correction, Mana Cores—absorb them at a much faster rate. You recover your Mana easily, and you keep getting stronger. Are those symptoms accurate?"

Aloe Vida was beyond astounded. The ghost lady got it all spot on.

"Y-yeah. You're exactly right!"

"Well, Mana and Miasma are just two sides of the same coin. It's only natural that your Soul pumps out what your body is capable of receiving. It should have matured into Aether by now, though."

"Y-yeah, you're right. So teach me." Aloe didn't believe she was doing this... but she simply had to ask.

The ghost lady stared at her. It seemed even she was stunned by Aloe's approach. Then—

"Haha! I like your spunk, girl. You know, I was already impressed that you got access to Aether at such a young age. Plus, these multiple Mana Cores, such a wonderful innovation."

Aloe felt a little guilty since she didn't really achieve any of that, but she just laughed in response to the woman's praise.

"Yeah, hahaha..."

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Chapter 608: The Moon's Guardian [Pt 2]

Aloe wanted to attribute her achievements to Jared, but she didn't know how to bring it up.

'This exposure to Aether she's talking about... is it because Jared resurrected me?'

She still had a bunch of questions.

"Alright, Aloe. I've decided to take you in as my apprentice. We're gonna be here a while, you ready for that?"

It was a sudden question, but Aloe was already certain about what to respond with.

"Yes!"

'I'm sorry for my selfishness, everyone. I have to find out more...'

"Haha! I like your zeal! Alright then."

The Mirrors around them turned into walls, and a tiled surface appeared underneath. Before long, it seemed like they were in a glass room—with both the woman and Aloe as the occupants.

"You seem to have a suspicion as to how and where you must have gotten access to Aether. So, spill." The woman in white spoke, her voice echoing lightly in the vast and empty hall.

"I-I think it's when I died and Jared resurrected me. I was killed by some demons during an invasion and—"

"Hoho, I see. He resurrected you through normal means? The world has advanced to that extent already?"

"N-no, not really. Jared is just really exceptional..."

"Seems to me like you have some sort of 'special feelings' for this Jared character. Hehe." The pale woman leaned closer, grinning mischievously.

"I-its not like that. I just respect him a lot. Besides, he's got someone else..." Aloe was blushing hard at this point, yet she denied any prospect of having feelings for the boy in question.

Surely, she wasn't expecting the ancient being in front of her to buy that.

"Haaa, I totally get how you feel, Aloe. It was the same for me, with Merlin."

"Oh... you liked him?"

"W-what? Who said that? Of c-c-c-course not! Why would you think that?!" The pale lady was also blushing all over.

It seemed the two were more alike than they initially thought.

"Oh... okay..."

"What's with that tone? You don't believe me? Come on, if you have something on your mind, spill it!"

"Haha, I'd rather just focus on training on the... Aether?" Aloe swiftly tried to return the focus to the relevant subject that they had decided to undertake.

It wasn't like romance and those kind of things weren't also important to her, but...

'The world is at stake. I have to get back to the others quickly.'

"What's the rush? Come on, let loose a bit. I haven't had someone to talk to in ages." The pale lady said with a pouty expression.

With the snap of her fingers, a sofa made of glass appeared, and she sat on it with an emphatic desire to make herself comfortable.

"B-but, aren't you like... going to disappear or something?"

"Uh?"

"I mean... back when Jared met Merlin, he said something about him being out of time, and he vanished. So, I was wondering about you, and..."

Instantly, the pale woman's eyes popped wide open and she dashed in Aloe's direction in a flash.

"You saw Merlin? What did he say? Did he mention me?" Her eyes sparkled with desire and curiosity.

For someone who claimed not to have any feelings for the man in question, she sure displayed the opposite.

With her face blushing so hard, and what appeared to be steam coming from her her nose, it seemed pretty clear to Aloe... but who was she talk?

"W-wait, I don't know. I'm not sure. I wasn't the one who met with him personally."

"Ah, is that so?"

Disappointment spread across the lady's face as she plopped back to her seat. Aloe heaved a sigh of relief, happy her 'mentor' hadn't egged her on concerning the topic.

'Merlin didn't talk about her at all. According to what Jared said, he only mentioned...' Aloe's eyes bulged as she realized something.

Something utterly important!

'H-how could I have forgotten?'

