

SPELLCRAFT 761

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

Chapter 761: Facing The Nether

'U-uh...?!' I suddenly felt chills run down my spine and I felt the attention of both Ciel and her very very evil master.

They were both looking at me, and even though I was within the area of influence granted by [The Pope], I wasn't completely immune to the bloodlust I felt.

"Jared Leonard... Singularity... it has come to my notice that you were one of the obstacles that delayed my return. As a result, I will be eliminating you now." The Nether finally let go of Ciel and he slowly began to descend.

Right as Ciel was about to follow him, he stopped her. "Wait here. I'll take care of this quickly." He said.

Afterwards, he resumed his descent.

I felt a menacing glare from Ciel on me, for some reason. This glare finally transformed into a very malevolent gaze—one that felt like she was waiting for me to get what was coming to me.

I had no luxury to dwell on the meaning behind her expression, though. After all, the Nether had just said something I couldn't ignore.

"You'll... eliminate me?"

So, I was first in line before the destruction of the world? That didn't seem very comforting.

"Let's fight him together, Lewis." Karlia made a fist and gave me her usual confident smile.

I saw her lips quivering, so I could tell that she was feeling anything but confidence. How could I allow her to throw her life away like that?

'It's possible that she'll die for real if she faces him so haphazardly. I can't allow that!' Both for selfish reasons and also for the sake of the world, I didn't want Karlia to die.

"No. I'll face him alone."

"WHAT? You don't stand any chance at a—"

"Neither do all of us if we rush in at once. Don't worry, I don't plan on dying or anything. I'll do my best to come up with a strategy that we'll use to defeat this guy." I smiled at the two women beside me.

"But, Lewis, you—"

"We know very little about this guy—especially since the Nether is in a perfect vessel. I have to find out more."

"Then let me go! I'm stronger than you." Karlia yelled, not wishing to let me go.

It broke my heart to see her nearly cry, but...

"You wouldn't be capable of the kind of analysis I'm opting for. You're stronger, most likely smarter too. But... I'm still a better strategist."

I simply had more experience in fighting, and Karlia was someone who was averse to violence unless absolutely necessary.

"Besides... I don't want you to get hurt." I touched her face with my hand, a smile on my face.

Frankly, I wasn't the least bit confident of lasting a second against my opponent. However, it is said that people can draw out limitless strength when it is for the sake of others.

'I hope that's true...'

"I can't lose you again—"

"ENOUGH TALK!" Before Karlia could complete her statement, the Nether released a burst of energy from his finger—one that turned into a massive surge of purplish-black power.

It charged straight at us, and I doubted the barrier would be able to handle it.

'That blast has enough power to wipe out everyone here!' My allies were already regaining consciousness, and I had so many people I cared about here.

There was no way I could allow them to suffer.

"Protect one another! I'll be back soon!" With that, my entire body became doused in multicoloured light.

>VWUUUUSSSSHHHHH!!!<

Utilizing Grand Fusion Mode, Elemental Chamber, and my Original Magic, I sped towards the Nether's blast.

It felt so powerful that even in my current state, I knew I was probably going to die.

'No way! No way! I won't die here!'

"RAAAAARRRRRGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Pushing my body to its limit, I summoned the strength of every single familiar in my body. I condensed their power, fused it with the power of [Strength], and sent it charging at the imminent burst of destruction.

"RAARRRGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Blood began pouring from my eyes, nose, ears, and even mouth. They evaporated as soon as they leaked outside, though, but I kept pushing.

The blast, despite all my efforts, was still overwhelming me. Despite giving my all, it still didn't halt.

There was not an ounce of Aether in the air—just Nether—making my Spellcraft obsolete.

However...

'It's as good a time as any to use my Trump Card...'

It was something I had planned on using against the Cult Leader before the plan failed. However, now was the perfect moment to rely on my best crutch.

Preparing my body for the imminent series of mind-gruelling and painstaking efforts I was about to go through, I strengthened my resolve.

'Even if it costs me everything... even if I die... I'll pave a way for everyone to defeat you!'

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

Chapter 762: Jared's Trump Card [Pt 1]

I only had one chance.

Any small misstep, or even a little bit of wrong timing could mean a definite loss for me.

If I didn't move carefully, swiftly, decisively, and desperately... loss was inevitably going to be mine. Realizing this, I decided to give everything I had to the plan.

Everything was set, and it was probably going to take a lot more out of me than anything else. However, if it would fulfill my goal, then... there was no other choice.

"Let's see how you handle a second strike." Pointing his finger at me again, a burst of purplish black energy made its way to me.

The roaring concentration of power almost consumed me if it hadn't been for the swift activation of my new Swap ability by my Great Sage's Memoir. I had swapped places with the many tiny automatons in the area.

With their help, I could achieve effects similar to teleportation... though, I could probably only use it a few times before it would become useless in the face of this powerful opponent.

"Sneaky. So that's why you spread these things about. Switching positions....?" The Nether chuckled, snapping his fingers.

Instantly, all my Automatons turned to dust, leaving me utterly stranded.

