

SPELLCRAFT 681

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

Chapter 681: An Awkward Walk

'Why did I choose to tease her?'

When I teleported, I saw Maria standing alone, so I decided to play a little joke on her. Of course, I used my [Unknowable] Magic, so she didn't notice me approaching her. I even overheard her saying she missed someone.

Thinking that was the perfect cue, I made my presence known.

'H-how could I have known that things would come to this?!'

Maria was dangerously close to me. Her blue eyes seemed to have a hypnotizing effect, and her glossy lips beckoned the moment they parted when she smiled. It was almost as though she was inviting me to make the first move.

'No way!' I thought to myself.

This girl confused the hell out of me. She always surprised me by how easily she switched personalities, from being gentle and mild to being so upfront and confident.

'What happened to that shy girl from Ainzlark? Has she always been like this?!' My heart raced even more as I continued to observe her.

One thing was for sure. She definitely wasn't the girl from the Academy. I wouldn't be saying any more than that.

"A-are you kidding? We're out in the open, you know?" I stated my argument.

It was an ultimate defence since nobles like us couldn't be seen acting improperly in public—especially since we both belonged to families who were among the four great Nobles.

'Or should I call them three now? The Netherlores should be out of the equation.'

Unfortunately for my defence, the courthouse—and practically its surroundings—were devoid of people. If I had to guess, it was most likely a defensive measure taken because of the Netherlore Trial.

'After sentencing, they'll most likely be transported by teleportation—kind of like how the Ainzlark Academy works.'

In essence, other than the patrolling Mages and Warriors hiding around, Maria and I were alone. Once I realized my defence wouldn't hold up, I knew I had to brace myself for impact.

Impact in three... two... one...

"Relax. I wasn't actually going to do anything." Maria chuckled, stepping back in a playful manner.

'U-uh...?' I was a little dazed for a second, but I almost instantly regained my composure and realized that she had just been teasing me.

"Consider it revenge for what you did earlier!" She gave a smug smile as she folded her arms—thus boosting her chest to a heightened degree.

I didn't know whether this was on purpose or not, though. It was better not to guess.

'This is good, though. Right? She was just kidding!' My thoughts broke into relief, and I joined Maria to laugh it off.

Why, then, did I feel a bit disappointed? Yes, just a little disappointed. Was I really hoping she would—?!

"So, why are you here, Jared? I thought you were busy with stuff on the team? The arrangement was for me to return once I was done here, right?" Fortunately, Maria interrupted me before I could delve deeper into my thoughts.

Thank goodness, really!

"A-ah, well something came up. A lot has happened, and it's caused me to move up my plans a little." I managed to say, finally using my serious tone.

Fortunately, this served as a precedent for a serious conversation, and all the silliness from before quickly fizzled out.

"Move up? Really? What happened?"

As expected, Maria's eyes displayed curiosity. She had missed out on a lot, after all. Perhaps this would be a good way to let off some steam.

"Well, I'll tell you on the way. You're going to the Royal Palace, right? Me too." I smiled at her.

I was a bit caught off guard when she blushed in response to my words. Really, she kept on confusing me every single time.

'I didn't even say or do anything weird this time.'

Fortunately, the awkward air was remedied by Maria's sensible approach and her agreement to cooperate.

"Alright then. I'm guessing you want to see The King?" At this point, Maria and I started moving.

It would have been much easier and faster to simply teleport to our destination, but considering we had much to discuss, I chose to enjoy a walk with her instead.

"Yes. But it's not just him. There's Elrich Lenderwale, as well as my father who's in the Capital. I dropped by his manor, but I was told he's in the Palace."

"Ohh, I see..."

Awkward silence tried to settle down between the both of us, but I decided not to let it prevail.

"You've seen him around a few times, right?" I asked with a smile.

"Y-yeah. You take after him a lot, I think." She laughed so charmingly that I felt like my heart jumped from its position

"Haha. Is that so? What part of him do I take after?" I decided to further that conversation.

"Well, mostly good traits. I can see that handsomeness runs in the family."

"H-handsome? Surely you jest. You should have seen my face in the past. I was perfection."

I puckered my lips while using my hand to smoothen my chin. My eyebrows were raised and I gave her my best 'Sir Charming' smile.

"Pfft. Haha... stop it, Jared. Hahaha!"

As expected, the damsel burst out laughing. Was my expression so funny? I hoped so, considering I intended for us to have a good time and clear away the awkwardness

And by my calculations, I was precisely on track.

"I'm serious, though."

"Really? Why don't you show me?"

"Eh? Show you what?" I had an idea of what she meant, but feigning ignorance was my best bet at the moment.

"Transform into your past self and show me. You can use that Magic, can't you? Or even just Projection or Illusory Magic."

I gulped down the saliva that got stuck in my throat and forced myself not to draw attention to the bead of sweat forming on my forehead.

"Haha... there's no need for that. Come on!"

"Show me." Maria's tone suddenly sounded firm, and her wide blue eyes seemed so imposing.

I was caught between crossroads.

'Should I? Should I not?'

I got myself into this mess, so I had to simply resolve it. Fortunately, I had a trump card I could utilize.

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Chapter 682: Blossoming Change

"I'll show you some other time. Perhaps somewhere more private. There could be eyes watching."

Yes, that's right! This was my secret weapon.

'From what I've seen, there are people who knew my identity in the past. People like Aurora and Jane. There could be others.'

"We have to be careful in this phase of ours. We can't mess things up."

"O-oh, yeah. You're right. My bad..." Maria laughed a little, but I could tell that I just made things worse.

All of my effort at lightening the mood had just gone down the drain. A certain thought popped into my head, asking why exactly I cared so much.

I hadn't always been so conscious in the past, had I?

'I think it's pretty obvious to me already...' My thoughts trailed as I stared at Maria.

Things were different between us now. That much was certain.

"Y-you know, I'd really like to meet your parents too. I'm sure you'd share a lot of attributes with your mom." I laughed, drawing closer to Maria as I tried to repair the bridge that was slowly collapsing.

"W-wha—?! Meet my parents...? No way!" Her cheeks turned pink and she raised both of her hands as her voice rose in panic.

"Come on. It's not fair you've met my parents, but I haven't met yours."

I mean, Maria spent some time in my house. She met my mother too. What about me?

"Well, maybe..."

"How about this? You come with me when I meet my father, and I go with you to see your parents. You have to tell them about the trial and all, right?"

Normally, Nobles of their calibre—and even the king would be present during the trial of a family as influential and large as the Netherlores.

However, for safety reasons, I determined that they shouldn't attend.

Maria had an Arcana, so she would be fine. Elrich would have also been present, but after the sentencing, he would have returned by teleportation.

Maria's parents did attend a part of the trial as witnesses, but they didn't stick around for the sentencing.

'Elrich utilized the Golems and Automatons I gave him during the Demon Incursion for security.' Since he kept me updated with information through communication Magic, I was pretty much updated on how things fared.

