

SPELLCRAFT 741

SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

Chapter 741: Serah's Resolve

Upon switching places with an Automaton, I decided to utilize my Space Magic once more.

'I'll use a more powerful version of [Unknowable] to get in this time. I'll also steer away from my earlier location.'

I had to be extremely careful. If I was caught by the Martial Blade God again, I wasn't too sure of pulling the same trick twice. Since that was the case, I had to be more prepared.

'I'll move to my pocket dimension and use that chance to restore my strength while creating something better than [Unknowable]. Hopefully, I can still find the others and find a way around searching for Neron.'

As for completing the mission, I still had one more ace up my sleeve. Once I secured everyone else, I would use it. For now, though... everyone came first.

'Alright, Jared... let's get a move on!'

"Garghhhh!!!"

Serah Crimson yelled as her body was flung to the ground, creating a massive explosion in the boiling surface.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!!!<

The earth rumbled, and the shockwave of the hit spread for miles.

"U-urgh..." She growled, glaring at the opposition who hovered above her.

Her opponent, the Succubus who had the 2nd Seat in the Nether Cult, cast a condescending look on her injured form—causing Serah's determination to soar even more.

"I told you already..." The Succubus, Karlia, sighed in exasperation.

She had repeated this very same thing to Serah countless times, but they always fell on deaf ears.

"It doesn't matter how hard you try—you can't kill me. Trust me, I've also tried."

Karlia's demon wings flapped behind her, and her tail danced as she folded her arms while maintaining her position in the air.

Her clothes, which had been destroyed many times by Serah's attacks, instantly reappeared on her body. The Succubus was not only immortal, but it seemed her lab coat and her accompanying attire, were also capable of restoration.

"You're almost out of steam. Your power won't even be enough to damage me at this point. I've done well to adapt to it all."

"Haa... haa... is that... so..?" Serah huffed and put on a brave smile.

Despite all her bravado, she knew Karlia was right.

She was already well past her limits, and the 2nd Seat was yet to break a sweat.

"Guess I have no choice..." Serah whispered.

Karlia appeared puzzled, but also curious. It initially felt insulting to Serah that the Succubus never showed any caution or fear when they fought, but after a while she completely understood.

There was no real reason for her to feel threatened by Serah's power. In the end, even if she was damaged, she could instantly heal. She could never die. She was virtually unstoppable.

"I can clearly see what you're doing. You're going to kill yourself if you attempt to use so much power." Karlia spoke after watching Serah keenly.

"Is that your trump card? Don't use it."

"I can't believe you care that much about my wellbeing..." Serah leaked out a smile as she huffed even more.

Even though she was tired, her eyes contained enough resolve to carry out her mission. To save Neron, to protect her Kingdom—no, the world—she wouldn't mind sacrificing her life.

"W-w-what are you even talking about? You'll just blow yourself up and me alongside you. Now, I'm sure I'll still survive, but my lab is still right there. I would prefer it if you didn't resort to that." Karlia's face seemed redder than usual, for some reason.

Was she angry at Serah's stubbornness, or was she feeling some other form of emotion—perhaps embarrassment?

But why?

"Well, I'm not a big fan of throwing my life away. But... I have to do all in my power to accomplish my mission!"

"Haa... you're so insufferable. Look, I told you already, I don't really want to kill you. Of course, you'll leave me no choice if you threaten my project."

"Haha... well, I also don't feel like killing you—not that I could—but... we are enemies. That hasn't changed."

"I suppose. Hey, I've been curious about this for some time now, but... what exactly is your mission? If it is to stop us, then even if you sacrifice your life, it would be for no—"

"That's not all there is to it! I want to save my people, and I want to save the world from your organization. But more than that... I want to save my man from your clutches!" Serah pointed at Karlia with resolve.

"Your man? What are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb. Neron came here to scout, and we lost track of his signature. Clearly, he was taken by one of you."

"O-ohhhh..."

"See? You know what I mean. It's just as I thought! You're guilty as charged."

"N-no, wait—"

"Neron wouldn't die that easily, so you've kept him in that lab of yours. The fact that I can't sense whatever is inside shows that if Neron could be anywhere, it's in there."

"Just hear me ou—"

"I can only imagine what he's going through in there. Ah, Neron... don't worry... I'll save you!" Serah tightened her fist in resolve as she ascended to the air in order to confront the enemy once more.

"Are you finished?" Karlia sighed.

"No, I'm just getting starte—"

"Shut up, you idiot. I don't have Neron. Legris does."

"U-uh...?"

For a moment, silence pervaded the whole area. Serah blankly atared at the Succubus, who groaned as she slapped her head in annoyance.

"S-so you're saying..."

"Yeah. This whole thing is a misunderstanding. Look, we were all assigned our respective tasks. Legris was to take care of Neron—and neither of them is even on the island as we speak."

Serah's face slowly began to leak beads of sweat. Her body suddenly began to ache, and she could feel the flame within her quell.

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" She asked her final question.

"Have I ever lied to you? Lies are something I can't stand, so I don't engage in them. So, there you have it."

Serah an instant sense of awkwardness wash over her as Karlia sighed. Everything suddenly felt like a waste of time and energy.

"H-hey, Karlia..." Serah mumbled, feeling nervous and embarrassed as she stared at the Succubus in front of her.

She never thought she would resort to this, but after hearing the truth about Neron, and that there was no longer any point in fighting, Serah could no longer help but wonder...

"D-does your offer still stand?"

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Chapter 742: Unexpected Reunion

When they first started fighting, Karlia promised to look the other way and ignore Serah if she left her alone. She rejected the offer back then because of her desperation to find Neron—and also because she didn't trust Karlia's words.

Well, things were different now—and on both accounts too.

"Sure. You look tired, though. You might as well rest here for some time." Karlia shrugged, still watching Serah with somewhat curious eyes.

Serah was surprised to see her enemy show her mercy, but she was too tired to complain or suspect. Besides, she somehow felt she could trust Karlia's words.

"Haa..." Serah returned to the ground, exhausted beyond description.

The heated surroundings instantly cooled down as she landed to have a seat. Surprisingly, Karlia also descended from her heights. Both women stared at each other for some time before the Succubus finally spoke up.

"So, you actually went through all that to save your man? You were even willing to die in the process... just for him?"

"Well, yeah... I mean, he's Neron."

"Wow! That's totally badass. I have even more respect for you now. We're sort of similar, you know?" Karlia laughed.

