

## **SPELLCRAFT 81**

### Chapter 81 - Herb Hunting

Our Lecturer, Neron Kaelid returned to class soon afterward and began our first course for the day— Basic Magic Knowledge.

The first class was nothing spectacular, for some of us at the very least. This was because the privileged among us were already familiar with the topic since our Magic Tutors gave us the knowledge before we enrolled in Ainzlark.

It was trite for any well-off household to have a tutor to train their child in magic should they show an affinity for it. As such, almost all the Magic Users within the classroom were familiar with what our tutor was explaining.

The concept of mana, spells, and ultimately magic.

However, I could tell from Neron's teachings that he wasn't entirely comfortable with the way he taught all of us. He must have been following a curriculum and was merely dispensing what he was instructed to.

'I see... the Academic system, uh?'

I was certain the higher class students were already being taught more advanced subjects to place them on a higher pedestal than us. The fact that they intentionally made us waste a lot of time on such fundamentals meant that the faction opposing our class wanted us to be terribly behind the others in both knowledge and power.

Even our libraries were different, so it was certain that the Middle and Power Class students had more advanced materials than we did.

'I only have to endure for a little while longer.'

By the time Neron was done with his lecture, nearly an hour had elapsed. Lectures took a maximum of one hour, and a break of at least thirty minutes was given before the start of a new one.

When he was done the adult in the room gave a deep sigh of dissatisfaction and told us that classes were over. Though he would be returning in an hour's time to take the next Lecture, Neron already appeared exhausted for some reason.

I stared at him curiously, a little disappointed that he chose to follow the mainstream approach dictated by the Academic board rather than take a more radical approach. There was no I could blame or judge him though... this was merely a job, after all.

He left the hall, giving me an hour of free time while others had to leave the main lecture hall for their Electives.

Electives were thirty minutes long, most of which occurred in the afternoon. Still, a few were occasioned in the morning. I remained seated as over half of the students left the hall to attend the Elective that would soon commence in one of the subsidiary halls in the Lower Class territory.

The other students either talked among themselves, excused themselves to have a light snack, read for the next class... or slept. I was interested in neither of those things. I finally had access to such rich surroundings and an hour of free time... there was something that called my attention more than anything!

“I should get to it!”

Beaming, I brought out a book that contained several pictures of plants and information written about them. That’s right! It was Alphonse’s gift to me. With the lush gardens that surrounded our vicinity and the opportunity to find several herbs I needed, I couldn’t keep myself still.

“Now then... time to commence the search!”

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The search was extensive. To ensure I didn’t miss a single detail or make an error, I carefully observed the plants and plucked them. Since this was a public garden, I was able to see so many useful herbs. There were no rules against plucking flowers and plants, so long as they didn’t do any extensive damage to the garden itself. Magic was always circulated around the field, ensuring the plants would grow back and maintain an optimal state.

Since no one would miss the herbs, I took as much as I deemed necessary. Unfortunately, I couldn’t find any rare herbs for more complex potions since this was a general garden. It wasn’t like I expected to find any, but I had hoped a miracle could occur.

“Meh, let’s go back...” I muttered, realizing it was about ten minutes to the end of our break.

The herbs were enough for me, and I placed them all in a sac I weaved with magic. I saw a few students watching me from a distance as I returned— they must have been observing me for some time.

Paying them no heed, I dragged my robust sac into the classroom where most of the students offering their electives had already returned to. They gave me peculiar glances, but I turned away nearly instantly as our gazes met.

‘I can just put the bag near my seat. The plants already have ample magic energy in them so they’ll be preserved enough until I get home...’

Using this line of thought, I placed the sac on the chair beside me— after all, no one sat around, to begin with. Everyone still watched with surprise, but there were no rules against this either... not that anyone had ever thought of taking a bunch of plants on the first day of school.

From the school’s brochure and Alphonse’s words, Alchemy and Medicine Arts were Second and Third Year Elective Courses. The current students didn’t have any intensive knowledge or interest in plants as of now.

“Today was a great find. Let’s have better hopes for tomorrow”

After all, I wasn’t done exploring the plant life around the Lower-Class territory.

Classes ended pretty early for me.

While others rushed for their Elective classes, I remained in the hall. Some students who had noticed that I had not even bothered leaving for a single Elective wondered if I actually chose any.

Of course, I didn't!

With the Lecture Hall nearly empty, except for a few who would have their own courses in a little over thirty minutes time. They hung around, but I didn't have the luxury for that.

'I should be on my way to my dorms right now... but I have to wait for that Edward guy for our duel...'

## Chapter 82 - The Duel Commences

It was a pain since I was now left with over an hour of free time. It was already 3:00 PM, standard for the end of Main Courses.

On Mondays, we only had General courses taught to us in our Mains, so all departments used the same hall for the Lectures. However, tomorrow would be different. There were several other Halls around so we were sure to be having Specialized courses in other classes.

"Should I just begin the process here?" I whispered.

No, there were too many eyes around and I rather preferred privacy when processing the herbs I collected. I also didn't dare to meditate in such a place since I needed absolute concentration. Realizing there was nothing better to do, I decided to bring out a book and engross myself in reading to while away the time until the duel began.

They say time flies when you're having fun. I suppose the same can be said for reading since I wasn't even aware of how much time had passed while being engrossed in the texts I diligently studied.

'Ah, did I overdo it?' I mumbled, realizing the time clocked 5:09 PM, when all Electives ended exactly nine minutes before.

Well, there was no problem if he waited for me just for a few minutes since he delayed me for longer.

Closing my book, I kept it in the small bag I wore by my side. After making sure I had packed up, I carried the sack that remained beside me and made my way out of the hall— it was already abandoned.

The Hall wasn't closed until 6:00 PM, in case some preferred reading or sleeping there. I hadn't overextended my stay, so it was all good.

Leaving the classroom, I went outside, met with a dimly lit sky. It was evening already, and the cool weather caused more clouds to gather than usual. The surroundings weren't dark, though, since ever-glowing lamps could be found in nearly every area of the campus.