"So what do you say?"

Maria's stoic expression reappeared and she placed her finger on her chin, looking deep in thought.

"You know the implications of meeting with our families, right? You're a Noble, so..." Her eyes sharply pierced mine and she gave a serious look.

'A-ah! That's true. How could I—!'

"I won't rush you, Jared. But if you want to meet my parents, you need to have the resolve."

A meeting like that was seen as a prenuptial tradition among intending couples. I missed something so basic in order to get closer to Maria.

"So, until you decide whether or not you want to be with me..." Maria drew closer, causing my heart to beat faster.

I took a step back, but stopped myself and steeled my body.

"... And until you become a Legal Adult..."

At this point, her face was mere inches from mine, and her body was lightly pressed against my very teenage form.

I felt heat rise from my inside, and the tempo of my heartbeat followed.

"... The answer is 'Nope!'" Maria smiled after this statement, slapping my cheek twice before stepping back.

Throughout all of this, I couldn't even move! I was just frozen in both shock and excitement, waiting to see what she would do.

"W-wow..." I muttered, unsure of what to say and how to begin.

Maria had recreated a distance between us, enough to indicate that she was still very much invested in our conversation.

"What is it?" Her stoic face looked at me once again.

After staring at her for a while, the image of her younger self overlapped in my mind. While they shared the same expression, as well as many features, I could tell that there was a striking difference—both in how I saw her, and how she had grown.

"You've changed." I smiled, keeping up my pace as I kept walking.

And, after moments of silence, I felt a tap on my shoulder, and I was met with a smile from the amazing girl.

"I'm not the only one." She said.

Thus, with both of us having that fuzzy feeling within us... we kept walking and discussing.

And, to be honest... it wasn't so awkward anymore.

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It took some time—though I hardly noticed at all—but we finally arrived at our destination.

"It's been quite some time." I smiled, staring at the large walls and humongous gate. It reminded me of the last— as well as the first— time I made my appearance in the Royal Capital.

'In my past life, I first came to the capital to Awaken my Mana Core. I never got close to the castle, though...' Humiliating memories coursed through my mind, causing me to smile wryly.

"You have a lot to do. What's your first order of business?" Maria interrupted my self-reflection with her melodious tone, and her blank face indicated slight curiosity.

Perhaps it was just my imagination, but it seemed I was beginning to understand the dynamics of her reactions... even though they all practically looked the same.

"Well, we're about to enter the Royal Palace, right?" I smiled at the young lady.

Guards—both visible and invisible were stationed around the vicinity, and I could see many barriers erected all over the place. It wouldn't be very difficult for me to infiltrate, but a majority of people wouldn't even dream of trying to pass through uninvited.

Fortunately, I had way more than an invitation with me.

Moving forward with a confident stride, I approached the giant gate. Of course, the guards on duty would stop us and request certain things before allowing us to pass. However...

.... There was an exception to every rule.

"L-Lord Jared!"

"We've been expecting you!"

"Court Mage Elrich Lendertwale has informed us of your arrival!"

My smile grew broader. It seemed Elrich had already set things into motion, just as I had instructed.

'This way, we'll preserve much of our time.'

"Is everything ready?" I asked, drawing even nearer as the gates were instantly opened.

Then again, it wasn't like I needed them to be.

"W-we're not sure, but the relevant participants have arrived already. The Lord of the Crimson Household also arrived not too long ago."

The Crimson family was recognized to be tardy—no, a better terminology would be fashionably late. If they were present, I was guaranteed that everyone was around already.

Elrich really did a wonderful job setting things up while I was talking with Maria. No time was wasted.

Turning back to the stoic-faced Maria, I realized that she was most likely confused, as well as curious. It looked really cute.

"Everything's ready, so we'll be going straight to our first meeting, Maria." I quickened my pace, passing through the bowing guards and widely opened gate.

We were members of high nobility, so this sort of treatment wasn't exactly surprising. Still, in case she still had some leftover confusion in her mind, I thought it would be better to clarify things.

"We're going to see the King."

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Chapter 683: Jared's Reward

The Royal Palace

Within it was the magnificent throne room of the head of the Eastern Kingdom.

Gold and precious stones decorated the massive hall, and it looked spectacular—worthy of being the central power of the Eastern Kingdom. The clean floors sparkled with splendour, and the designs oozed luxury. The carpet was elegant, the chandelier was glorious, and the people present looked impeccable.

Nobles gathered close to the throne. Members of the 'Four Ducal Households', now reduced to three, sat at the forefront, among the twelve Council Members of the Kingdom. Of the twelve, eleven were present—a staggering number to be centralized in one place.

The twelve Council Members, representing the great families and foundations of the kingdom, presided over matters such as the Legislative and Judicial affairs of the Kingdom—though all were in accordance with the King's will.

King Albion Lestrome Indiavel sat on his throne, and beside him was the Royal Court Mage—Elrich Lendertwale.

The three princes stood behind their father, while the princess stood behind the Queen, who was also dressed marvellously.

All in all, it was a full house, and everyone was waiting in anticipation.

The King

The Queen

The Princes

The Princess

The Royal Court Mage

The Council

The Ducal Households

The Kingdom stakeholders—Research , Imperial Forces, Executive Officers, etc.

It was no understatement to call this a prime gathering of the Kingdom's finest and most significant people. The only missing faces that would be considered important here were the ones on Jared's team—too occupied with their tasks to be present.

Thus, this would be considered—by far—the greatest audience the Kingdom could bestow upon anyone. And yet... all of this was for a single individual.

"Presenting... the saviour of Ainzlark, and now the saviour of the Eastern Kingdom, as well as the proponent of the Allied Nations... Jared Leonard."

The large doors were opened, and every head turned in the direction of the approaching male who stepped into the royal hall with poise and dignity.

A girl was beside him, and her appearance connoted peerless beauty. Though she was not announced, everyone in the hall knew her to be Maria Helmsworth—a prodigy in her own right, and the disciple of Serah Crimson.

Together, walking side by side, the boy and girl entered the throne room. Once they reached a considerable distance, they halted... and bowed their heads in reverence.

"Raise your heads." The King said almost as soon as they bowed.

In obedience to the pinnacle of power in the Kingdom, both Jared Leonard and Maria Helmsworth raised their heads. A look of respect still remained in their eyes, and their etiquette remained unfettered.

"We greet your Majesty, King—"

"There's no need for such formalities... at least, not anymore." King Albion swiftly spoke, chuckling under his words.

His memories took him back to the first time he saw Jared. He had been impressed with the boy's etiquette and wisdom. But now, such etiquettes were irrelevant.

Albion Lestrome Indiavel knew Jared had more power and authority than him, at this point. Not only was he superseding the Allied Nations, but his influence far extended beyond what the Eastern Kingdom could obtain.