"How? You're the bad guy in a group that wants to destroy the world." Serah rolled her eyes.

"No, I'm serious. You're kind of right about the whole thing, but I'm only on this side because I have to be. Just as you were risking your life for your lover, I'm doing the same for mine."

"A-ah... the one who died?"

"Yes. I want to bring him back—just as you want to bring Neron back." Karlia sighed, sitting down as well.

"W-well... I don't know what to say. You're still my enemy, but..."

"It's fine. I get it."

Another round of awkward silence enveloped the two of them. They could hardly even look at each other, at this point.

"So... what will you do now? You know, about Neron?" Karlia finally broke the silence with a question.

Who would have thought the enemy was so interested in Serah's actions when it came to finding the man she loved?

"Oh, that. I don't need to do anything."

"Wait... what?!" Karlia's jaws instantly dropped in shock.

She had thought Serah was a selfless woman who fought for her lover. After all they had been through, and all the exchanges they had, it was clear how strongly she felt for the man. Yet, her current words were contradicting her past actions.

"I don't need to search for him anymore. I know who he's with, after all."

"Legris is an enemy. He's also dangerous. It wouldn't bode well to underestimate him, you know?"

"I am well aware of that."

"Then... don't you care about Neron?" Karlia narrowed her eyes in disbelief.

"I do. It's just... if he's with Legris, then there's no need for me to worry. Neron will never lose."

"Oh? That confident, huh?"

"Yes. I am. Neron is the strongest!" Serah nodded, her chest swelling with pride.

"Do you think he can defeat me, though?"

"Sure, he can! You think he can't bypass your immortality? I don't think so!" Serah burst out laughing.

"And how will he do that?"

"W-well, I'm not sure. And even if I was, why would I tell you? You're the enemy, after all!" Serah instantly interjected, looking away.

"Hmm. Fair point. Well, even if he can, though... there's still one more person to consider." Karlia's grin widened as she spoke.

Her face suddenly displayed a dangerous smile, and a wave of pressure enveloped Serah just by looking into her eyes.

"The First Seat—The Martial Blade God. Neron would have to face him too."

"Well, he would still win!"

"I doubt it. I don't think he will."

"H-hey! Whose side are you on? Oh, wait..." Serah retracted her statement, slowly realizing something about it didn't add up.

"Haha. You're an amusing woman. I really like you. Unfortunately, you and your team made a terrible mistake by coming here."

"What do you mean? We have a plan!"

"It doesn't matter. Trust me. I'm a scientist, and I study the data pretty closely. Based on what I've researched, and the evidence I've seen... you people won't be able to win."

"Heh! We have more Arcanas, though."

"And what of it? Do you really think we need Arcanas to win? I've not used mine at all, even though it's powerful enough to defeat you if used properly. The First Seat also has his, and he could easily wipe out your team with it if he wanted to." Karlia sighed.

Her exasperated expression made it clear that she was trying very hard to convey just how hopeless the situation was.

"I was actually sending you on your way to meet the Martial Blade God, back when we first met. If you had gone, you would be dead by now. But, I've taken quite a liking to you, and I don't want you to die pointlessly."

"What... are you saying?"

"Leave this place. Honestly, it's the best option for you. That way, you'll be able to live on. I doubt you'd be considered so much of a threat if you hand over your Arcana and retreat. You'll be safe."

Serah chuckled instantly. As tired as she was, her voice roared and ascended to the heavens. It contained amusement, as well as seriousness.

"Do you really think I would run?"

"No. It was worth the try, though." Karlia sighed, rising to her feet.

Serah followed suit, and both women stared at each other as they stood a good distance from each other.

"We might as well end it here." The Succubus began to infuse her body with energy.

"What will you do?" Serah asked, her face showing nervous preparation.

"Don't worry. I won't kill you. I'll preserve you until everything is set. That way, you won't get in our way."

"Tch. You'll have to kill me first!"

"I already told you I won—"

"WHATEVER!"

A massive surge of energy burst from the two of them, and they prepared for their final confrontation. The power was enough to tower the sky and part the clouds, and the tension was so thick that it caused the earth to rumble.

The final moment of attack... the clash between the two... was near.

However—

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMM!!!<

—A sudden interference occurred.

"Serah! I finally found you!" The voice of a boy instantly pierced the air as he landed in the middle of the two women.

His blond hair fluttered with the wind, and his body was shrouded in multicolored energy. As the cloak he wore danced behind his back, so did his eyes the Aether enveloping him.

The smoke cleared, and the dust settled, revealing the identity of the third party.

However, the moment it became clear—and all three people suddenly saw each other—the most unexpected occurred.

"Jared! You're back!" Serah smiled in both shock and relief.

However, to her surprise, she wasn't the only one who felt this way. No, perhaps she was the one who felt the least of these emotions.

"Y-you are... Karlia...?" Jared's eyes went straight for the dazed Succubus opposite him.

His body was trembling, and his widened eyes wouldn't stop shaking. It seemed like he was having both the sweetest dream and the worst nightmare.

He wasn't the only one, though.

Opposite him stood Karlia, just as shocked—if not more so.

Tears streamed down her eyes as her body froze in place. She would have been mistaken for a statue if not for the wind that swept her dark hair, and the tears that clearly depicted emotion.

Her lips began to quiver, and her eyes gleamed with something she hadn't expressed in so long—the bright sign of hope.

Only one word could emerge from her lips as she gazed upon the boy and he gazed back.

"L-Lewis...?"

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Chapter 743: Parting Of Lovers [Pt 1]

The last time we met... was so many years ago.

The nations had all converged in a single location for a special event—the last days of Lewis Griffith himself.

Kings and honorable people from all over the world graced me with their presence. They gathered to celebrate with me, and to mourn my passing. This started with the arrival of Jane Ursula in the morning, stretching until daytime, when even more guests arrived.

However, soon enough, no one was present in the room. Per my request, they all left, and so I enjoyed my solitude—waiting for the time death would come.

However, who could have expected that I would still have one more visitor?

"You're definitely a sight for sore eyes." The melodious voice echoed within my room.

My tired, old eyes widened the moment I heard the voice.

I was too tired to raise my head, and my blurry eyesight couldn't completely pick up the person who spoke. However...

'This presence, this scent, this voice, this... it is...!'

It belonged to a crimson demon, coated in black. Her enthralling physique was still evident despite the dark outfit that clung tightly to her body. Her tail danced gently, and her wings were retracted at the time.