I quickly shook my head, deciding that was enough sightseeing. With steady steps, my body naturally gravitated toward the arena where I would face Edward— the backyard of our Lecture Hall.

By the time I got there, Edward was waiting. Not just him, but nearly the total number of our classmates. I saw their eyes beam the moment I made my appearance, flashing their teeth in excitement.

'Did they think I wouldn't show?' My mind trailed as I stepped forward.

“You’re here, uh? I thought you weren’t going to come.” Edward said, confirming my suspicion.

The students formed a semi-circle and gave a lot of space at the center so we could duke it out freely. If I wasn’t aware of the whole situation, the whole thing nearly looked like a gang-up.

Needless to say, I shrugged a little and set my eyes on the young boy. He indeed looked more mature than his age. His height and build were bigger than a usual 13-year-old, and he had a passionate glow in his eyes that was unbecoming of his barely teenage status.

From the corner of my eye, I spotted Ana, his dear friend. She watched from the forefront of the crowd, her face depicting sadness. If Edward was considerate, he would have noticed the girl’s feelings and called off the match. However, men like him had big egos. I needed to make him see for himself... how wrong he was!

“Since we’re all here, let us begin...”

My voice was smooth and calm, apparently surprising everyone. Edward had a thick skin, so he simply stood directly opposite me, waiting for my condition for the duel.

“We’ll be having a battle duel... where we both get to choose our means of fighting. Of course, you’re a martial artist who practices sword arts, so you’ll be using a sword, yeah?” I smiled.

He nodded, but the hesitancy in his eyes hadn’t vanished. The question ringing in everyone’s mind was the same... what form of fighting would I adopt.

The Magic Users already knew that my magic ability was downright frightening. My victory was guaranteed on that route.

“... And you’ll be using magic, yeah?” Edward responded with a question.

From the look of suspicion and uncertainty in his eyes, the others might have already told him of my Magic capabilities. His wariness was proof of that— that didn’t make him back down, though.

“No, you’re wrong...” I replied.

Chanting silently, I caused the ground beneath me to move. The earth rose, a portion of it anyway. Sand-like particles gathered at a single point, forming an object that rose to my hand.

In a few moments, the object’s creation was complete and I gripped it tightly with my right hand. Everyone was astounded. They let out voices of surprise, and why wouldn’t they be?

In my hand was a sword entirely made from earth. Since I didn’t have a proper weapon, I had to make do with this. Why would I need a sword? One might have asked...

“... I’ll be using Martial Arts... the same as you, Sword Art!”

My statement struck a chord in Edward as he gave a very deep frown in response to my statement. His brow furrowed in agitation as his fists were clenched.

“You dare... look down on me?”

His tone was very grave, and the eyes he gave me indicated seething fury. This was as a result of a hurt pride!

“Am I looking down on you, though? How presumptuous of you to assume that I am not equally as skilled as you in Martial Arts, even the Sword Arts you practice.”

My grin broadened while his scowl deepened. Unlike my opponent, I was never conceited— neither was I immature in both mind and body.

My decision not to use magic was based on sound judgment, and after observing him now... I was certain!

There was no way this boy could win against me in a sword fight!

“Shall we begin?”

Chapter 83 - Jared vs Edward (Pt 1)

Gawain Lenard was the greatest Sword Arts user in the whole Eastern Empire, arguably the greatest in the whole world during my time— though he always disputed this and claimed there was one who was greater than him.

But, most importantly... he was one of my closest friends. Unlike the many I associated with, he was a meathead, thinking with his muscles. Still, he was smart enough to realize his limits without a higher proficiency in Magic.

Perhaps that was one thing we had in common that brought us together... we were both inept!

“Yo, Lewis!” The muscular beast of a man called out to me one day.

As usual, I was doing the most enjoyable thing one could find me engaged in late in the evening— studying.

“You should really let go of your books and do a lot more!”

Gawain had been pestering me for so very long on this very matter, but on this very day, he wouldn't let me off the hook no matter how much I whined about his persistence.

“You have a great body, Lewis...”

“What the heck, Gawain? Don't tell me you swing that way!” I quickly responded with mock disgust.

For a moment we both laughed at my not-so-true reply. Gawain had no wife or child, but... he slept with a lot of women— especially when he was drunk. I had to pull him out of so many messes in the past too.

That was the kind of man the greatest swordsman was!

“But, I'm serious Lewis. You're letting your body go to waste and only exercising your mind. To be a complete person... you need to strengthen both!”

By the time I looked at his face, it was devoid of any tinge of unseriousness. He had the same expression as when he was about to engage in battle, absolute focus and determination!

“You... what are you implying?”

My voice was hoarse and slow, as though trying to dissuade myself from the conclusion I had already reached from what my dear friend was suggesting.

“Lewis... why don't you learn Martial Arts? I will personally coach you— even the art of the sword!”

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‘It has been so long after that now...’ My mind trailed as I stared at Edward.

Something about him reminded me of Gawain, which was perhaps why I took an interest in the young lad. A thought flashed in my mind that perhaps he was one of Gawain's countless descendants caused by him spreading his seed to so many women. That would explain a lot, but it wasn't entirely plausible either.

In any case, what I needed to do hadn't changed... using my skills, I would crush my foe— just like Gawain taught me!

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“Begin!”

Our match commenced the moment a member of the third party signaled it and acted as our referee. At his signal, dust was launched from the earth as both our bodies moved from where we stood— mine and Edward's.

WHOOOOSHH

Without hesitation in his eyes and body, Edward charged at me in a simple, straight pattern. Thanks to this, he easily transversed the gap that existed between me and him.

SWOOOSH

His blunt sword slashed at me with remarkable speed, one so great that a normal person would not have seen it coming. However, thanks to my already-peaked body state, I saw the flow quite well.

Bending my back, I pushed my body down and dodged the clean hit while gripping my sword readily.

