

SPELLCRAFT 611

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Chapter 611: Interrogation [Pt 1]

An unconscious Aloe Vida.

A worried Asa and Maro.

A Beastfolk under Mana Shock.

It didn't take me very long to piece all the information together. I realized that simply standing outside and asking questions would get us nowhere, so I resorted to the only reasonable option.

"Let's talk inside."

Aloe was placed on an enchanted bed—a Magic Tool meant to preserve a person's physical and Mana conditions.

The bed a curtain-like barrier hovering above and around it. The barrier glowed, and then the entire space around Aloe shimmered with white particles of light.

'This should stabilize the situation.' I thought to myself.

Even if a person was in a near death situation, as long as they were on the bed, their survival was guaranteed.

'It contains immense healing properties and restorative effects.'

As if that wasn't enough, even if a person was dead, the bed would still fix the body and return it to optimal condition while also ensuring the circulation of Mana within it.

"Don't worry, she'll be fine." I told the audience that gathered around her.

Edward. Ivan. Lemi. Asa. Maro. They all appeared worried for the young lady.

I was too, but this wasn't a relevant time to indulge in such emotion. So far, I only had a basic idea of what could have transpired.

I had to completely understand the situation.

"You guys, come with me." I specifically addressed Asa and Maro.

They knew that very well, as they instantly left Aloe's side and followed my lead—though Asa seemed a bit saddened to abandon her bedside.

We left the room and proceeded to another more conducive environment to conduct our conversation.

The Beastfolk, also known as former Beast King Vaizer, was already waiting for us within the space.

Of course, he remained paralyzed as we entered.

The room was large, and it was greatly strengthened with enhancements—even more than that of the entire building.

'No one should be able to see through the walls or hear whatever goes on in here.' I glanced in Vaizer's direction while making this thought.

"You two, please have your seats."

Two chairs appeared in the room, and they obeyed instantly. I could tell from their sullen expressions that they were ready to cooperate as long as I fixed their supposed mistake—Aloe's current condition.

'These guys...' I almost sighed.

"First of all, I apologize for not coming to your aid. A lot happened on my end, and it didn't seem to me like you were in extreme danger."

They expressed surprised upon seeing that I bowed my head, but I didn't care. As the leader, I was responsible for their wellbeing.

Whatever risks they took was on me—albeit indirectly.

"N-no, it's all my fault. It was my plan to—"

"Yeah. It was Maro's fault!"

It seemed the two agreed that Maro was to be blamed. It was no wonder the older man looked more miserable.

'You say that it's his fault, Asa... but why do I also sense guilt from within you? You blame yourself too, don't you?'

It was better not to address that now, though. The important things came first.

"It's fine. What's relevant now is how to rectify the situation."

A chair appeared right behind me and I sat opposite them.

"Now, then, tell me everything that happened."

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"I see. So that's how it is."

Once they were done explaining, I could finally see the big picture.

As expected, Vaizer here was their foe. It seemed the Nether Cult somehow caught wind of everyone's location, after all.

'Despite how hard I tried to hide it... that Legris.'

In any case, they did well in their fight against Vaizer. For them to have emerged victorious against someone who possessed an Arcana, they had my respect.

'[Justice], uh? And with what they heard him say, it sounds like a very dangerous Arcana. Did he not know how to use it properly?'

Vaizer was a Martial Artist by nature. Arcanas were basically Magical in nature, thus expecting him to master such complex Magic would probably be asking for too much.

Fortunately, what happened to be the case here was their opponent's inexperience in Arcana utilization.

"I did everything I could, but she won't regain consciousness. I don't think it is physiological." Maro postulated.

He was most likely spot-on.

'Maro is very intelligent, and we both worked on the newly improved Mana Shock potion...'

Thankfully, he had enough sense not to use the lethal one on Vaizer. That way, we had a perfect hostage.

"I see. If you think it has something to do with her Soul, her Soul Brand is still intact. There's nothing wrong with her in that respect."

If I were to give a diagnosis, I'd say she was simply in a sleep-like state. The reason she hadn't awoken wasn't due to any damage or danger, but...

'It's almost like she's choosing to remain asleep?'

I wasn't certain of what it meant, but there was probably no way to know for sure at this moment.

"Let's focus on what we can actually control now..." My gaze went to Vaizer.

His expression was frozen, and his monstrous form made him appear similar to a statue.

"We should get some answers from our dear friend, here."

To achieve what I wanted, it was best to do this without any interruption. Besides, it would be best of Asa and Maro rested by Aloe's side.

"You guys can leave now. Make sure you relax, too. You've earned it."

They nodded and made to leave. Their backs told me that they were less troubled than when they first arrived.

At least now they knew Aloe wasn't in any danger.

"Thank you for your help, the both of you. You've done an amazing service by capturing him and retrieving an Arcana."

'Really, thanks.'

They both nodded and smiled faintly, exiting the room soon after.

The moment the door was shut tight, and I once again confirmed that the Magic pervading the room was intact, I gave my full attention to our prisoner.

"Hello, Vaizer." A smile slowly crept on my face as I approached him.

'Let's start this, shall we?'

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Chapter 612: Interrogation [Pt 2]

"You and I... we're going to have a discussion now."

Was my tone sounding scary? Perhaps. I couldn't care less at this point.

It didn't really matter how it was achieved... as long as I could get what was required, that was victory.

'And what I require is every single person I care about being intact.'

"But you compromised that, Vaizer." My smile broadened.

Now right in front of the paralyzed Beastfolk, I prepared myself for what I was going to put my interlocutor through.

"I really hope you cooperate... though I'll get what I want either way."

I drew closer to the Beastfolk, whispering as clearly as I could into its scaly ears.

"So... as soon as I undo this paralysis... you better start talking."

Vaizer felt an emotion squirm within him when the human in front of him spoke.

RAGE!

'How dare you?!' His thoughts pounded.

Had it not been for his clearly miserable state, he would have crushed the boy's jaws and proceeded to draw out his intestines.

It was simply because of his current weakness!

'Don't think you deserve my fear, boy. You've earned nothing!'

The human before him was fifteen—maybe sixteen at most—by human standards. He was still a fledgling, no matter how one sliced it.

Yet...

"It seems we're in agreement." He spoke, now summoning some sort of potion to cure his current predicament.

Vaizer felt pain as he awaited the moment he would be free—enough pain to drive someone to the edge of insanity.

He waited to be cured so desperately!

However, compared to the pain he endured 'back then', this was nothing. He simply grit his teeth and awaited the moment he would strike.

'Stupid brat. I'll show you...'