Besides, he had performed such great service to them that it was reasonable to exclude him from the cumbersome rites of greeting. After all, the Eastern Kingdom needed Jared far more than Jared needed them.

With that in mind, King Albion was ready to do anything to remain on good and consensual terms with the young boy—and he had something he could offer him at this point.

"Very well, King Albion. Maria and I came here as representatives of the team I gathered. There are certain things I would like to discuss, moving forward. Thank you for agreeing to this meeting, as well as involving all the relevant parties here."

"That is no problem at all. Before you venture into the matter you wish to discuss, though... I have something to say."

King Albion's voice boomed through the large hall, sending his charismatic tone into the ears of everyone present. Jared nodded in response to the King's words.

"The Netherlore Trial has been concluded, and we will see fit that they pay for their crimes. Your efforts in subduing them, exposing their crimes, and even every other thing you've done thus far, have not gone unnoticed."

Everyone present nodded their heads in agreement.

Jared Leonard—contrary to how he seemed at times—was very humble in terms of rewards. Even for his efforts in subjugating the Demon Army, he did not ask for much. Every effort he had done to benefit the Kingdom was rewarded very meagrely, per his instruction.

This time, Jared also made it clear he did not desire any reward, but King Albion's conscience could not take any more.

"While you have not made any request for a reward, and you have no desire for any of the Kingdom's possession that could be yours, I still desire to reward you for your efforts, Jared."

This was difficult for King Albion. Jared Leonard was an impossible man to satisfy with any reward. However, he was still a man.

And a man... had certain needs.

"Step forward, daughter." King Albion Lestrome Indiavel spoke with a stern tone.

Silence filled the hall as the attention of everyone swiftly converged in her direction.

Dressed in her royal blue attire, with golden accessories all over her, the young blonde stepped forward in her elegant shoes and stood beside her father.

She curtsied, showing more of her elegance. The small crown on her head bounced as she returned to her upright posture, and her charming smile captured the attention of all who saw her—Jared included.

"Jared Leonard... I present before you, my only daughter—Celestine Lestrome Indiavel."

The young man was clearly attracted to the princess, since he had a dazed expression while he stared at her. King Albion smiled coolly. It would seem like he had made the right decision, after all.

"I have spoken to your father, and it seems you are almost of age, Jared. You will need a spouse soon, do you not agree?" His smile broadened.

"U-uh? Y-yes, I suppose..." Jared muttered, his eyes now widening as though he was realizing where the conversation was heading.

Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—for the boy, it was too late to turn back now.

"I wish to give you my daughter's hand in marriage. What do you say, Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth? Will you take the Princess' hand in marriage?"

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Chapter 684: Royal Rejection

'... Eh...?'

My thought process became suspended as soon as I heard King Albion's proposal. The confidence I had built up, and the rational line of reasoning that followed from that confidence seemed to evaporate.

The question he posed had me stuck in one position—one confused stance.

'What the...?!'

I watched the entire Throne Room become very lively, as several Nobles looked at me in amazement. Some eyed me enviously, while others nodded in approval—those of the latter were more than the former, by the way.

However, whether or not they liked the deal was inconsequential. There were so many things to consider. For example—

'M-Maria...?'

Glancing to my side to see the facial expression of the girl beside me, I was surprised by her reaction. It was... utterly blank! She made no expression at all. It was simply a stoic, unmoved, and utterly bland look.

And the worst part? I couldn't even tell what she meant by her lack of-expression.

'Is she angry? Anxious? Worried? At least look at me or something, Maria!' I panicked internally, but the girl maintained her completely unfazed position.

It almost felt like I was all alone in this decision.

"What do you say, Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth? Will you have my daughter be your bride?" King Albion once again pressed me on the matter, causing me to shiver slightly.

My eyes turned to the princess—a way to distract myself from her father. Unfortunately, her highness also had a charm that made her irresistible.

She looked splendid, to be honest. Perhaps it was because she was decorated in royal apparel, and she had this luxurious appearance, but her attractiveness seemed to radiate all around her. I still thought Maria was more beautiful, but at the moment it was no secret to determine whose appearance dominated the large hall.

"I... I do not subscribe to an arranged marriage. Have you discussed this with her highness, Celestine Lestrome Indiavel, prior to this meeting?" I asked with the most respectful tone I could muster.

I didn't want to step on King Albion's toes—not simply because he was a king, but also due to his position as a father. What kind of father would be glad if he offered his only daughter and she was rejected?

I needed to be smart about this, or else—

"Indeed. She is thrilled by the idea of being your bride. Why not hear it from her lips directly?" King Albion's words broke my defence, and he nodded at his daughter—signalling for her to give the finishing blow.

"It would be an honour to be your wife, Jared. I honestly feel that way." She bowed slightly and gave me a charming smile.

'It's possible she's pretending, using the face of etiquette. Mum taught me all about that as a kid...'

I didn't want a situation whereby she was going into marriage by force. That would be tragic on both accounts. However, on the likelihood that she was indeed willing, there was no problem on their end. It was simply me who had to make the decision.

But why did it have to come to this?

'King Albion seems like a smart guy. He should know that I won't do anything to harm the Eastern Kingdom. He should also know that I have this place's best interest at heart. I also possess more

influence than him at this point. This, looking to take over the throne by marrying the princess wouldn't even be an option I would consider...'

That narrowed down the reasons quite a bit.

'If I am to follow my hypothesis, I'd say... he just wants to render his gratitude? Maybe he feels the Kingdom just hasn't done enough for me? If that's the case, as a father... he wants to offer what he values most.'

I sighed internally, finally understanding the rationale behind the King's offer. Unfortunately, I didn't subscribe to it.

"I apologize profusely, but I'll have to decline." My tone was firm while being as respectful as I could make it.

I could see an expression of shock on the face of the princess, and I indeed sympathized with her. It wasn't a good thing to be rejected so openly, after all. This was why it took me a while before I finally decided to refuse.

As for King Albion, a soft smile appeared on his face. It was a bit creepy, but I stood my ground on what I said. This was no time to be a coward.

'Doing so would only make things worse.'

"May I ask why you refuse?" His Majesty asked, still maintaining his friendly attitude.

Thankfully, it didn't seem like anyone was offended. The princess' smile returned to her face—though something about it felt strained. I could also hear hushed whispers among the nobles.

My father, whom I had been monitoring for some time now, had a neutral expression. He simply wanted me to make my choice freely.

'He was brought into an arranged marriage, so he knows how it feels...'

I wouldn't say my parents didn't get along, and neither would I say they loved each other unconditionally. My father was born into High Nobility, and my mother was born into a Mage family—she even spent some time away as an Adventurer. It was evident that there would be some dissonance between them, and the older I grew, the more I noticed it.

'Father and Mother are not the ideal couple.'

They were able to create a happy marriage and birth me, so it had been a success. However, if even one of them had decided not to put in as much work and understanding as the other, everything would have collapsed.

'I don't want to take that kind of risk... at least not for just anyone.'