My eyes caught Edward gasping with surprise, flustered by my quick motion. For someone who claimed to be a Magic-User, such fluid movements betrayed such disposition.

A smile formed on my face as I twisted the lower part of my body and sent my leg flying to his face while supporting myself with my hands on the ground.

FWOOOSH! and BAM! My legs made contact.

“Gurkk!” Edward groaned, feeling the brunt of my offensive move.

Fortunately, he had already moved his hand to block my kick, therefore mitigating its effects. His body was sent a few inches back thanks to the recoil from my blow and I used this chance to further twist my legs to give another hit while ensuring I got back to my standing pose.

Edward, as expected, blocked the second hit and gritted his teeth once more— allowing me to make a flip and return to a normal stance a couple of meters from him.

“Huu...” Nearly visible breath escaped from my lungs through my lips as I set my gaze on Edward.

My body was already feeling excited since this would be the first time since reincarnation that I would be involved in physical combat without the use of magic. Well, to be fair... my body was already being influenced by mana in the first place.

Thanks to the multiple cores I had, channels had formed like veins within me. As a result of the Mana flowing constantly through those channels, as well as my constant tempering, my body's base state was far superior to a normal one.

“You...” Edward's eyes narrowed at me both in suspicion and added annoyance.

Judging from his reaction, it was clear he never expected me to be so skilled in combat. Not only had I evaded a strike for him, but I also counterattacked and created more space between us.

Still, merely doing this wasn't enough. After all, I hadn't even started using my sword.

“If you keep fighting in an unrefined way, you'll lose badly,” I spoke.

Loud gasps filled the area as everyone apparently felt the sting of my words for some reason. They looked at each other with disbelieving faces, as though wondering how I could say such a thing.

‘Eh? It's true, isn't it? What was with his form? Even a noob could predict that!’

“You dare... call the Martial School of Fundamental Sword Arts unrefined? Who do you think you are?” Edward growled in fury.

After he said this, I fall silent. For a moment, I did not speak. While others may have thought of this as a sign of fear from Edward's rage, it was something else entirely. I was simply confused.

‘Martial School of what and what now?!’

Chapter 84 - Jared Vs Edward (Pt 2)

I was confused for a moment.

“You're telling me what you just used belonged to a Fundamental Martial School Of Swords?” I asked in nigh disbelief.

“It's called the Martial School of Fundamental Sword Arts!” Edward barked at me with annoyance.

Well, the name didn't matter. Sword Arts differed depending on the school that postulated it. While I wasn't interested in the school itself, I was mostly concerned that such basic movements could be recognized as a feature to be implemented by a school.

“Ah, I see...”

In any case, I didn't have the luxury of thinking about all of this right now. Perhaps after this duel, I would consider reading up more on Martial Arts. Balance was important, after all.

“I’ll make you eat your words!”

With this statement, Edward changed his stance and gave off a different vibe entirely. Everyone around us took steps back. Those who appeared to be from the Martial Arts department all looked worried, recognizing the stance he took.

“Is this from the same school?” I asked, not expecting anything impressive.

The students around us shook their heads, not saying anything more. From their reactions, Edward had taken my advice and switched to another School. Hopefully, this one would be better.

“I’ll finish this in one blow!”

Clenching my earthen blade, I braced myself for what was to come. Underestimating my opponent would only lead to carelessness. Besides, those who were in the know expressed a degree of fear concerning this particular technique of his.

He began whispering some words to himself, so low in volume that no one could perceive— well, that didn’t apply to me.

My enhanced ears picked up his words in a jiffy and I got to know the Sword Art he intended to use.

“9 Fundamental Precepts: Form 1...”

The name sounded intense. It was most likely a basic move, but even basic Sword Arts packed quite a deal of power depending on the skill of the user and the level of mastery.

‘Unlike Magic, Sword Arts are very tricky and hard to predict. Since they have so many schools, unless the particular school and form is known, it’s very difficult to evade!’

I strengthened my vision a little, refraining from leaking out any mana since that would be cheating— well, in my opinion anyway.

“...”

WHOOOOOSH

Like a gust of wind, Edward dashed from his location and charged at me with yet another simple pattern.

My sigh intensified as I readied my blade, ready to defend if necessary— or strike him down if I saw an opening.

The boy reached me in a short count, a surprising feat considering my perception made everything slower for easy navigation.

Holding his blade with both of his hands, Edward, made a horizontal strike, as though ready to lope off my head in a flash.

“... REND!”

With this scream, his offense arrived and I felt what appeared to be sparks of power temporarily enhance his sword.



It glowed for a moment, and then vanished, leaving me puzzled. Unfortunately, I had gotten too carried away by the strange occurrence that I didn't notice the blade nearing my neck.

It was blunt, so it wouldn't kill me. The damage would be very great for a normal person, though. I could tell from the force that was arriving that it could crack a bone— at the very least.

Since we had an infirmary, and this was a Duel, Edward wasn't crossing his bounds and I was at no risk of losing my life. Well, considering my strengthened body, I was certain his strike called 'REND' wouldn't cause me much damage. However...

'For a swordsman, the moment an opponent's blade reaches your neck... it's your loss!'

Those were the words Gawain beat into my head several times even though I kept telling him I wasn't even a real swordsman.

The blade came, approaching its target position at an increasing pace. But, I didn't intend to lose as a swordsman!

SWOOOSH

The sword missed by barely an inch as I made a quick sidestep and became one with the wind. It was fluid and beautiful, one of my favorite motion techniques in Martial Arts... [The Illusory Dance]

Like a blur, my body became light as a feather and reached Edward's side, leaving what appeared to be an afterimage of myself being struck by Edward's blade.

Now, this... was Martial Arts!

Edward's eyes bulged as soon as I appeared beside him and quickly made to redirect his sword at me with intensity. It must have taken some effort, but he twisted his arms and turned his body in my direction, straining the muscles that had used a great deal of power for that horizontal strike from earlier.

