

SPELLCRAFT 701

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

Chapter 701: Things Fall Apart [Pt 1]

One second.

Five seconds.

Ten seconds... and then one minute.

"What's going on? Where's Neron?" I found myself blurting out.

Timeless World was supposed to take a mere instance for us, so it was surprising to notice how a minute passed without any sign of Neron.

'What's happening?' A dark thought crept into my mind, but I didn't want to imagine it until it was the only choice left.

'Is Neron messing with us? No... he wouldn't do that at this point. Then, where is he?' I ran many simulations in my head, wondering what could have happened.

Did he undo Timeless World for some reason? Did he have to interact with something? But, even if it were the latter, only he and that thing would be moving out of time.

'T-then... are we also in Timeless World?' I doubted it, considering the clouds were moving, and everything seemed normal.

Neron had shown me what it felt like in Timeless World before, and it definitely did not feel like this. Time was running its course... I could see that—or rather, sense it.

"Jared... I've lost contact with Neron." Serah suddenly interrupted my thoughts with more bad news.

I felt a twitch inside of me, and I checked my connection with Neron... just to be certain.

'H-he's gone...' My eyes widened in surprise.

No matter where Neron was, our communication connection still had to be intact. This stability made it a reliable way to at least tell whether Neron was around or not. However—

"I can't connect with him at all!"

—It was almost as if Neron vanished from this plane of existence.

At the moment, I had two immediate theories. Considering the little amount of time we had to work with, this was the best I could do.

'Neron is either stuck out of time—that is, stuck in Timeless World—or something has happened to him.'

Considering the mental elements of Neron, it was highly improbable that he would intentionally do something like this. It had to either be by accident or due to a malicious attack from the enemy.

But that left the question... what or who exactly could have been powerful enough to stop Neron?

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After waiting for five more minutes—mostly thinking and deliberating—I concluded that Neron wasn't coming back. At least, it was better to make our next move with that in mind.

Since it had come to this, we had to make a choice; to either continue the mission or...

"Jared, what will you choose? It's your call." Serah told me with a calm expression on her face.

I knew she was just being composed for the sake of the team, and so that I wouldn't make any biased choices that would cost everyone's safety.

'She's planning to go off on her own if that's what it takes...' There was no way Serah would sit still after this unknown circumstance that had befallen Neron.

The question was, could I do the same?

After contemplating time and time again, I couldn't arrive at any other conclusion. The Nether Cult's headquarters was dangerous, and the enemies were going to be very powerful. With Neron gone, not only did we lose information on the landscape we would be invading, but also about half of our combat potential.

Continuing the mission would be risky—too risky.

Still... STILL...

"We're going to continue with the mission."

... There was no way I could abandon Neron!

Anytime I thought of it, his image would just pop into my mind, and I couldn't stand the thought of it. Was it because of how much I owed him... how much he helped me?

'I was going to die back then... when Kahn had invaded Ainzlark. If it hadn't been for Neron, then—!'

That's right! I couldn't leave him behind.

"I would have said that Serah and I alone, would be going, but frankly we would be at a disadvantage without the help of everyone here. What do you all say?" This time around, the mission was more personal than it was logical.

However, even if it was personal, I had to use my intelligence. We had a better chance of succeeding if we went as a team. Unfortunately, that also meant that if we lost... it would be deadly.

'If the one that got Neron is still out there, it doesn't matter if we attack sparingly. We might as well stick to the original plan and go all-out.'

The choice, however, was up to my teammates.

"Of course, we're doing this!"

"What do you think I trained all that time for?"

"This is the optimal moment, right? The Golden Time!"

It seemed we were all on the same page. Thank goodness.

"Alright, guys... I hear you. Let's get ready to go."

We didn't have the privilege of information any longer, and Neron was no longer on our team. The probability of success had just reduced drastically. Still, it hadn't dropped to zero.

And also—it was just a gut feeling, but—I knew wherever he was, Neron wasn't going to allow himself to remain there forever.

'He's going to find his own way out... and we'll be there, waiting for him when he does!'

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With everyone ready for the teleportation, I steadied my breathing and used [Strength] to enhance my abilities. In case we met any danger, it was best to be prepared—though we also had to be lowkey so as not to be too forceful.

There had to be some room for stealth.

'The First Seat will probably see it coming, though.'

In any case... we only had one shot at this. And it was NOW!

>VWUUUUUUUSSSSSHHHHHHHH<

The portal appeared, and we all warped away from the Eastern Kingdom plains. Whatever we would find there... whatever we wouldn't... we could only hope for the best... and prepare for the worst.

>SHWWWUUUUUUUSSSSHHHHH!!!!<

Space undulated, and we were soon going to appear at our destination. However, something odd began to occur.

>ZZZZTTTTZZZZZZZ<

The blue energy became bloated and began spasming and retracting as though it was being affected by a strange phenomenon.

"W-what?!"

>BZZZTTTTZZZZZ<

This glitch had never occurred mid-travel before, and as I tried to wrap my head around this occurrence, the most devastating thing occurred.

"H-huh?!"

I found myself all alone! None of the other members were with me. Only I was surrounded by the blue energy!

However, before I could even scream, I found myself at the destination I preset... the Nether Cult's Island. It was shaped weirdly, and the white-coloured beach was different from what I expected, but that was hardly my concern.

"Everyone... where's everyone!"

I looked around me, and spread my senses as far as I could... but I couldn't sense them.

'Damn it! What happened back there? Why did we get separated? How?!'

It seemed like interference Magic of some kind. Was it the enemy? Did they know we were going to appear at exactly that destination? How could they have predicted so far and interfered with the teleportation?

'The only other possibility is that someone in our team did it, but... that's not possible. The mental elements don't add up.'

I was left confused, but confusion was going to get me nowhere.

'This is a big island—bigger than my senses can decipher. I'll just have to scout the area and hope that I come upon any other member. Or better yet, I'll keep a lookout for all of them.'

'You guys had better be safe! I'm coming for you all!'

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Chapter 702: Things Fall Apart [Pt 2]

"H-huh?!"

"Where are we?"

"Where are the others?"

Edward, Lemi, and Ciara found themselves at the very same spot. They were located on a wide expanse of land, white in colour, with presumably nothing to be seen for miles.

"What's this place? This is supposed to be the Nether Cult's base, right? Where's everyone else?" Ciara's voice was beginning to sound irritated, and the frown on her face proved that even further.

Edward looked calm, observing as much of their surroundings as he could. And as such, rather than speak, he kept analyzing everything around him, in hopes that he would understand the situation.