I couldn't tell when she arrived, and I also couldn't clearly see her face until she drew closer. Once she did, though, I noticed how shaky the smile on her face was.

"Karlia... is that you? It's been so long, hasn't it?" How could I not return her best efforts with a smile?

I did my best to give a toothy grin—though I could only imagine how awkward that would be, given my old age.

Several emotions ran through me. Nostalgia, relief, guilt... they all squirmed within me. Still, with all of these emotions, I couldn't dream of not staring at her.

"It's been very long to you, but not to me." Karlia sighed, drawing closer to my side as she spoke.

The cool scent of her alluring charm caused my body to relax. When did I last experience such a soothing sensation? The mere presence of this Succubus brought me so much satisfaction.

However, I still couldn't forget what happened the last time we met—how I chose Emilia over Karlia, and how much I hurt her.

Even though I didn't stay with Emilia for very long after that, I didn't settle with Karlia either. I lived out the rest of my life single—and while there were fulfilling points in it, I still felt that empty void that could only be filled with love.

Still, with many people here to wish me goodbye on my deathbed, I let go of those regrets and chose to die a happy man. I chose to let go of the burdens of the past and focus on the present—as well as my nonexistent future.

Unfortunately, Karlia hadn't moved beyond her past—at least, from how she looked at me.

"How have you been, Karlia?" I asked warmly.

"I've been traveling around, exploring many things. I learned lots of Magic Science from you during those times we spent together, do you remember? Well, I've been expanding my knowledge."

"Oh? Is that so?"

"Yes. I might even know more than you already?"

"Hahaha! You really think so? Well, give it a couple of decades, and you'll probably surpass me. For now, though, I'll keep my title. Hehehe."

Surprisingly, we both burst out in laughter.

Even if it was just for a moment, it felt like old times—me and Karlia, all alone in the room, talking and laughing.

We went on to discuss many other things. I told her of my escapades, and she told me of hers. It turned out Karlia had been through so many adventures—exploring many regions of the world and experiencing so much.

It was good to hear that she was finally seeing the world. I genuinely felt happy to hear all that she was seeing—and the many more she would see. However... when I realized the point she was driving at, it saddened me a little.

"No matter how much I try, I can't forget it, Lewis. Believe me, I've tried all I can to forget about you—about us. But, it is impossible. I know that I truly love you, and that can't change."

It broke my heart to hear that. Here I was, on my deathbed, yet Karlia still couldn't let go of the connection we had.

"Tell me, Lewis. I truly want to know. Back then, when you chose Emilia over me... did you really feel nothing at all?"

'I see. So she still hasn't let go...' I thought to myself when I saw her glittering violet eyes.

I was going to die very soon. If there was any time to be honest and spill out the truth, now was a perfect time. Even though I lived with regrets, I didn't want to die with any.

"I have always loved you, Karlia. I loved you back then... and even now..." I stared at her, unable to let go of the past too.

I couldn't explain it. I couldn't ignore it. I couldn't avoid it.

Perhaps this was one of the reasons why Emilia and I eventually broke up. I couldn't completely disregard my feelings for Karlia despite choosing Emilia. And now, facing her, I couldn't lie to her any longer.

"Haa... is that so?"

"I'm sorry for lying to you. I had to make a choice back then."

"So why didn't you choose me?"

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply. I didn't know what to say at that point. Did I love Emilia more than I loved her? Maybe.

Or maybe, with the way the situation had escalated—with Emilia being my wife and being hurt by Karlia's Miasma—I instinctively chose her.

I genuinely didn't know.

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Chapter 744: Parting Of Lovers [Pt 2]

"So, it's like that, huh? I understand." Karlia sighed.

"Y-you do?" My voice stuttered as I looked at her sad smile.

"I do, Lewis. Thank you for telling me." She placed her hand on my chest and I couldn't help but fall deeper in love with her.

The fact that I could see her one final time before I died meant a lot to me.

"Thanks for coming, Karlia. I... appreciate it."

Strength was leaving my body, and I knew the time of my demise was already near. Anytime from this point, and I would meet my demise.

"It was... good to see you again. Even after all these years... you are still very attractive."

"Pfft. You little pervert. If you want to fuck me, just come out and say it."

"Hahaha! I'm afraid I can't do that now."

We both burst out laughing, though mine was interrupted by a series of coughs. The fact that no one came in, even when we were making such a ruckus, meant Karlia had probably enchanted the room.

"Well... maybe not now. Perhaps another time." She gave me a calm smile.

"Another time? What does that mean?"

"It means I'm not giving up, Lewis. I'll find a way to bring you back—healthier and younger. That way, we can do it all we like!"

I smiled at Karlia, appreciating the sentiment. Even Jane said the same thing before. However, there were certain rules in the world that couldn't be broken. And, just as I explained to Jane, I also said the same to her.

"You don't know everything, Lewis. You can't be certain."

Well, she was right about that. But, I didn't want the woman I loved to spend her whole life trying so hard for me—especially when she was finally experiencing so much of the world.

"Lewis... I've given it so much thought already. I've done all I can to forget about you—to find a new purpose, or something else I can wholeheartedly dedicate myself to. But they always come short of you."

Karlia's words melted my heart. I appreciated her so much, but her statement also made me feel worse for leaving her just like that.

My departure was causing so many people sorrow, yet it was only natural.

"I can't imagine a life without you, Lewis. I... I can't." Tears were already falling from Karlia's cheeks.

I didn't expect a woman so mature to become so fragile. Still, even amid the tears, Karlia was so cute.

"Karlia... thank you. Honestly, I... I thank you. However, you must live on without me. I have no right to tell you how you should live, but... please be happy. I can only die without regrets if I know you'll be happy. So please... stop crying."

"L-Lewis, you... you're so unfair."

"I know. I know. And I'm sorry for that. But I'm leaving now... and I want to make sure you're okay."

My bony hands fell atop hers, and we had a moment of silence—one where we both exchanged smiles.

"I promise, Lewis... I promise to live well without you. Don't worry about me. I won't be dying or despairing anytime soon."

"That's good to hear."

From the depths of my heart, I was happy that Karlia was going to be fine without me. Even though Emilia never saw me, despite my imminent demise, I still worried for her.

At least, with this, Karlia would be fine.

"I... actually also have something I need to ask you." A smile formed on my wrinkled face.

Honestly, I had no idea why Karlia would care so much for this sack of bones. She was the epitome of perfection, and I was far from that definition. However, I loved and respected her enough to respect her feelings.

