

SPELLCRAFT 731

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

Chapter 731: The Ultimate Sacrifice

The Star.

That was the Arcana Stefan Netherlore possessed.

It could control motion. Up, down, left, right. Its influence on motion spread to that of gravity. It had an irresistible pull, an unstoppable push, and an unrivaled inertia.

All in all, [The Star] was an ultimate tool in terms of attraction, repulsion, and stasis—a fine example would be how it blew up the Royal Capital in a matter of seconds.

That's right. Such was the power of an Arcana.

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>VWUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

A heavy feeling of gravity suddenly permeated the area, causing both Maria and Elrich to wince, bracing themselves as they resisted.

Maria unleashed her Pope ability, instantly shielding both Elrich and her from Stefan's influence. However, the moment she did this, Stefan appeared right in front of Elrich, with a blackened hand that oozed concentrated Nether.

Elrich, whose mind operated over a dozen times faster than his body's reaction, saw his opponent closing in on him and quickly chose to utilize his Arcana.

'U-uh?!' Elrich's eyes bulged the moment he realized something.

'Why isn't... it working?!'

One look at Stefan's wide grin told him that the young boy knew what was going on. However, before he could find out—

>SQUELCH!<

Stefan drilled a hole through Elrich's chest, going for an instant kill.

"Guark!" Elrich, whom Stefan's hand was now impaling, coughed out blood and shuddered with pain.

"ELRICCCCHHHH!!!" Maria sped in his direction, but Stefan seemingly vanished, appearing a further distance from Maria, the Grand Mage still impaled on his hand.

"Pathetic. I expected more from the Grand Mage of the Eastern Kingdom." Stefan grinned devilishly, as he slowly removed his hand from the Grand Mage's chest.

Elrich writhed and groaned as a result, his eyes turning bloodshot, while Stefan simply enjoyed the old man's expression of pain.

"I've destroyed your Heart Core. I've also infected your body with highly concentrated Nether. You won't survive. It seems you thought that that measly protective layer of Aether could protect you, but... I easily went through it with a far more powerful amount of Nether."

Elrich was grunting and groaning as Stefan spoke, while Maria did her best to strike him while he still spoke—all to no avail.

~Don't do it. Don't use it. Not yet...~ She heard a voice within her, and it prompted her to simply rely on screaming and pointless attacks to stop Stefan.

"Hahaha! It's no use." The enemy grinned at Maria's sheer stupidity.

"I'm much faster and stronger than you are. I don't know how you resisted my Arcana's ability, but it won't happen again. Besides, with your Space Magic now completely out of the picture..." Stefan fully removed his hand from Elrich's chest, leaving a gaping hole in its place.

No matter how one looked at it, the Royal Court Mage was going to die.

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There was something not many people knew about in this world—the interaction between the laws of existence.

How did time interact with Space? How did Space interact with Gravity? Understanding these factors would have shown them the truth about what would happen when two laws conflicted.

As such, when Stefan and his enemies fought, the latter assumed that they had the upper hand due to the nature of Maria's Arcana. But... could it not also have been the other way around?

Gravity was the very glue that held space and time together.

Once Stefan realized this about his power, he often wondered what it would be like if he created a highly dense gravitational field encompassing an enemy who could use either space or time Magic.

He didn't leave this untested, though, as he sought the aid of the Cult. There, this theory of his was personally tested by Legris—of all people—who had the ability to teleport through his dark portals.

And what would you know... Space Magic couldn't properly function within a highly dense gravitational field. It would grow unstable and collapse.

Once he realized this, Stefan's joy knew no bounds. He had finally found it... the power he would use to lay waste to those who had looked down on him, acquiring even more power by doing so.

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Elrich could feel his body turning cold, and his consciousness fading. He had been struck in both his first heart and his backup heart. As a result, he was going to lose his life very soon.

Stefan's attack had been a surprise to him. Perhaps he had miscalculated and underestimated the boy's abilities. They hadn't been the only ones holding back, after all.

It was a shame his Grimoire couldn't mimic any Nether ability, so he couldn't be of much use in the fight. Sure, he had a few more cards here and there, but Stefan was either too fast or too strong to resist it.

'He really has grown very strong, hasn't he?' Elrich smiled to himself.

Perhaps that was why he had allowed himself to get hit.

Even though his body moved at a set speed, his mind was much faster. He had processed Stefan's approach before the act had actually occurred. Space Magic didn't work, and Elrich surmised it had to do with the gravitational field Stefan set up.

'I'm such an idiot! Why didn't I see it earlier?' But it was too late. It was already in course.

Elrich thought of various routes he could use to escape, and while he came up with one or two, he also realized something.

'I won't have a chance like this again. The next time he attacks—which will most likely be immediate—I'll be dead for sure.'

As a result, he had to make a decision.

Thus... he did.

"U-urgh..." Groaning and glaring at Stefan, he let out the last bit of his strength.

"What are you doing? Still struggling to... uh?!"

Elrich, despite the influence of the gravitational field, was utilizing his Arcana. The blue energy turned purple, and then black, ever-expanding like a vortex, as it emanated from him.

"W-what are you—? You can't use it now, it's destabilized."

"E-exactly... When Space gets destabilized and collapses, and yet gets bigger and bigger, an anomaly is formed. And... that anomaly is..."

The vortex grew extremely large, appearing between both Elrich and Stefan, as it suddenly started swirling and twisting, forming a gaping black void.

"... A black hole!"

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Chapter 732: Stefan's True Power

>WHUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM!!!<

The Black Hole instantly began sucking everything around it into its pitch-black void.

This position of his, however, changed the moment Elrich used another one of his trump cards—the mirrored attack he had used on him. Since it was an offensive move that was used with the intent to kill, Stefan felt the brunt of it quite well.

'T-this... is my attack?!' He had thought to himself, groaning and feeling the pain that accompanied being hit with his own power.