Lemi had been teaching him the art of observation and science... and it was really helpful—especially for training his senses and Martial Perception. It didn't do much for his cognitive abilities, though.

Speaking of Lemi, she was holding a pair of Magic Binoculars, trying her best to survey the area. It was best to figure out where they were before complaining and whining like Ciara.

"There's no point, you guys. You realize our connection is being interfered with, right? I know everyone is alive, but I can't sense where they are... or even communicate with them." Ciara dropped to the white sandy surface, finally sitting down in frustration.

"You've tried your Mind—?"

"Yep! Everything! Our devices don't even work too. The Nether here is really dense. Urgh!"

Edward joined Ciara in her sigh, realizing that she was right. He had just spread out his senses, and yet he didn't sense anyone. He also couldn't connect with Jared and the others.

'Did she already do all of that before giving up so early? Impressive!' Edward nodded at Ciara, smiling proudly.

Well, he soon noticed Lemi's gaze piercing him, and he quickly removed his eyes from the fussy girl.

"W-well, maybe we should keep searching... you know, for clues and stuff... right Lemi?" A bead of sweat fell from Edward's face as he made his appeal to the Half-elf.

"Yeah..." Of course, she just shrugged him off.

The three were still in the process of deciding what to do, or how to find their bearing without Jared when... another unexpected thing occurred.

"Greetings to you all."

"H-HUH?!"

All three jumped back, swiftly reacting to the voice that had greeted them from behind. Once their gazes fell on him, their eyes widened even further.

The man in front of them donned a blue kimono. He had long auburn hair, and a sword was strapped to his waist. His sandals covered his feet, and he had a calm look.

"I welcome you all to the Nether Cult's abode. I am the First Seat, also known as the Martial Blade God. I was of the belief that there would be more of you, but..."

>WHOOOOOOSSSSHHHH<

In a flash, Edward surged forth with his summoned blade.

An immense burst of energy swirled around him as he swung his blade downward, ready to cut down the foe in a split second. However—

"Hmm... it seems you split up at some point. I can see where the others are. Ah, I see... so that's how it is." The man murmured.

He didn't move from his position, yet Edward couldn't believe what had just happened. His attack... his attack which was full of killing intent... was still stuck in midair.

"Hmmm... that attack isn't capable of getting past my defence. I apologize for that."

>BOOOOOOMMMMM<

Edward suddenly felt a huge gust of power push him back. He did his best to resist, but—

"Guh!"

—Ultimately, he lost against the current.

Crashing a few meters behind his comrades, Edward slowly rose to his feet, clenching his teeth as he stared at the man in front of him. After that single exchange, he now had no doubt.

"This guy is very strong."

"He said he knows where everyone is! Just how high could his perception be?" Ciara added in wonder.

"Edward, you idiot! Don't run headfirst into danger like that!" Lemi hit Edward behind his head.

Of course, since she was way shorter, she had to jump to reach him. That sight in itself was funny.

"Sorry about that. I just had to know... when I heard that name, I had to know how strong he was."

"And now you know, I guess."

"No. Not yet. I haven't tried everything..." Edward's smile broadened for some reason.

His excited gaze met the mellow one of the Martial Blade God, and one predominant thought assailed his mind.

'Could this guy really be... the originator?!'

If so, how the heck was he still alive? Sure, Edward had read about the path of transcendence in his Martial Books, and how it led to immortality, but he didn't think of that in the literal sense.

But... if that was indeed true, then this man before him was most likely the Martial Blade God himself! The founder of the Martial Blade God Martial Arts... as well as Edward's ancestor!

'Words are cheap, speculation is a waste of time!' If he wanted to find out the facts, he had to get them for himself—by engaging in a conversation of combat.

"Don't even think for one second that you will be engaging him alone." Lemi interrupted Edward's excitement, causing the big guy's shoulder to deflate.

"Well... a guy can dream, can he not?"

"W-wait... hold on, you want to fight THAT?!" Ciara burst out, as her eyes widened.

Clearly, she didn't want to fight.

'We should just use our Spell Cards and get the hell out of here!' Her mind rang.

"Excuse me, but you shan't be leaving for anywhere. I took the time to rid you of your means of escape." The Martial Blade God's tone caused them all to stare at him in shock.

Especially because he was holding all of their Spell Cards in his hand.

"W-WHA—?!"

In a brilliant burst of blue flames, they were all destroyed.

"It's not like teleportation would do you any good, but... it's simply more preferable for you to try your hardest without the assumption of being able to retreat." He calmly added.

Ciara felt like she was growing crazy with what she was hearing.

"See? He won't let us go. We have to fight!" Edward's grin widened, to which Lemi simply sighed.

"As much as I would like to disagree with him, the musclehead has a point. We have no other choice, at this point."

Ciara groaned, slapping her face with her palm. To her, she seemed like the only one who was thinking rationally.

Or was she the only one who knew how impossible it was to beat the guy in front of them?!

"Damnit! We should just fight to escape or something..." Regardless, Ciara understood that they couldn't run without at least subduing the man.

'Even if it's for one second!' She thought to herself.

Victory was definitely not her goal.

"It seems we are all in agreement. That's good. Well, then, shall we get this over with? I still have two other places to stop by. That last one can be handled by the leader himself. Or, well, maybe... her?"

The Martial Blade God placed his hand on his sheathed blade, taking a normal stance as he stared at the three youngsters in front of him.

"This feels almost unfair." He added softly.

"Huh? And why is that? You don't think you're outnumbered, do you?" Lemi raised her voice defiantly.

"No. It's not that. It's just... you won't be able to win. This unfairness can hardly be called a battle, but... I still have my responsibilities."

"Tch!"

The Martial Blade God brought out his blade—a regular-looking blade with no special features at all.

It just looked ordinary, and yet... something about it oozed danger and signified havoc to the three who saw it.

"Forgive my selfishness. However, you three will be struck down right here and now." Thus said the Martial Blade God.

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Chapter 703: Struggling To Go All Out

Lemi was extremely skeptical about fighting such an obvious red flag.

Not only was he the First Seat, but they were currently not at full strength as a group. Jared was missing, and so were Aloe and Serah.

'We're not the ones who are meant to be handling this dude!' Her thoughts rang.

Then again, now that she was confronted with such an obvious foe—one they could not escape—the only thing she could do was plan how to fight him... and how to win!

'This is the guy that destroyed an entire civilization without batting an eye. He'll be ready and willing to kill us at any time.' To Lemi, that meant they couldn't pull their punches.