The human went ahead to inject a potion into Vaizer's body. The draconic warrior wondered how he was able to pierce his armored skin so easily.

'It"s probably the material used for the injection. What's it made from?' Vaizer found himself pondering.

Still, it didn't change the end result.

'Haa... I feel it... the pain leaving me...'

Slowly, Vaizer began to feel his nerves and his aching muscles. His insides had been bastardized beyond belief, but not beyond redemption.

He slowly healed himself when he could, and while he was slightly able to move, he remained stagnant.

"This should do it. Should I wait for a while?" The boy whispered, turning away from Vaizer.

He casually walked to his seat, most likely intending to have a good time while watching his prisoner slowly gain control.

'Fool!' Vaizer grinned.

Once he was done healing, he would go on a rampage. He could sense it well... the reinforcement behind the walls that surrounded the room.

'I'll kill you first, impudent brat! No one will be coming to your aid.'

Then, he would pour out his strength and concentrate it in a single portion of the wall. Vaizer assumed he would be able to break it down eventually.

'But first...'

His eyes narrowed on the boy as he prepared to have his seat.

'... How could you turn your back on an enemy, paralyzed or not?'

Vaizer felt like he could easily tear down the brat, but he kept his cool. He would prefer it if he was completely recovered.

The blonde sat down, patiently watching him. A moment of silence pervaded the room, and some minutes flew by in a flash.

Then—

'Hehehe... FINALLY!'

Vaizer's eyes bulged as he enhanced every muscle in his body.

He would have preferred letting his prey suffer as much as he did, but other pressing matters required his attention.

As such...

'... I'll blow off his head in one hit.'

>BOOOOMMMM!!!<

The shockwaves made by Vaizer suddenly moving extremely fast sent echoes flying in the room.

He swiftly made his way to the seated lad, preparing to launch his fist at the boy. Vaizer had poured a great deal of energy—enough to tear down mountains—in his fist.

Surely, that was enough to kill someone.

"Sloppy."

In a blur, The boy's hands moved, grabbing Vaizer's neck. His strong grip and sudden movements shocked the beastfolk.

'E-eh...?!'

The human boy, still seated, had so easily grabbed his throat?

'Y-you—!!!'

Realizing things could get awry due to this slight deviation from his plans, Vaizer instantly sent his raw punch flying in the boy's direction.

"Dieeeee!!!"

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

The walls were sturdy enough to absorb the impact, but certainly not the boy. He was human, after all.

... Right?

"N-no way... with a single hand?" Vaizer's eyes widened in disbelief.

What unfolded before him shouldn't have been possible. This single boy had casually stopped his blow with one hand.

He was even smiling at him—almost as if the hit meant nothing! Even the other humans he faced couldn't have taken this hit and remained unscathed.

Besides, Vaizer was in his transformed state. His power and speed had reached a different realm completely.

'He's not even in any form! T-this is just his normal strength?!'

The former Beast King found it preposterous. This simply shouldn't have been!

However, even as he was making these thoughts of shock, Vaizer sensed a sudden change in the boy.

He was no longer smiling.

'W-what is—?'

>WHOOOOOOOSSSHHHH<

In a flash, the human zoomed forward, Vaizer still in his grip, and crashed the latter into the wall.

"Guark!" Vaizer found himself spitting out blood due to the impact alone.

His throat ached as its muscles were tightly squeezed by the kid. The boy's deadly gaze slowly made Vaizer realize how powerless he was.

"You..." He coughed as he spoke.

"W-who are... you?!"

Vaizer tried to use his fists to respond, struggling to the best of his abilities. However, the human boy easily caught every single attack with his unoccupied hand.

'Guek!' The boy's monstrously strong grip kept crushing his throat.

"Ah, I see now. I never introduced myself." The boy grinned, his hold tightening further.

Vaizer shivered, instantly giving up on attacking.

He now decided to remove his opponent's hand from his aching throat. Unfortunately, even that bore no fruit.

Despite how hard he tried, the boy wouldn't budge.

It was just... impossible.

"I told you to start talking the moment I undid the paralysis."

"S-shut up, bra—"

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

A sharp, stinging sensation spread through Vaizer's body as his stomach was kicked by Jared's single blow.

'U-urk!'

"Now, then, for the sake of introductions. My name is Jared Leonard."

Vaizer's bloodshot eyes widened.

Why hadn't he realized it sooner? Was he so caught up in rage and defeat that he couldn't recall the most pervasive enemy that the Nether Cult currently faced.

'T-this... this is THAT Jared Leonard?!'

"Now then..."

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

Another echo of devastation spread through the room, sending a round of pain coursing through Vaizer's body.

It felt... utterly overwhelming!

"... Speak."

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Chapter 613: Vaizer's Resolve [Pt 1]

Vaizer felt his head spin.

He wanted to throw up—not just blood, but the undigested food in his bowels.

However, as if sensing this, Jared tightly locked his jaws with his strong grip. He gave another punch to the beastfolk's stomach, causing another throee of pain.

"When I ask a question, you answer."

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!<

"It's not up for negotiation."

Vaizer gave up on resisting the human's attacks at this point. He was simply no match.

'I was wrong... I was wrong...'

The person in front of him was in a completely different realm compared to anything he imagined.

Still...

"I... I won't ever betray the Cult." Vaizer coughed.

No matter what pain he went through... he didn't care. The Nether Cult was his new family. The leader gave him a new purpose, and even granted him power beyond his limits.

'H-he also cured my Mana Overload problem by replacing my normal Core with an Artificial Special Grade one.'

While Vaizer knew he wasn't the best when it came to moral ethics, there was no way he could budge on this matter.

He was loyal to the Cult. That would never change... EVER!

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

"KEUK!" Vaizer was forced to swallow the vomit he tried to release. Jared's grip remained ever so strong.

"Let's try again... talk."

More blows followed, and then more resistance—a never ending dance of madness.

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"It seems physical pain won't get us anywhere..." Jared murmured, staring squarely at the battered Beastfolk.

At this point, Vaizer had already returned to his normal state, no longer having any strength left to maintain his transformation.

His face was swollen, and his body was filled with several bruises—all from Jared's punch.

"I-I'll never talk..." Vaizer managed to say amid his groans.

"It's at this point I wish Ciara was here. She would have made you talk with her Magic. But she's busy right now..."

Jared took one or two steps back while sighing.

"You... no matter what you use. I won't crack. Everyone in the Cult knows that too... so there's no use." Vaizer grinned, though it was painful.

He wondered what his torturer would do next. However, Jared simply smiled in response—shocking him.

"I wonder why the Cult placed a self-destruct sequence on your Artificial Mana Core, then. Shows how much they trust you."