Still, it didn't eliminate the question that plagued me for many years. It was always something that popped up anytime I thought of Karlia, and I couldn't get it out of my head.

However, now that things had come to this, I could ask her. No, I had to ask her.!

Only then could I rest in peace.

"Karlia... back when we were together... do you remember?"

"Yes...?"

"When we were having sex for the first time..."

"Y-yes..."

"Y-you said something..."

"Where are you going with this, Lewis?"

"My... erm... tool. You said it was quite small..."

"O-oh... that."

To be honest, I still hadn't forgotten that awkward moment. Her words haunted me, even when I got married to Emilia. I lacked confidence in it for years, even though Emilia told me it was way above average.

The dissonance between Karlia's opinion and Emilia's opinion left me confused. I... could not get over it. No matter how hard I tried, those words remained stuck in my head. It was petty, but...

"I have to know, Karlia... is it really that small?"

Did she really manage with my equipment? I had to know before I died!

"HAHAHAHAHAHA! Lewis, you idiot. That's what you're thinking about on your dead bed?"

"Hey! Different strokes for different folks. You have your priorities, and I have mine."

We both chuckled and laughed under the watch of the moon. It was a truly magical moment, one I wished lasted longer.

"Well, the truth is... it wasn't actually small Lewis. It was pretty average." She smiled, narrowing her eyes as she went on to lick her lips.

Words could not express the relief I experienced the moment Karlia told me that. I felt like all the things that haunted me in the past evaporated.

Finally, I had inner peace.

"H-hey, what do you think you're doing? Don't even try." I could already spot her gaze moving in the direction of my equipment, and I knew just what kind of mischief she could pull.

"Boo. You're no fun."

"Yeah, yeah. As much as having one final go with you before I die will be the best way to go... I plan on my last moments being more... solemn." I smiled, closing my eyes as I inhaled deeply.

"Want me to stay here with you?"

"Thank you. I would really... appreciate that."

Karlia moved closer and kissed me on my forehead, and she tightly held my hand while watching over me. It felt... very good.

Soon, all my guests and visitors entered the room, but none of them could see Karlia. She was like a ghost. However, I had no doubt that it was really her I just talked to.

There was no way it was my imagination.

Jane, and pretty much everyone else, stayed with me as I closed my eyes for the last time. I saw all of them with my blurry vision, especially Karlia's teary smile.

As much as it pained me to see them go, I was happy they were here with me. Now, it was time to let them all go.

And so, as I thought about Magic in my last moments, I could hear Karlia's voice overlapping with my thoughts.

"I will bring you back, Lewis. And then we're going to live happily ever after... forever."

A smile formed on my face as I felt my consciousness fade away.

This was finally the end.

Little did I know at the time... I couldn't be more wrong!

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Chapter 745: Lovers Or Enemies?

... The Martial Blade God!

'He's tracked me down so quickly! Damn it!'

The plan was to cause a stir here, while grabbing Serah and making a break for it.

With the perfected form of [Unknowbale], I could choose to reveal myself or stay hidden. My intention was to temporarily reveal myself here, causing the attention of the Martial Blade God to divert to this point, while I used the chance to look for the others alongside Serah.

Unfortunately, I faltered at the most decisive point thanks to seeing the most unexpected person. As a result, the timing, and everything else, was ruined.

'Shit!'

I swiftly clutched Serah and decided to instantly replace our bodies with automatons. However, just as I suspected....

"That trick won't work on me again."

... The Spell didn't activate!

I could think of many reasons why this could happen. One would be that the Martial Blade God could already see our destination, thus eliminating the automatons before we had a chance to swap positions.

There were a few other explanations, but the most straightforward approach, and the one I suspected most, was that he was simply hijacking my Spell with his dominating pressure.

'You can use [Interference] to disrupt Spells. He could be resorting to that. No... he has to!'

"I appreciate you keeping them here awhile, Karlia. I will be taking over things from here." The Martial Blade God took a step forward, slowly unsheathing his blade.

I was frightened out of my mind, at this point.

There was no way to beat this monster!

'If he's interrupting my Magic, and his motive is to execute me, then... I'm screwed!'

The worst part, however, was that my only backup—Serah—looked completely worn out. I could tell that she went all out, and she was completely tired.

'Spellcraft would have been preferable, but it's useless because of all the Nether around.'

I was out of options, and my partner was a mess.

'Who's to say he can't simply interfere with all my Spells and kill me as fast as possible? Damn it! Do I have to pull out my trump card now? But... if I do, then the plan is—'

"Do not fret, Jared. I will make it quick." The Martial Blade God raised his blade right in front of me, ready to swing it and rid me of my breath.

For a moment, I actually saw my life flash before my eyes—and I felt like it would be over before I even realized it.

However, just as he was about to strike... the Martial Blade God suddenly halted.

'H-huh?!'

His arm was still raised, but he didn't move it any longer. Instead, he slowly looked behind him and gazed upon the colleague behind him.

"What are you doing, Karlia? Your bloodlust... I can feel its intensity." He spoke, narrowing his gaze at her.

'W-wha—? Karlia...?' My gaze also went in her direction.

She was transfixed in a single location, but I could tell see what the Martial Blade was referring to. Even though her bloodlust wasn't being directed at me, I felt myself shiver just by looking at her.

"Get away from him." Karlia's voice sounded deep and imposing.

Her fists were clenched, and her face resembled that of a ferocious predator. The bloodlust kept rising to an unprecedented degree, and it seemed her face kept morphing into a more dangerous scowl.

"Why should I do that?" The Martial Blade God's voice was the only thing calm about the current situation.

"He's mine."

"I saw him first."

"No, I did."

"Ah... yeah... that's true. Unfortunately—"

"I said... stay away from him." Karlia began taking steps forward—each move made me shiver down to my bones.

Never before had I seen her like this—not even against the Demon Lords in the past. It made me wonder just how much she had changed... how I probably didn't know her anymore.

'NO! What am I even thinking?! I told her before I died... that I wouldn't dictate how she would live. I'm not about to judge her for her actions now!'

I had also done terrible things in the past, and even I had to give Karlia the benefit of the doubt—even if she was a Nether Cult executive.

'I won't make the mistake I made in the past!' This time, I blamed myself.

I simply assumed Karlia would be living a happy life without me—never once considering the opposite. It gave me the perfect excuse to live my own life without worrying about her.

'Forgive me, Karlia... I failed you.'