Once things got to this point, and Stefan could feel himself slipping into the abyss... he had no other option. He had to let go of his ego and claw his way to survival. He had to win... no matter the cost!

"RAAARRRRGHHHHHH!!!"

As a result, he finally unleashed his most primal instincts, as well as his most powerful form.

His body completely turned black, and red cackles surrounded him.

Even his face was completely dyed in darkness, leaving only his red eyes visible. His wings became larger and more crooked, spikes emanated from his body, and his dragon-scale armour became one with greater darkness.

Once he attained this state, Stefan had enough power—not just simply to escape, but also to destroy the very thing that threatened his life.

Thus, in a brilliant eruption of dark power, Stefan destroyed the black hole and liberated himself.

"Haaa..." He floated in the air, heaving as his glorious new form created a blot in the sky.

He could see the despair written all over Maria's face—he took this as his reward for trying so hard. Still, despite not dying as Elrich had wanted, he had to give props to the old man.

'You made me use my full power. That's impressive.'

He swiftly discarded this transformation, returning to his Fusion State. After all, using such a form on Maria would be too boring. Her face told it all—how frightened she was as a result of his immense power.

"W-what have you become...?" Maria's shuddering voice echoed in his ears, but Stefan felt nothing stir within him.

If she was trying to gain his sympathy, it wasn't going to work.

"Look at all you've done... all you're doing. How can you truly enjoy this? You... are you really Stefan?" Hearing her whimpers made him both disgusted and delighted.

Maria had always been a goody-two-shoes; a personality he had grown to dislike over the years.

He had initially started out with respect for her. He had felt frustrated about his inferiority, yes, but that didn't blind him from seeing her sheer ability. In terms of talent and skill, she was superior—and he didn't deny that.

However, as time progressed, the respect he had towards Maria—the reverence—slowly became something else.

Some called it envy, others called it resentment, but to Stefan, it only meant one thing... disgust!

He felt disgusted towards Maria, and towards himself as well.

For someone who had so much power, her actions annoyed him. He often imagined what he would do if he had that power—no, if he had more.

Finally, just when he had been about to be swallowed whole by the despair of weakness, his family revealed to him just who he was—what he was. To his surprise, Legris Damien had also conspired with them.

He was promised power if he followed Legris and joined the Cult. The promise was well kept.

The Cult Leader personally supervised the procedure, and Stefan was integrated with so much Nether—enough to kill anyone.

However, according to the leader, and the lady in white, they had not seen anyone as compatible with Nether as he was.

It turned out that he was truly a genius among geniuses. He had always been special, and the depths of his powers had yet to be reached.

He had just been looking in the wrong direction all this time.

"But now..." Stefan grinned as he gazed at Maria.

She was still on the ground, but she was covered in a dense dome.

"Hmm?"

He stretched out his hand towards her, using the effects of his Arcana to pull her in his direction. However, much to his chagrin, nothing happened.

"Ah, so you're the one responsible for that interference. Your Arcana must be countering mine. Very good."

Maria remained on the ground. Her expression was stoic, but her eyes hid so much pain.

"Why don't we try something a little bit different? If I won't use my Arcana, then..."

Suddenly, various colours of light began appearing all over Stefan.

Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Indigo. Violet.

Once these seven colours danced around Stefan, his grin widened even further, and a dark gleam entered his eyes.

"... Why don't we try Original Magic?"

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Chapter 733: Backup Arrives

Original Magic was the pinnacle of a Mage's personal journey with Magic.

After familiarizing themselves with the concept, they could weave the very formula they had been practising and create their own unique brand.

Mages could choose to either start from scratch or tweak the ones they could already use.

The more unique an Original Magic was, the more unpredictable it would be. And the more versatile it was, the more useful it would be. However, no one could argue the power an Original Magic user wielded.

After all, even the Arcanas were formerly the Original Magic of certain individuals of old.

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"Original Magic: Dance Of The Celestial Lights." Stefan smiled, both hands folded as he looked at Maria in a condescending way.

"At this point, using Original Magic should be enough for you."

Maria said nothing as she kept her gaze on him. Her calm face always bothered him, but he soothed himself by staring into her eyes. They were filled with emotions—most likely fear.

However, just when he decided to strike, Stefan noticed something.

"They're here..." Maria whispered.

The people who had arrived—who Stefan had also sensed because they had gotten within his range—were none other than the backup forces.

The Beastfolks!

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Baraja was a powerful, well-renowned Beast folk among his people.

Some even said that he was second only to the Beast King in strength. When he had been younger, he'd even dreamed of having that position.

That would be the greatest honour, he thought to himself.

However, with Gerard's emergence—someone much more powerful than he was—Baraja accepted his fate. He would always come short against the Beast King no matter how hard he tried.

Sure, he was a Dragon Beastfolk, just like the former Beast King—Vaizer. However, Gerard was a different kind of monster. He was a variant with so many transformations and bloodlines that it was impossible for him to compete against him.

In both strength and versatility, he was inferior.

And... Baraja accepted it.

He decided to accept his lot, refusing to compare himself to Gerard any longer. Rather, he chose to cultivate his strength at his own pace.

He was currently a well-to-do warrior. He had enough fame and status to last him a lifetime. He had a good family, and the satisfaction he experienced when he attained a new level of strength—without comparing it to Gerard—was indescribably pleasant.

All in all, Baraja was the best he could possibly be; which was why he was sent, alongside a squadron of five thousand Beastfolks, to the Eastern Kingdom.

According to the last report they got, the Eastern Kingdom wasn't under siege at all, so he and his forces took their time getting there while taking close looks at their surroundings to spot where the enemy could be hiding.

They didn't spot anyone or anything until they neared the capital. Once they did, however... he and his team were overwhelmed by the horror!