There was one person that Merlin vehemently warned against. The only person he specifically mentioned.

"U-um... what's your name? I just realized we haven't exchanged names. I'm Aloe Vida." She gulped, looking at the pale woman with a slightly nervous expression.

If she was indeed the 'person' that Merlin spoke about, then...

"Ah, I'm Kazen. Wait... did you think I was Ciel? So you did meet Merlin!" The lady named Kazen once again launched herself at Aloe.

"N-no, Jared was the only one, really. He only told to beware of a 'Ciel'."

It was a tough one, but Aloe once again avoided the hounding of her obviously lovestruck or obsessed mentor. She could deny it all she wanted, but wasn't it plain?

"It's a relief you aren't Ciel, though." She laughed, trying to create conversation upon seeing Kazen pout.

"How can you be so sure? This is my world, you know? Reading your thoughts isn't exactly difficult, if I wanted to. I could just pretend to not be Ciel."

'Ah, that's true. Crap!' Aloe realized that no matter how she sliced it, there was no way to be entirely certain.

"Don't worry, though. I'm not her... and you best be happy I'm not. For one, Ciel isn't an Apostle of Aether... at least not anymore."

Aloe felt there was a lot to the story, considering Kazen, who was usually so expressive, now had a darker expression.

"What exactly happened?"

Kazen gazed into Aloe's eyes, and she sighed while shaking her head.

"Na. I don't want to talk about it. You asked why I'm not worried about disappearing, right? There's no need to worry about that."

Aloe felt a bit saddened about how Kazen brushed off the topic, but it was probably too painful to discuss.

Either way, she simply had to respect her predecessor's privacy.

"I didn't use up my Aether before dying, after all. Besides, I used my Original Magic to ensure I wouldn't vanish... at least, in a sense."

"Huh?"

"[The Moon] Arcana controls reflections. In essence, mirror copies. I copied my soul and placed it as the custodian of this Arcana."

"N-no way..." Aloe found herself in amazement.

"I know. I'm pretty awesome, right?"

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Chapter 609: Kazen's Revelation

"In any case, you mentioned how you were resurrected by Jared's special technique and got into contact with Aether, right?"

At this point, both Kazen and Aloe were seated opposite each other in the vast glassy room—appearing to be in some sort of consultation.

"Y-yeah. But the thing is, he has resurrected others too, yet none of them seem to have experienced the same change I have. I don't understand it myself."

Kazen nodded calmly, obviously assessing the situation with the best of her abilities. She placed her finger on her chin and thought for a moment, arriving at a conclusion before long.

"I don't know!"

"E-eh...?" This certainly wasn't the answer Aloe was expecting.

"I said I don't know. There's so much vague information, so I can't deduce anything. I wasn't there, so how can I tell?" Kazen sighed, throwing her hands in the air.

"W-well..."

"Besides, you were dead at that point too, right? So there's no way you could give an entirely accurate account. If only that Jared dude was here, I would have asked him to give more useful answers..."

Somehow, that sent a direct hit to Aloe's heart. She instantly felt sorry for not being adequately equipped with the information they required.

"There are many elements that could have caused your transformation. The most plausible is that your soul got exposed to Aether before it returned to your body. But, there are other options..."

"Ah, I see." Aloe whispered, listening more to her mentor's words.

"You mentioned how Jared saw Merlin, right? That means his soul also has exposure to Aether. Perhaps it resonated with yours upon revival and sent some of its materials to yours?"

However, Kazen wasn't sure about this option. The quality of Aether in Aloe's soul couldn't have come from mere trickles. Besides, that was indeed the case, then a portion of Jared's soul should have been attached to hers.

Soul theory was complicated, and the woman didn't want to start delving into it.

"The bottom line is that there could be one of many factors, or maybe a combination of many reasons that you're the way you are."

"Ah, I understand. I don't know if this is helpful, but Jared mentioned something about... him being a Singularity? Do you know what that—"

>WHOOOSHHH<

Instantly, Kazen appeared right in front of Aloe, tightly clutching both her shoulders.

An expression of insanity played on her face, and it seemed like she was on the verge of a mental collapse.

"D-did you just say... Singularity?"

"Y-yeah, that's what—"

"Are you sure?"