In any case, I needed to answer the King's question.

"It's simply because I do not desire the princess. I also do not want to be tied down. I want to marry someone I can have an adventure with—who shares my passion for Magic, and is willing to travel the world with me." I smiled.

The Princess could try her hardest to be that person, but we had to face it... she most likely wasn't very adept at Magic or rough combat. Her expression proved my point nicely.

"I see. Interesting take. However, from your words, it seems you already have someone else in mind. Or am I overthinking it?" King Albion grinned.

"I do."

My words caused all of my audience to gasp or murmur. Many stared at me curiously, and my father gave a somewhat complicated smile. I already knew we would have to discuss this privately.

However, my immediate situation remained unchanged.

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Chapter 685: Grand Confession

"May I ask who? King Albion's words echoed in my ears.

'Alright, Jared... are you sure you're ready for this?' I thought to myself, looking beside me to see even Maria staring at me.

Her expression still looked blank, but her widened eyes showed that she was just as surprised as everyone else. Yes, even until a few moments ago, I was surprised as well.

Surprised by the fully formed conviction within me.

How long would I deny it? How long would I shove it aside? Was it really something I could ignore now? The answer, of course, was NO.

"You wanted an answer, right?" I whispered to Maria, smiling as I stepped a little forward.

I could tell that she was trying her best to maintain her composure, so I took her hand into mine as I advanced even further.

This was the moment of truth. Honestly, I hadn't planned on doing this here, but... it was a perfectly grand opportunity I wasn't going to miss.

Here I was, holding Maria's hand while stepping forward in the presence of the king. My father was watching. Maria's parents were watching. Every relevant person in the room was watching. At this point, I had reached the point of no return.

'No more running away!'

With a confident smile on my face, I raised both mine and Maria's hand above, making my official declaration.

"I am in love with Maria Helmsworth of the Helmsworth Household."

My shocking confession, in front of so many strangers, caused even me to feel so embarrassed. I watched as my dad's jaw dropped, and the Helmsworth Family looked at me with a somewhat neutral expression. I was getting mixed reactions from everyone, but the one they all shared in common was most likely unfiltered surprise.

'Not yet... I'm not done yet!'

"She has also professed her feelings for me, so it's mutual. If Miss Maria still feels that way, then it is my desire for us to be wed." I clasped her hand with mine, glancing at the stoic, but blushing face of the young lady.

Her beautiful eyes sparkled so much that I felt trapped in them even though I tried resisting with all my might. Maria's reddened cheeks became blatantly obvious as the pink hue contrasted with her pale skin. In essence, she was unable to hide it anymore.

"There's your answer." I whispered again, winking at Maria, the cutest girl in the world.

"If it pleases Your Majesty, I would like to be wed to Miss Maria instead. Of course, even if it doesn't... that doesn't change anything."

King Albion and I chuckled a little thanks to my little statement, and thanks to that, the tension in the atmosphere melted considerably.

"Well, well, well. You made an interesting choice, but a wise one, nonetheless. It would seem the Helmsworth Family is the one who will be accommodating Jared as their son-in-law." He chuckled even more, glancing in the direction of both the father and mother of Maria.

I also stared at them. While the father didn't seem all too imposing, her mother's wide eyes made me gulp a little. It seemed Maria's stoic expression came from both of them. She also seemed to get a good deal of her physical traits from both of them.

All in all, Maria's parents seemed like the adult versions of her—though her father would be the male kind. However, thanks to this resemblance, it was just as difficult to read their expressions.

'What are they thinking?' I thought to myself.

It was scary how they were completely unreadable.

"Well... if the young boy is serious, then he should come to our Estate when he's old enough. We'll host the official meet then." Duke Helmsworth spoke.

His tone was surprisingly warmer than I thought.

"Words are cheap. We have had many who have proposed to be our in-laws. Unfortunately, none of them qualify." Maria's mother said the very thing I dreaded to hear.

The fact that her family could consider me inadequate.

"Fear not, boy. You seem reliable enough. Besides, there's no detriment in your union. Your family is equal to ours in official status—perhaps even more so in the actual holding of power." The Duke's words soothed me once more.

While he wasn't smiling outwardly, his voice made it seem like he was.

"Surely, you jest, Franklin. Your family is an elite unit of generational Mages. The very backbone of the Kingdom—alongside the Crimsons. I daresay you are superior to ours." My father swiftly interjected, chuckling in the process.

Unfortunately, what was meant to be taken as a light humour quickly died due to the unamused expression of the Helmsworths.

"We'll leave this debate for another time, Damien."

"Of course. Haha. So what do you say about my son?" It seemed my father and this 'Franklin' Helmsworth were really hitting it off.

Did he learn to read their emotions, even though they showed none? Was it like how I was currently learning to understand Maria and her stoic face?

'You're a genius, father!'

"I personally like you, Jared. However, as it has already been established... wait till you are of age. Should you still feel the same way, you may take the proper steps." Franklin Helmsworth addressed me, to which I bowed in response.

"Indeed. If you two are to be joined as one, we'll require that family meetup and discussion." The Duchess added.

I understood things perfectly well.

The good news was that the Helmsworth family favoured me. The fact that my father was also close to them was a good thing. Finally, the fact that Maria and I felt the same made all complexities vanish.

Everything solely depended on my will.

"Maria... what is your response to this? Do you feel for him as he feels for you?" The question came from none other than my father himself.

He had a smile on his face, but I could tell that he meant every word with utmost seriousness. And he was justified in it.

'I know how she feels, but not everyone does. She is yet to say anything...'

"Yes, Father. I love your son."

'WHAT?' My eyes widened as she made such a bold statement.

It shook the whole hall, and even Maria's parents both widened their eyes at their daughter's words. The King, the Nobles, everyone present was filled with surprise. And I? I was the most surprised of all!

'She called him... father...?'

"Hahaha! Glad to see you're so enthusiastic. I sincerely hope things turn out that way." My father's laugh felt genuine, and I was happy that he accepted and even supported us.

With everything clear and settled, it brought me joy and relief that I was finally able to muster the courage to stand by Maria and declare our desired union.

I was able to see her smile, and she was able to see mine.

'Alright, then. Now that the most difficult part of this conversation has been dealt with, it's time to focus on the easy part—taking down the Nether Cult.'

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Chapter 686: Proposal Against The Cult [Pt 1]

"Now, then, shall we move on to the topic for today?" I smiled, stepping forward once more.

After settling the Maria issue—at least, to the best of my ability—it was time to address another matter of utmost pertinence.

The Nether Cult!

"We currently have an edge over them, but if we're not careful, we could get flipped to the losing end." I added, my tone depicting concern for the Kingdom.

"I see..." King Albion murmured. "... You must have a strategy to cover that, right?"

Once he added that, I nodded.

My main objective, after retrieving the Arcanas, was to find out more about the Nether Cult. Once that was done with, I had to destroy them.

'And... we've finally reached that phase.'