"Say what you will. Even if I am disposed off, I would harbor no ill will towards them..."

Vaizer's response seemed to surprise Jared. It felt completely bonkers, but the man wasn't afraid to die while protecting the Nether Cult.

"I'm sure they must be proud of you for saying that, considering they've begin the sequence. In a minute, your Mana Core will explode and you'll die."

"W-what?!"

"You're only a lower seat, so it makes sense. Your disposable. Besides, you have no problem sacrificing yourself for the cause, right?"

Jared's some grew wider as he stared down at the slightly flustered beastfolk. Despite all his grandiose statements, even he didn't want to die.

"Y-you're lying—" Vaizer felt his heart race and his insides tighten up.

Something wasn't right within him. He could sense it already, despite how subtle. The Mana Core within him was growing unstable.

Jared was right.

He really was being executed.

'B-but... I wasn't going to talk...'

"Now I know you don't care about anything else, but you must value your life. Maybe you don't, but definitely care about what you want to achieve."

Vaizer gave a glare of surprise at Jared. What did he know? A brat like him couldn't possibly understand.

"You want to fight against Gerard and win, don't you? You want to be recognized by your people. Both of these were stolen from you by the cult.

"N-no, you're wrong! The First Seat must have acted on his whim! He always does personal stuff like that!" Vaizer sharply responded.

There was no way the Cult Leader would have known about his genocidal intentions on the Beastfolk and he wouldn't stop him.

"Really now? In an organization like yours, the leader wouldn't know where the First Seat went to?"

Vaizer's eyes bulged.

The Cult Leader must have known! The First Seat asked for permission, and he granted it. The Cult Leader knew everything. That was show he had been able to guide them so far. He left them with absolute precision.

'There is no way he wouldn't have known...' Vaizer felt his insides tighten up even more.

"Ah, thirty seconds more. Guess I better make my pitch, then." Jared smiled, squatting so he could be on the same level as the fallen Beastfolk.

"I can help resurrect Gerard and the other Beastfolk. You are aware of what I can do, can't you? At least to an extent."

How could he forget? This was the same Jared who was giving the Cult such a difficult time. He resurrected the Elves and even saved the fallen soldiers who met their end in their final battle against the Demons.

The boy had been resurrecting people since he was still a kid in the Academy. This was THAT Jared.

"I... I don't need your charity. The Nether Cult can do that just fine." Vaizer growled.

His glare remained and his position remained unchanged. Once he explained to the cult, surely...

"Ah, my bad. I wonder if they'll do that once you're dead. Or even if you do survive... I wonder if the Beastfolk have enough value for that."

This was the statement that broke Vaizer.

Slowly, he remembered the Cult members that died before him. Had any of them been revived?

No.

The Cult Leader indeed didn't care about those who didn't have value.

'T-the fact that... I'm about to die is proof of that, right?'

The reality was that Vaizer lied.

More than anything, he wanted to live. He desired strength so he could rise to the top and rule his people once more.

'To be unbound by my limited ability and short lifespan... that was why I joined the Cult...'

And now... he was going to meet his end like this?

'KEUK!!!' He felt his Mana Core on the verge of collapse.

'I-is this really how I'll die?!

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Chapter 614: Vaizer's Resolve [Pt 2]

Jared simply watched the suffering beastfolk with no emotions.

The boy was really going to let him die without any consideration at all.

'N-no... I don't want this!'

Vaizer realized... he would do anything to live.

He betrayed his people.

He joined the Nether Cult.

He abandoned everything to get his heart's desire.

'KEUUUKKKK!!!' His Mana Core was already at critical point.

Any second now, and his death was going to surface.

'Not yet! I can't die yet!'

Vaizer simply wanted to live on his terms. To soar higher than any Beastfolk ever had. He wanted to rise even far beyond. To do that...

"F-fine! I surrender! I give up! I'll cooperate!" Vaizer screamed.

His eyes were tightly shut, and a miserable expression clouded his bruised face. The creature's body trembled as he waited for help—salvation from the imminent death that crept up on him.

"Wise choice."

With a snap of Jared's fingers, Vaizer felt the irregularity within his Mana Core to cease. No longer was he feeling the dreadful signs of Mana Overload.

"I only paused the effect. If you don't give me what I want to know, it'll resume."

The Beastfolk instantly understood.

He hadn't gotten free—at least, not yet. Unfortunately, he was still a dog on a leash. The only thing that changed was his master.

"I'll keep it nice and simple. You don't have any objections, do you?" Jared gave a warm smile.

If it wasn't that Vaizer had just seen him being a completely ruthless being, he would have been sold. He truly didn't seem harmful in any way.

"N-no..." The beastfolk's voice trembled as he answered.

He couldn't believe he was going to divulge cult Intel, but... he had to do anything to survive.

"Perfect. Let's begin."

I asked a series of questions, to which my prisoner gave me honest answers to.

'He's not lying.' I thought to myself.

The reason I knew this was because I constantly monitored his pulse, heart, Mana Core too. He couldn't escape my appraisal.

Other than the palpitations that came about due to fear, there was no sign of dishonesty. Despite that...

'This is useless.'

... Nothing I got was worthwhile.

I pretty much knew the location of the Cult, so confirming it from him didn't help in any way. The number of Arcanas in their possession, their remaining members, etc. I already know all these things.

As for their grand goals, or the reason behind seeking the Arcanas—the questions I had no answers to—Vaizer couldn't provide me with an appropriate response.

As I feared, he wasn't aware of anything substantial.

"W-we all have our reasons for joining the Cult. I don't know what the leader desires, but... he said with the combined abilities of the Arcana, we can do anything."

Well, their leader wasn't wrong.

Arcanas dealt with the laws of the world. I could only imagine how much one could control if they possessed all that power.

The very prospect worried me.

Unfortunately, when I asked about who this leader of theirs was, Vaizer didn't particularly know. He simply gave a vague description.

"H-he looks young, but his profound wisdom and power makes it evident... there's no way he's just a kid." So said Vaizer.

Based on what I surmised from his words, their leader was very strong. Since he was the head of the organization—having an even higher position than the First Seat who, apparently, was the one who busted the Beast Kingdom—I expected some massive power.

Such a thing couldn't be achievable by a kid... or perhaps it was.

'Is it possible that their leader is reincarnated like me? Is he a Singularity? There's so much I don't know...!' Unfortunately, Vaizer didn't know as well.

The beastfolk also mentioned something about him being accompanied by a woman in white. He added that the woman was also quite powerful.

'His mother, perhaps? Or could the whole thing be an act?'

It wasn't like shapeshifting didn't exist. What if he simply took on that persona to misdirect anyone from realizing his true identity?