With his blade returning to me, I could have used my sidestep again, but decided against it. The battle had lost its taste for me and ending it quickly would be the best option.

CLANG

My sword was launched, like an invisible blade, and parried his swift blade. In a flash, his weapon flew away from his hand and landed on the floor.

Edward's face paled the moment I disarmed him so effortlessly. Fear, shock, disbelief, frustration, and a couple of other emotions I didn't care to analyze came flooding in and showed on his face as he lost all rationality and lunged at me with full strength.

'He must have figured it would be faster to attack me than run after his sword... a somewhat sensible choice...'

However, it was a disgraceful sight, really. The boy who claimed that he wanted to elevate the status of Martial Arts, the one who had trained his body and endured who-knows-what to achieve such a glorious

physique, the lad who caught my attention and reminded me of my dead comrade... how could he be so weak?!

SWOOSH

My blade landed on his legs, causing him to fall to the side thanks to the weight I put behind it. He didn't secure any fracture due to my holding back, so his body merely landed on the floor with a THUD.

Now moving before him and pointing my blade to his face, my expression showed disgust and a bit of pity as I saw Edward's defeated face.

"Who taught you Martial Arts?"

Chapter 85 - Disappointment

I was conflicted, no, confused.

Even though Edward was in the Lower Class, I expected his Martial Arts to be on a particular level. Everyone seemed to hold him in high regard, so it was only natural that he was strong.

'He's most likely like me... he failed badly in the Mana Core Grade test...'

Martial Artists could use Mana to further boost their abilities, so it was actually within reason that they would be tested that way. If he failed the Mana Core Grade Test and still got into Ainzlark, it meant that meant he must have been exceptional in the other sections of the Martial Artist exams.

Why then...?

'Why is he so weak?'

No, it wasn't that he was weak. His strength was far above what anyone of his age would normally possess. I could tell from Edward's body that he had trained very well in Martial Arts, which was why I expected more of a challenge.

He had good strength, but his techniques were sloppy at best. He had a simplistic form and easily predictable patterns. All that brawn and speed—gone to waste due to his crude style of fighting.

I got annoyed by this!

"Who taught you Martial Arts?"

My voice echoed across the area and I could see everyone who heard me shiver. Their faces paled, they trembled slightly—that is, the Martial Artists.

Turning back to Edward, I saw a disbelieving expression play on his face. It was like something had broken inside him.

'Is he about to cry?' I thought, noticing a glint in his eyes that signaled tears.

It was all awfully disappointing. For someone who spouted such a grand dream, if he was only at this level and made such a conceited statement... Edward was beyond silly!

“Huu... this is pointless. I suppose this Duel ends in my victory.” I sighed, undoing my Earth Magic which returned my blade to dust.

Wringing the wrist of the arm which held the sword with my other, I walked away from Edward in disappointment. At the very same time, the girl called Ana rushed to him in a jiffy.

Our faces crossed each other as we each went our various ways. From the corner of my vision, I could see tears in the young girl’s eyes. Edward was truly an idiot for making someone so dear to him cry due to his selfishness.

My bag and sac were just around the corner so I picked them up and left without saying another word. Regret formed within me as I realized that the time I spent waiting and engaging in such a useless Duel would have been better spent on bettering myself—especially in making concoctions.

Needless to say, I had wasted my time!

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“E-Ed!!!” The feminine, childlike voice of Anabelle rang out as she ran toward her dear friend.

The young girl’s steps were hurried, but she couldn’t reach him in a flash due to her short legs. As soon as she did, though, Ana collapsed to the ground where Edward was lying and observed his body well.

‘No major injuries, then—’

Yes, she had figured it out with the small time she used to analyze her fallen friend. His physical state wasn’t in a terrible condition. He hadn’t sustained any grave injuries, so why...?

“Ed...” Her voice trailed, realizing the cause of her friend’s position.

He could have stood up. He could have continued the fight—probably. But he didn’t! Edward’s tenacity was something Ana deeply respected about him, even though it sometimes led him into trouble.

Still, to think he didn’t resort to stubbornness...

“I... couldn’t even land a hit on him...” Edward’s hoarse voice sounded in a whisper.

At this point, the crowd that had gathered was already dispersing. Having no further interest in the loser, none bothered to approach Edward. Perhaps they already assumed Ana would nurse the emotional wounds of the fallen one, or they didn’t want to deal with the hassle.

It was getting pretty late, anyway. The students made their way to the dorms.

Despite the noise caused by the mumblings and grumblings of everyone as they left, Ana didn’t miss the stifled statement of her dearest friend.

“Edward, it’s okay. Just calm yourself...” Anabelle didn’t know what to tell him other than that.

Edward was a warrior, she was a Scholar. Brawn and brains were opposite so she couldn’t directly relate to the pain he felt. But, she still felt hurt that her friend had lost pretty miserably.

“I told you... not to challenge him... you always do this...”

Upon hearing these words, Edward's sunken face looked in Ana's direction and saw tears fall from her eyes.

She was a terribly emotional person who often put up a tough front when confronted by others. Edward knew her true face though, especially during times like this.

He gave a somewhat sad smile and pulled himself out of his pit of despair. He had lost so terribly that he felt ashamed to call himself a Swordsman. His opponent was a Magic-User, yet, he was able to depict finer swordsmanship than he ever could.

There was no way he could find the strength in him to rise and further their match even after being easily disarmed and shown such a one-sided battle.

'So this is why he proposed a duel with swords... it didn't matter to him...'

His sad smile broadened as he stared at Anabelle's crying face. He was an idiot who underestimated his opponent, suffered a miserable defeat, and even caused his dear friend to cry.

"... You idiot!" Ana yelled, as though reading his mind.

Edward rose from his low estate and sat uprightly on the ground. Ana was kneeling beside him, do they directly side-by-side.

"I now understand why he made such smiles and laughs when we mentioned our goals... to him they must have been too grand to consider. Someone as skilled as him merely wants to sharpen his skills... perhaps I should have had a simpler goal like that too..."