'Shit!' I wanted to wait a little longer, but it seemed like I had to bring it out now!

>VWUUUUUUUUUUSSSSSSHHHHHHHHH<

The air around me turned purplish blue, with white light striking the area around me, as I brought out my weapon—the very one that destroyed the demons in a single strike.

"Oh? What is that?" The Nether watched with curiosity.

Thankfully—whether it was due to pride or inertia—he was standing still in the air. That made him a perfect target!

The weapon of mass destruction—the one I used to destroy the demon continent back then—had been my last resort in dealing with the Nether Cult.

This was why I had to time everything!

"You really—"

My device suddenly whirred loudly, indicating that it was about time to release its power. From its upper angle, it would shoot a powerful blast at the Nether, weakening or perhaps injuring this being.

"Like I'd let that happen." The Nether pointed his palm at my device, pouring out an immeasurable amount of Nether into it.

'Wait for it...' I thought to myself.

I was nearly out of cards, but cards wouldn't cut it this time.

The moment the blast was about to be released, my device was also ready to fire. And then—

>WHOOOSSHHHHH!<

I switched places with my device, allowing it to appear right behind the Nether—at a lower angle. From this angle, it fired its shot while the Nether's blast slowly enveloped me.

'NOT YET!' I swiftly returned to my friends by swapping positions with the Spell Card I left behind when I charged into battle.

With that, I was not only safe, but...

>BOOO
OOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
MM!!!<

... The Nether got hit by my strike!

Due to the angle of the attack, and the sheer power unleashed by my device, the beam of light pushed the Nether up into the sky.

It would be too much if everything here got razed—leveled to the ground. As a result, I positioned the blast to a lower angle. This sent everything flying upward, detonating itself and the Nether into the sky.

'Not finished yet!'

I remotely controlled the device to fly upward as well. Its core went critical, causing it to self-destruct in the most elaborate way as well.

In the end...

>BOOO
OO
OOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
MM!!!
!!<

Everything erupted marvelously!

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

Chapter 763: Jared's Trump Card [Pt 2]

The sky above was painted marvelously in a multitude of colors.

It seemed to spread across the entire world—like an expanse of glorious light. With such shimmering lights, and the beauty of destruction evident to our eyes, we witnessed the elaborate destruction I caused.

The area of effect was estimated to be at least three times bigger than what happened in the Northern Continent, and I also tried to contain the blast so it would target the Nether and only him. Still, the area of effect, as expected, expanded far and wide—the target being at the center of it.

'That's why... or at least, one of the reasons why I took it far into the sky.'

The shockwaves greeted us as they accompanied the loud explosion, fortunately, we were safe within my reinforced barrier.

"W-wow... such destruction." Kazen whispered beside me.

She gave me a nervous look, as well as that of surprise. She probably couldn't believe that someone like me could be capable of so much power.

'This is the result of stocking up for a long time...' I thought to myself.

"You really did it, Lewis! I'm sorry I doubted you. You really..." Karlia was astounded.

She looked at me with such pride that I also felt good about it, and myself. However, I was not blind to the reality of the situation.

"It's not over yet." My gaze went far beyond the direction of my allies, and focused on a single location.

"What do you mean by that?" Jane spoke up behind me.

My allies were finally conscious, and I had seen just how tired and disturbed they were. Their faces were slowly brimming with hope, but my statement must have made their relief cease.

"Look at Ciel. She's just floating there, unconcerned. Based on everything that has happened so far, you'd think she would be upset—or at least concerned—about what just happened."

Instead, she was giving her usual smile.

"She's not concerned at all. It's not over. Not by a long shot!" I grunted.

We all raised our heads to the sky, and sure enough, the lights were slowly evaporating, and a deep, dark purple cloud began to manifest in the air. Flashes of purple lightning occupied the expanse above our heads, and a single entity stood there.

This being's monstrous majesty could not be ignored even if one tried.

'It's the Nether and... it's unscathed.'

I had hoped that the blast would be enough to injure him, at the very least. It contained so much energy, after all. Yet... he seemed absolutely fine.

'Now I see why Ciel couldn't have been bothered. All of that was just child's play, eh?'

"Well, this is a pleasant surprise. I certainly felt that one..." The Nether's voice thundered.

He remained above, most likely immersed in the grandeur of his dominance.

"Do you have more attacks like that? If so, then perhaps you're not so weak, after all." The Nether slowly began to descend.

It felt like his power just increased, or perhaps he had been holding back his powers before now. It was also possible that he still had a good amount of his powers that he had not yet revealed.

In essence, just like with the Martial Blade God—no, this was even worse—I couldn't detect how powerful this monster was.

Speaking of the Martial Blade God... he was still in deep meditation. Since the fight started, he had yet to move from his location.

I would have gone after him if I had the chance, but my hands were full with the Nether. It probably wasn't worth it anyway—though I couldn't help but wonder what he was up to.

'Still...'

"If you have nothing left to offer, this should be the end for you."

'... I'm not done!'

In fact, this was only the beginning!