That meant he could be anything, for all we knew.

Vaizer's testimony was flawed because even he hadn't conversed with the leader beyond official settings. The only time they spoke alone was when he was recruited.

Vaizer described it as the most inspiring moment of his life, but that didn't matter to me.

'In the end, I'm back to square one...' A sigh escaped my lips.

"At the very least, tell me the names of the Cult Members."

So far, I knew quite a few of them already. Vaizer, being one. The others included;

Legris Damien

Reed Sterling

Fairy King Beruel

Stefan Netherlore

Yeah... that pretty much covered it.

I was still missing out on the true names and identity of the upper three members of the Cult. Descriptions would also be nice.

"A-ah, t-there's... there's... t-the—"

Suddenly, I felt something surge from within Vaizer.

It was murky and dark, and it consumed him from within.

'Shit... no way... Nether?!'

"G-guurrrrrghhhhhh..." Vaizer's choked scream echoed as he gave a shocked glare at me.

His expression was akin to that of betrayal. He must have suspected my hands in this... or at least my culpability in refusing to prevent such an outcome.

However... I had no idea!

Before I could respond or help the Beastfolk, his body underwent rapid corruption, and the darkness completely shrouded his being.

"N-nooooo..." Every fiber of his being was engulfed in the pitch black energy. And before long... he became one with nothingness

"Damn it!"

My eyes were wide with rage at this point. Not only had I been outdone by the enemy, but it was at such a critical moment too! Just when I was about to find out something I wasn't aware of.

'Vaizer had those answers... and they intentionally cut me off!'

Rage swirled within me, but more than that existed frustration.

'I couldn't detect the Nether in him at all. Just how much was it integrated into him?'

From what I heard, it seemed the Cult Leader made him stronger by undergoing some procedure.

'He received a new Mana Core, but what of he got something else too?'

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Chapter 615: Discourse Of Corruption

Nether, depending on how used, had various effects on people.

'But it usually leads to death, right? I don't understand...'

The Netherlore had conducting experiments on Nether for something similar—harnessing the power for themselves.

The fact that Stefan also manifested the power made it plausible that certain people were clinging onto the forbidden abilities offered by Nether.

'But I didn't sense anything like that from Vaizer!'

He had been using Mana throughout, and even Maro's testimony tallied with that. If he could utilize Nether, he would have done so already.

That made it all the more confusing.

A reasonable explanation would be that the Nether Cult found a way to make Nether manifest from Vaizer remotely. In that case, he was never safe from them.

'Even though I set up the perfect stage... damnit.'

"I'm sorry, Maro, Asa. Even though you went out of your way to capture a specimen for me... I let him slip away."

'No. This isn't the time to let this drag me down.'

I just had to focus on the more important matters... things I could control.

'Apologies, Vaizer. I couldn't fulfil my end of the deal.'

His soul had also been corrupted and destroyed, so there was no retrieving him. I didn't have enough time to establish a Soul Brand too, so I couldn't have preserved a portion of it.

'Though that was probably for the best.'

The mere thought of having Nether invade my Soul using the connection I had with another made me shiver.

If I had home ahead with the Soul Brand, the likelihood of getting corrupted myself was high. In a way, things could have gone a lot worse.

The fact that I didn't make good on my word left a bad taste in my mouth, though. I didn't plan on just letting it slide just like that.

'This is on me. I might as well have justice for you...'

I stepped out of the room to share the news to everyone, once again ensuring I had my Arcanas close in hand.

'... That'll be my penance.'

In the darkness of a strange abode sat a young man.

He looked nothing more than a teenager, having dark hair and equally pitch black eyes. His expression was cold, and his pale skin made him seem almost like a corpse.

He wore a dark cloak, shrouded in dense power that would make anyone crumble under the pressure.

This was the Cult Leader, as his subordinates would like to call him.

"Vaizer is dead." He spoke, almost as if telling someone in particular.

However, no one was in the vast hall where he sat. A table was set before him, and numerous books—pile after pile—remained for him to attend to.

In this office-like hall, he was all alone.

Well, not really.

A lovely young woman appeared from behind him. She was doused in white—her attire, and her hair color. Everything about her was clear and beautiful.

Her light skin had a bright tone too, perfectly matching her choice in fashion.

The only thing different about her was the gleaming hues in her eyes. They seemed to flash a different color per moment.

She approached the young man, who was busy with seeing through the ancient texts. Her gaze was constantly on him.

He was the Cult Leader, after all. The object of fervent devotion and immense authority.

If only the subordinates could see just who he was beneath the child-like appearance he had... perhaps they would even begin worshipping him.

He was that glorious.

"Deep in thoughts?" His voice echoed as he glanced in the direction of the woman behind him.

"Yes, forgive me. I was just in awe of your greatness, as usual."

The young man returned his gaze to the work he had to do, narrowing his vision as he have a sigh.

The white maiden was always like this. She wouldn't shut up about his greatness, especially when they were alone.

When they were in front of the others, she simply kept her composure and remained silent. However... in private...

"I didn't expect Vaizer to betray us. He had no reason to." The Cult Leader whispered.

It sounded like he made a statement, but it raised a question for the woman to answer.

"Perhaps. Fortunately, you silenced him before he said any more." She smiled in response.

"Were you able to locate them? They have something that belongs to us, after all."

"I did. Unfortunately, his Magic distorts my vision of the place."

The Cult Leader sighed.

Things had gotten more complicated than he expected. If it hadn't been for the interference of one person, they could have steadily achieved their goals.

"We should have eliminated the Singularity back then... when he was still a child." He added, staring coldly at the woman behind him.

"Perhaps. But, we had to operate under the radar and use less impressive means to achieve those goals."

The young man had no choice but to accept her words. She wasn't wrong, after all.

Singularities were the beloved of the world. They had access to Aether, and somehow things functioned in ways that prevented disasters from occurring to them.

However, if it was on a smaller scale, something beyond the control of nature... they could have achieved their goals.

"Ever since I got the [Vision], it's been one issue after the other. Who would have expected the child to take out not just one, but two assassins. When we used the Shadow Demon, he was saved by Neron."

One thing or the other always had to happen.

"We could have just eliminated Neron." The Cult Leader grumbled a little.

His gaze was on the book, but his mind travelled far behind.

"Ah, perhaps... but you know we can't do that."

"Haa... still waiting for the right time, huh? I see..."

Neron Kaelid was perhaps a greater nuisance than Jared—always had been.

The only reason he was still alive was due to the [Vision] that made him valuable to the plan.

Taking him out would severely affect the causality of their goals.