#### Chapter 86 - The Dorm

Edward's words were full of pain as he spoke. His heart ached, but defeat had taught him that his pride was worthless. A loss was still a loss!

"No matter how unrealistic our dreams are, that guy has no right to criticize it! That's what I think!" Anabelle responded in an argument.

There was no way she would acknowledge the sneer of someone who didn't know how hard she worked to get to where she was.

Edward had mellowed out, but her annoyance had only increased.

"You're right..." Edward spoke weakly.

He still didn't agree with Jared's actions. However, the weak could do nothing but feel awe for the strong. It was the same for Edward. Jared's swordsmanship and fluid motion with the blade had left an impression on the heart of the young swordsman. He couldn't bring himself to hate the one who was once his adversary.

A gentle smile formed on his face as he remembered Jared's last words to him.

"Who taught me Martial Arts, eh?"

What could he say? He was self-taught. His father had left a legacy for him in the art of the sword and he desperately tried to live up to it. But, without a proper master... his Sword Arts barely scratched the surface of the teachings contained in his inheritance.

'Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth... I should be asking you the very same question... who taught you Martial Arts?!

While Edward was lost in his thoughts, Anabelle looked at him with curiosity. The tears in her eyes had dried up and her very small and cute face ogled his.

Ever since they knew each other, she had been able to tell what he was thinking just by observing his facial muscles. Now was no different. Edward was having positive thoughts about Jared, something that directly contradicted Anabelle's disposition toward the arrogant boy who had just hurt her friend.

Her fairly large eyes narrowed and her brow crinkled in displeasure.

'Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth... I'll never acknowledge you!'

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My dorm was just as I expected—trash!

The building erected before me was painted grey. It had a very large structure, with an even bigger compound. I was certain that if everyone within the building chose to spend time within the compound, there would still be room to spare.

One would consider this good, but it was far from it! In the first instance, the building had an ominous feel about it. Perhaps it was due to the multiple amounts of energy I sensed within it—belonging to the students already lodged in. Still, I really didn't like this Dorm.

That wasn't the worst of it, though.

The handouts we students were given after leaving the temporary lodge we were in contained the location of our respective dorms and the room we would be staying in.

Ainzlark was a large Academy, so even the Lower Class Students should have had more than one dorm.

At least, that was how it was supposed to be.

'We're all sharing one Dorm, uh?'

All the students (Juniors and Seniors) jam-packed in the same apartment... what could possibly go wrong?

Of course, I expected the accommodation to be inferior to what I was used to, but I didn't expect things to be so bad. Still, just watching the building from a distance wasn't going to help my case.

"Let's go in!"

The interior was worse than what I kept from the outside. It was a literal mess!

Clothes and several properties were scattered about. Trash filled the ground and I could tell that in the short while of resumption, this place was slowly becoming a pigsty.

'What did I expect from the trash of the institute?'

Of course, I didn't mean to belittle them. However, one's identity affected the general perception and personality developed over time. If a person is constantly told he is a loser over and over again, and the environment supports that assertion, it would only be a matter of time before that person takes on the attribute of his newfound Identity.

While we first years would not have been so affected since we were just starting out, our seniors were another matter entirely.

Having spent so long at the bottom of the barrel, perhaps their minds had become accustomed to it.

'Oh well...'

I wasn't going to concern myself with trivialities such as this. I was certain they could easily clean up their messes, especially since Magic could be used. There was no point in making a fuss on my first day.

My sac and bag were still with me as I climbed the stairs and made my way to the room assigned to me.

I reached the third floor after a few minutes and saw several doors aligned on both sides of the hallway. Based on their distance, I could estimate that the rooms within couldn't be that large. It sickened me to consider where I would be spending my resting time within Ainzlark, but I ignored the annoyance that had been building up and walked down the hallway.

Fortunately, I met no one on my way to my room.

There had to be a good set of reasons for that. For second and third years, their classes ended by 6:00 PM due to the workload. Since it was just after 5:00 PM, only the first years would be around. Since I left them back then, it would take a little while before they arrived which meant I was possibly the only one currently present.

On the ground floor, I had seen a staff there who was most likely our Hall monitor. The young lady pretended I didn't exist as I walked in. Thinking things through, the seniors would have lodged in here yesterday or maybe earlier considering the Assembly had all of us gathered. We first years came from our temporary residence, but the seniors must have been here all along.

'As usual, my necessities will be placed in my room as per Academy protocols...'

Finally reaching my door, I placed my hand on it and turned the doorknob. It responded and opened up for me. The moment it did so, dust flung outside, welcoming me to the place I would be staying in for my Academy years.

It was thick, so thick that I had to cover my eyes and block my nose. I was a moment too late, though, as my natural reaction toward such a huge wave of dust acted up.

"ACHOOOO!!!"

Chapter 87 - Experiment

"ACHOOOO!!!"

I felt my voice echo across the empty hallway. The loud sound of my irritated reaction to the wave of dust enveloping me could be said to be anything but subtle.

“What the heck?!” I coughed, taking a few steps back.

It was crazy!

I was not really intent on pointing out how terrible unkempt the Dorm was since it didn't directly affect me. However, for my own room to be in such a state... clearly, my annoyance would be peaked.

The room was dusty, the bed dusty, everything dusty! I saw cobwebs and lots of unpleasant gathered around the furniture.

‘Are you kidding me?’

Still, I couldn't just watch dumbfounded. This was without a doubt my room—so I had to clean it up!

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After what would be one of the worst thirty minutes of my new life, I was done cleaning up. Of course, as a noble, doing menial tasks such as this was something I had never done.

If not for the experience I had in my past life as well as my adept use of magic, the state of my room would end up creating a huge dent in my stay at Ainzlark.

“Whew!” I sighed.

My lips curled up in a smile as I looked at the new version of the once messed-up room. Not only had the dust disappeared, but the floors and furniture were also sparkly clean.