'T-the entire capital... has been destroyed?!'

What amazed Baraja the most was that there were still no Nether Beasts in sight. Just chaos and destruction all over the place. However, almost as soon as they spotted the destruction, Baraja was able to spot two people on the scene.

One was a young woman, who was on the floor, and the other was a young man. The latter seemed to have the advantage, and Baraja could spot highly concentrated light energy emanating from the man's direction.

"Is this the enemy? Is he the one responsible for all of this?!" Baraja whispered.

He recognized the young lady once he got closer. She was one of the people of the Eastern Kingdom—his ally. The fact that no one else was around—not even the Grand Mage he had been told he would meet—meant the enemy had either wiped them out, or something unfortunate had occurred.

Either way... he and his team would have to help.

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"HALT THERE, NETHER CULT MEMBER!!!"

Stefan watched himself become instantly surrounded by the Beastfolk army.

They gathered around him like flies, and he felt that they would be a bother to him and his little rematch with the genius of the Eastern Kingdom.

"You're in my way..." He sighed.

A Goddess!

The screams instantly ceased and were replaced with utter decorum. The Beastfolks fell unconscious, and white flowers suddenly shrouded them where they lay.

The Goddess, covered in light, and oozing sheer purity, looked around her to ensure that all the Beastfolks were safely under her protection. Once she confirmed this, her gaze shifted in the direction of the malefactor.

Stefan Netherlore.

"You... what did you do?!" He snarled.

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Maria felt like the most powerful being alive.

This was only an illusion that her sudden boost in power offered her, but it was enough to grant her a much wider perspective on everything.

Her aching heart and trembling face were suddenly frozen in place, and an aura of gentle authority took over.

The Beastfolks who suffered would suffer no more. Once she produced that thought, her will was carried out.

Maria encased the entire area in her protective sphere, and with all the preparations finally made, her focus finally converged on the enemy... Stefan.

"What did you do?" He asked her spitefully.

She owed him no explanation, so she didn't speak.

Why did she need to tell him how she and her Familiar had fused past the allowed integration level?

Usually, in Fusion Mode, the host had an equal or higher share in the power distribution. It offered a balance and some means of control for the host. The highest synchronization rate would be an equal distribution, so both Host and Familiar would be co-drivers—partners in the body.

However, Maria had exceeded this level.

Her synchronization rate was currently 30:70—the lesser number being her current position in the body. As a result of this, she was granted even more power, and the flow of power from her Archangel Familiar was increased dramatically.

This, in turn, allowed her to siphon more Aether from her Arcana and utilize it more efficiently. In essence, she was far stronger than before.

However, with his new power came some dangerous effects.

Maria's personality had gotten numbed, and her self-awareness plummeted. In this state, she was seemingly in a daze. It felt like she was not the one piloting her body, though she still had a good idea of what was happening.

Finally, even with her lack of complete consciousness, Maria's main objective remained the same.

Stop Stefan Netherlore... no matter what!

"Original Magic..." Maria muttered, staring at Stefan with focused eyes.

Suddenly, a circle similar to a wheel appeared underneath her—right beneath the sole of her armoured feet. Maria's angel wings flapped, and feathers fell from them.

'W-what? I don't... I haven't fully developed my Original Magic. What is this? This isn't...' It didn't take long for Maria's inner self to realize what was happening.

This wasn't her Original Magic.

It was the Original Magic of her Familiar!

"... Starlight Of Heaven."

Suddenly, the Magic Circle began to shoot rays of light upon Maria, and the feathers around her took the appearance of stars.

The stars burned brightly, and they radiated gloriously.

From the circle also emerged something akin to a wand. The wand floated into Maria's hands, and she held it lightly.

Her gaze remained on Stefan, and despite the amount of time she was taking for her preparation, there was a reason she hadn't been attacked by her opponent yet.

That was because he was frozen still.

From the activation of her Original Magic, and the manifestation of the circle underneath her, she had already transcended the speed Stefan could reach. Albeit only temporary, due to the activation sequence, Maria was currently moving faster than the flow of time itself.

"Star bright, Starlight, Stars with heavens delight." She muttered, swinging her staff slowly as she controlled the glimmering stars around her.

The circle slowly disappeared, and time finally went back to normal.

Stefan could be seen in a confused rage, as he directed multiple light blasts, all possessing different colours.

Still, none of them seemed to grab her attention. Maria's focus seemed to be on the stars that were focused on a particular point.

Once the stars converged and formed a more massive one, Maria's smile finally appeared.

"I hereby wish, O' Star, for you to hearken to my heart's desire. Wish upon a star, and the star shall heed your heart's desire. So, reverse the harm done and set causality right. Such is the wish of this Constellation, one of the twelve watchers of this life."

Stefan's multicoloured lights instantly disintegrated the moment they neared Maria, but her light kept getting brighter and brighter. It ascended far into the heavens, shimmering in all its glory.

Up, up above, it went. Finally, upon reaching a precipice... it exploded.

And then...

>WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

Everyone was blinded for a moment due to the sheer intensity of the blast.

However, once the dust settled and sight returned to their eyes... They were all greeted with the most amazing sight.

All had been restored.

The entire capital—no, even the areas beyond that—had been restored, down to the last bedrock.

And, as if that weren't enough the people who had died, and the ones who suffered—were all present once more. It was a miracle from the heavens, a sight impossible to comprehend.

All of this wonder was induced by a single source.

The single star that ascended to the sky—illuminating everything with its light— restored everything to what was right.

"Such is my wish... answered by my Starlight."

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Chapter 735: Showdown Between Geniuses

Stefan was stupefied by the sudden occurrence around him.

"Y-you..."

The disaster he had caused was completely reversed, and the casualties all appeared alive and well. It was as though time had been reset to a time before his appearance.

'H-how...?!' Stefan knew fully well what had effected this change.