~We're going all-out, guys! Use your Arcanas!~ Lemi found her mind connected to her other two colleagues thanks to Ciara's Mind Magic.

Since communication was scrambled, and Resonance was risky in such a situation, Ciara's ability was the perfect alternative.

It was fortunate that each of them had Arcanas;

Edward had [Justice].

Lemi had the [Wheel of Fortune].

And Ciara had [Judgement]

~I've tried trapping him in the Mind's World, but it's not working. I guess that's out of the picture~ Serah's voice echoed within the minds of the other two as she sighed.

It seemed she would have to make use of the other ability of her Arcana. If she coordinated it well with the attacks of the other two, then perhaps they could stand a chance. There was, however, a problem.

~We still don't know what his Arcana is!~

"Here I come." The Martial Blade God announced, taking a step forward as casually as possible.

Everyone's eyes immediately narrowed in his direction, as he instantly vanished before their thoughts could even process it.

And then—

>FWOOOOOOSSSHHHHHH<

—The first target met her end.

"LEMIIIIII!!!" Ciara and Edward yelled, their eyes widened in shock.

Right in front of them, Lemi had been sliced into two equal pieces, courtesy of their opponent.

It didn't even take a moment before she met her end. It just... happened.

Amid the carnage and floating entrails, the Martial Blade God stared at the other two. His unfettered gaze told them they were next.

"Hmm... strange ho—"

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!<

A massive explosion descended upon the Martial Blade God, covering everything around him in plumes of flame and smoke. The shockwave spread out to a wide distance, and the two who would have been caught in the blast were miraculously dragged away.

"Haa... that was a surprise." Lemi heaved a sigh of relief.

"L-Lemi?!" Edward's eyes widened in shock.

He had just seen her get cleaved into two by their enemy. How in the world was she still fine?

"I got lucky... I almost died, damn." Even she had a bothered expression on her face, so that meant the horror wasn't over yet—no, it was far from it.

Ciara, who was still recoiling from the shock, realized how Lemi must have used her Arcana to escape death. That was certainly a convenient ability to have, wasn't it?

"He's coming!" Edward glanced in the direction of the blast and watched how the flames and smoke parted, as a figure emerged from within.

The Martial Blade God was unscathed, as he simply held his unsheathed blade. His blue kimono contrasted with the crimson embers that glowed in the background, and his calm gaze drove fear into the hearts of those who saw him.

"Shiiit!" Ciara swiftly activated her Arcana before whatever attack could come.

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH!!!<

Instantly, a fortress built with golden light emerged. It covered Ciara and her comrades, and it seemed several layers thick.

"This should buy us some ti—"

>BOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMM!!!<

In one clean swing, the Martial Blade God broke through her defence.

"Crap!"

Many projectiles made of golden light appeared out of thin air, each doused with immense power—Aether, of course.

She resumed her projections and created even more barriers to shroud her and her teammates.

"Guys... going all out means going all out. This guy is dangerous!"

Edward and Lemi nodded at Ciara, swiftly connecting their Mana with the nature of their Arcanas—just as Jared had taught them.

In a flash, their bodies were transformed, and their abilities were heightened.

Be it Mage Mode, Fusion Mode, Martial State—and for Ciara, Original Magic—the group of three donned their best in order to defeat their most powerful opponent yet.

At this point, the Martial Blade God sheathed his blade.

"... You three are not worthy of my blade."

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Chapter 704: The Martial Blade God [Pt 1]

The Martial Blade God was disappointed.

He felt eager to go to the next battlefield and test the others, but he also felt the inclination to remain where he was. As long as he felt this way, he refused to end the lives of his opponents.

Time seemed to be still for him.

He could walk past all of them and cut them down before they realized it, but he chose not to. Something about this group... pulled him in.

Their attack patterns were simple. Their mastery over the Arcanas was basic, at best, and their level of experience paled in comparison to his by a wide margin—It was simply too wide to consider.

These were mere toddlers.

The Martial Blade God hadn't even used any techniques yet, and he already felt like it would be impossible to converse with children like these. This was the burden he carried as someone who had transcended the bounds of nature.

He could move so fast that time seemed to come to a complete standstill.

He could see so far ahead that even the future was within his line of sight.

If he wanted to, he could destroy any continent with a single strike.

Yet...

... He chose not to.

Restricting himself to basic clothes, a basic sword, a basic stance, and a lazy fighting style—he kept hoping that he could reduce the level of danger he posed to his opponent in order to enjoy a somewhat fair battle.

However, just how much could he restrict his abilities?

As a transcendent being, he had far surpassed the reach of most constraints. He was simply too strong, and he knew it.

'There has to be someone stronger, better than I am!' He thought to himself.

Looking back at the past, he remembered how he had fought the one acclaimed to be the strongest Martial Master in the world—Sword King, Gawain. Gawain was one of the Heroes who fought off the demons.

When they fought, he found the man to be above average in skill, but not in much else. It was unfortunate that Gawain had been inept in Mana, considering how the Blade God noticed him unconsciously using fragments of Aether.

If he could grow more, live more, then perhaps...

'Unfortunately, he refused to grow any further—choosing a mundane life of peace.' The Martial Blade God could not understand such foolishness.

He, on the other hand simply sought the next mountain to conquer. Unfortunately, every single mountain had been cut down by him—every obstacle pulverized.

He simply stood on a vast field filled with no speck of challenge.

It was boring.

"All men are like grass, and their glory, like the flowers that fade away..." The Martial Blade God spoke calmly as he stared at the three children in front of him.

Having deemed them unworthy of his blade and sheathing it, he could see their eyes widen in relief. Why were they looking at him that way? Did they really think they had been saved?

"Use your best attacks if you will. I will be ridding you of your lives in one strike each." The Martial Blade God took his stance.

Having no blade, he raised both hands and took a martial stance. His eyes sharply focused on the three, as he remained fixed in position.

"Damnit, you guys!" He heard the brunette growl.

She was currently in Mage Mode, as well as Fusion Mode—her Familiar being a literal Star.

'She attracted the attention of a Celestial. That's interesting... it's as I thought. This one is special.' Celestial Familiars existed outside the bounds of this planet.

They were far more special than Principalities, and the greatest of the Stars were the 12 Zodiac Constellations.

'Hers is a regular Star, though. Not bad, but not the best...' The Martial Blade God observed the nature of her energy flow.