My bed was tidy and the cobwebs around were all gone.

“SPELLCRAFT sure is useful, uh?”

I had used my mana to absorb all the dust, creating a form of magnet. By gathering them all through dispersing my mana, the dirty particles became one whole sphere. I opened my window and disposed of the large sphere—as big as a man's head— into the yard.

The cobwebs were taken care of using , a Spell I invented on the spot.

Using wind magic with SPELLCRAFT as its base, I created a form of suction that took in the cobwebs and all other residual dirt in the atmosphere. The suction made sure everything went out the window and vanished into the yard as well.

‘From what I saw, the yard is usually tidy, so the cleaners will take care of that... that is, if the wind doesn't do their job for them.’

Fresh air was one of the stable features of the Ainzlark Academy grounds. Cobwebs and dust only gathered in places that were untouched for very long and had a stagnated atmosphere. When exposed to the fluid nature of the wind, the components would disperse.

I covered my window to make sure none of the particles entered my room again. Still, the cleaning work was not done yet.

I used water magic to spread moisture on the wooden tiles that covered my room as well as the walls and used heat to dry it off, creating a cleaner and more sparkly ambiance.

I checked my wardrobe and found—as expected— a good deal of clothes already stored there.

Unlike the room, the wardrobe seemed to be in perfect condition. I had to assume that the whole thing had been transported here using Magic.

Two sets of uniforms other than the one I wore, a bunch of casual wear which was my size. Their designs were plain and simple, but the quality of the outfits was all exquisite—as expected of Ainzlark.

We could also make requests for the kind of outfits we wanted and they would be delivered in a week, but I wasn't going to bother with that. Shoes were also prepared. A couple of pairs and, just like the outfits, a different kind could be requested.

Looking around, my room was small—smaller than the one I used back at the temporary apartment and incomparable to the one in my house. Still, it wasn't unbearably so.

With my bed by the side, touching the wall, I had a study desk and chair beside it. The setting was similar to the other apartment—only smaller.

I had my personal bathroom and toilet, something that gave me pure relief. The fear that I would have to share made me shiver on my way to this Dorm. However, when I thought of it rationally... there was no way Ainzlark would resort to that—even for Lower-Class students.

'I'm still a noble, after all... and this is a prestigious institute.'

With everything basically in order, I decided to do what I had intended to do from the start.

"My sack..." I used Wind magic to draw it closer to me as I sat on my bed.

It was a hard and flat surface... but Magic could make it better.

Opening the sack, I brought out the various plants I had plucked from the garden not too long ago and began processing them. It was a long wait, but I could finally begin practicing based on the treasure Alphonse gave me as a gift.

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"Huu, all done!" I cleaned the nonexistent sweat from my forehead as I looked at the products of my labor.

Several bottles that appeared transparent were lined up on the flat surface of my bed.

They were 12 in total, the same amount of the different types of plants I gathered. Within the transparent bottles which were just a little smaller than a fist, were liquid substances that had respective colors.

My test tubes, as I called them all carried concentrates of the plants. Since these plants were all useful components in making drugs or medicines, people often used the entire thing for the process.



However, what would truly be deemed as important were the chemicals that formed them. Just as I created the poison that killed the traitorous maid, I intended to draw out the chemical components of each of the plants and experiment with them.

Plants contained more than one component and rare plants had some similar chemicals to common ones.

If I could figure out which chemicals did what in the body, I could create potions that would usually require rare plants using just the combination of chemicals within common ones.

It was a cheaper, more conservative approach!

Chapter 88 - Points

The room was cool due to the circulation caused by SPELLCRAFT using Wind Magic so I felt no discomfort during the tedious process.

“This takes a lot of time, but it’s the best option I can come up with for now... my resources are limited!” My whisper came out as I watched the result of my hard work, study, and dedication.

Within this little room, I was going to bring a revolution to the concept of Alchemy and Medicine as a whole!

“Hehehe... hehehe...”

Night fell soon, and I could hear many sounds coming from outside the room. I didn’t bother leaving my little comfort zone until I was sure the coast was clear.

The Dorm rules were already established and I had a copy as a handout.

There were several eating spots on the Campus, so the Students could eat as much as they liked—well, not exactly.

The Class System in Ainzlark also came with a concept known as Class Points. The range was from one to a hundred.

Class Points were extremely valuable and were one of the few things I made sure never to forget about Ainzlark. Student privileges were tied to how many points they possessed. From requesting more outfits to buying more luxurious meals in the cafeteria—everything depended on how many points were in a student’s possession.

Fortunately, Class Points were not stagnant. These points could either rise or fall depending on the actions made by the student and they varied depending on individuals and not a collective.

The bad news was that Lower Class Students all had a starting number of 30 Points. Middle-Class students were better off with 60, while Upper-Class Students had the most privileges available to them since they had 90 Points to start with.

An action of demerit caused these points to fall while actions of merit made them rise. This encouraged students to behave in exemplary manners and work very hard. So, in theory... it was possible for a student in the Loser Class to amass Points similar to those in the Upper Class.

'In theory, that is...'

Needless to say, I had a starting Point of 30, so there was a limited number of things I could do. I had to ensure that it didn't drop, but increase.

"I should get something to eat now..."

Upon realizing that the hallway was empty, I opened my door and walked out of my room. The stairs were empty as well, as expected, it was 8:00 PM at night.

Most students were either resting or studying in the library or their rooms.

Upon reaching the ground floor, my eyes darted to a door that led to the 'Lounge' area of the Dorm. Based on the handbook I received, a mini cafeteria was situated there so I could get a bite to eat.

Since it was unilaterally for Lower Class students, the restriction of Points was not an issue to be considered. Still, I didn't want to go there.

'I don't want to interact with any student for now... my social battery is low.'

My eyes left the Lounge entrance as I made my way to the exit of the dorm.

"Haa..." My voice leaked out as I felt the fresh breeze of the outside garden wash all over me.