>VWUUUUUSSSSSHHHHHH!!!<

I instantly teleported to the sky, leaving everyone behind. Flying far above the Nether, I reached the spot where the explosion had taken place. Once I reached this summit, I was able to see everything around and beneath me.

'Haaa... it worked!' A smile formed on my face as my gaze rested on the Nether.

My true goal hasn't been to kill the Nether with my earlier blast. I did count on him being injured by the blast, so the fact that he was perfectly fine threw a wrench into my plans. Still, I just had to improvise.

'The true reason for the explosion... was to create an ideal environment for my actual trump card.'

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"Let's begin round two." I grinned fearlessly despite being completely nervous about this whole thing.

"Hehe... you're amusing. Different from Merlin, but similar to—"

>VWUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMM!!!<

Interrupting his words with my first strike, I sent multiple flashes of light charging in his direction.

"Really? That won't work, you know?"

I was well aware. The big blast from my device didn't even leave a scratch on him, and that had been my strongest move. It was clear that I couldn't overpower him with raw power alone.

There had to be another way.

Sourcing for that weakness was my reason for creating the perfect environment for Spellcraft.

'The explosion dispersed Aether into the area. I can use all that Aether to my advantage. If I take the interaction of Mana and Miasma, and compare and contrast it with Aether and Nether, I should be able to find a way out of this...'

Mana and Miasma could be considered opposites the same way Aether and Nether were. I had almost no knowledge of how Nether worked, so I was just going on a limb here.

If I was wrong, then things could become messed up really quickly.

'If an equal amount of Mana and Miasma collides, it will cause a balanced elimination of the distinct particles and offset any action that is brought forth from them.' In essence, it created Anti Magic.

If either side was weaker than the other, depending on the ratio and method of combination, it could lead to a chain reaction of unstable elements, causing a much bigger explosion than normal.

Kind of like how little sprinkles of water caused flames to flare up, while a larger measure would put it out.

'If I use the same process here, I wonder what will happen.'

There was only one major thing to consider about this task I was undertaking—one crucial element.

'Will I have enough Aether to survive?'

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

Chapter 764: A Hero's Farewell

I was scared.

My body felt cold, and I was shivering uncontrollably. Despite how cold I felt, beads of sweat still formed on my skin. Terrified of this entity, and the huge possibility of loss, I remained stagnant in the sky.

I watched as my bolts of light flew in the Nether's direction, waiting and keenly observing the effects.

"This is stupid."

Without moving an inch, the blasts were completely dissolved.

'They were canceled out by his Nether. They were too weak, after all. Then...'

Using Spellcraft to attract the Aether around me, while also powering it up with [Strength] to quicken the process, I created a javelin of light.

It contained more condensed energy, and I fired it right at the Nether.

"Hmmm? I see." This time, he flicked his finger, and the javelin met the same fate as the bolts that came before it.

"I see you're being cautious... testing the waters. But I grow impatient. So, I'll be coming to you now."

My eyes widened as I felt the Nether suddenly appear behind me. It didn't even take a second, or a fraction of it.

One moment, he had been speaking to me, and the next, he was behind me. It made me realize something... that this monster could kill me at any time.

'He's been messing with me!' My thoughts rang out as I smiled internally.

Using Spellcraft, I became one with my surroundings. Of course, all my senses improved dramatically. However, because of this bond, I could easily be anywhere in my sphere of influence as well.

No distortion or disturbance could prevent my free teleportation. Besides, since it was close by, and well within my domain of influence, I could evade even the Nether's strikes.

My brain couldn't keep up with the speed of my opponent, though. However, I wasn't necessarily the one casting the Spells. It belonged to my Original Magic.

'Great Sage's Grimoire!'

I vanished from my location before the Nether could capture me, moving even further above him. A smile formed on my face, and sweat dripped down my face.

That was a close call, and I really thought I would die. However!

'I've got you where I want you now!'

All the Aether around swiftly converged on him, shrouding him in their multicolored light. Back when he had been outside my area of influence, I could only test the waters, but with him here, I could attack with all I had.

Of course, trying to damage his body was useless. He was too strong for the Aether to really damage him. However... I hadn't forgotten how he got to this state.

'Ultimately, the Nether is possessing a vessel, and that vessel has the total set of Arcanas within him to keep everything stable.'

If I used Spellcraft to guide the Aether into my target, and offset the reactions going on within him, then it would be my victory. No, I probably didn't even need that much.

'Just one Arcana. If I can just offset one Arcana, or cause an internal imbalance due to the mix of Aether and Nether, that will be enough.'

The chain reaction would cause the Nether to go unstable, and that was when we would all make our counterattack. That's right... that was the hallmark of my plan!

>VWUUUUUUSSSSSHHHHH!!!<

I sent the Aether around him to even the depths of his soul, concentrating them in order to poison him from the inside out. His external shell was tough, but what about his internal self?

Giving it my all, with total concentration, I probed deeper and deeper, until—

"You fool." The Nether chuckled, causing me to suddenly freeze.

"So that's what you were trying to do? How foolish."