"I plan on attacking them in a week's time. Before the appointed time is reached, there are certain things I would like to prepare, but a week is the highest time frame."

Gasps and murmurs echoed around me. Since this meeting was filled with the important members of nobility, as well as high-ranked persons of the Kingdom, they were most likely under a heavy presumption of the Cult.

The same Cult that stood behind the Demon Incursion, and also had spies working within the Eastern Kingdom... they were formidable foes indeed.

"But why one week? Surely, we'll need more time to prepare and amass our strength. Besides, if you desire to use the Arcanas to your advantage, won't you require quite a bit of time to learn of their abilities?"

King Albion was correct. In an ideal setting, that would have been preferable.

However—

"There's no telling what the Cult would do if we give them enough time. It's possible that they might have something sinister they're plotting, and the fact that we're giving them more time means they will have more opportunities to enact whatever scheme they have in mind."

It was simply too risky!

"I see. But still..."

"I understand your concerns, however there's no need to worry. I have hatched an efficient strategy that will function exactly how I envision it to."

The issue with one week was that it didn't give us enough time for training, as well as time for preparation against the enemy—whoever they were.

Personally, I felt we would also need more time—that is, unless two conditions were satisfied.

"We possess [The Hermit], which is an Arcana that slows time. Using this, we can properly prepare in the space of one week."

Neron had more Mana than I did, so he could make the time ratio work to our advantage. We could spend years within a week, training with our Arcanas to improve as much as possible.

"We also have an informant from the Nether Cult. A former member has been successfully won over to our side, and with enough information on their organization, we'll be able to plan more appropriately."

I saw the King's expression brighten as I spoke, and he nodded with every point I made.

Once I was done, a wide smile formed on his face, and he glanced to his side—in the direction of the Helmsworth Family.

"You guys are quite fortunate."

The Duke and Duchess nodded, though their expressions still didn't change. It felt almost creepy, but I could live with it.

"I know I have said this before, but your son really takes after you, Damien." Next, King Albion addressed my father.

"Haha... not a chance, your Majesty. When I was his age, I was barely running my family business alongside my father." My father humbly laughed.

He was a modest person, so he had omitted the part where he had been responsible for the finances of his family's linen business when he hadn't even been an adult yet.

My father was a genius!

'The only edge I have over him is the fact that I'm older.' Since I reincarnated, I had a wealth of experience that he didn't.

That was what made me special.

"So, Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth... tell us your plan moving forward. The specifics, if you may."

There was no harm in saying anything.

For one, I had ensured this entire area was impervious to Observational Magic. I had also fact-checked everyone present here, so the possibility of an information leak was minimal.

'Besides, if it's Legris Damien, he should be able to figure out what I'm going to do. It's pretty obvious.'

The plan was simple and straightforward, and the only reason it would work was because of our level of skill as individuals and as a team.

"I intend on dividing the members of my team into groups. One part will remain in the Eastern Kingdom to protect it, the others will be spread out to the respective Nations to assist them there, and finally the main force will attack the headquarters of the Nether Cult."

"Spreading out your team? Won't that reduce the level of power you'll have? Going into the enemy's camp, won't you need more people in order to stand a better chance?"

King Albion had a point. If I didn't have any other stakes in the other nations—Eastern Kingdom included—I would have poured all my efforts on the headquarters.

However, that would be a stupid thing to do.

"There's a strong likelihood that the cult will attack the other nations. They've shown how merciless they can be in the past, and if it was me, I'd definitely lay waste to the other civilizations while their champions were currently fighting against my forces."

I had utilized the same strategy against the demons, during the war. It was an effective plan to not only reduce the moral of the fighters, but to also take care of a defenceless nation.

The Nether Cult most likely considered the other Nations to be worthless or dangerous enough to be eliminated.

'The Demon Incursion proved it. Besides, their First Seat easily wiped out the Beast folk Nation.'

In any case, if we were to make any mistake, we could suffer the same fate.

"I'm curious, who will you leave behind to protect the Eastern Kingdom?" King Albion asked.

I smiled upon hearing this question. It was bound to be asked eventually.

"Elrich Lendertwale and Maria Helmsworth. These two will remain here." I saw a surprised expression leak out of Maria, but I chose not to address it yet.

Fortunately, she didn't too.

"It's the best option, and I hope you understand."

I watched as her parents nodded in approval, most likely thankful that I wasn't taking their daughter to the centre of the battle.

'I don't think they understand, though...'

If what I was thinking was the actual case, then every single portion of the world wouldn't be safe from the Nether Cult.

'Maria and Elrich will have to fight their hardest to protect this place.'

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

Chapter 687: Proposal Against The Cult [Pt 2]

"I will need you to prepare some things before then, King Albion. Please be ready to cooperate with the Allied Nations, and I also plan on resolving certain things on my end."

His Majesty responded with a nod, a bright smile still spread out on his face.

Many would consider it weird that a child my age was referring to matters like this in such a respect, and that even the King acknowledged me.

However, after displaying both my power and intelligence in the last round, only fools would utilize a bias like age, in this situation.

"As for the members of our team that will be assisting the other nations; Anabelle Frederick, and Beruel—our newest member—will be working with the Fairy Race. They will be involved in the final stages of a project that will be very instrumental to our cause." I added.

The revival of the Beast folks was going steadily, but even if they were to be revived at this point, their battle efficiency wouldn't be astronomically relevant to the battle to come.

'The enemy has Nether, after all.'

That meant we needed something that could fight against their overwhelming force. Fortunately, I had just the right idea.

'With Ana and Beruel—both of whom are geniuses—by Jane's side, they should be able to pull it off.'

My only worry was how to convince my dear Fairy friend to accept Beruel back into the Fairy Sanctuary.

I also needed to inform the Fredericks of their daughter's journey into the Fairy Kingdom—since I had informed them when Ana joined my team.

'I really had my work cut out for me, didn't I?'

Afterwards, I told King Albion about the other members of the team and where they would be stationed.

He didn't ask for my reasons anymore, and simply believed I had genuine and strategic purposes behind my choices—which I did.

Ultimately, I was able to lay out the plan for our assault against the Nether Cult.

All that was left...

"So, your Majesty, what do you think?"

... Was his approval.

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"So, what now?" Maria asked me as we stepped out of the throne room.

We had gotten our approval from the king—as I had expected—and now, it was time to move on to the next phase.

"We'll have to inform the team. That means I'll have to explain everything from scratch." I knew I sounded whiny, but what could I say?

I was deflated.

'The team isn't exactly what it used to be...' My thoughts trailed as I stared at Maria.

Fortunately, I had her by my side. If nothing else, she was an emotional support that I could use right now.

"Can I ask you something?"

I gulped instantly, nodding as soon as the words registered in my head.

"Why did you station me at the Eastern Kingdom?"

"O-oh... that..." I sighed in relief.

"What did you think I was going to ask?"

"N-nothing..."