"Y-yes, I am. Merlin said so too... Jared told me that too." Aloe quickly added the last part so as not to raise another issue of Merlin x Kazen.

Everywhere suddenly grew tense, and Aloe began to wonder if she should not have mentioned a Singularity at all.

"Well, of that's the case, then it probably makes sense that you got access to Aether. Singularities can't exactly be reasoned with, after all."

Now Aloe had more questions. In the first place, what exactly WAS a Singularity?

"No one really knows much about Singularities, so don't look at me for answers. Their cause, their purpose... it's all shrouded in mystery. All I know is that they're chosen by Aether."

"Chosen... by Aether."

Kazen sighed, returning to her seat once more. A serious expression ran through her face, and it appeared grim.

"It means from the time they were born, they had already been exposed to Aether. They're special."

However, if that was all there was to it, Kazen wouldn't have had such a reaction. No, in fact, she would have probably rejoiced. Geniuses were a cause for celebration, after all.

Unfortunately, there was a stark difference between geniuses and Singularities.

"The Root, Aether, chooses Singularities for a particular purpose. It usually involves something of a grand scale..."

Aloe Vida felt like she was slowly grasping the logic, but it seemed to be shrouded in even more mystery. What greater particular purpose? What grand scale?

"I need to speak with this Jared character..." Kazen spoke, giving off an entirely serious vibe.

Aloe remained silent. There was nothing to be said. Even if her mentor wanted to, there was no way she could leave this space... or was there?

"We should hurry up with this training. If it's the same as last time, then the world is in grave danger."

Kazen rose to her feet, and Aloe did likewise. The sofas vanished, and the time for small talk seemed to have gone far behind.

'This is what I wanted, but... why do I feel so frightened?'

Perhaps it was because she just heard some pretty damning news? Yes, that was probably it.

"How long will this take?" Aloe nervously asked.

"I don't know. But, don't worry, Aloe... I'll make it quick."

Aloe nodded, and Kazen stared straight into her eyes.

"Once you're done here, we'll have to inform the others"

"W-wait....we??"

Kazen broke into a smile and placed her hand on the younger lady's shoulder. It felt fluffy and surreal, but it was still tangible.

"Yep! I'm coming with you!"

"W-what? For real? H-how...?!"

"You don't need to know, for now. Just do your best with the training."

"O-okay!" Aloe nodded diligently.

She didn't want to disappoint her master, but she also refused to delay any further. If the world was truly at risk, then Aloe Vida had no choice but to give her all.

"I'll do my best!"

Kazen smiled at the young lady's determination. She had many proteges back when she was still alive, so she understood the joy of seeing an apprentice eager to learn.

Not only was Aloe bursting with potential, but she was also eager to learn.

It really was an amazing and inspiring sight.

'It's such a shame, though...' The lady in white thought to herself.

She had observed Aloe for long enough, seeing through her Soul and her body to perfectly understand how it functioned.

'You seem like such a sweet girl, Aloe... which is why it pains me to resort to this.'

However, to do what was necessary, she needed to manifest in the world... and how could she do that without a vessel.

'Once I make your body suitable, Aloe... I'll be taking it.'

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Chapter 610: Converging Comrades

"She's not gaining consciousness. There's also no Arcana in sight."

Maro sighed as he stared at Asa and the frozen Vaizer. His eyes contained hints of worry, and guilt riddled his mind.

'Was I being too ambitious? It's really my fault for choosing such a risky tactic...'

Sure, they had won, but at what cost?

"Tch, let's head back. I'm sure Jared can do a better job in fixing her up." Asa glared.

He still hadn't forgiven Maro for granting Aloe Vida such a dangerous mission, but he also wasn't in any position to complain.

They had won, and it wasn't as though Aloe was dead. Besides, without Maro's guidance, they would have probably lost.

'As frustrating as it is... we owe this victory to him.' The boy thought to himself.

It wasn't like he planned on saying such a thing to Maro's face, though.

"Besides, we got our hands on an enemy and his Arcana, right? That had to count for something."

Maro's eyes brightened once he heard Asa's words. They were rather optimistic, as expected of a kid.

'He's right, though...'. The older fellow smiled.

Jared could probably fix Aloe up, and they had achieved quite a lot in this mission.

Sure, they didn't find what they were searching for, but one could argue that what they raked in was far more valuable.