"We live in Aether's world, after all... and a mother cares for her own." The lady in white smiled.

The Cult Leader ignored her words and continued reading. Certainly she wasn't implying what it seemed to be.

No, she probably meant the other thing.

"To think we would have more than one Singularity this time..."

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Chapter 616: Haunted Abode [Pt 1]

"This is boring..."

A boy and a girl were walking down a dark path.

It was within a building, yet it seemed like everything was covered by an expanse of night.

Even the darkness of nighttime had the light of the stars, though... unlike their current location.

For these two, only a fragment of light lit their path—and it came from the boy's brightly colored flames.

"I'm just happy you're not scared anymore." The young man responded to his female counterpart.

His brown hair flowed with the cool climate, and his honest eyes showed his innocence. To the contrary, the girl seemed cute enough, but her glossy eyes rang of deviousness.

It lacked the fundamental innocence of the man.

"Yeah... whatever."

The boy and girl were, of course, Ciara Epilson and Jerry Keller.

Ciara couldn't help but sigh as she stayed beside the boy, sticking as close to him as possible.

'Seems he's completely used to it, at this point... this isn't good.'

The two were currently in a Dungeon—or more akin to a haunted ruin. The structure resembled to a multiple storey house—perhaps once an exquisite villa.

Jared transported them just outside the haunted house's gate. Their instructions were given, thus... they were supposed to get into the creepy-looking place to get their rewards.

As instructed, Ciara and Jerry both ventured into it, ignoring the twisted garden that contained withered flowers and hushed whispers.

It was quite easy to infiltrate the house, considering the doors weren't even locked, to begin with.

The problem, however, was what happened after.

The house was without any form of light, and there seemed to be many creatures shifting through the darkness. Bright eyes flashed through the sheer blackness of the house, and they slithered all around them.

The two could feel themselves being watched. They sometimes felt touches from behind.

It was the real deal. This place was most certainly crawling with creatures. Creatures that hid themselves from sight and struck when the time was right.

As a result...

"Kiaaaaaaa!!! I-I'm scared!"

"I-it's alright, Ciara. Really... I'll use my Magic. Really..."

Even though using light would just attract the creatures—whatever they were—to them, and the pair would become easy targets, it was still much better than being blind.

Sure, they could sense their surroundings through Mana Sense or other sensory aspects, but with Ciara freaking out, Jerry decided to take the lead.

Just as she planned!

The boy seemed to think Ciara had been scared since they entered their current location, but that was simply what she made him think.

It was her excuse for sticking close to him, and whenever she did, he would always yelp in a flustered tone.

'It was supposed to be fun. I was supposed to be a damsel in distress. He would get shy and all around me, which is cute, and then... he would slowly... we would slowly...'

Unfortunately, things didn't quite turn out as she expected.

For one, it seemed Jerry was more focused on the situation than he was her. His eyes never really glanced in her direction.

Even when she pressed her body on him!

Sure, he had made uncomfortable sounds before—especially when her chest touched his body—but he slowly acclimated.

His mind was so focused on the mission that it drove Ciara crazy.

'You should look at me! I'm right here, Jerry!' She was exasperated.

They ascended the first, second, and third stairs—realizing the building definitely seemed smaller on the outside.

For one, there seemed to be no end to the size of the entire structure.

The entire villa seemed like some noble's mansion, having chandeliers, carpets, and of course, a lot of pristine designs.

They had explored the many rooms within the house, only finding emptiness wherever they went.

Even when they found some rooms with specific purposes...

"T-this is the library?" Within were shelves filled with books, to which Jerry readily explored.

Unfortunately, the books were all empty. Literally.

No pages existed in the books!

Even when they saw the music room, viewing many instruments—none of them functioned well.

Why, for example, would string instruments lack strings?

"This place is weird..." Jerry felt the eerie vibes of his surroundings the more he explored the structure with Ciara.

If there was something he noticed over time, though, it was that...

"Where are the monsters? I don't see them lurking around anymore."

Indeed, there were definitely living creatures who constantly watched them. They often gazed in their direction.

Their glowing eyes often reminded the two that they weren't alone. Still, the monsters hadn't engaged them, and Jerry thought to keep things that way.

"We don't want to cause unnecessary commotion here, especially since we don't know the rules of this place." Was his rationale.

Besides, without any idea of how strong the entities were, it would be unwise to engage them.

Though if they found no clues, it would be imperative to change their approach.

"I wonder..." Ciara responded to Jerry's earlier question.

'The monsters, eh...?' A wide smile formed on her face.

"ROOOOOAAAARRRRRRR!!!"

"GRRRUUUUUUUU!!!"

"KRUUUUAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

Suddenly, multiple sounds emanated from all around them.

"W-what is that?! T-these sounds—!" Sweat slowly formed on Jerry's face as he glanced around.

They were currently in the hallway of the third floor, and these cries sounded like the aggressive howls of monsters.

Jerry could sense bloodlust! The Monsters were now direction their killing intents toward the two.

The pressure so strong that even Jerry shuddered in response to the sudden outbursts of the beings lurking around.

The floor began rumbling, and the rushing sounds of several beings rushing in their direction caused the two to snap to reality.

The situation was dire!

"Eeeek! S-save me, Jerry! It's dark... and I'm scared!" Ciara cried, hugging the boy with far greater fervor than before.

Her chest pressed against his body, and their skin rubbed against each other... enough for him to yelp.

The boy's heart ached instantly.

'What are you doing, Jerry? You can't be flustered like this. Ciara is counting on you!'

With that in mind, he put his mind to action in order to protect both himself and his dear friend.

'Don't worry, Ciara! Just like back then... I won't leave your side!'

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

Chapter 617: Haunted Abode [Pt 2]

Ever since they had known each other, Ciara had always been scared of the dark.

She would often spend her night in his room—a practice that filled their childhood.

Jerry was of low nobility, and his father was the lord of the particular patch of land where Ciara had been brought up.

Still, as was common with those who had very little power, the Lord was close to the people. Which made Jerry know Ciara, and even become friends with her without any form of bias.

She spent some time in his abode, and he spent some time in hers as well. His father had been poor, so they didn't really have much going for them anyways.

But, Ciara had had it much worse. She'd lived in the slums. Her home hadn't been in any good state at all. Compared to her lifestyle, Jerry had felt himself to be a king.

It made him appreciate her more... especially her smile and expressive personality.

Well, all of that vanished once darkness arrived.

Ciara was scared of the dark, and simply clung close to him whenever it was that time of any day. And as the confident one... as the man, he had to protect her!

His father had allowed her to spend the night in his house, after some persuasion. Though Jerry didn't know why, the Lord often asked about his experience the next morning.