However, if I was sure about one thing, it was that she couldn't have changed. She was still the same Karlia I knew. Just by looking into her eyes when we met, I could see the same woman I fell for all those years ago.

'Even now, she's protecting me from her own group.' There was no doubt about it, and I would be a fool to think there was.

"Hey, Martial Blade God..." I tightly clenched my fist as I spoke.

What kind of man would I be if I let her stand up for me without also standing up for her? With this resolve quelling the questions in my heart, I glared at the Martial Blade God.

"Don't look at Karlia that way!"

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Chapter 746: Resonating Feelings

Karlia was locked in an endless swirl of emotions.

Her heart constantly raced anytime she saw Jared—no, Lewis Griffith in Jared's body.

He seemed surprised that she would be able to recognize him despite his new form, but that was simply underestimating her sensory abilities. Since their Souls were linked by her Original Magic, Karlia could tell the moment she looked at him.

Even though the bond wasn't as strong as a Soul Brand, the moment he appeared in front of her, she could instantly tell.

'I-I can't believe this! H-he's alive?!' Her heart was racing at an unbelievable speed.

Through the years—for over five centuries—she had sought ways to bring him back, yet here Lewis was, right in front of her.

'Oh, no! He must think I'm his enemy! I'm in the Nether Cult, and I even wanted us to kill Jared because he was troublesome!' Her thoughts suddenly surged.

How was she going to explain her way out of this mess?

"Lewis, I—"

Unfortunately, her words were interrupted by the arrival of the First Seat.

The moment she saw him, she realized her blunder... as well as what was to come. The only reason for the Martial Blade to come was for Jared's execution.

Normally, she would have allowed it—no, even supported it. After all, Jared was one huge stumbling block that stood between her and her dream.

However, now that she discovered Jared was Lewis, what would she do? Was she going to watch the Martial Blade God execute the only person she ever loved? Or was she going to save him?

'He's still confused. He probably has some weird perception of me. I... I...'

Betraying the Cult was something she never wanted to do—especially because of her goals. But, her cooperation so far only hinged on one reason. And now the reason was in front of her.

Did it really have to take her so long to decide?

'NO! I'm not letting you near him!' Her thoughts echoed, and her bloodlust began to manifest—focused only on the Martial Blade God.

She knew she was courting death with her actions, but Karlia's thoughts were only centered around one thing. That single thing was enough to conquer the fear and reverence she had for her senior.

'Lewis is mine!'

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*

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"Don't look at Karlia that way!"

The eyes of the succubus widened the moment she heard those words from Jared/Lewis.

'H-he's... not mad at me?' Her heart thumped louder than before, and her whole body became hotter by the second.

She could see the resolve in his eyes as he stood up for her. It was similar to the one in her eyes. For that moment alone, despite their confusion and mixed emotions, Karlia could feel the connection between the both of them restored.

They had become one!

"I see. So, you've chosen to side with each other. I don't blame you for your choice. However, do you really believe this changes anything?" The Martial Blade God asked, his eyes narrowed as he exchanged glances between her and the one she recognized as Lewis.

Serah was out of the equation, but she was most likely going to be dealt with after the Martial Blade God was done with them.

'I already mad my peace with this a long time ago...' Karlia thought to herself as she took a deep breath in.

The Martial Blade God was standing right between her and her goal. And there was only one thing she could do to get back her lover.

"... I don't care if the world burns as a result—and the same applies to the Nether Cult!"

>VWUUUUUUSSSSHHHH!!!<

In a flash, she darted in the direction of her prey.

The Martial Blade God instantly picked this up, and he swung his blade to intercept her. However—

She instantly vanished from his reach and appeared beside Lewis, and right in front of Serah. They both displayed shock, causing her to grin a little.

"W-whoah... what did you do?" Lewis asked, his eyes ablaze with curiosity.

"It's one of my abilities. I can teach you about it some other time."

"Sweet!"

They both smiled at each other, and she could feel something deep within her Soul. It was—

'RESONANCE!' Her grin grew wider, and so did Lewis's.

It was just as she realized. Lewis and her... they were both one in thought and intentions.

~Let's do this, Karlia.~ His voice appeared in her thoughts.

'Yeah. Try to keep up!' She responded, her focus on the enemy in front of her.

It was both of them against this incredible monolith.

Karlia didn't know the full extent of Jared's strength, but she knew it was inferior to the Martial Blade God's power. She also knew her limits, and they also fell short.

However, she had a plan.

'We'll fight... for now. Once the time is right—I'll get us out of here!'

Facing the Martial Blade God and hoping to win was suicide. Fortunately, she had perfect immortality!

"This should be an interesting battle." Their opponent muttered, pointing his blade at the two of them.

"I have always wondered if I could kill you. Now is the time to put that to the test."

"Give it your best shot!" She yelled in excitement.

Even though she greatly feared and respected the Martial Blade God, having Lewis by her side gave her all the confidence she needed.

Somehow, she felt she could do anything as long he was by her side. It also helped that, at this very moment, she was...

... INCREDIBLY, INDESCRIBABLY HAPPY!

And with this profound joy, came strength!

'Lewis is alive! That's all that matters!' She strengthened her body and prepared to go all-out.

"Give it my all, huh? I'm not sure about that." The Martial Blade God whispered, blue and white energy suddenly emanating from his body.

Pressure filled the entire area, and the power he exuded was unbelievable.

"You are right in one aspect, though. I'll need to try harder if I want to win."

As he spoke, his hair turned white, and his skin appeared clear and pale. His eyes glowed bright blue, and he seemed to be covered in a bright attire made of energy. In his current form, all his senses were heightened, and his power reached more frightening heights.

This was his Martial State.

"Now then, shall we begin?"

With both sides prepared to give their all, the tension of battle enveloped the entire island. Anyone who dwelled on it could instantly tell...

... This would be a devastating clash!

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Chapter 747: The Grand Malefactor

Amid the chaos and destruction that constantly shook the entire island, there was one portion of it that remained unaffected.

It was the Nether Cult headquarters' main building.

It stood wide and tall, almost as though daring whoever challengers to venture inside and face the consequences. Not only did it ooze out such power, but the strong field around it was so dense that nearly anything that tried to venture inside without the proper authority would instantly die.

Despite all of that, a certain figure still approached the building with resolve.

She swiftly moved like the wind, easily passing through the barrier without suffering any harm, and passed through the walls of the buildings with her powerful Magic.