"Spill. Is it about your public confession? We'll get to that part soon, don't worry." As soon as she said that, my heart nearly leaped out of my chest.

So, she did remember, after all!

"So, why am I being assigned to the Kingdom? Is it to protect me, or...?"

"Not at all." I swiftly interrupted her.

Just like her parents, it seemed Maria was mistaken about the safety of her role in the grand scheme of things.

"Your job is very dangerous. The Eastern Kingdom is probably the most dangerous location to be assigned to—apart from the Fairy Sanctuary and the Cult Headquarters." I said, staring into Maria's eyes.

Unlike the other nations, our Kingdom had less security and also fewer individuals who possessed adequate power.

I had no idea how the Nether Cult would choose to attack, but it was most likely going to be by overwhelming the nations with unstoppable power.

"I'll create a barrier around all the Nations, and I'll also charge up the devices of destruction each one has—at least to serve as a means of countering any large-scale explosion from the enemy."

Unfortunately, I had to assume Legris would be aware of this much. If I were to think it through, the enemy would most likely resort to an all-out melee attack.

'If they have an army, it's going to be an overwhelming one.'

"The Elf Kingdom has the environment to their advantage. The Dwarves are extremely tactful and resourceful. Their technology and impervious fortress gives them a decent advantage. The Fairy Sanctuary... well that speaks for itself. The problem is the Eastern Kingdom."

In terms of security and defences, we were dead last on the scale. It was due to that mere fact that I decided to employ more Automatons here than in the other nations for defence.

But that also meant I had to choose the most capable members we could spare to protect this area.

"That's why you and Elrich were chosen. You two are the most powerful duo among the others that I'm sparing."

'Well, Beruel and Ana would make for a stronger team—considering their skill set and Beruel's power, in general, but their expertise is needed with the Fairies.'

In any case, I decided to place Maria here because I trusted her and believed in her strength. Plus...

"You have [The Pope] Arcana, and Elrich has [The Tower]. They're both useful for defence and evasion. You have to use them well to protect everyone."

Unfortunately, she wasn't very skilled in the use of her Arcana yet—the same also applied to the Royal Court Mage.

'That's why this one week is instrumental. Even Elrich is going to be training with us. We need to get stronger... and fast!'

"I-I see. I got the wrong idea. Thanks for clarifying." Maria gave me a sweet smile, something that caused my cheeks to turn hot for some reason.

"Haha... is that so?"

I quickened my pace, still laughing awkwardly as I walked ahead.

"Where are you going? I hope you haven't forgotten the other thing we need to discuss."

My body froze instantly. There really was no escaping it, huh?

"Jared."

"Maria."

I heard two distinct voices call our names a distance from where we stood.

I turned in the direction of the voices, and found out that it had originated from a small group coming out of the throne room.

My smile twitched a little when I saw my father walking alongside Maria's parents. I didn't need a soothsayer to tell me the cause.

"Jared, where do you think you're going? You think you can drop a bomb on us like that and just leave?" My father approached me, placing both hands on my shoulders the moment he drew closer.

I could feel the pressure already building up, causing me to gulp.

'Ah... oh, well. Might as well just get this over with.'

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

Chapter 688: Mixed Emotions

"You really take after, your mother, Anabelle. Did she teach you this habit too?"

My father seemed shaken beyond belief—but in a good way. He probably never expected me to pull off such a card in front of everyone.

"To confess your love, though... that took a lot of guts, I have to say."

The Helmsworths approached us at this point.

Their faces still maintained the stoic expression that Maria usually had, and the way their eyes glimmered as they drew closer gave me mixed feelings.

Maria's parents both had polished appearances, and their black and silver outfits were in tasteful contrast to my father's white and gold outfit.

To each family their own, I suppose.

Duke Franklin Helmsworth suddenly placed his hand on mine, giving me a gentle gaze—though his face was still stone-cold.

I could sense a soft sincerity in his eyes; so, even though it felt a little overwhelming, I knew everything was alright.

"I truly can not wait till you come of age and go through the due process. I'd be happy to give my pride and joy away, then."

"F-father!" Maria's voice sharply rang out in protest.

Her face was flushed pink, and she appeared even more bashful than I had ever remembered her looking

To be honest, she was so cute!

"Father? Maria....father?" I heard Duke Franklin's voice quiver with emotion, though his face was as steely as I could describe.

Still, the way his eyes watered, and the tone of his voice, showed that he was displaying a certain kind of emotion.

"I-I'm sorry..." Maria's eyes looked at me for a split-second, before finally turning away.

"... Daddy."

'Whhaaaaaaaaaa!!!' It took all of my willpower to control my facial expression.

How did the Helmsworths manage to do this stuff for such a long period? It was crazy!

'Maria just called her father 'daddy' in front of all of us!' I really did my best to hide every single emotion within me.

Still, I had to say...

... It was sooooo CUTE!!!

"That's much better." Her father patted her head, causing my face to turn red due to holding in my laughter for so long.

Seeing Maria look so shy and uncomfortable while experiencing these things just made me want to jump with joy.

"What about me? Won't my daughter refer to me as mummy as well?"

"F-fine... mummy..."

Her mother also jumped with excitement—well, her body did. Her face remained stoic, but she also lovingly stroked her daughter's hair.

After this very awkward display of familial affection, both parents hugged their daughter.

My father and I glanced at this and we both had the same expression. We were both trying our hardest to remain dignified.

I noticed how my father's reddened face was about to explode with laughter, and suddenly an idea popped into my mind.

"How have you been... Daddy?"

"Pfffffffffttttttttttttttt!!!"

It worked like a charm!

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"Please take care of our daughter during your one week of training." The Helmsworths told me after hugging and cuddling their 'baby girl' to death.

"I'll be sure to inform your mother about everything... son." My father broke into a grin.

Something told me he was going to have his revenge for what I just pulled off, making me all the more nervous.

Still, I couldn't show any weakness. I had to stand strong!

"Indeed. I'll also tell her about drawer four in your office."

My father's face froze and his eyes widened, as his lips mouthed the words;

'You know about drawer four?'

I nodded and winked at him, causing his face to pale instantly. He was almost at the point of looking like a Helmsworth himself.

"We'll see you all later. Thanks for having us." I smiled, preparing to teleport away from the Capital.

Elrich Lendertwale was going to join us later in the day, after delegating his responsibilities to his subordinates and completing whatever work he had left.

As for Maria and I, it was time to reunite with the rest of the team.

>VWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUSSSSSSSHHHHHHH<

An awkward silence was left behind after Jared and Maria teleported away.

Well, it was mostly awkward for one person—namely Damien Leonard Alphonse Sereth.

After what seemed like an eternity of silence between the three nobles—with the couple constantly staring at the lone man with curious eyes—someone finally broke the silence.

It was Franklin.

"Damien... what's in drawer four?"

The blond-haired man knew this question would arrive, thus he knew he only had one option at this point.

>VWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUSSSSSSSHHHHHHH<

... He utilized one of the Spell Cards his son gave him and conveniently made his escape.

With only the Helmsworth couple left behind, still donning doll-like faces, they shrugged and decided to return to their homes.

After all, they had confirmed that Jared was indeed serious about Maria. And if that were to be the case, a family interview would be in order.

Whether Damien Leonard wanted to or not, he would have to divulge that information to them.

Thus, the couple nodded to themselves and spoke in unison.

"Curiosity is the way of the Helmsworths, after all."

>VWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUSSSSSSSHHHHHHH<

We easily returned to the base, Maria and I, and we found the team readily waiting for us.

Beruel and Ana were present—everyone was there.

'Looks like Neron did well to assemble them before I arrived.' I smiled to myself, nodding in his direction.

He gave a nonchalant shrug, and I decided to fulfil my role as leader.

Maria was welcomed grandly. The girls, and even Serah were so happy to see her again. Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said about me.

Well, they hadn't seen her in a while, so it was understandable. With that thought as an excuse, I decided to move on to more important things.

'It's a bit monotonous, but I'll explain everything in the plan to them.'

The atmosphere was still awkward, and the gazes of certain individuals—like Lemi—threw me off a little.

Still, I was determined.

Of everyone here, only about half would be following us to the headquarters itself. I imagined some would be disappointed by this, while others would be ecstatic.

However, it was the only optimal solution I could think of.

'Alright, Jared. Let's spill the plan.'

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Chapter 689: Designations

"W-what?! No way! Do you not understand what you're implying, Lewis?!"

Yes, the person speaking was Beruel. Like Jane, he was accustomed to the name I had used in my past life—therefore, he kept on referring to me as Lewis Griffith.

'He's just making things more complicated for me... but I understand.'

"How can you say I should return to the Fairy Kin—I mean, Sanctuary? Don't you know that I was evicted by Jane and her followers? I'll never be allowed in there again!"

Beruel was currently worried about his place in the plan. He and Ana were meant to assist Jane, but he was hesitant to go along with it.

It wasn't like he wanted to refuse, but... he was simply being rational.

'Jane hates his guts, after all. I mean, I could stand him, but she couldn't.'

Still, looking at Beruel now, I could say that a lot about him had changed. He was now a little less arrogant, and his respect for other beings—women especially—had gone up considerably.

Surely that had to count for something... right?

"Don't worry about Jane. I'll take care of her. If she understands how important this is to the plan, I'm sure she'll concede." I smiled.

"Are you certain?" He narrowed his gaze and stared at me with suspicion.

"I am. Besides... don't you want to see her again? It's been so long, right?"

"W-well..."

Beruel's face couldn't lie to me. Even though he was trying his hardest to hide it, the pink flushes on his cheeks gave his heart away.

'He likes Jane? That's new...' I nearly laughed out loud, but held it in.

What was it about romance being in the air these days. It seemed everyone was being paired up with someone.

'Is it some kind of divine phenomenon? Or is it...?' I shrugged, after harbouring those foolish thoughts for a while.

"I'll trust your judgement, then, Lewis. You're a smart guy, after all."

"Thank you. I also haven't forgotten the bargain you made with Ana. Once this is all over, I'll resurrect your fallen comrades. You have my wor—"

"Subordinates. Fallen subordinates." Beruel sharply corrected, crossing his hands across his chest and looking as proud as he possibly could.

"S-sure... subordinates."

'Am I sure he's really changed, though?' I laughed internally.

In any case, since Beruel's issue had been resolved, I had to move on to the other teams.

"Ivan and Jerry will be stationed with the Elves." I spotted Ivan giving himself a fist bump once I made this statement.

It seemed he had an interest in the Elf Kingdom—one I wasn't even sure about.

'He was training under their General, right? I believe she had a daughter. Could it be... Was he also...?'

A smile formed on my face, and I nodded instantly. It seemed my dear Ivan was a man of culture as well.

'So you finally understand the appeal of the Elves. Well done.'

When the time came, I would have to teach him all I knew about them. That way, his chances were sure to increase.

"H-hold on, Jerry is going to the Elf Kingdom?! What about me?!"

I nearly rolled my eyes when I heard this objection. It was from none other than Ciara Epilson.

'She's always on my case where Jerry is involved. It's so exhausting...'

"You'll be with the main team. There are reasons for tha—"

"I refuse. Station me with Jerry." Her stubborn voice interrupted mine, making me all the more exhausted.

I disliked having to go through stuff like this with her every single time.

"But, Ciara, this is the most efficient method." Jerry interrupted Ciara with a sensible statement.

It made me glad that he had been paying attention to all I had been saying.

"We make a good team, don't we? During the Arcana retrieval, didn't we do very well together?" She crossed her arms and stared at Jerry.

Suddenly, the young man fell silent. His eyes widened and his cheeks became flushed with pink, almost as if he remembered something embarrassing.

Frankly, it had me interested. Neither of them had told me what happened with them during their Arcana retrieval.

Other than the issue of Legris Damien appearing, I knew nothing else of their adventure.

'Did something interesting occur between them?'

"W-well..." Jerry suddenly turned to jelly, as he lost all confidence.

For some reason, he wouldn't even look Ciara in the eye. His eyes were so distracted, and beads of sweat formed on his face.

I wasn't the only one noticing this, was I? Was this just my imagination, or...?!

"Let's proceed with the listing."

"Hey! I haven't agreed to—"

"Asa and Maro will be stationed with the Dwarves." I swiftly spoke over her voice.

Utilizing Spellcraft secretly, I diminished her sound while increasing mine. Magic was very convenient during moments like this.

Just in case she wanted to bring out her Mind Magic, I fortified my body and soul with Magic. Ciara was that unpredictable, after all.

"For the main team, there will be Neron, Serah, Ciara, Lemi, Aloe, Edward, and me." So far, the list seemed acceptable to me.

However, to appease the fuming lady who wouldn't shut up, I decided to further explain my rationale.

"Jerry and the others don't have access to the Arcanas, and by extension, a good supply of Aether."

I planned to train everyone within the week we would be using for preparations. I also planned on finding ways in which everyone could utilize Aether in their fights—even though they couldn't produce it the way they did, Mana.

Unfortunately, when up against the Nether Cult's upper echelon, those sorts of things were useless.

'I can't imagine Jerry, Ivan, and the others faring very well with those odds.'

"I plan on giving one of you four—Maro, Asa, Ivan, or Jerry—[The Magician]. Depending on your affinities with it, you'll be able to use the Arcana for your battle against whatever the Cult is planning."

Unfortunately, there were only so many Arcanas to go around, and most had already been assigned.

'Edward will be getting the [Justice] Arcana. That'll help us a lot in our battle against the Cult.'

Every other Arcana was already taken, at this point. Neron possessed two, but according to him, he had already resonated with [The Fool], so I thought it would be a waste to give it to another.