It had to be the star his opponent sent flying into the sky. It contained such dense Aether that even he had felt shaken to his bones. However, that didn't answer the crux of his question.

'How is Maria able to use such power?!'

He watched as even Elrich Lendertwale appeared beside her, completely unscathed. The Grand Mage seemed surprised as well, but after a few moments, he calmed himself and backed down from the fight—leaving only Maria to face him.

'You're looking down on me too much!' Stefan growled.

Something had changed about Maria, sure. She seemed more capable and certain of her actions, and the energy she emitted was beyond ordinary. However, so what?

'I'm still the superior one!' The moment he made his triumphant thought, Stefan created seven large beams of light—each containing six of the seven colours of his Original Magic.

'Let's see if you can handle this bombardment!'

As a safety measure, he created a gravitational field that would collapse any spacial rift that tried to interfere with his offensive move. As far as his senses went, Elrich Lendertwale seemed to be protecting everyone below.

He didn't need to worry about those small fries.

>WHOOOOOSSSSHHHHHHH!!!<

The surge of multicoloured lights leapt from his direction, and with such a speed and veracity that could not be described. They reached their target in no time, surrounding her from all angles. With each light promising the most fatal of injuries and damage to every portion of her being, they struck.

>PSHUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU<

However, before they could even get to her, the giant balls of light dissolved into particles—glittering as they were swept away by the wind.

'W-wha—?!' Stefan was taken aback by this.

Not only did his attacks not work on her, but they were easily done away with.

'I see. So you've also reached that level, huh?' He realized he would be foolish to underestimate her.

With the amount of power oozing from her, refusing to acknowledge the girl's strength would be the very definition of stupidity.

'Guess I'll go all-out.' Dark energy slowly began to rise from Stefan as he made those thoughts, and the intensity kept climbing to an overwhelming degree.

"It is no use, Stefan Netherlore. You have already lost." Maria spoke, her tone sounding hollow, and her gaze completely focused.

"Hahaha! Shut up! Just because you deflected my attacks, you think you can run your mouth?!" A violent, raging storm surrounded Stefan instantly.

Wrapping itself around the boy to form a cocoon of darkness, the black power, coupled with dark red flashes of light, kept growing stronger and stronger.

Unlike the last time when he entered this form half-prepared, Stefan decided to fully transform into his most powerful state—a form that Maria could not trump no matter what.

'I'll show it to you, Maria... despair!'

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Elrich Lendertwale stood among the gathered Beastfolks, and all of them watched from the safety of their distance.

He wasn't sure if he would consider this range to be safe, but he had been assured by Maria—whoever she was now—that it was.

"W-who is that female?"

"A-amazing!"

"S-such power!"

He could hear the Beastfolks around him murmuring and marvelling at Maria's power ceaselessly. Ever since they awoke a few moments earlier, they had been talking about the same thing—how powerful the goddess-like figure in the sky was.

Some even bowed and prayed to her.

As much as Elrich found that to be extreme, he also couldn't blame them. He too was in awe as to how Maria was able to generate so much power.

The dome she created spanned several miles, and the white flowers that blossomed and covered the entire landscape flowed with smooth energy. The destroyed capital was restored in the blink of an eye, and all the dead were returned to life.

It was a reset—something he could not have fathomed.

'Even I am alive. It truly is amazing!'

He remembered how surprised he had been to find himself by her side. It was only when she telepathically communicated with him that he sort of understood what was going on. He was also given a task—which was to teleport the previously dead people to the safe storage space and to protect the Beastfolks.

He realized none of them would agree to be sent to the pocket dimension for safety, considering the sight that was about to unfold before them. Even Elrich didn't want to miss it for anything.

Somehow, he had the reassurance that everything was going to be fine now. And so, like the other spectators, he knelt and watched the clash between light and darkness in the sky—hoping to see light prevail.

"Show me..." He smiled at the shimmering goddess above him. "... I pray thee."

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"HAHAHAHAHAHA!!!" Stefan cackled.

His body was now covered in darkness, and everything around him radiated pure malevolence. His size had also improved, as he became a bit over three meters tall, with sharp distinguishing features that made him resemble a devil rather than a man.

"WITNESS MY POWER!"

Dark lightning flashed all around him, and the intensity of his Arcana peaked. The power of motion began expanding beyond his area of influence until it covered the entire capital and even beyond.

'I'll destroy it again! I'll destroy everything and everyone below! And I'll destroy you!'

His power was unstoppable. He was currently covered in highly concentrated Nether. Who could be his match?

Perhaps if Stefan had paid a bit more attention to his surroundings, rather than obsessing over the goddess in front of him, he would have noticed something.

The impotence of his power to everything around him.

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Chapter 736: The True Genius

Nether naturally corroded anything it touched.

The more intense and it was, the more powerful the decay would be—and the quicker it would take for anything to devolve into nothing. That was what made this radical, perverse element so dangerous.

One would expect the magnitude of Stefan's Nether to have the same effect, considering how incredible the power was.

But, it didn't!

The air around him remained the same. The ground remained the same. The city, the Beastfolk, the flowers... everything maintained its purity.

And it was all because of one being.

"Your last chance to stand down is now. You can not emerge victorious."

"SHUUUTTTT UUUUUPPPPP!!!"

Stefan went critical, gathering all the Nether that leaked out of him so he could expel all of it at once. The moment he did so, not only would the entire area be destroyed, but the corrosive effect of Nether would return everything to nothingness.

'I'll ruin everything!'

>VWWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU—<

Just as the climbing energy reached its threshold and was about to explode, Maria suddenly appeared right in front of Stefan.

'I-I can't move!' Stuck in place, even in his almighty form, Stefan could only quiver as her hand neared him.

"W-what are you doing to me?" Stefan barked in his loud, distorted voice.