A cloak was around her, and it shrouded her body, revealing very little of her face. This culprit was none other than Aloe Vida... or rather—

Kazen herself.

'I apologize, everyone. You all have good intentions, and your plans were well-meaning. However... you have no idea who you're up against.' She thought to herself as she stealthily strolled through the massive hallway within the building.

'It's pretty. As expected...' Kazen thought as she took a good look around while advancing in Aloe's body.

She inhaled deeply, still feeling the sting of guilt for abandoning her supposed teammates and ruining their plans.

'I interfered with the teleportation to separate them all. That way, they won't interfere with my actions. As much as it pains me to have done that, it was for the best...'

Kazen had to do what she had to do—and she had to do it alone.

That was the reason she came from the grave, after all.

'Apologies, Aloe. Apologies, Jared. Apologies, everyone.' Her gaze was now fixed on a massive door that ominously stood in front of her.

So far she had stealthily traversed the Nether Cult's center of power, but Kazen was not foolish enough to believe that the master of this building would not have noticed her presence.

Her stealth was meant to prevent any annoying pests from getting in her way.

'In the end... you're the one I have to face!'

In one swift move, Kazen made her way past the door and found herself in a massive hall.

Murals decorated the place, and the tiles were paved with white. The chandeliers glimmered marvelously, and the ambiance within it brought back old memories within her. This place... the homely feeling of this room... Kazen could not forget it if she tried.

A distance from her, she saw the twelve seats around a round table, and she was once again reminded of her comrades—her friends.

The Apostles of Aether.

"Tch. So you recreated even this..." Kazen murmured as she stepped forward.

The seats were fewer than in the original setting, considering the Apostles were 21 in number. Compared to the memories she had, the twelve seats felt lacking. They were also empty.

The chairs were not well-rounded, unlike how she remembered them. Instead, six chairs were located to the right, and six went to the left. At the head of the table, that is, the top front, was a much more grandiose seat.

This thirteenth seat resembled a throne, and someone sat on it. He resembled a young boy, having an aura of darkness around him. As he sat on his throne and watched her, Kazen could tell... this was the leader of the Cult.

His steely gaze and malevolent eyes were fixed on her as she stepped forward. Her steps were careful, yet steady. Nothing about the determination on her face had changed the slightest bit.

"I have been expecting you, intruder." The Cult Leader spoke, his bone-chilling voice spread through the hall.

The power in his voice, and the darkness he depicted, were enough to make anyone tremble before him. However, Kazen did no such thing. Her gaze remained determined.

She kept moving forward.

"I'm surprised you came alone. Do you really think you can defeat me alone? Or, are your allies so occupied that only you could make it here?"

Kazen did not respond to the Cult Leader's obvious attempts at provocation or information probing. She wasn't going to waste her breath talking to him.

"It's a bit sloppy of the First Seat, I must say—letting one of the targets slip under his watch. Then again... he must be occupied with the Singularity." The Cult Leader chuckled to himself.

Suddenly, his malevolent aura increased over tenfold, and a sheer quantity of Nether danced around him. An instant wave of tension consumed the entire area, causing Kazen to finally halt and glare at the young lad.

"Haha... oh, well. We should conclude things no—"

"Enough with the theatrics. I didn't come here for you." Kazen finally spoke, her tone indicating the impatience and annoyance that she felt.

"What?"

Kazen's scowl intensified as soon as she heard the Cult Leader speak again. Instantly, a gust of Aether swirled around her. In a flash, it fought off the Nether that the Cult Leader emitted... and it prevailed.

Her power suppressed his, causing the seated young man to let out a gasp of shock.

"I have no interest in a pawn. I want to speak to the true master of this place. Reveal yourself, Ciel!" Kazen roared.

For a moment, her voice invoked nothing but echoes, and finally silence.

The Cult Leader seemed frozen in shock—his bloodshot eyes focused on Kazen, and a very deep frown formed on his face.

"What... are you talking about?"

"I said its enough! Bring me Ciel... NOW!"

Kazen released more of her aura, causing the entire area to tremble as a result. The Aether she released was so pure that even in such an area dense with Nether, her power prevailed.

Even the Cult Leader shook at this point, unable to bear it.

"Hahaha! That's quite enough, Kazen." A voice suddenly echoed across the massive hall.

The moment it did, the trembling ceased and Kazen swiftly lifted her gaze around. She swiftly attempted to find the origin of the sound, but failed.

"I'm right here." The voice came from where the Nether Cult Leader sat—or rather, beside him.

The sonorous, gentle tone belonged to a woman clad in white. She elegantly stood beside the Cult Leader's throne, a smile placed on her face.

"Y-you... you're Ciel...?!"

"Haha... it makes sense that you don't recognize me. I've gone through a bit of a makeover since our last encounter over a thousand years ago."

Kazen was speechless, but she maintained her stance regardless.

"It has been ages, hasn't it, old friend?"

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Chapter 748: The One Called Ciel

"It has been ages, dear friend." The white-clad woman, or rather... Ciel, spoke with grace.

A smile constantly remained on her face, and her pristine beauty could take one's breath away. This enthralling part of her held no appeal to Kazen, however. Instead, it only drove her further into a rage.

"Do not call me that. I am no longer your friend!" She growled.

"There's that temper. As expected of you, Kazen. When I felt your Aether, I instantly knew it was you. Honestly, even in death, you haven't changed."

Kazen gritted her teeth, glaring murderously at Ciel.

Millions of thoughts ran through her head, but most of them consisted of one major element. How to kill the woman in front of her.

"I expected, if anyone would return from the dead, it would be the strongest or something. Perhaps Merlin or Lancelot. Why would you be the one to come? And why choose such a weak vessel?"

"That's none of your business," Kazen responded brazenly.

It wasn't like the Apostles had the chance to come back from the dead, or anything like that. Not all of them could ingrain their Souls into their Arcanas as she could. The few who could do that only left portions of themselves there—little embers that would fade after a while.

The only reason she was different was because of her Original Magic.

"I could say the same about your little charade. Using a figurehead to control others... that sounds perfectly like what you would do." She clenched her fist.

Kazen remembered when she had once called Ciel a friend. She remembered how she had initially been a pure maiden, who was meant to be their newest member. Kazen remembered how she used one of their members and tricked him into deluding the rest of them.

She remembered how, in the process of solving the consequences of her ambition, her comrades had used up their lives. They protected humanity from the Nether and saved the world from Ciel's twisted ideals.