'Besides, that Arcana is dangerous. If I'm not the one to use it, I can't think of anyone else to wield it other than Neron.'

My final reason for letting him keep the Arcana was because it wasn't exactly in my place not to 'let him.'

The others who found their Arcanas were pretty much bound to them. Since I didn't ask Lemi or Ciara to cough up theirs, what right did I have to ask Neron for his?

'It's finders keepers, after all.'

Moreover, [The Fool] was extremely unwieldy and difficult to use. If anyone could crack the code, though, it had to be Neron.

'I'm counting on you.'

"With that said, the ones who will be going to the Nether Cult's Headquarters were chosen because of their high affinity with their Arcanas, their strong potential to wield Aether, and their level of power.

We needed our tough hitters at the forefront of the battle, but we also needed some people to man the other regions.

That was the rationale behind this arrangement.

"I hope you understand now, Ciara." I smiled tiredly at the defiant girl.

'Please! Please understand!' I prayed internally.

After staring at me for some time, Ciara sighed. From her tone and facial muscles, it seemed my prayers were answered.

"I understand everything you've said." She gave her verdict, bringing me relief.

Unfortunately... she wasn't done yet.

"But, I still don't agree!"

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

Chapter 690: A Weird Moment

"Y-you still don't agree? But why?"

"Jerry and I make a good team. I believe we would be able to function more efficiently if we are placed together."

I nearly screamed in frustration.

Ciara was so stuck on her convictions that I couldn't see a way to convince her at all. I glanced at Jerry for help, but he didn't seem capable of rendering any assistance.

'What to do?'

Ciara was very important for this mission. Her Magic abilities placed her at the top tier of our team's fighting power. Plus, her Arcana seemed particularly useful.

'Should I just risk it and drag Jerry along? I could keep a fragment of his Soul to resurrect later, so there shouldn't be any problems... right?'

In case any member of the team died, I could still rely on The Hanged Man. The Original was with Jane, but I still had it recorded in my Memoir.

"You know what, Ciara? Why don't we—"

"I'll be going to the Elf Kingdom. I agree with Jared. This isn't the time to be selfish." Jerry's voice echoed across the vast field.

Hearing his mature, thoughtful voice made me nearly break into tears of joy. Finally, someone understood.

"But, I'm not being selfish. We'll function better as a team. Isn't that for the benefit of all?"

"Function better how? We were literally running around throughout our search for the Arcana. If we hadn't... k-k-k-kissed, we wouldn't have found it."

It seemed Jerry's voice took a nosedive during the second half of his statement, but I heard something like a 'kiss'?

'They kissed during a mission?!'

"D-don't misunderstand! It was essential for finding the Arcana!" Jerry quickly raised an objection once he noticed my expression.

Well, looking around, I was certainly not the only one who gave an odd reaction to the news I was hearing.

"You don't need to explain, Jerry." Ciara interrupted, sighing.

"W-well... ahem." Jerry coughed.

After a while, his complexion returned back to normal, and his firm conviction was evident on his face as he made the same statement as before.

"I agree with Jared, Ciara. It's best we split ways."

"Really? You would really—!"

"There's a lot I need to think about... apart from you. It's best we spend some time away from each other."

'Oh, snap!' My thoughts echoed as I looked at both Jerry and Ciara.

'Is this... what I think it is—ow!' I felt a knock from behind me.

It came from Maria, and she gave me a tired sigh.

'What was that all about? What did I do?'

"What are you even talking about, Jerry?" Ciara gave a nonchalant shrug as she stared at the brave lad.

"I... after our experience back then... the kiss... a lot had a been going on in my mind. It's all jumbled up, and I think I need time to sort things out. It's best we spend this time apart."

"The kiss? But that's not a big deal. It was just to dispel the barrier and—"

"Well, it's a big deal for me! I can't stop thinking about it, and it's driving me crazy. It's best we spend some time apart. How is that so difficult to understand?!" Jerry's voice rose to an unprecedented degree, surprising even me.

When he said all of these things, I couldn't help but wonder if this was the appropriate time to divulge such information.

'I mean, you could have done it secretly or something...'

But, I still had to admire Jerry's fortitude and courage.

"What are you saying, Jerry?"

"I... have a lot to think about. But, I promise you, Ciara..." He approached her with gentle, slow steps.

Jerry actually placed both his hands on her shoulders, and the feisty girl seemed stuck in place.

Not only did she not move a muscle, but she also seemed dazed as heck! It fascinated me to no end.

'I still can't understand their relationship!'

"... Once I'm done sorting these thoughts and feelings out, I'll let you know." He gave a gentle smile.

For a moment, awkward silence permeated the atmosphere.

The tension was high, and I could see everyone awkwardly staring at each other. Ana's eyes were especially teary, and Maria looked touched by the whole thing.

Edward kept glancing at Lemi for some reason. And the worst part? She was also glancing at him!

'I... what's all of this?!'

Ultimately, the crazy atmosphere made me even more confused, throwing my plans for the rest of the day into chaos.

"Let's stop our meeting here. You are all dismissed." It was almost evening anyway. Everyone had things to attend to, considering training officially started the next day.

"You should all prepare well for tomorrow."

I glanced in the direction of Ana and Beruel—who seemed to have gotten surprisingly close, considering their difference in race, age, and gender.

"We'll be leaving for Jane's place soon."

Unlike everyone else, these two weren't going to be training with us. They had to spend the whole week with my fairy bestie.

'That way, the project will be completed as quickly as possible.'

"Alright, Jared. But are you sure about this?" Beruel asked once more, a nervous expression breaking out on his face.

"Is Jane that scary?" Ana asked him with a curious gaze.

"The scariest." He whispered.

"Get ready in five. Say your goodbyes if you want to... well, I meant that in a positive way." I chuckled faintly.

Beruel didn't seem to understand my joke, and Ana didn't seem to particularly care.

We hadn't exchanged a single word since the incident, and that in itself made the conversation weird.

'I should follow Jerry's example and save this difficult conversation for later. We both have a lot to think about and sort through, after all.'

Thus, I left the two and walked away, in order to get a well-deserved five-minute break from everything.

As I prepared to teleport, I could hear Lemi, Edward, and everyone else wishing Ana farewell.

Their excited voices tickled my ears, and I felt a tinge of loneliness. Just a tinge.

Maria was also bidding Ana farewell, so there was that.

'Isn't this the time when Aloe usually comes to cheer me up?' I joked to myself.

Just to humor my thoughts on the issue, I glanced in her direction. Once I thought of it, I realized that I didn't really pay much mind to her in our meeting.

"She's just staring at everyone blankly. She has a smile on her face, but..."

Something about her gaze felt very similar to mine. She looked lonely—no, more than that.

Somewhat nostalgic... or was it my imagination?

"Oh, well..."

Blue sparks appeared around me, and I let myself become swallowed by space.

>VWWWUUUUMMM<