His growl, meant to inspire fear within others, had now become nothing more than a powerless whimper.

"It's not about what I am doing, but about what I will do. You have devastated the balance of this world with this power of yours. I am going to correct that."

Her words could only mean one thing, and Stefan realized it instantly.

"N-no... please no! Don't do it!" His voice suddenly peaked as he begged.

Maria did not stop, even though his face depicted desperation at this point. She continued toward his head, and he dreaded every moment of it.

"DON'T DO IT! DON'T TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME!"

Nether made him special. Before cultivating this power, he was nothing more than an inferior genius—someone who was destined to stay behind Maria and Jared as they both crossed the boundaries of Magic.

He was destined to be the side piece, never allowed to shine.

But, once he was given power—the Nether and [The Star], he became relevant. His words mattered, and he possessed authority.

Words could not describe how happy he felt when he was told of his immense compatibility with Nether. For the first time, he felt like he had won over everyone else.

That he had become a true genius.

Yet... YET...!!!

"DON'T TAKE IT AWAY FROM ME. THAT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES ME SPECIAL!" He begged, his devil-like face cowering at the mercy of his enemy.

A gentle smile formed on her face, and she gave him an expression of pity.

"If it's of any comfort to you... you were never special. The Nether didn't change anything." With that, her hand touched Stefan, and the most electrifying sensation shot through his body.

"ARRRRGGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!" His scream pierced the heavens as the dark, forbidden element, rose from their depths.

All the Nether around and within him gathered on Maria's hands, and her purification effect took complete control.

"[The Pope] wards away all evil, and purifies the darkness that lurks around." She whispered, closing her eyes.

Stefan's bloodshot eyes leaked out the dark mass of energy—the same went for his nostrils, his mouth, and his ears. Even the sweat pores in his skin brought forth all the Nether they had, leaving no room for escape.

"GAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!"

The screams went on, as Stefan's body slowly started to shrivel up. His face turned pale, and his skin dried up. He grew thinner as more energy was drained, and his hair soon began to fall out as well.

"Do not fear. You will not die. Just endure this pain. You... will be reborn anew."

"GARRRRRGHHHHHHHHhhhh... ahhhhh...."

Stefan's voice finally went stale, and the loud noises he made slowly diminished.

"Y-yoooouu..." His vision blurred as he looked at Maria.

'You took everything from me. How dare you! You... how could you! I hate you! I hate you so much!'

He had no strength to speak, but his thoughts raged with malevolence and evil. His heart cried out for power to kill this person—to destroy her—but nothing responded.

He was drained of all of it.

'Y-you took it all away from me.' Tears flowed from his eyes and his body powerlessly fell to the ground.

Just when he had found the perfect power to rise above his past and surpass all those who trampled upon him in the past, it was stripped away from him.

'Why can't I be powerful too? Why can't I be a genius as well?'

Even after all of this time, Stefan realized nothing had changed. Even though he tried his best to fight his fate, everything ultimately led to this moment—his defeat.

And now, even as he descended from his heights, his blurry vision could only see one thing—one person!

'It seems I can never be the star...'

The glowing figure of Maria filled his sight as she drew closer to him.

'You're the true genius, after all.'

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Chapter 737: Aftermath Of The Invasion

"WOOOHOOOOOOO!!!"

Thunderous cheers echoed in the air as Maria descended from her high estate, cradling Stefan as she landed.

The Beastfolk were all in joyous moods, all addressing the power she displayed with reverence. Their eyes no longer saw a human girl. No, they saw someone even more impressive than a true warrior.

What they witnessed was the act of a god.

"You did it, Maria." Elrich Lendertwale approached her with a smile. "Even I don't believe it."

Maria undid her transformation, reverting into the sixteen-year-old human girl with regular—albeit beautiful—features.

Groans could be heard from the Beastfolk audience, who would have preferred her remaining in the form of a goddess. Now, things had become too awkward.

"It wasn't me. I had help. My Familiar... she helped me."

"Yeah, I understand that—"

"No. She really did. I don't know how and why, but..." Maria's stepped back in exhaustion, and she almost fell to the ground as a result.

"Easy, there. You used a great deal of power back there—more than I thought was possible. You should rest." Elrich supported her, guiding her to sit among the white flowers that slowly faded.

Unfortunately, Stefan did not get the same treatment, so his frail body fell to the ground. Thankfully, he was already too unconscious to care.

"Will he live?" Elrich suddenly asked, his gaze shifting from Maria to Stefan.

"He was drained of all the Nether in him. He still has Mana, so he should be fine. His Soul is badly damaged, though. A huge chunk of it was already corroded by the power. He would have died in a few more months if nothing happened."

"I see..." Elrich stared at Stefan's still body.

It looked about as good as that of a corpse.

'I wonder what will happen when he wakes up and realizes what happens. Will he be thankful that his life was saved? Or will he be bitter that he lost so much power?' Elrich was willing to bet on the latter.

"With this, we've quelled the Nether Cult's attacks on all nations. You've also captured the leader. Well done." Baraja, the Beastfolk General, walked up to Elrich and Maria, showing his respect.

They all looked around them, and it was doubtful that a battle even occurred, in the first place. If it hadn't been for Maria's god-like ability, things would have been very different.

'Stefan Netherlore... while I understand what drove you to this path, you're going to pay for your crimes—just like your family.'

It was perhaps more of their fault than his. Stefan didn't choose to be born into the Netherlore Household, and he was probably used also used as a major subject in their experiments. Being exposed to Nether at such a young age... it must have contributed to the downward spiral he experienced the older he got.

Still, that did not excuse him of the horrors he had committed.

He had the chance, the choice, not to follow through with his deeds, yet he did not. Rather, it seemed he even enjoyed all the havoc he wreaked.

It was plain obvious—Stefan Netherlore was guilty.