"Alright, Asa. Let's return." Maro brought out his Spell Card.

"What of this Vaizer guy? He's still suffering, right? You sure he won't die on us?"

"No. That dosage shouldn't be enough to kill him, though most people would have perished a while back."

"Ah, I see..." Asa murmured, sticking close to the red-haired adult.

Maro carried Aloe on his shoulders while Asa kept guard over Vaizer's body. Upon activation, the Spell Card created a distortion in space, instantly transporting them to their destination.

"I hope the others are fine..."

"Well done, guys!"

I smiled at my comrades as I saw them appear from the warped space behind me.

Thanks to their Soul Brands, I was already aware of their imminent return, but seeing them up close gave me comfort.

It seemed like I hadn't seen them in forever, though it hadn't been up to two days.

"To be fair, I didn't think you guys would be the first to return."

In front of me were Lemi, Edward, and Ivan—the merry trio.

'It's not like I doubt their skills, but...' I laughed internally.

We were currently in our base, located in the outskirts of the Eastern Kingdom. The vast sky and ever-expanding field just seemed like the perfect location for a welcome.

"Hehe, mission complete!" Lemi grinned, excitedly flashing the Arcana that was locked in her fingers.

It brimmed with energy, and I could sense Aether brimming from within it.

'It looks like they got the real deal.' My smile widened.

"[Wheel Of Fortune], eh? I guess it suits your team well. You guys are lucky."

"H-hey! What do you mean lucky? We worked hard for it, right guys?"

Edward and Ivan jointly nodded. Something about them seemed off... like they were completely exhausted.

'Lemi has the least amount of stamina, yet she seems fine. The boys on the other hand...'

Just what happened during their journey?

"Did you work them to the bone? You used them, didn't you?"

Lemi shrieked upon hearing my voice. Her surprised told me I was spot-on. She had always been quite easy to read, after all.

"W-well, I just did what I had to do! It's not like—"

Moving swiftly, I closed the distance between me and the trio, embracing the chattering girl. I felt Lemi's body tremble as my arms got wrapped around her.

"You did well, Lemi. I'm proud of you."

"W-what are you—!"

She seemed to be in protest, so I quickly detached myself from her. It was probably inappropriate, anyway...

'I just wanted to congratulate you like a father would. Maybe...' I observed Lemi's extremely flustered face, thus deciding to place my hand on my shoulder while giving her a thumbs up instead.

"Nice going!"

Even with the boys lifelessly groaning in the background, I couldn't have foreseen these results she showed me.

'You used them to achieve your goals, but everything turned out fine. That meant you were careful and precise. You weren't reckless too. Amazing, Lemi...'

Seeing my own daughter evolve right in front of my eyes brought me satisfaction that I couldn't quite explain.

"Yeah, yeah. What did you expect? I'm awesome!" She huffed, swelling in pride.

'Okay, that's enough.' I stopped praising her and appreciated her partners for their help.

"You guys did well. I'm proud of the results... and thank you."

I didn't plan on being biased, though it seemed inevitable. Still, Lemi couldn't have achieved what she did without them—their exhausted reactions showed that much.

'Now I really want to know what happened.'

"Ah, where's Maria, by the way?" Lemi started glancing around, as though that would make the girl in question appear.

"She's in the Capital, dealing with some legal issues. Some things happened in your absence. I'll fill everyone in once they arrive."

"Hmm? Kay..."

Thankfully, Lemi didn't further the discussion. I didn't want to have to repeat myself on the whole Netherlore saga.

Maria was busy with the arraignment and dispensation of justice on the Netherlore household.

I let her get involved since she was a victim of their antics, and also an important eyewitness. Plus, since we finished our mission early, she could as well spend it on other important affairs.

'She's with [The Pope], so she should be fine. Plus... I'll instantly rush to her side if there are any issues at all.

So far, so good.

"Let's go inside. I'd love to hear about your adventures." I spoke to the trio, to which they were all eager to.

Life slowly returned to the faces of Edward and Ivan. It seemed they desired the comfort a good old sanctuary provided.

Thus, we decided to retreat inside. However—

'Hmm? What's this? Another batch?'

>VWUUUUSSSHHH<

Another blue portal appeared, and within it emerged four figures—only three of which I recognized.

My eyes widened the moment.I realized what was going on.

'T-this is—!!!'