'Original Magic is Mind-related, and it's in perfect sync with her Arcana. Her Arcana... hmmm... she can project whatever image she conjures up in her mind. This image will take on the properties assigned to it and manifest itself in reality.'

So much potential. Such waste.

"I will be ending you first." His gaze met Ciara.

"W-wai—!"

"Wait your turn." The Martial Blade God released just enough pressure to paralyze the black and white girl, as well as the muscular guy she clung to.

It was just him and the Ciara lady now.

"Your name is Ciara, isn't it? Epilson... hmmm, I see. It's no wonder you're so special."

"W-wha—?! How do you know?!"

"I can see through the layers of this world. The past, present, and future. All planes of existence exist in different layers, making it impossible for them to overlap. However, as long as they exist, I can see them." He provided the courtesy of explaining to her.

In simple terms, the Martial Blade God knew all about Ciara in an instant. The moment he chose her as his opponent, everything about her flashed into his mind.

Everything including her dirty little secrets.

"Apologies for intruding. I may have seen things that are... better off not being seen."

"W-what are you—?!"

"It is fine. You will not be alive to bear the shame. Isn't it better this way?"

"You bastar—"

"If you do not make your move in ten more seconds, I will strike you down. Use your best attack to subdue me. I will wait."

A wave of seriousness greeted the atmosphere, causing the girl in front of him to gulp. She must have known her fate, yet her eyes didn't show a hint of weakness.

'Good. Now show me...'

"I-I can't use my strongest technique with them watching..." Ciara glanced at both of her paralyzed teammates.

"I see. Very well."

With a single breath, the Martial Blade God initiated a world-defying phenomenon.

The world suddenly darkened, and the veil of darkness covered the whole area—stopping short of where Edward and Lemi stood, paralyzed.

"Martial Zone." The Martial Blade God whispered.

The world was still, devoid of anything that existed beyond its occupants.

"We're currently out of the bounds of space and time. You won't be seen or heard here. Nothing exists beyond this point."

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Chapter 705: The Martial Blade God [Pt 2]

The surrounding darkness suddenly expanded into an infinite void. It seemed to stretch on for eternity, and the space around seemed endless.

Stars and glimmering sparks of light appeared above the heads of both the Blade God and the awestruck Ciara, illuminating the area. Everything simply looked beautiful.

"Do not look so amazed. Your ability to conjure up anything you desire... surely, you do not believe it to be inferior." The Martial Blade God spoke.

His gaze remained on Ciara, yet she felt no burden or pressure.

She felt a still, unimposing pressure.

It was just like when he had first appeared. Nothing about him screamed extraordinary power, but her instincts told her to flee. The only difference now was that she didn't feel like running. She wished to stay.

"Can you teach me? Teach me how to harness this power like you?" Ciara could only interpret her request as madness.

What in the world was she saying to a man who wouldn't hesitate to strike her and her comrades down? He was dangerous! He belonged to the Nether Cult!

She knew all of that, and yet...!

'I can't bring myself to hate him!'

"I am teaching you. Now draw out your power, show me everything you have. At the end of your life here... you would have gotten much stronger."

Ciara had definitely heard that her life was going to end. She had just heard that he would kill her. Yet why... why was she brimming with such excitement and determination? She couldn't comprehend it.

It didn't feel like Mind Control or the influence of Magic. It was just as though the man in front of her was simply a force of nature—like the sea, or perhaps air.

Who could hate air?

"Fine then... I'll conjure up my greatest Projection. I'll pour all my power into it... I'll show you, my best!"

Ciara was determined. She hadn't pushed herself this far before, but she knew there was only one thing that could qualify as her most powerful projection. It was the most glorious, most precious thing she could create.

'I'll make it a zillion times stronger!'

Ciara poured out all the Aether she could muster, and she strained her mind to the limits. She could feel herself going insane, but she put her heart, soul, spirit—everything—into this one construct. Throughout the ordeal, there was a single image that flashed in her mind.

And, the image guided her through the process.

'Almost... there!'

The golden light originating from her projection lit the vast space with its splendour. Its brilliance was indescribable.

And just like that, a brilliant glow enveloped the entire space, and the shockwave was enough to shatter it.

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"I... I see..." Ciara croaked.

Blood dripped from her lips and her stomach as she was pierced with the blade of the Martial Blade God.

"CIARAAAAA!!!" Edward and Lemi screamed in powerlessness as they watched this horrible scene.

In what appeared to be a flash, the Martial Blade God had run his blade through Ciara. Usually, it was possible for such an injury to be healed by Magic, but Ciara seemed too far gone to be healed by magic this time.

"Did you learn something?"

"I... I did." Ciara's smile broadened.

"I think... I found a reason to hate you now."

The Martial Blade God was genuinely surprised this time. He was also curious.

"What reason?"

"Ack... kof... you... you destroyed my precious Jerry." Ciara muttered, spitting out more blood.

"I hate you now."

She said that, and yet her eyes were still gleaming with delight and her smile was wider than before.

"Ahh... how very peculiar. You really are special." He returned her smile with his.

In one swift stroke, he dislodged his blade from Ciara's body, and she collapsed to the ground instantly. Falling in her own pool of blood, Ciara breathed her last and died.

A light bow of respect was given to her by her opponent, and it seemed that he genuinely gave her the honor he felt she deserved.

After a few seconds of this, he finally concluded his ritual.

"Now then..." The Martial Blade God turned from the corpse and gazed upon the surviving two.

His gaze was once again devoid of emotion. Neither of malice nor of love.

Just calm emptiness that seemed to garner no reaction from the party that looked at him. They despised what he had done, but he was too abstract to be hated.

He was simply... the Martial Blade God.

"... I choose you, next."

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Chapter 706: Battle Of Luck

"U-uh...?!"

The person the Martial Blade God chose next was Lemi.

Her eyes bulged with surprise. She was still recoiling from the trauma of watching her comrade die in cold blood. Perspiration covered her body while her breathing got out of control.

'Relax, Lemi! Jared can revive her. Jared can—' Suddenly, Lemi remembered something extremely pivotal.

The man before her had attacks which destroyed the soul, and Ciara had refused Jared's Soul Brand. That meant... it was very likely that Ciara was gone forever. With this realization, Lemi's heart tightened further in pain, and she almost retched in horror.

"Ten seconds before your demise. You choose." The Martial Blade God calmly stated, watching Lemi with keen eyes.

The black and white girl knew that she couldn't escape her current situation. Ciara, who was one of the most powerful people in the group, had been killed. Edward, the strongest of all three of them, was stuck—paralyzed.