"I only wish I could have helped him more..." Maria's voice trailed sadly.

"Don't beat yourself up over it. You saved my life—and the lives of others. That is more than enough." Elrich responded, placing his hand on her shoulder.

"Listen to the man. He's right, you know?" Baraja grinned energetically.

With both grown men telling her what a good job she did, Maria couldn't help but feel a surge of pride in her achievement. She was happy she was able to live up to all their expectations.

... Especially Jared's.

'I hope you're well, Jared. We're already done here.' She raised her head and smiled into the distance.

The image of a blond boy pervaded her mind as she inhaled the fragrant scent of the wind, enjoyed the company of her allies, and settled down to rest her head a little.

"What now?" Her voice echoed

"We rest, I guess." Elrich shrugged. "Once we catch our breath, we should rendezvous with the others so we can assist them."

Maria knew Elrich was being considerate of her—considering she was the only one who appeared to be exhausted out of everyone else.

"Jane Ursula is already gathering a team to venture into the Nether Headquarters in order to assist Jared and his team. From what I heard, they could be in trouble."

Maria's eyes instantly flashed open once she heard Baraja say this, and her heart thumped with worry and anxiety.

"What did you say?"

The Beastfolk General scratched his scaly head in a bid to remember more of what was asked of him. As was prevalent among most of their people, he wasn't very bright.

"Something about the plan being delayed and a lack of communication. I don't know the details, but Jane is seriously concerned about the success of the mission. So, she's sending an elite team there. Who knows, you may get called."

"I... I see..." Maria could only mutter in response.

Jared? In trouble? She couldn't help but think about the conversation they had many nights before—about how uncertain he was about the plan. She remembered how she had encouraged him back then.

And now...

'If Jared is in trouble, we have to go.' Her thoughts echoed.

"Elrich, why don't we... argh!" She suddenly felt faint, and unbelievable pain shot through her body.

The effects of using power that would normally be too much for her to handle were finally catching up to her. Somehow, Maria knew it was too good to be true that all she got from exerting herself so much was nausea.

'Damnit... not now.' Her thoughts faded away, and the last thing she could hear were voices calling out to her.

'Jared... needs... me...'

Upon making these final thoughts, Maria passed out.

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

Chapter 738: Where Neron Went

Tension among the nations fizzled out once the news of Stefan's loss and capture reached them.

Apparently, the Eastern Kingdom had the showdown against the Fourth Seat of the Nether Cult, and they emerged victorious—boasting no casualty or damage at the end of their confrontation with the enemy.

Once the nations got the news, relief spread through the people like wildfire.

The tired soldiers were finally able to rest, and the Beastfolk were left with nothing to look forward to. Security was certain among their people, and the only location left to strike was the Nether Cult headquarters itself.

And this was why Jane prepared herself for the important mission.

'I already know the people I'm going to employ.'

The heroes from each nation, and the most useful personnel on the battlefield—those were the people she was after.

'Elrich is looking after Maria and the Seat member, so we'll leave them as standby. For now, though, the rest of us will have to do.'

Her thoughts focused on those she had in mind;

Aurora

Dulum

Z'ark

Gerard

Jerry and Ivan

Asa and Maro

Of course, Beruel and Ana would accompany her as well.

Once Maria recovered, she and Elrich would join them if necessary.

'There's the risk that we'll end up facing just as much danger once we get there. If that's the case, wouldn't it be unwise to pack our strongest cards into the enemy's base?'

Jane wondered if she was acting purely based on emotion. While she was extremely level-headed in terms of objective analysis, she was well aware of her limits as a strategist. In battle, many unforeseen variables could surface, and she wasn't very good at dealing with such unpredictable elements.

That was why she needed Lewis.

'But, if we don't make a move, the enemy will eventually wipe us out. It's better we create a united front to fight against them.'

Once she made up her mind, she decided to contact the affected parties. For something of this scale, they needed all necessary hands on deck.

Only then could they show the true force of the alliance.

'Still... this all started going downhill when that guy's Magic suddenly failed and I couldn't even detect him at all.' Jane thought to herself as she got to work.

'What the hell happened to you, Neron?'

*
*
*

Pitch black darkness covered everything, and the whole expanse was filled with malevolence.

One of the many figures in this dark world calmly stood, gazing into the abyss that enveloped him. His dark hair, pitch black eyes, and completely stoic face told of his identity.

"Neron Kaelid!"

"Welcome to my domain!"

"I've been expecting you."

"Wondered if you'd actually fall for it."

"I had no doubts."

"And now you're trapped."

Various voices overlapped, echoing emptily in the vast expanse that didn't seem to end. The voices all sounded like the same person, yet they were spoken by different people.

"Legris Damien, I presume. I have to admit, I'm impressed." Neron finally spoke.

He could feel the rigidity of his body, and how the laws of this world restrained him to a terrifying degree. He could barely move, and it took a great deal of effort to speak.

However, that wasn't the scariest part about this place.

'I can't access my Time Magic... and even [The Hermit] isn't functioning properly.' Neron could instantly tell why all of this was happening.

"HAHAHAHA!"

"As expected of you, Neron. You figured it out!"

"That's right! It is as you've seen."

"This place is completely made up of Nether!"

"This is my domain."

The various voices seemed to approach Neron slowly, and he could feel the darkness around him closing up on him, pressuring him even more.

'A world filled with nothing but darkness and Nether. No wonder my Magic isn't working. The concept of time, space, and the other things that Arcanas control aren't present here.'

It was simply a perverse world that Legris owned.

"Who are you, Legris?" Neron's eyes narrowed, glowing brightly as he focused Aether into them.

Thanks to this, he was finally able to see.

But, what he saw...

"Who am I?"

"That's a funny question."

"How to answer that."

"I wonder..."

"Make a guess."

"You could get it right."

"Or wrong."

"Either way..."

"It doesn't matter."