My eyes widened instantly, feeling a certain pressure course through my body.

"What an interesting way to use Magic. Unfortunately, you're not the first to try something like this on me. What did he call it then? Magecraft? Haha... he truly was an interesting specimen."

I didn't understand a word of what the Nether was speaking, but that wasn't important at the moment.

'I... I can't move! I can't use Magic! I couldn't do anything at all.

"Aren't you aware of the dangers of this technique? If you can control the Aether remotely by infusing your energy into it, then isn't it possible for me to hijack that control by infusing my more dominant power?"

Upon hearing this, my eyes widened and my senses suddenly went haywire.

All the Aether around me, all the lights that surrounded me, suddenly died out. They all became corroded, turning into Nether.

And I was right in the middle of it.

I couldn't do anything but helplessly watch.

"What now? What is your counterattack?" The Nether asked, but I could not respond.

My body was no longer my own, and my mind was going blank.

"Don't tell me you only thought this far? This is all you can do? Really?"

Unbelievable pain seared through me as the overwhelming Nether began eating through my body. It felt so painful that I wanted to cry and scream, but no sound would come out.

In silence, my body went through torture.

"I don't understand why he would choose someone like you. You're weaker than he was when this happened. You're also not as clever—or should I say, creative?" As the Nether belittled me, I felt everything around me going blank.

I could hear faint noises beneath me—the voices of my allies.

"Compared to him... you're nothing special."

A gust of wind lunged at the Nether, but he waved it off in a flash, sending whomever it was crashing to the ground.

"Stay out of it." He whispered and drew closer to me.

"Singularity, this is the end. I'll kill you, and then kill this world. I'll consume everything and become whole." The Nether's hand touched my chest, and I felt a searing pain course through my soul.

"Don't even think of returning. This Soul, and every other one that exists in any other place within this plane of existence... will be extinguished."

It was painful.

I was scared—terrified.

I was really going to die.

No coming back, no contingency, no countermeasure.

Everything was going to end right here!

"Bye bye."

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

Chapter 765: Jared's Death

I watched as my life came to an end.

This was the point of no return, and I knew there was no turning back. All my countermeasures--the clones and Soul Brand duplicates--were being rendered useless by what the Nether was doing.

He was going to use my current soul to destroy any other copy of my soul that was within the same wavelength. In essence, corrupting everything related to me and ensuring all of my links to this reality are cut off.

Thereafter, he would extinguish my soul by permanently destroying it with Nether. That way, there would be nothing left.

My body was already expiring, so that meant I'll be gone forever.

'I... I...'

I wish I had more time.

In my final moments, my thoughts began to plague and hound me. I couldn't help but think of so many things that I had pushed back for so long.

My past life--my friends, lovers, family.

I remembered my parents; both in this life and in my past life.

I remembered my lovers; both in this life and in my past life.

I remembered my friends; the ones I had in this life and in my past life.

As both lives flash before my eyes, I realized how much I wanted to live. How badly I wanted to cling to existence.

When I died in the past, I had accepted it. I was fulfilled--save for one regret that I had.

MAGIC!

I had wished to use Magic and in this life, I had far surpassed the level of anyone I knew in my past life--except maybe Solomon and perhaps Lilith too.

I wondered where Lilith was now, and I wondered if she eventually found the peaceful death she sought.

In the end, these two were the only ones I could not surpass. The rest never stood a chance.

I have developed more Magic theories in this life and even invented Anti Magic. I have done so much, and I've had so much fun.

The only regret I could never let go of in my past life had already been fulfilled. And even though I never reached the pinnacle of Magic, this much would have satisfied the 'me' of the past.

But... not anymore!

Magic or not, I now have more regrets. More reasons I simply can't die.

I realized now what Alphonse and my other friends had been teaching me--about how Magic means nothing without people.

I saved my Academy. I saved the Kingdom. I just fought a being that is capable of destroying the world. I have had my fair share of adventures and heroics.

This was more than enough for people to remember me by.

However, therein laid the problem.

'There will be no one left...'

If I died now, everyone would die too. The very thought of that hurt my very soul, far more than the Nether that had nearly completed its task.

The death of my friends and family--everyone I care about--weighed heavily on me.

I so desperately want to live to prevent any of the chaos that was about to come. Unfortunately, I was too powerless to do anything.

My body had long expired now, becoming one with the Nether. My soul was nearing disintegration--merely a breath away from utter destruction.

'It seems... I won't get to see anyone ever again.' Everything slowly vanished.

Memories and experiences faded away.

Jane. Aurora. Ana. Edward. Stefan. Jerry. Ivan. Freya. All of them came and went, like flashes of light.

Kuzon... I wish you were here...

Maria... I'm sorry...

Karlia... forgive me...

The memories of my other friends and family overlapped and then vanished, all turning dark. In the end, there were surprisingly only three images left.

Lemi... forgive your father...

Neron... where are you...?

Finally, the last single thought that remained shined ever so brightly. It shone in the ever-growing darkness. The memories of this person were corroded by the murky depths of despondency, and I could not do anything to prevent this.