Her frightened brain struggled to understand the probability of victory. It was pretty much nonexistent. She stood no chance at all!

Yet why... Why was she stepping forward?

"You killed Ciara... without seeing her ability." Her tone was trembling, but she spoke anyway. "I thought we had one shot."

"She indeed attacked me, but it was within my Martial Realm. I'll show you."

The Martial Blade God breathed once more, oozing life into the world to create his own.

Once again, the firmaments darkened, and the brilliance of the stars filled the sky. A nigh infinite space covered them, and only the two inhabitants were there to witness it.

"T-this... is where... she fought you?" Lemi muttered in amazement.

She had so many questions, but she swallowed them all.

"There is no need to hold back your words. Say what you must."

"How did you make such a vast space? Based on the principle of Energy Conservation in Mana Theories, making such a vast realm like this is deemed impossible. The kind of energy you would need to pull that off is... too immense."

In essence, to create an infinite world, one practically needed to have an infinite amount of energy.

"I have more than enough Aether to utilize this technique. So long as my mind projects this as my will, then it's not impossible." Lemi didn't fully understand what the Martial Blade God was saying to her.

If she got anything, though, it was that he was very strong. Impossibly strong.

"Isn't this unfair? You know I can't win."

"Then, will you back down?"

"Nah... with these odds? No way!" Lemi revealed a toothy grin.

Suddenly, a brilliant light shone around her, and a massive wheel appeared behind her. It was a roulette, similar to the one she, Ivan and Edward had found in their search for the Arcana. However, unlike back then, this roulette seemed to be constructed with yellow energy.

It shone brightly behind Lemi, and the girl gained some level of confidence because of that.

'With the Wheel, I can overcome adversities based on what I spin.'

The roulette had many colors—ranging from white to black, with colors getting progressively darker the further they went in the gradient curve. Lemi had done her in-depth study of its mechanics, figuring out what worked for it.

It basically went thus;

The lighter the color chosen in the color scheme, the better your luck. The darker the color, the less effective it would be. As for the colour black, it simply represented no luck at all. Lemi was fortunate that that was all there was to it.

If there were downsides—like having bad luck for certain spins—then things would have been way worse.

'I survived getting killed by this guy because I rolled a green before we arrived here.'

The effects of a spin lasted at least an hour—and because it had been a 'Green' one, its effects were really good.

"Okay, right now... I need the best."

Lemi was in the most dangerous of situations. Death was staring at her right in the face, and he patiently waited for her futile resistance.

'White. Give me white!'

Causality Manipulation. Plausibility Alteration. The power of luck had been interpreted in more ways than one. However, if there was one thing luck could do... it was capable of turning a situation as hopeless as this into something she could see some victory in.

Lemi turned to look at her wheel, proceeding to spin it with as much accuracy as she could.

>VWOOOMMM!<

The color wheel spun, turning and turning, as the arrow steadily pointed at the different colors.

Suspense ate into the girl. Her heart raced uncontrollably as she awaited the products of her result. What she wanted was something to use in order to survive... in order to win.

It could be a power-up for her, a nerf for the enemy, or both, or even something completely different. Lemi prayed within herself as the Wheel slowed down and finally stopped on a color.

The color was...

"WHITE, BABY!!!" Lemi grinned, practically surging with confidence at this point.

With white, she was invincible!

"Alright! I'm ready!" Lemi grinned

"Are you certain?" The Martial Blade God asked a useless question.

Lemi nodded with absolute confidence. She would have loved to stack up more lucky spins, but her current level only allowed one spin. In fact, it took her body some time to even adjust to the changes in causality around her.

Her major challenge had been learning how to properly spin the wheel in order to obtain her desired result. Another issue was the amount of energy it sapped from her. However, it was well worth it this time.

With 'White', she was practically untouchable.

"Causality manipulation and interference with order... that is indeed a frightening ability." The Martial Blade God commented.

Lemi ignored him and conjured up her most powerful attack. Mixing an unstable combination of Mana and Miasma while coating them with as much Aether as she possibly could, she created a bomb.

'The blast radius and intensity should blow everything around into smithereens. Plus, since I rolled a White, I won't die from it. Let's do this!'

The massive ball of white and black light she generated above her made both Lemi and the Martial Blade God seem like insignificant specks of dust. It brimmed with so much energy that Lemi began to grow frightened.

'So this is what happens when I go serious with a 'White'.

Without any further delay, Lemi launched her massive orb of destruction towards the Martial Blade God, who was standing still.

>BBBBBBBBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Lemi felt herself get vaporized by the blast—well, almost, considering her immense luck—and everything around her suffered the same fate. The blast radius covered a lot of ground, and as far as Lemi could see, destruction reigned true.

But then—

"Impressive." The Martial Blade God commented.

His body was shrouded in what seemed like an incorpreal armor.

The blue energy-like projection must have shielded him from the attack, and it didn't even seem to have a single scratch on it.

"W-wha—?!" Lemi was beyond appalled when she saw this.

Her luck was maxed out, wasn't it? Why was this still happening?!

"Do not look so distraught, young one." The Martial Blade God spoke, calmly closing the distance between them.

"Probability manipulation only works when there is a probability. In a situation of absolute certainty, it becomes redundant."

Lemi's eyes widened at the man, who was now right in front of her.

"Your use of luck—no matter the amount—cannot allow you to change something that isn't simply a possibility, but a well-grounded truth. An impossibly certain reality."

Lemi's heart raced as she stared deeply into the eyes of the Martial Blade God.

She knew what was coming next. She dreaded it!

"Multiply any number by zero, and you get zero. You had no chance to begin with. No amount of luck was going to change that." He raised his blade.

Lemi closed her eyes, realizing the inescapable truth in his words. He was right. She had always known, but she thought... she thought she could actually prevail due to the power of luck.

So far, it had seemed to work so well for her. However, this was finally the end of the line.

Her demise was imminent. Her death was certain.

In her final moments, Lemi found a couple of images flashing through her mind.

The face of her loving aunt. The face of her amazing cousin. Her family. Her people...

... Her mother

... Her father.

"I-I'm so sorry, everyone." She burst into bitter tears, but it was no use this time.

It truly was the end of the line.

>WHOOOOOOOOSSSSSHHHHHHHHH!!!<

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

Chapter 707: The Nature Of Life

"You were too confident in an absolute possibility. Or were you simply being delusional?" The Martial Blade God watched the corpse of the Half-Elf in front of him.

"YOOUUUU BAASSSTTTAAAARRRRRRDDDDDD!!!"