... What Neron saw defied logic.

All around him—as far as his eyes could see and his senses could reach—were various versions of Legris Damien.

They all had distinct markers, so Neron was certain they weren't mere clones. Some had slightly distinct facial features. Others appeared taller, some looked shorter, some had different colors of hair, others wore various attires.

However, they all had one thing in common...

They were all Legris Damien.

"Ah... I see." Neron whispered as he closed his eyes.

The numerous people surrounding him suddenly halted, and only one of them stepped forward. That was the Legris he was most familiar with—the Sixth Seat of the Nether Cult.

"This is your trump card, isn't it? Original Magic..."

"[Who Am I?]" Legris completed Neron's words, grinning widely as he did so.

With a single Legris right in front of him, and many around him, he was obviously trapped. He was in a world where his Magic was ineffective, confronted with many enemies that had powers and strength rivaling the one who stood in front of him.

"It's been a while since I've been pushed back like this. Who knew you were hiding a card like this?"

"You do—or rather, you should." Legris gave him a knowing smile.

That smile was enough to finally shatter the mask of ignorance that pervaded Neron.

His bright eyes darkened a little, and his stoic expression slowly transformed into something else... something similar to a grin.

Both men stood opposite each other, yet the tension that once filled the air was nowhere to be found.

"Well said, Legris... or should I call you 'old friend'?" Neron finally spoke, his tone sounding a lot more confident than earlier.

"I thought I told you already... I never considered you a friend."

"Fair enough." Neron's eyes narrowed even further.

Images of his dreams slowly began to overlap, and the pieces began connecting. It didn't take him very long to recognize the domain he was in, and the nature of the man in front of him.

His smile widened the more he looked at Legris.

"Still, Neron, I have to say..." Legris returned the expression. "... It feels good to have you back."

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

Chapter 739: Hidden Secrets

"Is that how you really feel?"

Neron and Legris stood opposite each other, a short distance dwelling between them. While the tension in the dark expanse was nonexistent, and both of them kept up a smile, there seemed to be something more to their reunion.

Something darker.

"Nope. You're already a threat to me now. Who knows what'll happen when you gain all your memories?"

"Hmmm. So you know all about it, then."

Legris instantly erupted into laughter.

"Yeah, well, I guess I never really told you about my origins. That Spell you used at the end... while it got the job done, it didn't erase my memory—or should I say it didn't reset it."

"How much do you know about it?" Neon's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Not much. I was quite surprised to see what happened too. I knew it had to be you, so I monitored your progress. That's the reason why I became a teacher at Ainzlark, to be honest." Legris shrugged, a smug smile spreading all over his face.

"Isn't it because of Jared? His status as a Singularity... that's what the Nether Cult wanted you to eliminate, right?"

"You are also a Singularity. The only reason you haven't been targeted yet is that I made a deal with the Cult. Even though you're currently weaker than before, and you don't have those memories, I still don't know if you'll resort to something so pesky again."

"Oh? So that's why you kept up your charade until it was finally time to catch me. Is that it? Neron's smile grew wider.

"Yes. That's right. You can't use your powers here. You can't break out as well. Even if I kill you here, you won't be able to resort to that trump card of yours." Legris placed both of his hands on his waist, nodding emphatically.

Looking at the conversation between the two, one could only conclude that they were either best friends, or the worst of enemies—perhaps somewhere in the middle.

"Then why didn't you set up a similar trap earlier? You're smart enough to do it, aren't you?"

"Well, you know me well. I was simply curious about what you were planning. That's why I decided to observe a little."

Legris and Neron exchanged piercing gazes, and both parties appeared to be searching for clues in the eyes of the other. This wasn't purely a discourse between friends... neither was it coated with hatred either.

Suddenly, just as the silence was about to recreate the tension of before, both men burst out laughing again.

"You're an intelligent man, Neron. I don't know why you would do what you did without accounting for your loss of memories. The routes you took this time were also quite different from before. I never pegged you for the type to attend the Academy... or even become a teacher there."

Neron remained silent, simply smiling and watching Legris.

"What were you thinking, though? And how is it going with Serah? You guys are together now, right? That's cute. Hey, does she know about—"

"She does. And she doesn't care... just as I predicted."

"Nice one."

"Look, Legris... I know what you're trying to do." Neron sighed, his arms drooping.

"Do you, now? Even back then I never told you everything. Plus, it doesn't seem like you remember everything. Am I right?"

"Believe what you want. However, I still won't concede. Everything thus far has led up to this moment. Do you really believe I didn't know you enough to predict what actions you would take and what actions you wouldn't?" Neron's face suddenly grew tired, and his smile began to vanish.

Before long, his expressions returned to their old state.

"Even with my loss of memories, I still get nudgings from what I call my 'intuition'. That's how I have been able to veer away from certain paths."

"Ah, I see. So you were the one that put those intuitions there? As a measure for when you lost your memories? That would mean you've plotted out everything, huh? Including this round?" Legris' grin was also disappearing.

"Who knows..."

"PFFT!" A snicker suddenly came from Legris, and he hugged his stomach to laugh a little.

Tears formed on his face, and he gave a roar of amusement that echoed across the vast hall.

"Hahahaha!"

"Neron, you're so funny!"

"Amusing!"

"Exciting!"

"Scary!"

"It's not possible!"

The multitude of Legris Damiens joined him in his amused laugh.

"Enough with the tricks, Neron. You won't fool me with that nonsense. Your so-called intuition would have warned you about this place. Even if you could see all of it, you can't see through my Nether Domain. It's cut off from your reality, after all."

"Fair enough."

"Besides, I've already narrowed down what your plan is." Legris mused.

"Oh? Why not enlighten me?"

"U-urhh..." I groaned, rising from the massive crater which had formed as a result of my impact.

"When will you begin to fight earnestly?" A voice spoke from above me.