Artificially making wind circulation was one thing, but experiencing the genuine article far surpassed it. My eyes squinted were wide open as I got used to the dark state of the outside world. The interior of the Dorm was brightened up by several lights produced by magic. So, seeing the night sky felt a little strange.

The surroundings were far from dark, though. Lamps of never-ending light shone all across the school grounds and the fence surrounding our huge compound had many lamps with the same function.

There was literally no way to get lost in such a place.

"Curfew is by 9:30 PM. I should get my meal and return quickly..."

I wouldn't want a situation where I would be caught outside past the appointed time and be penalized. My precious points weren't going to be sacrificed today!

'I should speed things up a bit!'

In an instant, I carefully circulated mana across my body, strengthening it further. It wasn't as intense as leaking it out of me, but its effects were just as much since my mana veins were far better than most people.

Putting strength in my legs, I dashed toward the nearest cafeteria to get a bite—and also some takeaway!

'I'll be needing a great deal of energy this night!'

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Unlike everything else that had happened today, the cafeteria was fairly normal.

No food or drink was outside my Points. That meant there were no restrictions on how many meals I could pick. Food was free in Ainzlark Academy, the only limit was the ability to obtain the meals through Points. Of course, there was a limit to the quantity a student could order at a particular time.

Still, having ten packs of an adequate meal set would suffice.

I thanked my attendant and left the cafeteria in a hurry. While I was still early, I wasn't going to risk nearing the deadline for curfew.

In a flash, I made my way back to the Dorm and entered in relief.

'Whew! I'm not late!' Looking at the time and seeing that it wasn't even 9:00 PM yet, I smiled in relief.

However, this look of relief soon vanished from my eyes the moment I realized that the ground floor was occupied by so many students—all of which I had no knowledge of!

'Oh shit... seniors?!'

Since I made quite a bit of a racket when entering the Dorm, swinging the door open, the seniors all turned in my direction.

The piercing stares of everyone sent a jolt down my spine and I gulped without realizing it. I really didn't want an encounter now. I just wanted to eat, meditate, eat some more... practice again—and sleep!

This had to be the worst-case scenario!

'What do I do?!'

Chapter 89 - Attention

My body was petrified as the countless gazes rested on me.

Well, they weren't exactly innumerable, about ten seniors, maybe twelve, were gathered in a bunch and conversing when I entered.

'I was careless!' My mind rang.

A smile formed on the face of one of them as he approached me while the others also gave amused looks. One way or the other, I knew I wasn't getting out of this situation easily.

My eyes unconsciously darted toward the door to my left as I saw the entrance to the lounge already opened. It creaked as it closed slowly. This caused me to register the reason these guys were suddenly loitering on the ground floor.

'They weren't loitering... they were just coming out of the Lounge!'

The very students I wanted to avoid by choosing a different eatery were standing before me. It felt disappointing and annoying, but there was nothing I could do at the current moment.

"You're Jared, right? Jared Leonard—the kid from back at the Assembly."

My mangled thoughts were poked by the senior who was already standing before me.

He had auburn hair that seemed to stretch to the back of his face—tied behind to form something similar to a short ponytail. His brown eyes showed sincerity and his thinly lined lips parted to form a genuine smile.

I instinctively nodded to answer his question once I saw the expression on his face. It contained no malice.

“You’re a pretty interesting kid, aren’t you? You sure made a scene out there today.” The senior added with a wide grin and I could see the other boys behind him laugh and nod their heads.

Their laughs weren’t condescending, but rather, of enjoyment.

“But, who would have expected you to be an introvert, eh?” His eyes darted toward the meal sets I held in both hands.

I gulped, realizing he had figured out my intentions.

“Well, you’re a newbie, so I suppose we seniors might seem somewhat scary. Can’t blame you, we’re a rowdy bunch!”

I smiled wryly at this statement. He was a blunt guy, uh?

“In any case, welcome to the Dorm. I hope to see more of you around...” He took a few steps back, finally seeming like he was done with me.

I gave an internal sigh.

‘He must have sensed my unease around them and chose to simply leave me be. Whew, if it was someone else, they may have taken offense...’

That made me certain that even among the seniors, there existed some who hadn’t been affected by the oppressive hands of those above and truly became Lower-Class.

“Oh, and by the way...” The boy turned back and smiled at me.

“I’m Jerry, Jerry Keller... you should be careful, Jared. The higher-ups have their eyes on you.”

With this final statement, the boy ascended the stairs alongside his nine other companions and left the Ground floor empty.

I felt bad that I couldn’t reply to his sincerity even once, but I wasn’t in the right mind frame to speak. The boy I spoke to was most likely in his third year, same as the others.

I couldn’t tell since they were all wearing casual outfits, just like me.

‘They’re strong!’ Was what registered in my head.

All of them had powers that could rival mine, and I wasn’t certain I could beat the one who seemed to be the leader—Jerry Keller—in a fight.

Well, that would be me without using SPELLCRAFT.

‘I should get going too...’ My thoughts trailed and I made my way to my room.

It had been a very eventful day, but it was finally coming to an end. Well, not for me though... I still had training to attend to.

Just because I made it to the greatest institute in the Kingdom didn't mean I had to slack off.

No, rather, this meant I needed to work extra hard.

The atmosphere was rich in mana, my skills had improved drastically, and I had the right amount of food. It was only right that I strengthened my cores further.

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Jerry was walking to his room, situated on the topmost floor—the fourth—and had a wide grin plastered on his face.

For some reasons best known to him, he was in a terrific mood

His companions had an inkling of what made him so amused, but didn't understand why he was so excited about it.

“Why are you in such high spirits, Jerry?” One of them finally asked.

His curiosity had reached an uncontrollable peak.

“Well, I guess you guys wouldn't have known...” Jerry's whisper was barely loud enough for them to hear him.

“Is he that interesting, that Jared?”

“He had guts back at the Assembly, but was it just me, or did he seem nervous when facing us?”

“Yeah, I noticed it too. Plus, I hear he's a White Core Grade... why did you take such an interest in someone like that?”