The Martial Blade God ignored the words let out by the powerless Edward and kept staring at Lemi. His eyes bled with something akin to compassion.

"Your parents would be proud. Do not worry... your father will be joining you soon." The First Seat smiled softly.

He bowed his head in respect, remaining that way for a while.

Of course, there was no moment of silence since Edward kept shouting and barking out empty words. Tears streamed down his face—understandable tears.

His hulky body did nothing but throb with weakness and powerlessness, and the First Seat understood why the young man felt so wounded by the death of his female companion.

"He loves her, doesn't he?" The Martial Blade God could not understand why people would rather fill their hearts with such mundane things.

That was what differentiated him from the likes of Gawain, and even this Edward in front of him.

"Haaa... it seems you're the last person left." The Martial Blade God finally concluded his respects and stared at Edward.

"Shall we get this over with, then? As a Martial Artist... give me your best strike."

There was no need to use the Martial Zone. A Martial Artist-to-be in another Martial Artist's Zone—now that would be unfair.

'Let this landscape sink into his mind. Let him use his environment as a canvas... a stage to dance upon.'

"Do not worry about using all of your strength. The impact of your attack will not destroy the bodies of your friends."

Lemi was lying in her pool of blood; same with Ciara. They were both shrouded in white-like energy—courtesy of the Martial Blade God himself.

"Your paralysis has been released. What are you waiting for?" He asked Edward.

Edward remained silent. He remained on his knees. His head hung low on his shoulder and he couldn't raise it.

As his eyes stared at the white surface he knelt on, he didn't budge a single inch. Sniffing and trembling, he remained in the same position. As someone who had expected the opposite, the Martial Blade God was displeased by this.

"Get up."

Edward refused. Or perhaps he just couldn't obey.

"Get up."

Edward remained in the same position. He slightly raised his head and saw the dead bodies of his comrades. Once again, the fresh sensation of fear and weakness washed over him.

"Get up. Or In ten seconds, I'll—"

"How... do you find it so easy to kill?"

Edward finally raised his head and stared at the Martial Blade God with bloodshot eyes. Tears streamed down his eyes as he stared at the older man with what could only be described as conflicted emotions.

Edward genuinely did not know what to feel... or what to do. All he wanted, at the moment, was to know why in the world the Martial Blade God could eliminate people so easily—so swiftly.

"All life is life." The response the Martial Blade God gave was inadequate.

It was not substantive. It wasn't enough to give him closure or help reconcile any of his shattered thoughts. He was just more confused than ever. He kept staring at the Martial Blade God for a genuine answer.

ANYTHING!

"You still know nothing about Aether, right? Or the nature of the Soul." The Martial Blade God remained emotionless as he stared at Edward.

"When someone dies, they return to the Root. The Root assimilates the soul, allowing them to become one. Soon after, the soul is released in another form after having its previous properties mixed in with the Root—now possessing new properties."

Edward felt stupefied by the Martial Blade God's words. How was this an answer to his question?

"Your soul is merely a recycled version of another's. When you die, your soul will mix in with other souls in the Root. You will lose all your current properties, merge with the Root, and another fragment of you will be taken up as the soul of another. Do you understand now? All life is life."

According to the Martial Blade God, everything came from and returned to the Root. But what was this 'Root'?

"You do not need to worry about my motivations or ideals. You do not need to consider my intentions or plans. They are insignificant—selfish at best. I apologize for taking the lives of your companions, but I will not regret it. Just as you do not regret trampling the grass to reach your destination, nor do you worry about the family of the animal you slaughtered for the sake of sustenance. I too... will do whatever I must to attain my desire."

Just as Edward thought... he couldn't bring himself to hate this man. He despised his acts, but the man before him was no longer a mere man. He had become an ideal—a force that seemed both tangible and intangible.

"Now... Get up."

Edward heaved a heavy sigh and found enough strength in his muscles to rise to his feet. His footing was steady, but he didn't completely feel like himself.

"Snap out of your daze. Draw your blade. Steady your thoughts."

Edward heard those words. He allowed them to guide him. He felt his bleeding-heart stop and his hot tears dry up. He felt strength rise from his depths, and he could feel something else... something more.

For some reason, his heart felt different. It was like he, Lemi and Ciara stood together on the battlefield—both of them possessing his body.

How could he explain this sensation? Perhaps it was because he now felt that he was wielding his blade for the sake of the two who had died.

Maybe. Maybe not.

But, one thing was certain. The fact that he wielded a blade... and his enemy stood right in front of him.

"Well done, Edward—My seed. You will show me just how well you have honed the power of the blade."

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

Chapter 708: Two Martial Masters

If there had been any doubt about it before, such a thing had now vanished from Edward's mind.

He was convinced that the man in front of him was his ancestor. Other than their similar auburn hair and striking brown eyes, Edward felt a form of kinship he had never experienced with anyone except his parents.

'He also called me his seed.' He thought to himself.

However, what did all of that matter at this moment? Edward threw all his thoughts aside and brought forth his bastard sword. The massive blade completed his mass, and Edward instantly took his stance.

The man in front of him was ready to kill him without any remorse—just as he had killed his friends. Clearly, there was no chance of going mellow... none at all.

"Percival, we're going all out!" Edward roared, as he was suddenly coated in dense energy.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

His surroundings bore the brunt of the damage, and the earth shattered in response to his transformation. For miles, one could see the glorious light of his transformation ascend to the sky. A mix of white and dark purple.

>VWUUUUSSSSHHHH<

The dust settled, and standing right in front of the Martial Blade God was Edward. He was in his Martial State, and he now had white hair. His eyes were also bright white and his attire had also transformed into a pure martial robe.

However, this was merely the start.

Soon, Percival's armour began shrouding him. From top to bottom, the dense shell of his Familiar's protection granted him an increase in power. Edward's blade was also coated with the Dullahan's sword, granting it far more durability and power.

All in all, Edward's power had risen to a tremendous degree, heightened to the transcendent stage.

"I see. Martial State and Fusion Form... This is the Martial Fusion State, correct? Good choice. What next?" The Martial Blade God seemed quite familiar with this transformation.

Not only would Edward have access to heightened versions of his power, but he would also be able to use the Bond abilities of his and his Familiar's combined Magic. It was indeed a frightening state, however, one would think it wasn't based on the gaze and tone of the Martial Blade God.

"I'll show you... my best!" Edward intensified his gaze and hardened his muscles.