It belonged to the man who had kept me here all this time. Rather than searching for my allies, I was stuck engaging this person—nearing death many times already.

"Who said I'm not fighting earnestly?" I muttered, grunting as I glared at his looming figure.

The Martial Blade God—truly, he was worthy of his title.

A mere glance around revealed several craters—some ten times as large as the one I currently stood in. Whether on the ground or in the sky, this man remained unmatched. I tried various tactics to escape, but he always cornered me regardless.

'I understand why Neron said he wasn't sure who would win. Even I am not certain.'

I still hadn't seen the true depths of Neron's abilities, so I couldn't judge. But, from what I could see and also estimate... it seemed like the Martial Blade God was superior.

Not only did he have precognitive abilities, and speed which I hadn't seen Neron exhibit, but even when I used my Original Magic and supported the Arcana Abilities stored within with my Aether, he found a way to counter everything.

Time was ineffective against him—I tried!

Perhaps Neron's mastery over time would make a good difference, but the Martial Blade God could see through time. That was how he was able to decipher my identity. That was also why he could be so confident of my demise.

'Damn it...' I thought to myself.

Fortunately, with the few exchanges we had—mostly consisting of me fighting for my life—I was able to figure out something.

'He can see through time. But other than that one time he used it, he supposedly hasn't utilized it anymore. I can't be too sure, and this plan hinges on that assumption, but I'm running out of options!'

When the Martial Blade God supposedly looked through time, he would take in the information of the present, and it would split into the past and future.

'However, while the past is certain and fixed, the future can be malleable. He can't possibly see through all the versions of the future, so he simply takes in the present and it branches off to the more probable future—creating a more streamlined set of foreseeable events.'

Thankfully, the Martial Blade God was honest. It wasn't too difficult to extract enough information from him.

'Now, for my counter...' I watched as the Martial Blade God rushed at me with another strike.

To be honest, I couldn't evade his assault. Space wouldn't warp properly, so my teleportation wasn't going to function well. Displacing an object of mass, leaving a vacuum behind... that wouldn't work at all.

As I watched him get closer, barely able to move my body due to how fast my senses and his speed moved, I knew it was impossible to evade or block.

Even though my Familiars currently buffed me up, and my Elemental Chamber was active, and I was relying on my Arcana—something he wasn't doing—I could barely keep up with him.

He did tell me something amid our fight;

"You're making me exert full strength at base. Impressive."

Those were his words of praise, yet I couldn't help but feel insulted. Here I was, pouring out all I could—using all of my power—while he was simply relying on his normal strength. Despite all of that, the Martial Blade God was superior.

And now... he was ready to perform the execution.

Would I see my two lives flashing before my eyes? Would the images of those I cared about overlap in my head? Would regret and sorrow fill me up? Would I desperately cling for life despite all the hopelessness?

The only answer to these questions was simple—I wasn't going to die here!

'Thankfully... it's ready!'

>WHUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMM!!!!<

The Martial Blade God swooped down from above, well past the speed allowed to any mortal. Shockwaves and earth-shattering pressure surged from him as he sought to finally execute the young boy.

'He put up a good fight—more than the rest of them, apparently.' Truly, the Martial Blade God felt like Jared Leonard was worthy of the Nether Cult's attention and troubles.

However, what of it?

Ultimately, the boy was going to die by his blade... just as he had seen.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOUMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!!<

The attack connected, and the entire area suffered for it. For miles, the radiation of battle surged forth. Everything within that range was pulverized instantly.

It meant victory!

However...

"H-huh..?" The Martial Blade God whispered in shock.

He was usually composed, but the sight in front of him—what he held in his palm—was surprising, to say the least.

'This is...?'

A metallic odor tickled his nose as he held a scrap part of a supposedly artificial being. In one move, he crushed the metal object—most likely a heart—and inhaled deeply.

"He tricked me..." The Martial Blade muttered, staring far into the sky.

Jared was nowhere in sight, and the Martial Blade God even had trouble sensing him. It made him instantly realize what had just happened.

"Not bad." A smile formed on the swordsman's face.

"Not bad at all."

"Haa... I survived!"

It was no mean feat, escaping the clutches of such a powerful man. I actually thought I was going to die.

'Thankfully, I analyzed it right on time...'

What did I analyze, some might ask? Well, it was something even I did not expect to come in handy...

Damien Lawcroft's Original Magic!

As much as I didn't like the guy, and as simple as his Original was, it quite literally just saved my life.

'Damien's Original Magic allows him to switch places with any object he has marked—or to even switch the positions of two marked objects. Neron told me all about it during one of our conversations.'

I actually recorded his Magic during the Demon Incursion, even though I never really completed the process since I was busy with other matters. However, during that fight with the Martial Blade God, I had no choice but to resort to it.

'Damien's Original Magic worked because—unlike my Space Magic—it wouldn't leave a vacuum once I escaped.'

If I timed it perfectly, and chose an object with similar mass to replace me, nothing about the unstable nature of Space, at the time, could prevent the exchange from taking place.

So, I replaced my body with an automaton with a similar structure and Mass as me. The only limiting factor was the whole 'Mark' condition for Damien Lawcroft's Magic, so I had to replace it with a more convenient one.

It caused the process to take longer than it would have taken normally, but thanks to it, I was able to alter the Original Magic. I could swap places with objects I had control over—or objects connected to me.

All the Automatons I remotely controlled shared this connection with me, so it was convenient.

'Finally, to bypass the Martial Blade God's precognition...'

Since he could only see the present, which could branch out to the most probable future—and he didn't check again after the first time—I was able to develop a new Original Magic that escaped his future sight.

If he had been more careful, checking my future at every given moment, then it would have been my loss. Fortunately, his personality wouldn't allow that.

Putting all these factors into account, I was able to secure my escape.