There was no experience, though. He simply cuddled her and caressed her hair so she could fall asleep.

He would soothe her with his words and they would whisper nice things to each other till they fell asleep.

It wasn't anything special, really.

However... they eventually parted.

Despite their friendship, there was one thing that severed the connection they'd had—talent for Magic!

It initially hadn't been a problem, but after some time... Ciara changed.

He would often declare how he would get to her level, but she always seemed to get even further and further beyond his reach—even at Ainzlark.

'Those were some days, huh?' Jerry smiled a little, now recollecting how he had been very frustrated and impulsive back then.

Despite their very strained relationship in the Academy, and his dislike for how things had turned out, Jerry couldn't deny he often had certain thoughts about Ciara before he slept.

He had often wondered how she managed to sleep when she was in the female dorms back at Ainzlark. Her fear of the dark had been a serious problem when they were kids, after all.

After wondering for some time, he decided to settle on the thought that she had gotten over her fears.

'Looks like I was wrong...' Looking at her now, Jerry realized she still had that fear within her.

She was but a frail girl in the darkness!

'Just how long did she have to endure like that in Ainzlark... being alone in the darkness! It made him realize that her twisted personality in school was probably not entirely her fault.

She had simply been pushed to that point due to her mental stress, no doubt.

'That's why... I can't falter here!' Jerry removed his mind from her soft boobs and nice smell.

Now wasn't the time to indulge in such things—not that he had ever really done so.

Ciara Epilson was relying on him. That was all that mattered!

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"I-it's unavoidable anyway! Since they're coming for us, then there's no need to remain in the dark any longer!"

The purpose of simply having a small light source had been defeated, after all.

"Time to brighten up this place!"

>VWUUUUSSSHH<

His flames got much brighter, it became a blazing flame as they grew to a higher degree.

Suddenly, the darkness was banished, and illumination radiated everywhere. Jerry smiled, spreading the flames throughout the hallway—ensuring it passed through the crevices and exposed the hidden things.

"[Flames of Sight] have a low temperature and very little destructive power. They are perfect for this purpose." He turned to Ciara, hoping this would calm her a little.

"Tch."

It could have been his imagination, but John thought he saw Ciara frown and click her tongue. As soon as he blinked, he realized it must have been his mind playing tricks on him.

Ciara was still clutching onto him tightly, and her face indicated light relief... though worry remained trapped in her eyes.

It made him want to protect her even more.

'This time, Ciara... I'll do my best to help!'

It was no secret who was the superior one in ability.

Unlike Ciara who had Original Magic, Mage Mode, a Special Grade Mana Core, and several other impressive feats... he was quite weak.

However, no one was invincible!

In these circumstances... it was his turn to cover for his partner's weakness and do his best.

This was his way of catching up!

>DUMMMMMMM<

The hallway shook violently as the platform underneath them trembled.

As expected, more monsters were alerted of their presence and were rushing towards them.

'This can't be good!'

Jerry glanced around him, quickly attempting to decide on what path to take. They had to ascend to a higher floor to achieve their goals.

However, before he could complete this mission, creatures emerged from both viable means of escape.

'Shit!' Jerry cursed, now stuck between the horde of monsters.

The beasts facing him were all deformed entities, some had exposed, ugly flesh while others had multiple eyes. Some had several limbs, while others seemed unreasonably emaciated.

These freaks had various differences, but one thing was similar about their appearances.

"S-scary..."

Jerry's heart raced once more as he heard Ciara's shaky voice. The darkness wasn't the only problem, as this time around it was creatures that made up one's nightmares.

"Don't worry, Ciara... I'll protect you!"

Jerry swiftly made up his mind as he glanced at the least congested area to pass through. Sure, there would still be monsters to face, but it would be much safer.

'Using my senses, I already see the stairs. Plus, the monsters that are still coming after us are a lot. I need to move fast!'

"Hup!" Jerry quickly lifted Ciara, carrying her in both arms—like a baby being cradled by its mother.

"Hold on tight."

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Chapter 618: Haunted Abode [Pt 3]

"E-eeehh? W-what are y-you...?!"

The flustered girl in his arms made unintelligible sounds after her surprised yelp.

The whole thing was shocking, after all.

"Please bear with me, Ciara. Hold on tight... this will be a rough one!"

"O-okay..."

Ciara wrapped her arms around Jerry, blushing as she looked away. It seemed she finally understood the situation.

'I-I'm sorry to put you through this, Ciara... really!'

Jerry was simply following the method he knew best. Fear made a person slow. Ciara's motor functions would definitely become compromised due to her current state.

'If I let her run with me, chances of the both of us getting caught is higher. And I can't allow that!'

To increase their chances of survival, it had to come to this.

"[Elemental Chamber: Armament]!"

Instantly, condensed Mana formed all over Jerry's body.

Usually, the destructive flames would have burst out, devastating everything around him, but he had learned to compress this energy to simply serve as a thin shroud for himself.

This made it all the more powerful!

He became stronger, faster... and overall more powerful.

Of course, it limited the range of his offensive capabilities as he would only be able to engage in Melee combat. However... with the boosts it offered, this 'Armament' form was perfect for certain moments—like now.

'I'll save Bond Magic and Fusion for later...'

With that, he leaped into action.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM<

The platform he stood on was completely eviscerated as he launched his body forward. The wind violently blew against him, though his current state made it no problem at all.

As for Ciara, though, she covered her eyes due to the sheer speed at which Jerry was moving.

>FWOOOOOOSH HHHHH<

The monsters stood no chance.

They violently lunged at him, but he easily evaded them.

Leaping and running while using the walls as footholds, Jerry swept through the grotesque beings in a flash.

He made sure to kick the monsters that got too close for comfort, turning them to ash with only a single hit.

Due to Jerry's immensely concentrated power, a single blow from him would cause the pent-up pressure to instantaneously finish his target.

It was enough to destroy enemies with extremely high durability.

The mere matter of its focused range made it extremely deadly.

'Let's go! Yeah... I can do this!'

Jerry zoomed past the monsters, successfully escaping the hallway. He sped to the stairs, trying to be light in his steps in order to prevent destroying any more of the areas.

By dispersing the energy that would have devastated the grounds he trod on, the boy ensured there was a foothold left for him to tread.

'They're still chasing me. Maybe... ' Jerry's eyes narrowed at the monsters behind him.

He was maintaining a far distance from them, but it was still troubling that they followed him. He had ensured that his bright flames of light pervaded the entire area, so he wasn't particularly a beacon of light.

Still, they pursued him with such fervor that he simply had to shake them off permanently.

"A-ah!"