He made sure to pool together all the power he could into his body. He only had one shot, and he needed to win. That meant he had to use all the steps in the 12 Ultimate Forms. He had to push himself to the brink of his limit—no, even far beyond.

And, once he had reached such a precipice, he would finally...

"[Justice]!" Edward yelled, calling forth the ability of his Arcana.

>VWUUUUUUUUSSSSHHHHHHH!!!<

Suddenly, a pulse of pure energy surged from Edward, covering everything around him for about a mile. Something akin to a purple dome covered both Edward and his adversary, and a projected scale floated in the sky above.

The scale appeared golden, and it maintained a balance in its measurements.

"Oh? I see..." The Martial Blade God nodded in observation.

By utilizing his Arcana, Edward was ensuring their battle had a form of fairness to it. The Martial Blade God could already see why.

'He's in the Transcendent realm at the moment, albeit the lower strata. Even in base, I still outclass him. However, this Arcana of his changes things.'

The Martial Blade God could feel a restriction being placed on him—something akin to a set of weights. He felt his senses being distorted, and his movements becoming slower. His access to the world was slowly getting clogged, and he felt everything around him dampen.

'So this is the power of [Justice].' Not only did he feel much weaker than before, but he could sense the fairness that the Arcana firmly resolved to apply.

'Aether allocation. I see... It's granting him my Aether. So, this won't be a pointless battle.' The Martial Blade God felt a tinge of amazement from the ongoing phenomenon.

However, more than that, a surge of excitement was slowly climbing in his heart. Hadn't it been a while since he could fight on an equal level with an opponent? His skill was hardly even necessary when he was just profoundly stronger than his opponent.

This fight seemed fundamentally different, though.

'We'll both display our skill with the blade, as well as our understanding of Martial Arts.' The battle would be smaller in scale, but Edward would make it enjoyable for him, no doubt.

"Won't you use your Familiar or your Arcana?" Edward's voice echoed in the air as he took his battle stance.

"Hm?"

"I know the members of the Cult possess at least one Arcana. You're the First Seat, so you should have an Arcana. You also have a Familiar, right? Why aren't you using them?"

'Why indeed?' The Martial Blade God inhaled deeply and exhaled just the same.

He tightly gripped his fairly ordinary blade and met Edward's resolved gaze. His eyes contained purity and honesty—like a reflection of Edward's.

"I don't need them. If I did, I would use them."

"W-what?!" Edward's eyes widened in shock.

Why would his opponent—someone who wanted to kill him and his friends—put himself under such a restriction? Edward realised that the man in front of him must have been holding back from the very beginning. Even though he claimed that he wanted to end their lives, he still granted each of them an opportunity to prove their worth.

'I get it now... I understand.' Once more, Edward felt a similitude to the Martial Blade God.

"You desire fairness too, don't you? You want a battle of skill... of true Martial Arts." Edward grinned at his opponent.

In response, the Martial Blade God nodded, taking his stance as well.

Both of them stood a distance from each other, surrounded by a dome that ensured all fairness in their combat. This was justice... This was a true battle.

"Martial Blade God Technique; 12 Ultimate Forms: Step 1..." Edward inhaled deeply, readying himself as he focused only on his opponent.

At this point, nothing else mattered.

"... IGNITION OF THE BLADE!"

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

Chapter 709: Ancestor Versus Descendant

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMM!!!<

An astounding explosion ascended into the heavens as it surged from Edward—his blade to be exact.

The brilliant detonation painted everything in a bright light, and a dark corruption, thus propelling him forward with a speed that defied logic.

The earth shattered, everything around him crumbled, and the only things left were the two Martial Artists! Closing in on the only thing in sight, Edward clung to his highly volatile blade with an excited smile and a hardened heart.

He was going to win. He was going to kill this man!

Thus, the perfect opening to their fight was revealed.

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'12 Ultimate Forms...' The Martial Blade thought to himself with somewhat widened eyes.

How long had it been since he had utilized that technique?

He couldn't remember the exact century, but it had been quite some time, no doubt. A wave of nostalgia washed over him, but he did not have the time to dwell on it.

His opponent was rushing at him with tremendous speed.

'[Step 1: Ignition of the Blade]. It focuses on commencing the fight at a quick pace and swift tempo. A powerful strike is to be expected.'

>WHOOOOSSSSHHHHHH!!!<

The Martial Blade God chose to go on the defensive, leaping backwards as Edward closed their distance in a flash.

'I can't generate enough power to counteract the First Form, considering he ignited it first, and he has also given it time to climb.' Of course, this was simply restricted to his own use of the technique.

After considering it for a very short moment within the little time he had, the Martial Blade God arrived at a conclusion.

'Let's just go with this. I'll enjoy the fight. Show me what you have, Edward!'

>FWOOOOOOOOSSSHHHHHHH!!!<

The blinding light and darkness of Edward's blade devastated everything around him as he approached the Martial Blade God. What seemed like the harbinger of death and destruction approached with transcendent power.

In one swift and powerful swing, the culmination of all the built-up energy was released, all converging on the Martial Blade God.

>CLANG!<

In response, however, the kimono-wearer twisted his body in the air and created a divergent form of energy. This energy twister, so to speak, clashed with Edward's attack, causing the concentrated power that approached him to dissolve into much thinner particles of power.

The energy that was shrouding Edward's body suddenly coalesced on his blade, and Edward lowered himself from his height back to the very place he rose from.

Like a bladed meteor, he descended to the Martial Blade God.

"Step 3: Descent of the Blade"

Edward could feel his blade get heavier and heavier. The power within it made it difficult for him to steer it, and his forceful descent caused the pressure to mess with his aim. However, he tightened his grip and focused all his attention on his prey.

The perfect timing. The perfect piercing! He was going to be successful.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

The third step was meant to devastate everything in a straight line—from up to down.

And it did.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

A huge crater formed on the ground, creating a seemingly bottomless pit that oozed with unknown darkness. The chaos had been achieved, and the technique was successful.

However—

"Good execution." The Martial Blade God commented, a few inches away from the affected range.

He had taken a swift sidestep at the perfect moment, avoiding any fatal harm.

'Damn it! Next, then!' Edward gritted his teeth, prepared to take his next step.

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Unfortunately for him, none were effective.

Step 5

Step 9

Step 11

... STEP 12!

All of them proved fruitless.

Not only did the Martial Blade God come out of every attack unscathed, but he kept praising Edward's execution. That went to show that the problem wasn't Edward's lack of mastery. No, there was something else.