And, she remembered how they all went their separate ways—choosing to hide their most valued treasures since they believed that it was the only way to return the evil of the Nether to the world.

'Even after all that, she still hunted us down and tried to obtain our Arcanas. How many friends of mine died at your hands? You two-faced bitch!'

"You seem angry at me for personal reasons. Aren't the Apostles meant to be selfless heroes? Well, your anger is justifiable, but..." Ciel laughed softly, as she cast her gaze on the Cult Leader, who was still shaking in his seat.

She used her hand to rub his head, casting an unusually loving gaze on the boy.

"... Don't take it out on my child."

Kazen's eyes instantly widened in shock—no, more than shock... disgust!

"N-no... what did you do? What have you done!"

Ciel kept rubbing the head of her supposed son, and the boy—despite being the Cult Leader, kept his head steady. He did not resist, and neither did he squirm. Rather, he seemed to be enjoying her touch.

It was not an image befitting the leader of the Nether Cult.

"What have I done? Oh, plenty. As for my little child, well... 'WE' made him together."

The shock displayed on Kazen's face kept intensifying the more she watched and heard.

"Y-you didn't... no way..."

"I told you all, but you didn't listen. No one can stop our bond. Even though you took my beloved from me, I was gifted with a portion of his glorious self. As a result... I was able to fuse him with myself—thereby birthing our seed."

At this point, Ciel's frosty white face had shades of pink. Her hand was on her face as she smiled in euphoria. It seemed like she was experiencing a heightened sense of pleasure—one that would be better left unsaid.

"You're sick." Kazen shot a look of disgust.

"And you're ignorant. But I don't blame you. You weren't chosen by his glorious self, after all." Ciel shrugged.

"H-how can you say that? It is going to destroy everything and everyone in this world! It is going to kill everything! Yet you call my desire to stop that, ignorance?" Kazen raised her voice, her anger rising to new heights.

"And what of it?"

"W-what...?"

"And what of it? If it is his glorious will to destroy everything, then I shall gladly comply. There are more worlds out there, after all."

"Y-you..."

"I do not care if this world burns... as long as I get my beloved back. You do not understand, which is why you are ignorant."

"You monster..."

"I can only imagine his joy when he sees our child. Ah, the thrill makes me squirm with anticipation." Ciel was now using both her hands to caress her face as she spoke.

The Cult Leader was also smiling—the innocent smile of a child who believed the words of his mother and sought the return of his father.

Both of them grinned like maniacs, and Kazen watched their expressions of depravity, unable to take any more of it.

"I won't let that happen. I came here to stop you—even if I kill you, your child, or both in the process. I will not let you bring that monster into this world!" A burst of Aether surged from Kazen, instantly transforming her into a glorious maiden of light.

Resolve burned deeply in her eyes, and she readied herself for when she would strike.

"Well, that would have been more threatening if I wasn't already certain of my victory. Unfortunately for you, Kazen... you're a bit too late." Ciel smiled nonchalantly.

Despite the extreme pressure that dominated the area, Ciel did not even break a sweat. Her composed expression told Kazen how confident she was.

"Quit bluffing and stalling. You need all the Arcanas to achieve your goals. That is your reason behind establishing the Cult, isn't it? Without all of them, the gates will never open!" Kazen shouted.

With her eyes on the target, and her body ready to perform its task, Kazen let out a battle cry.

"This is the end of the line, Ciel!"

>WHOOOOOSSSSSHHHHHHHH!!!<

The first strike ended in a stalemate, almost as soon as it was initiated. Kazen met with a dense field, thus causing her attack to be nullified.

Even though she was moving well beyond the speed of light, Ciel was still fast enough to react.

'Tch! And she looked so relaxed...'

"You make too many assumptions, Kazen." Ciel's voice echoed in her ears, causing Kazen's glare to deepen.

"What... are you talking about?"

Ciel's light laughter triggered Kazen. She was enjoying herself in her dome of protection, and it seemed she had more cards up her sleeve.

'I knew this would be hard before I embarked on this task. I can't stop now...!' She gritted her teeth.

"Don't bother, Kazen. My plan is already in its final stage of fruition." Ciel ceased her laughter and made a gentle statement.

'She's just trying to bait me. She still needs all the Arcanas to—'

"You believe I need to have all the Arcanas to achieve what I want, do you not?" Ciel's smile broadened as she spoke.

Kazen obviously thought along that line. Who wouldn't?

The 21 Arcanas combined formed the last piece, and that was the only way to open the gates. That was the only way Ciel could get what she wanted.

'Arcanas can't be destroyed. We tried and failed. If we could... we would have destroyed them ages ago.'

Still, with the way the cards were currently divided, Ciel couldn't accomplish her plan. As long as that was the case, she was never going to win.

"What if I told you, dear friend, that I found another way?" Ciel's smile shook Kazen to the core.

The confident look in her eyes... the way she made her statement... Kazen could tell that Ciel was utterly sure of her words.

'What? How? I don't believe it!'

"T-that's impossible!" She yelled, ready to commence a stronger volley of attacks. And this time, enough to destroy the shield.

"Oh, but it is. I now have a way that allows me to win."

'YOU'RE LYING!!!'

"And I no longer need to possess the Arcanas to do so!"

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Chapter 749: The Loophole

What in the world was going on? What sort of nonsense was Ciel spouting? Kazen could not wrap her head around her words.

'There's no way... right?'

Magic existed to make the impossible possible. However, certain immutable laws couldn't be broken. One of those laws was the death of living beings.

The body or soul—preferably both—had to be present before the person could be brought back to life. The reasons stemmed from the complex nature of life, and the connection of Magic to every single element.

Ultimately, even if there was a loophole, it had to operate under the laws that existed—the power that be.

Even the solution to the impossible return of the Nether was only feasible with the convergence of the powers of the Arcanas. Any other way and it simply wasn't plausible.

Unless...

"It looks like you've caught on, Kazen." Ciel smiled, stretching her hand forward.

Instantly, projections of multiple cards began appearing in the air. The cards had various colours, but they were shrouded in Ciel's white light.

"I have lived for a very long time. Longer than you all have. That time has provided me with the means to create a second Original Magic—one as complex and intricate as this."

Kazen's eyes widened when she saw the floating projections. She realized it the moment she decided to take a closer look...

'T-those aren't mere projections!'

The patterns, the formulas, the nature... the projections that hovered above Kazen's grasp resembled the real thing in every sense of the word!

They were replicas!