I could only watch.

'Emilia...' My thoughts desperately called for her.

The moment she vanished, I knew it was over. But, what could I possibly do in this state?

Absolutely nothing!

The end was here... and the memory was completely consumed.

The moment this happened, everything went dark, and I found myself sinking into the jaws of nonexistence.

The abyss called for me... and I ceased to exist.

"Huh?!" Maria's eyes popped wide open in shock.

She swiftly rose from where she lay, seating upright instead.

"Hey, hey! Take it easy. You need to rest." Elrich's voice brought her out of the daze that enveloped her.

She glanced at him with widened eyes, her face depicting pure confusion. Something about her stunned expression showed horror that could not be described.

"I... I felt Jared's Soul Brand vanish." She whispered, still trying to wrap her head around the whole thing.

"O-oh... yeah, me too. It probably has something to do with that." Elrich pointed at the sky, and for the first time, Maria properly looked above her.

The skies were covered in pitch-black darkness. Dark lightning struck without end, and the air was chilly.

Around her, Maria could see many dead birds. All the beings that occupied the sky were already down--dead due to their exposure to the dark clouds and the element that caused it.

"Nether..." She whispered.

"Indeed. It is spreading at a fast rate... and I fear this is only the beginning."

Who was to say the lands wouldn't be covered by Nether next? If that happened, wouldn't that mark the end of every being who couldn't use Aether?

The death of everything that existed.

"Jared... he's in danger. I need to get to him." Maria's voice quivered.

Clearly, something had gone wrong with the plan. Jared needed her now!

"No. Not yet. We need to ensure the safety of everyone in the other nations first. Not many people can utilize Aether. What of the innocents? If the skies are being covered in Nether, I fear what will befall all of them."

"But Jared is--"

"I'm sure Jared would want you to do the same. We need your [Pope] to protect them, and my [Tower] to help move them to safe ground."

Elrich had pretty much reached his limit by putting the denizens of the Eastern Kingdom in his pocket dimension. He would have loved to stuff the whole world inside it, but he didn't have enough power for that.

"Create a massive dome, like last time--but bigger. That will create a sanctuary for those we'll be saving. Set it up here. I'll travel around and transport those I find to this place."

In essence, she had to keep the people safe, while he brought them to her.

"O-okay!"

"Good. Baraja and the others will stay here with you. I'm off!" Before she could say any more, Elrich vanished.

It was clear from his tone that he was in a hurry, and that he was extremely worried.

Who wouldn't be, with the darkness spreading to every region in the world?

"But, Jared..." Maria muttered.

Something in her heart felt empty, and her soul ached.

Still, she couldn't abandon the many innocents who needed her aid, could she? Now that she was awake, she felt much better--enough to protect the ones she could.

"SANCTUARY!"

Thus, her massive white dome began to form. As she created this shelter, however, Maria could not help thinking about the boy she loved.

"Jared... you're still there, right?"

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

Chapter 766: Battle Demon

"All done." The Nether spoke, returning his gaze to his dumbstruck audience.

Jared Leonard, humanity's champion, had long become ash, and his soul had been snuffed out. He was dead—in every sense of the word.

At first, only silence permeated the dark expanse.

Everyone was too devastated to utter a single word. Their eyes simply widened as their bodies remained still. It was as if they couldn't make up their minds on what to feel.

Anger? Sorrow? Regret? Shock? The list was too long for their brains to comprehend at once.

In the end, the onlookers gave gasps of despondency and pain.

"Now then..." The Nether grinned, slowly returning to Ciel's side. His satisfaction stemmed from the defeat of the only available contingency.

Now nothing was stopping him. Not anymore.

Jared's friends—his allies—could only watch powerlessly. None could stand up against the Nether.

"J-Jared, I..." Ana was too distraught to form a coherent speech.

She had been so upset at Jared that she had done something foolish because of it. She regretted it throughout her stay with Jane, but she just hadn't known how and when to tell him how badly she wanted to apologize.

But now... now she'd never have the chance.

Having lost Kuzon first, and now, Jared... she simply couldn't take any more. She could only crumble to her knees and weep helplessly.

Lemi was no different. She always blew off her father, and her relationship with him was paper thin. She had blamed him for abandoning her and her mother, and she often acted stubbornly towards him.

While she still felt that he was a jerk, Lemi knew he was much less of a jerk than she was.

"D-dad... no..." Her whispers were filled with emotion and her eyes displayed despair.

Then, there was Jane.

"J-Jare... Lewis..." Jane was also in deep agony.

While she didn't cry, her heart burned with immense pain. She fought off the tears this time, but her eyesight was blurry. Her head hurt ceaselessly, and she felt like something in her chest would explode.

'It hurts... it hurts so much!'

Tightly clutching her chest in pain and incomprehensible sorrow, she broke down as well.

The pain was not restricted to these three, though. Each person who watched was related to Jared in one way or the other. Even Kazen, who hadn't known him for very long, mourned his loss greatly.

"That boy... was a true Apostle..." She whispered amid the grief.