A fundamental difference that still created a vast gap between both Martial Artists despite supposedly being on the same level.

"You were taught well..." The Martial Blade God remarked. "... You've trained well too."

Edward was already out of breath at this point. His muscles were sore, but he kept up his bold front.

There was no way he would show weakness to his opponent!

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

Chapter 710: God Of Martial Arts

"You must have realized by now that your efforts are fruitless... and for good reason." The Martial Blade God spoke calmly.

Both of them were currently floating atop a devastated landscape. Nothing but absolute destruction could be seen for miles. At this point, they were floating above what could only be described as a sea of devastation.

However, both Martial Artists never got distracted by their surroundings. Their gazes were on each other the whole time.

"Your 12 Ultimate Forms... They were defeated a long time ago, by me." The Martial Blade God's words struck Edward in a heart-wrenching way.

"W-what...?"

"I once asked myself... what would happen if I were to be faced with the 12 Ultimate Forms that I created? Back then, it had been my masterpiece. However, in a situation whereby someone had mastered this technique and honed it to the same level of perfection as I had... How would I be able to defend myself against it?"

Edward's mind was slowly realizing why his attacks thus far had proved to be pointless. They were never going to serve as a threat to the being in front of him.

Because...

"After spending years training, I developed the perfect counter;

'Dispersal' for 'Ignition'.

'A Thousand Returns' for the 'Thousand Miles'.

'Shallow Evasion' for the 'Descent'.

I was eventually able to defeat every single one of those techniques."

Edward's bones were rattling, and his muscles ached. He slowly began to feel more exhausted than before.

"I never recorded this development, so you must have not seen my Reverse Ultimate Forms when you were learning the original. Do you know why I chose to do that?" The Martial Blade God slowly began to sheathe his blade.

"You... wanted your successor to figure it out themselves."

"Indeed. You should think of how to defeat yourself, even if no one else can. Rather than remain in your current state, seek out power by defeating whatever and whoever you consider to be ultimate."

Edward realized the profound wisdom in his ancestor's words, as well as his own arrogance. He had always thought he was too strong, but now... being faced with a true master... he realized just how much he had to learn.

"Shall I show you an example?" The Martial Blade God placed both hands behind him and rested a relaxed gaze upon Edward.

"W-what are you...?"

"I will now fight you a bit more seriously." The Martial Blade God spoke.

Edward could tell that he was dead serious, but that made him even more confused.

'Why isn't his blade unsheathed? His hands are behind him as well?' Edward thought to himself.

He was genuinely puzzled, but he took his stance regardless.

"You are right in thinking I require a blade to reveal the extent of my power. After all, what is the Martial Blade God without his blade?"

'Exactly!' Edward thought to himself.

He wasn't been paranoid or anything. This was simply a natural flow of thought.

"You are mistaken about one thing, though." As the Martial Blade God spoke, Edward slowly felt something in his insides.

It was like a needle—no, this was a blade.

The sharp sensation tickled his heart, coursing through Edward's entire body. It didn't take long for him to figure out that this strange phenomenon was being caused by the Martial Blade God himself.

Edward broke out in a cold sweat.

He could feel his powerlessness, and the nature of the blade that had now ceased stirring up his insides. For a second, he had thought he was dead. He had thought the sharp blade would pierce him, killing him instantly.

How the blade bypassed all of Edward's layers of defences remained a mystery, but Edward knew as surely as his enemy was right in front of him, that what he had felt was real.

"I do not need any physical blade to win against you." The Martial Blade God's voice echoed in the vast, cloudy area.

The smoke and fumes caused by the destruction around made the sky darken at this point. Stormy clouds stood above their heads, but Edward was still wrapped around the words of the Martial Blade God, as well as what he had just done.

"What... was that?"

The Martial Blade God let out a little smile. It was brief, but Edward could tell that it was warm.

"The blade I will now use to fight..."

Suddenly, a somewhat transparent projection was etched into the space between Edward and his opponent. It took form, and the shape of a blade manifested.

The blade was suspended in the air, and it felt just as real as it felt unreal.

It seemed too visible to be considered false, but it also had some elements of invisibility that made it seem unreal. So, which was it?

What was this weapon?!

"... The Mind Blade."

The invisible blade suddenly began to multiply.

Two. Four. Eight. Ten. Twelve. They kept growing in number... until...

... The whole sky was littered with them.

Many blades stood above Edward, their tips pointed in his direction. Like suspended raindrops, they awaited the time of their descent. All of them, without exception.

"A-are you still under the influence of [Justice]?" Edward had to ask.

This power he sensed... Was well beyond him. The dome that surrounded them still seemed active. Plus, the scales were evenly proportioned. Yet, Edward simply couldn't believe that this was fair.

No—how could it be?!

"I am. The only difference between us right now is our level of skill."

Impossible! How was this possible with simple skill?

"I simply used my skill and will. The energy wasted by you in your precious attempts to fight me was moulded by my mind. I granted form and life to them, turning them into my weapons. It has nothing to do with how much power I possess."

Edward's eyes were beyond bloodshot at this point.

He had thought this would be a fair fight by reducing his opponent's abilities. He wanted a true battle of skill with a Martial Artist, but what did he expect from someone who had come before him?

"Just who... are you?" He could only mutter powerlessly.

"Who am I?"

"How did you get so strong? The blade you wield... the techniques you use... the power you possess... why are they so different from mine?"

Edward had reached a realization. He couldn't beat the man in front of him. He felt like he couldn't beat him no matter how long he trained or how much he tried.

There was just 'something' that distinguished them.

Something Edward thought he would never have.

"I see. Your question is valid. Who am I? How did I arrive at this point? Well, Edward... the answer to that is right in front of you."

Edward was just as confused as he was perplexed. What did this man mean?

"I have no name. I have no identity. All you see is all I am. I am the Martial Blade God, and only the Martial Blade God."

Edward's eyes widened instantly.

He now understood! He understood the difference between him and the man in front of him—why he could never be as strong as him no matter how hard he tried.

'This man! He...! Everything about him is Martial Arts!'

Unlike Edward who had saturated his life with so many other things, there was only one definition of his opponent—one thing that defined him.

He cared not for money, women, or friends.

No, there was only one thing that occupied this man's mind. One reason he lived, one reason he breathed, and one reason he would die

MARTIAL ARTS!

"You understand now, don't you?"

Edward nodded instantly. He could not beat this man. No Martial Artist could.

Why?

"I have given everything to Martial Arts. And this... is my reward."

That was what made the Martial Blade God invincible.