"My initial Original Magic: [Eye Of The Wise], grants me perfect clairvoyance in this world. I can see all things present, so long as certain conditions are met. Utilizing that to my advantage, I created my second Original Magic... [Forge Of Creation]."

Kazen was lost for words, but everything started coming together.

"N-no way..." Her eyes widened the more she thought of all she had heard from Aloe, and what she had experienced since she came to this world.

"The war against the demons... the search for the Arcanas... the clash between the Nether Cult and everyone else... all of that was for—"

"Precisely!" Ciel's grin widened to a terrifying degree, causing Kazen to tremble.

She finally realized the truth behind Ciel's initial words, and how completely plausible it was.

"My magic [Eye Of The Wise] shows me when the Arcanas are being used, and I analyze their properties and functions down to the tiniest detail. With [Forge Of Creation], I can recreate the Arcanas perfectly. With these two abilities under my perfect control, I do not need to possess any Arcana."

'So that was why she was able to easily distribute the Arcanas to the Cult Members! Not only did she not need them, but by facing the Cult Members with Arcanas, Jared and his allies would have to use their Arcanas as well, allowing her to learn and absorb all the information she needed.'

Kazen instantly realized how they had all been duped by Ciel's elaborate trick.

'T-then... does that mean... that her plan is—' Kazen stopped herself before she could complete her thoughts.

She realized something as she thought of how absurd Ciel's new Magic was. It was subtle, a critical element that almost escaped her notice. However, she caught it anyway.

"Energy! You lack enough energy to supply them with enough power!" Kazen yelled

Granted, Ciel was very powerful. However, the Arcanas were made with the aid of the Root. Merlin and her comrades were connected to the very source, and they drew power from there with their Arcanas.

That was also why their Arcanas couldn't be destroyed.

'Even if she duplicated them, how will she have enough power to charge all the Arcanas?'

"Did you really think I didn't consider that problem?" Ciel's cool tone interrupted Kazen's thoughts, causing her to snap out of them instantly.

"What do you think I spent my time doing all this time? Over a thousand years... and yet I didn't expend any energy, nor did I actively search for the Arcanas. Where do you think all that excess power went to?"

'N-no way!' Ciel had been storing over a thousand year worth of energy just so she could achieve her goals!

Despite all this damage, Karlia and I were still nowhere near defeating our foe.

"Hahaha! Not bad, Jared. You've done well to keep up!" Karlia made a loud and confident laugh.

I could do nothing but smile at her words.

Honestly, compared to the Karlia I knew in the past, she was even more of a monster now. I was barely contributing to the fight since she carried most of the destructive power between the both of us.

I handled some side attacks and feints, but I had to rely on Karlia if we wanted to hit hard. When it came to defence too, she also took the hit.

As I had now come to realize... Karlia was completely immortal!

Even the Martial Blade God couldn't kill her!

With every strike he used to kill her, she returned much stronger than before—completely adapting to the attack. As a result, the Martial Blade God had to resort to different attacks each time—killing her over and over again!

It felt awful to watch Karlia die in front of me so many times, but if she didn't take the fall, I would. And unlike her indestructible and completely restorable body, mine was far too weak.

One serious hit from the Martial Blade God was bound to kill me.

"Both of you... are quite formidable." The Martial Blade God muttered, looking at us with an expression I had never expected him to make.

He was grinning widely.

It wasn't his usual stoic look, and neither was he smiling gently. No, the Martial Blade God had a smile that displayed excitement.

"How long has it been since I fought like this? Even in Martial State, I am unable to defeat you." I knew Karlia deserved most of the credit for his words.

Once or twice, thanks to our collaboration and well-synced attacks, Karlia was able to land hits on him. Those were the only times we were able to damage him, yet he had already healed from them.

Comparing that to how many times Karlia had died... the gap was just too wide.

"Hahaha! It's only a matter of time. We'll be the winners!" Karlia laughed confidently, displaying her sharp teeth.

Her optimistic attitude and cheerful personality in this fight were the only things that prevented me from giving up completely. Her presence gave me confidence, and despite my weakness, I did all I could to ensure that I could support her.

We were currently resonating with each other, so we shared our thoughts. Coupled with the fact that we were currently fighting side by side, the feeling was indescribably awesome.

Even though we were putting our lives on the line, and any mistake guaranteed instant death, I could not deny how much fun I was having.

With Karlia... this battle suddenly felt too good to be true.

~Let's do this, Lewis!~ I heard her prompt me from within, and I instantly heeded her call.

'Alright!'

My [Great Sage's Memoir] was right in front of me, and I flipped the pages to utilize the abilities I could.

No matter how powerful my Spells were, they couldn't compare to Karlia's, so I chose to support her instead.

Using [Justice], I evened the playing field as much as I could between the Martial Blade God and Karlia.

[The Hermit] made the both of us much faster by speeding up our time, thus making us capable of keeping up with his speed.

[Judgement] helped me create projectiles for distracting the Martial Blade God, or to even serve as constraints. Though, my projections hardly did anything meaningful to stop him.

I used Damien's Original Magic, which I improved, to switch places with Karlia—or vice versa—when the need called for it, and with my [Strength] Arcana, coupled with [Wheel Of Fortune], I was able to somewhat keep up and survive.

So far, it had been a stalemate, and that was simply because of our different methods of fighting. While Karlia and I relied on strategy mixed with force, the Martial Blade God preferred to attack us head-on.

As expected of a true Martial Artist!

With my current strategy, Karlia utilized a multitude of her abilities at once, engulfing herself in multicoloured light. Her body became tougher than anything, and she was easily able to evade the Martial Blade God's strike.

She passed through his follow-up attack, and a double of her assaulted him from behind. This was stopped by the shield protecting the Martial Blade God.

However, Karlia was one step ahead.

In a bright explosion, both she and her clone exploded, reducing the integrity of the shield. Several Karlias appeared, absorbing the rest of the shield, and leaving the opponent bare.

Several blades appeared to pierce Karlia—what the Martial Blade God called the Mind's Blade—but I countered by creating lots of projections to match their attacks.

One of his blades took at least a hundred projections to slow down, and I knew I couldn't keep it up forever.

Fortunately, I bought enough time for Karlia to pass through the ongoing assault and prepare to land her very powerful strike—one borne from the all-destroying power of [The Sun].

Just to be certain of our victory, I used more projections to halt the Martial Blade God in his tracks, making him unable to move due to the vulnerable position he was in.

Karlia went for the strike, putting all her strength into her thrust, no doubt.