Well, once you looked through the crowd, there was perhaps only one person who wasn't grieving. However, she felt very sad that Jerry was. And as a result, her heart broke to see such a tragedy happen.

This truly was...

"Y-YOU....!!!" The loud surge of a rageful voice suddenly sounded.

With Jared gone, their defensive array was gone, and overexposure to Nether would affect them adversely. In the end, she would have to rely on the Arcanas in their possession to protect them.

"I can create projections with [Judgement]." Said the one called Ciara.

If she made a stable platform for them, away from the wreckage that was currently taking place, they could survive. They could also surround themselves in the Aether projection, protecting themselves from the danger below.

"Alright! Let's do this!" Kazen encouraged Ciara, and she did as she was told.

Now in a safe location, observing from a position not too high, but also not too low, the group watched the mad dance between Karlia and the Nether. They could also see Ciel watching from her heights, and the Martial Blade God in meditation.

For the latter, nothing around him had been destroyed yet. Whether this was a coincidence, or whether it was simply a testament to his power, was beyond the scope of their concern at the moment.

"S-shouldn't we assist her?" Jerry spoke up, looking at the way Karlia struggled to land hits on her enemy.

Even when she did, she couldn't damage him. Perhaps together, they could stand a chance.

"I agree." Ivan supported the idea as well.

While a majority of the team was in a slump because of Jared's death, not all of them were too far gone to be called back.

"What could you possibly do? Look at her. The level of destruction she's causing, and the speed at which she's going. She's matching the Nether's pace, and she still hasn't suffered any real damage." Beruel interrupted the boys and sighed.

"If we try to help, we'd only get in her way and slow her down." He added.

They were all simply too weak. Compared to Karlia, or the Nether, they were mere pebbles—if not lesser.

'She's much stronger than I thought. What a monster!' Beruel began to wonder if she would have actually been able to defeat Kido if she'd tried.

However... this wasn't the time for such comparisons. He also hadn't seen Kido at full strength so comparing the two was ridiculous.

"B-but we have Arcanas, don't we? Let's help her kill that son of a bitch!" This time, Lemi spoke. The anger in her tone indicated a righteous fury that she wanted to expend on the enemy.

"Exactly. We can keep up if we use our Arcanas. Take my [Justice] for example. If we—"

"It's useless. Don't even think about it." Kazen interrupted Edward's rousing words.

She felt the boy was too optimistic for his own good, and the same applied to a lot of people in the group.

Or, was she the one being pessimistic? No, she was just more in touch with reality.

"Arcanas won't work on the Nether. Not only is he from another world, but he also possesses all the Arcanas as his base. His constitution will nullify your Arcanas' effects."

Once she said this, the expressions of everyone instantly fell.

"The Arcanas are designed to be used in this world. Their formulae exist to affect the laws of this world. It's tricky to use it against a being such as the Nether. In fact, without enough of this world's essence or atmosphere, an Arcana could be useless. And... this reality is slowly being eaten away by the Nether."

There could come a time when the Arcanas wouldn't work on the laws any longer. If the laws became perverted, then the relevance of the law-bending objects would cease to exist.

Kazen couldn't even bear to look at the faces of the people with her. How could she tell them that their situation was hopeless? That their world was bound for destruction?

"So... we can't do anything?" A sceptical voice sounded from behind her.

She didn't look, but a sigh escaped her lips. What did they expect her to say?

"Pray, maybe? I don't know. I don't have much time left... so I am also thinking very hard... about what I can do."

Hopeless silence enveloped all of them as they helplessly watched the battle between two monsters. All of them, without exception, hoped for the crimson one to win.

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"Hahaha! I've caught you now." The Nether grinned as it held Karlia by her neck.

"The nature of your soul is interesting. So, it keeps getting restored even when it is extinguished, I see."

He tightened his grip on her throat and then sent his power flowing straight towards Karlia's soul. His overwhelming energy held her in place while he did all of this.

"I'll simply utilize the same trick I used on that other fool. I'll synchronize with the frequency of your Soul and destroy all of them. You won't be returning."

And so, he did. He seeped his power into Karlia's Soul, gaining access to the numerous ones that existed in a multitude of places.

"Smart. You stored them in a pocket dimension. But that's too bad. I can reach them using your soul as a window."

It was time for her to die, and he was going to do it in the most satisfying way.

However—

"W-what is... this?"

—The Nether was not expecting what came next.

"How is this even possible?"

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

Chapter 768: Object Of Interest

The Nether could not believe his eyes—or rather, his senses.

'What am I looking at here?' He asked himself.

Throughout his life as a primordial entity, he had never seen anything like this. It was quite intriguing.

As soon as he utilized Karlia's current soul to reach the stockpile of souls she had, the Nether had begun to eradicate them. However, the moment he took one down, two more took its place.

Her souls were in a constant state of multiplication and he took that into account. That was why he sped up his corrosion and tried consuming as many as he could at once.

However, the moment one was consumed, two appeared, thus by destroying billions and trillions of souls, even more souls surfaced. It was like a never-ending game.