Jerry's smile broadened even more.

“If you heard about his Core Grade, you must also know about the results of his first two tests. He ranked among the top five simply by gaining perfect scores on both first and second sections of their exams...”

‘That boy is extraordinary,’ was what Jerry was trying to say.

“Plus, you should all know that Mana Core Grade isn't everything. If you keep assessing him like that, how are you different from those stuck-up higher-ups?”

The moment their leader said this, everyone gave apologetic gestures and felt a little bad for thinking in such a way.

“Y-yeah, you're right... sorry.” The one who made the statement gave an apology.

Jerry shrugged, though. He never really considered it a big deal.

“It's to be expected. Besides...”

The others couldn't sense it because they had been too neutral about Jared, but for him, he could detect it just fine.

'They think he was nervous, but he wasn't... he wasn't just interested.'

Jerry could tell the moment he got into close proximity with the young boy. His eyes seemed to be scanning everything—probing deep into his intentions and the vicinity.

There was no doubt that Jared was not ordinary.

Then there was one last thing that caught his attention about the young man, something he had to tell his companions.

"That boy... is stronger than all of you."

Chapter 90 - Impossible

"That first year is stronger than all of you!"

The statement dropped like a bombshell to the nine students who walked along with Jerry. The moment they heard this, everyone halted. This wasn't a light statement that could be waved off unnoticed.

"What?"

"Are you serious?"

"You're kidding, right?"

Various reactions leaked out of them as they all stared at Jerry with surprise written on their faces.

He wasn't one to examine someone wrongly, but Jerry was also known for his easygoing nature and teases. It could have been that he was just teasing. However, in the unlikely situation that he wasn't...

"I'm dead serious." Jerry's words confirmed the possibility they wanted to ignore.

The look in his brown eyes told them that he truly wasn't messing around.

Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth, as young and inexperienced as he was, was more powerful than they—third-year students.

"Welp, he's not stronger than me, though..." Jerry smiled and shrugged.

Still, even for an exceptional student, Jared was too powerful for his age.

'He should be in the Upper Class by just measuring his talent and power alone...' Jerry reasoned.

The problem was his Mana Core. The same applied to him as well. The school's system was rigged, but there was nothing he—as a student—could do about it.

"Well, if that's what you say, then it has to be true."

Jerry wasn't one to misjudge someone or lie. If he spouted something so unbelievable, then it had to be real.

“I suppose... well, it hard to guess it accurately without testing it out with Mana Pressure, but that should be about right. In any case, we’ll be seeing him around, so that’s fine.”

Jerry continued his slow steps and got to the door of his room.

“You know, you guys don’t have to always see me to my room. Your rooms are on the third floor, right?”

The boys behind him all gave the same light shrug. As always, they stubbornly wanted to escort him to his room. It wasn’t that they felt compelled to... it was just a mutual understanding among them.

Jerry was different.

Unlike other students who had to stay in rooms located on the first to the third floor, he was residing on the fourth. Unlike the three other residential floors, the rooms on the fourth floor were way bigger. That meant there were lesser rooms. Ten student residential rooms, to be exact.

Just ten rooms on that floor belonged to students, and for a special reason.

“Welp, goodnight, Jerry.” His friends waved goodbye to him as they hurried down to their various rooms.

The boy, who was now all alone, entered his room. His head still poked out until he was certain his friends had successfully descended the stairs before closing his door.

“Those idiots...” He whispered in a sigh.

Though they all hung out together and hardly showed him any special treatment, this was one thing they couldn’t forego. Jerry’s position deserved a little reverence, so they all decided that escorting him to his room would be their little tribute to him.

Compared to what others had to do, it was nearly nothing. Still, Jerry found it weird. It was fun weird though, since he had more time to talk to them.

Why was Jerry so special? Why was he being treated differently?

The answer was simple... though he was still a Second Year, he had achieved something barely any student in their dorm could achieve. He was among the Elite Ten... champions of the Lower Class!

The room on the topmost floor belonged to those who had been deemed to be ranked the highest among other students in their Class. Usually, they would be occupied by Third Years, since it was only natural that they would be stronger.

However... Jerry was only a second-year and he had managed to break rank. A truly amazing being.

He didn’t feel that way, though. According to him, he barely made the cut.

Plus, Jerry’s goal lay beyond just being a member of the Elite Ten—the best in his Class (Lower Class). He wanted to rise above that and break the standard that shackled everyone in the Dorm.

“I’m going to obtain the title of Ranker... the nine best students in the whole of Ainzlark Academy!”

It was a blasphemous dream... something anyone in the Lower Class shouldn't imagine. However, for Larry who had broken one dogma already and became one of the few Seconds Years to have ever attained the rank of Elite Ten, he wanted to go further.

The only way to gain acknowledgment and achieve his goal for reformation in Ainzlark was to achieve the impossible.

'Jared Leonard... I suppose you've given me the push I need.'

If someone like Jared was as strong as his Third Year friends, it wasn't impossible for a Lower Class to aim for the best spot in the whole academy.

'Now then, I should begin my training...'

Walking to the Lecture Hall the next day was a little strange since it would be the first for me. I freshened up and did everything early, however, leaving my room was another thing entirely.

The hallway was noisy, indicating the presence of many students. I didn't want to end up bumping into one of those guys, so I waited for a little while until I couldn't anymore.

In the end, I exited the dorm by jumping out of my window. It was crazy, but I had to applaud its efficiency.

Using wind magic to lock my window after I left, I also used it to cushion my fall so I didn't suffer any injuries while landing.

Students were in a hurry, leaving through the main gate, so no one noticed me landing by the side.

From then onward, it was a breeze. I blended in with the crowd and left for my Lecture Hall. I saw some familiar faces— members of the same Year—but ignored them.

I could tell that their eyes were on me though.

'They must still be thinking about yesterday...'

Rolling my eyes at the thought, I picked up my pace and swiftly ran to class.