An idea popped into Jerry's head, and he decided to cut off every means of reaching him.

"Burst." He stomped the ground, glaring at the monsters some distance away.

>BOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMM<

The platform that spread from his position to the monsters instantly shattered, turning into ash in moments.

The ground beneath the monsters began breaking apart as well, causing them to fall to the lower floors.

"GUUAARRAAAAAKKKK!!!" Jerry ignored their screams and continued on to his destination.

The platform where he stood was also becoming unstable.

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

Akin to a blur, he raced past the slowly collapsing platform behind him.

The stairs were just in sight, and Jerry ascended them in a flash. He didn't halt for a second, even when he saw monsters at the very top of the stairs.

The boy simply steeled himself as he proceeded to break through. There was only one thought on his mind at this point.

And it wasn't Jared's mission to him.

It was the girl he tightly held in his grasp.

'Ciara... just count on me!'

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'Kyaaaa! Yesss! This is what it's supposed to be like!' Ciara's thoughts screamed as Jerry held her tight and sped through the enemies.

Her heart raced uncontrollably and she found her passion increasing at an uncontrollable rate.

Her cheeks were so flushed with pink, but it wasn't due to embarrassment.

'H-he's so cool!!!' Ciara's eyes sparkled as she stole a glance at her knight in shining armor—literally.

Her body was trembling fervently, causing Jerry to soothe her instantly. More determination filled his eyes as he tried even harder to protect her.

It made her ecstatic!

Of course, she wasn't shaking because she was scared. No, Ciara was just excited and moved by Jerry's coolness.

'So he still thinks I'm scared of the dark... how cute.' She couldn't help but smile within herself.

Back when they were younger, she had wanted to spend more time with Jerry, so she'd had to resort to that narrative.

Thanks to her lie, though, she had been able to sleep beside him every night. He would speak to her, cuddle her, hold her tight... he would do just about anything for her.

It had been paradise.

Ciara felt like his father suspected her lie, but thankfully he didn't call her out on it. It had been an obvious sign that he was in support of their relationship.

Still, she had gotten so accustomed to being with him at night that even when they had been at Ainzlark she would sneak into his room to watch him sleep.

It was a habit that refused to leave her.

And now... who would have thought that he would hold her in his arms as he sped through a dangerous place—protecting her from the monsters around.

He truly was acting the part now... like a knight in shiny armor.

'As expected... you just needed a little push.' Ciara grinned.

With all the monsters around being under her mind control, she was successfully controlling the narrative.

'Should I make things a bit rougher? Maybe I should...'

If there was greater danger, wouldn't Jerry show even more of his cool side to her? His adorable expression as he did his best to protect his woman... Ciara could never get enough of it!

'This is so goooood! I love you so much, Jerry!'

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Chapter 619: Dead End

"Haa... haa..."

Jerry was heavily breathing as he finally reached the topmost floor of the entire building.

Fortunately, he had managed to protect both himself and Ciara while ascending the numerous stairs and they finally got to the highest point.

'We couldn't explore more of the other floors because of the monsters. But...'

There really wasn't any choice. The goal was to cause as little damage as possible, considering they had little to no information concerning this deserted place.

Once Jerry reached the top, he erected a Magical barrier, preventing the monsters from climbing up to reach them.

Ciara also assisted him, making the barrier much more powerful.

In the end, they were safe from the enemies.

"Haaa... such a relief."

Jerry was genuinely relieved, though one could say Ciara was indifferent. Perhaps it was because only she was aware of the fact that there hadn't been any real danger, to begin with.

If anything, she was sad to see it all end.

'It was fun while it lasted...' She shed a tiny tear.

Upon seeing this look of sadness on her face, the innocent Jerry misunderstood. He assumed she was still recoiling from the shock and fear.

"I'm sorry, Ciara. You must have been really scared, right?"

She nodded, and collapsed on his chest. Rather than resist her, Jerry stroked her hair... just like he used to in the past.

He whispered nice words to her, and his chest offered her comfort. Even if it was only for that moment, both of them felt like they had returned to their childhood...

... Back when they had been inseparable friends.

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The top floor was completely bare, unlike the other ones beneath, which had various compartments and rooms.

The bare area was illuminated by Jerry's bright flames, bringing everything into view.

The vast empty expanse resembled a simple hallway—though it's size made it more akin to a large room.

The flat surfaces surrounding it seemed to belong to the buildings' walls, and nothing worthy of note could be found.

"What now?" Ciara asked Jerry, who had already become the de-facto leader.

He had to think of what to do, and he was in charge of both himself and the woman in his arms.

"Y-you shouldn't be scared now, Ciara. There aren't any monsters around. Plus, it isn't dark anymore..."

Jerry was well aware of how ferocious his dear friend could be in given circumstances.

She was the very person who had made short work of the Demon Army and easily defeated the Demon General during the war.

She was one of the strongest in their group, and most Mages wouldn't stand a chance against her.

Thus, Jerry was convinced that she had to be fine now.

"I-it's not like I'm enjoying this, you know! Am I that much of a burden to you?" Ciara's outburst surprised the boy, causing him to rethink his position.

'Was I being too rash? It could be that she's still recovering from the trauma.

No human was invincible, after all. Everyone had fears, and Ciara was no exception. Sure, she was strong... but even the strongest had their areas of weaknesses.

"N-no, it's not like that. You're not being a burden!" Jerry quickly responded with an apology.

Thinking logically, he was usually the burden between the two. He was weaker, after all. Just because Ciara was incapacitated now didn't mean he had to rub it in or anything.

'I was being too insensitive...'

Unfortunately for the lad, he was dead wrong.

'Just look at his face. So cuuutteeeee!!!'

The girl whose emotions he was considering so carefully wasn't at all in a delicate situation. Rather, she was reveling in the current situation.

'I'm enjoying this so much!' Ciara pressed herself to Jerry, sending his body into shivers.

His innocent reactions never ceased to amuse her. Though... she wondered when he would finally be honest about his feelings.

'When will he confess?'

Unfortunately for the girl, even she was dead wrong.

Both of them were mistaken about each other on the most fundamental level.

"I believe we should try exploring this place. It looks empty, but... who knows?"

There was the possibility that Jared had simply been wrong about the existence of an Arcana in this location.

If that indeed was the case, then this would definitely suck.

"Alright. Let's do this." He, and the girl beside him nodded.

Together, hand in hand, they proceeded to search for whatever they could find.

However, as unfortunate as it seemed, there was nothing in sight. It felt frustrating that they had spent their entire time exploring the building, yet there was nothing to reward their efforts.

'Is this really it?' Jerry wondered.