'And what is this now? The new souls are resisting my power?' The corrosive effects of his Nether had been dampened, and he was amazed by it.

Karlia now had more souls, and she was less prone to dying than before. She had gotten much stronger and more resistant to him. It was as though she was on a constant stream of evolution—and if he didn't stop, a time could come when she would be completely immune to his power.

To prevent that, the Nether had to admit his loss and halt his corrosion.

"You really are immortal..." He muttered.

"I'LL KILL YOU!" Was all she could release from her lips, before once again overcoming his hold on her and exploding brilliantly.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!

She appeared a distance from him, ready to strike once again. Concepts such as exhaustion were foreign to her, and her focus was solely on her target—one who remained unscathed despite her many attempts.

"It's pointless. Do you not see? I can not kill you, but you also do not have enough power to damage me. We're at a stalemate." The Nether grinned.

Ciel, from her position, expressed surprise at this. She couldn't believe her master could make such a statement. He even went as far as praising the woman in front of him... just as he'd once praised her in the past.

'N-no way... does he...?!' Her eyes widened as she looked at Karlia with jealousy and fear.

There was no way the Nether would take an interest in a savage like Karlia, right?!

"Unfortunately, you are too deep in your grief and rage to consider a proposal from me. Mind control and other measures don't seem to work on you either. Your body must be resistant to those..."

The Nether didn't seem keen on keeping her as an ally, much to Ciel's relief. However, it begged the question of what exactly he was going to do with this discovery he had just made.

"I'm quite occupied now. So, I'll save you for later. Your power will be very interesting to observe..."

Karlia was done with her preparations, and an even greater surge of power burst from her—far greater than anything she had displayed earlier.

It was as though she was the very personification of destruction!

"I'll observe you later." As soon as the Nether stretched out his hand, Karlia was already in front of him, ready to launch a reality-shattering blow at him.

The speed defied time and space, and this blow was bound to be the finishing blow that would tear this island apart.

However—

"That's enough for now."

—The Nether easily parried it, using a huge wormhole to suck in her fist as soon as he deflected it.

"H-HUH...?!"

Before Karlia could recover from the recoil of having her hand sucked into the wormhole—a dazed state that didn't even last a moment—the Nether moved much faster and shoved her into the massive black portal.

Helplessly pushed inside, Karlia disappeared into the darkness, removed from the world completely.

"It seems I can still seal her away. In any case, she's not escaping from where I kept her. I'll deal with her later..." He murmured.

Still, he hadn't been this intrigued by a creature for a while. Only a few had accomplished this feat—like Ciel and Merlin. The last person that had really attracted his attention was the one who was responsible for the current overlapping of his memories.

'That one, Jared... he showed promise. Maybe it was because he was still young. He was not as strong as I'd have liked.' Ultimately, none of them could prove to be of much trouble to him—at least, not anymore.

"M-master, how do you feel?" Ciel's voice broke the Nether from his thoughts, causing him to look in her direction.

He felt like he could tell her the honest truth.

"I feel weak. As much as this body has managed to contain my energy without getting destabilized, there's still so much power I haven't tapped into. The consumption of this world is progressing slowly too."

~Very well. I will be sure to watch your final moments.~

"And who says I'm going to lose?"

~Well... shall we wait and see?~

The Martial Blade God could not help himself from chuckling. It was just like Aries to be salty because he wasn't being relied on. Still, who could blame a Familiar that wasn't being used by his wielder?

"Haha... I'll give my all. There shall be no regrets!" Suddenly, the Martial Blade God could feel it.

He was slowly reverting to how he used to feel back when he'd just started practising Martial Arts—back when he hadn't been so peerless.

The thrill he felt when he learned his first set of techniques. The excitement he had when he fought his first opponent. The joy he felt when he won his first battle. The fulfilment he had when he created his own Martial Techniques.

All those emotions had been numbed due to a lack of stimulation. But now, facing an opponent that was far stronger than he was, the Martial Blade God could not help but feel the rush of long-forgotten sensations.

It felt amazing!

"Here I come!"

In a powerful leap that destroyed the entire foothold that was perfectly fine a moment earlier, he lunged straight for the Nether.

His blade was fastened to his grip, and his Mind Blades went ahead of him to strike down the Nether.

Instantly, the Nether also brought his own darkened blade and parried the blades that were launched, prepared to cross blades with the Martial Blade God.

>VWUUUUSSSHHHH!!!<

Space parted as both parties swung their blades.

However—

>SPLOOOSSSHHH!!!<

—Dark liquid spurted from the Nether as the exchange ended.

"W-wow! I never expected this! You are—"

Before the Nether could say any more, the Martial Blade God went for the next strike. His blade was brimming with so much power that it could destroy anything it touched—even Nether as dense as his opponent's.

This time—

>SPLOOOOOSSSSHHHH!!!<

—More darkened blood leaked from the Nether.

"I underestimated you, eh?"

The Martial Blade couldn't access most of his abilities due to the Nether's influence around him and the nature of his being. He could not see through the Nether's time, and he could not rely on a lot of his techniques.