"Why don't we check the garden? We never explored it."

Ciara's suggestion surprised the boy. Neither of them had thought of exploring the exterior of the building considering what the obvious answer was.

Perhaps Ciara had a point. Still...

"A-are you sure you want to go through that, though?" The boy asked rather nervously.

"Y-yeah. No harm in trying, right?"

Upon receiving her consent, there wasn't anything holding him back.

"Okay. Let's do that."

While the decision to return downstairs was unanimously reached by the two, there was something important to consider.

The grotesque monsters of darkness!

This was the very reason why Jerry had been hesitant on the idea, and why Ciara had recommended it.

'I'll have to protect her again. Am I up for the job?' Jerry asked himself, after realizing that the monsters would have all piled up by the stairs.

They would be eagerly awaiting the descent of the pair.

If they had found the Arcana here, they could have used their Spell Cards to vanish from the entire vicinity. That had been Jerry's thoughts when he chose to seal the stairs from the advance of the monsters.

Unfortunately, they had to return from whence they came.

'I'll do my best!' He glanced at the girl he had to defend.

He saw her trembling, and his resolve tightened.

If only he knew the cause for her reaction. It wasn't due to fear or anxiety. No... he wasn't even close.

'Hehehe... hehehehe... hehehehehe....Time for round two!'

The girl called Ciara was simply indulging in her obsessive imagination.

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

Chapter 620: Trapped [Pt 1]

It took a lot of skill—perhaps even luck,—but Jerry and Ciara managed to descend to the ground floor without any casualty or injury.

It could have been his imagination, but Jerry felt that their opponents became faster and stronger at a particular point.

However, his will to protect his friend—as well as his own drive for survival—ensured he gave it his all. Until...

... They finally arrived at their destination.

'Kyaaaaaaaaaaaa! So awesome!' Ciara thought gleefully to herself as they both sealed off the monsters—preventing them from giving chase.

They noticed that the creatures avoided the door to the house, which meant that they probably couldn't leave. However, just to be safe, the duo erected a barrier anyway.

"Alright... we're in the garden. What now?" Jerry heaved a misty breath.

The environment was dark and cold, and the garden didn't make it a more pleasant sight.

Nothing but the deep darkness of a thick forest could be seen in their environment. The night sky barely contained stars, and the moon was awfully dull.

"Let's explore the garden." Ciara nodded to Jerry's words, and they began their exploration.

Of course, Jerry kept her close, and he diligently searched for their prize.

'This has to work!'

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NOTHING!

The duo found nothing at all!

There was no Arcana in the garden, and this was made clear to Jerry and Ciara after they tried their best to find one.

In the first place, neither could sense the energy signature which was unique to an Arcana—the incomprehensible energy—in the garden.

It was the same as the mansion.

Despite their best efforts... nothing.

"What now?" Jerry sighed.

He felt stuck at this point. After trying all he could, being as diligent as possible... he still couldn't do this one job right.

"Don't look so down, Jerry. This is a very difficult job. Besides, Jared said that it's possible that he was wrong and there's no Arcana here."

"Y-yeah..."

"You know... there's something we've never tried before. Maybe it'll work..."

Ciara gave Jerry a slightly embarrassed expression, and she slowly leaned towards him.

Whatever was going on in her mind remained a mystery to the young, oblivious man. He simply tried to encourage himself with her words, and he was happy when she made a suggestion that could work.

"O-oh? What is it?"

Jerry was desperate at this point. If it had even a slight opportunity for success... he would take it.

After a little moment of waiting, Ciara finally opened her pursed lips and let out what was squirming in her inner thoughts.

"K-kiss..."

"Eh?"

For a second, maybe more, awkward silence pervaded the area. Other than the howling of the wind, and the ruffling of the garden's withered, twisted branches, there was no sound at all.

"I-I mean... I read it in a book somewhere. A kiss breaks... some kinds of bind or spell. Maybe it... will break... this one..."

Jerry's eyes bulged as he heard Ciara say this. Red dots slowly appeared on his face and he yelled in shock.

"W-w-w-what are you implying?! A k-kiss?!"

"Don't raise your voice! It's not like... it's something easy for me too..." The girl fidgeted, creating an even more awkward atmosphere.

Despite saying that, though, Jerry could not help but wonder how their situation had devolved into a kissing matter?

For one, he had never heard of a book or method that prescribed kissing for solving a rather awry situation.

'I know I'm not as smart as Ciara, but...' His cheeks flushed with more pink and his heart raced.

Jerry was so uneasy that he began sweating. What could he do? If Ciara was smarter than he was, and there was a possibility of success in the act... then shouldn't they go ahead with it?

'I-it makes sense... right?'

Jerry gulped as he looked at the girl beside him. Her lips were glossy, and they were so welcoming. It felt so...

'Shame on you, Jerry. How can you think of her like that?' He thought himself to be vile for considering such a thing, especially to someone who was in a vulnerable state.

"Ciara... we better not. I know you said this because you're considering how much I don't want to fail, but you're right. Jared mentioned how it's possible that we won't find anything. I think we'd better report back to him."

As Jerry explained himself, he felt that he saw Ciara's countenance fall. But it all happened so fast that that he must have seen wrong.

"Tch!"

Once again, he must have heard wrong too. There was no way Ciara would click her tongue like that.

"We should teleport back. Where's my Spell Card?" Jerry rummaged through his outfit.

'U-uh?!' His eyes bulged.

Something wasn't right, but he couldn't be so certain, right? He decided to search thoroughly.

After a few seconds of searching and searching, he finally arrived at the most rational conclusion—though it made no sense to him.

"C-Ciara... I can't find it. My Spell Card."

Perhaps... perhaps she could find hers. If she did, then—!

"I can't find mine too!"

Both of them looked at each other in surprise. Shock was written on their faces until it evolved into confusion.

"H-how?!"

"Why?!"

They had no answers to those questions. Did they drop it behind? No, he didn't think so. It was possible that it could have been lost in his battle against the monsters, but...

'I made sure to secure it properly!' Jerry wasn't stupid.

He knew what he was doing well.

'Plus, Ciara isn't so clumsy. Something must be going on here...'

In any case, they were stuck.

Not only were they trapped in the middle of nowhere, but they also had no prize for their efforts.

"Damn it. I'm sorry, Ciara. The others might even be returning with their Arcanas by now, and yet..."

Why did someone as strong as her have to end up with a weak and unimpressive guy like this.

'No Arcana. No Spell Card. What's going on?!'

There was nothing he could do at this point, though. Even though he was a man, and he wanted to prove himself—at least to an extent—he had already failed pretty badly.

"We'll just wait for Jared to come save us."