Even if he could, they wouldn't have been very effective on the opponent. In such a situation, there was only one thing he could do.

He threw them all away!

He chose not to rely on his other techniques and focused all of his Aether on his blade. Every single power he had was focused on his body—and his weapon was an extension of it.

Nothing else mattered.

As long as he could reach his enemy... as long as he could cut his opponent down... that was all that mattered.

"HAHAHAHAHA! INTERESTING!"

They crossed blades many times, and the Nether always came up short—losing more fluids as the match went on.

Everything around them suffered damage, and there was practically no land underneath them anymore. Even the darkened seas were evaporating rapidly. Before long, there would be nothing left in the world.

Still, nothing prevented them from exchanging more blows.

'This is it! This is what I've been living for!' The Martial Blade God clenched his teeth and strained his body even more to land another hit.

In terms of speed and strength, he admitted that the Nether had him outclassed. In fact, the distance between them was very wide.

However, the Nether was not as adept in Martial Arts, which gave the Martial Blade God his only advantage.

Even then...

'It's taking every single ounce of my power to land a hit. This is it!' He was certain that if this kept up, he would finally be able to achieve it.

He would be able to surpass his limits and reach the state he desired!

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

Chapter 770: The Martial Peak

'How long have we been fighting for?' The Martial Blade God had no idea.

The concept of time suddenly seemed meaningless in the clash between both him and a being that had transcended such shackles.

Only the sublime feeling of cutting through the Nether's body, and the evasion of fatal blows, filled his mind. And slowly, he began to experience another sensation he had forgotten.

"Haa... haa..."

He was running out of breath!

His swings became sluggish. His bones ached. His muscles hurt with each convulsion. His body was already showing signs of exhaustion.

'So this is how it feels! I had forgotten!'

The Nether now had the upper hand, pushing the Martial Blade God on the defensive. He had lost the advantage, and was now barely keeping up. He was in a very precarious position, drawing closer and closer to death.

Yet... the Martial Blade God was smiling—no, he was laughing.

Like a madman dancing in the presence of imminent destruction—he did not cease his cackles of insanity.

Even as his body began to receive hits from the Nether's blade, he kept up his cheerful state, he kept up his excitement. His body screamed in pain, but that did not prevent him from enjoying every moment of it.

The constant stream of Nether energy that corrupted his body was purified by the high concentration of Aether in his body, and his wounds kept healing. However, the rate of damage, and the intensity, made him more and more wretched the longer he fought.

His wounds healed slower than before, and his wounds kept getting more.

"Haaa..."

He had finally reached it—the limit of his strength.

The Nether, however, seemed to be getting stronger. It seemed the gap between them only widened the more he swung his blade.

Yet, what could he do except swing his blade?

His body was weary, yet he couldn't stop. Until—

>CLANG!<

The very blade he took pride in... shattered!

With his blade of light broken, and the Nether's next strike approaching him, the Martial Blade God realized this was the end.

His hair was ragged and his breathing was uneven. His body was mutilated. He was in a miserable state.

He could no longer move too.

'Is this... the limit...?' He thought to himself.

Could he not go even further than this?

He watched as the blade closed in on him, unable to do anything. His thoughts were in a calm still, and yet he pondered the futility of all this time.

Did it really not exist?

Now that he had stopped swinging his blade, he could feel it. He could see the answer that had been right in front of him this whole time.

'It does exist!'

Only when he stopped swinging his blade did his mind open up to a new reality—the realm he had sought for so long.

ENLIGHTENMENT!

He shed his old body that very moment, escaping the expired shell that kept him trapped for so long. The Nether Blade was only able to kill that body of his, but his soul was finally freed.

The soul achieved a new body—one that was incorruptible, undefiled and transcendent.

The Martial Blade God's hair was still white, but so was his entire body. His clothing took on the same mantle, and he was shrouded in energy that could not be defined by mere mortals.

"So this is... the Primordial Waters..." He muttered.

The calm, blue gaze of the Martial Blade God was no longer on the surprised Nether entity a distance from him. It was way beyond that.

His senses extended beyond the world and went far into the dark reaches outside of it.

The other planets, the cosmos—the Martial Blade God was now one with the universe.

'So this is what you see... the state of this realm's existence—and that of the others. These infinite strata... I see...'

What the Martial Blade God now understood to be the world was much more different from what he had expected. The realities he peeked through, the multiple life forms he saw, the vast reservoir of energy left untapped... so many things that would not have been comprehensible to him prior to this moment.

But now, he saw them all.

"Oh? This is surprising. You've broken through to the Primordial Stage" The Nether commented.

A dark gleam of both anticipation and caution was displayed by this malevolent entity, and he finally had to admit the truth standing in front of him.

'My current strength is no lesser than his. This is worrisome. It looks like I'll have to go all out.'

As for the Martial Blade God himself, he was at the chest portion of this being of pure energy. He stood in a casing-like chamber there, and lines of ultra-thin energy converged into his chamber—like nerves in the body, all connected to the main source.

This was his trump card—an invincible, perfected form of a warrior.