

SPELLCRAFT 1031

SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

Chapter 1031: The Absolute One

Frustration coursed through Edward's heart.

His awe and affection slowly morphed into a deep desire to win.

Desperation clutched his heart deeply, and his bloodshot eyes clearly depicted his disbelief at his own loss.

Something like this shouldn't have been happening!

"Aries, do something! Help me!" Edward shouted, his powerful voice quaking the space around him.

~I am sorry, Edward. But with the current disconnect we have, I won't be able to aid you any longer...~

Those words shattered Edward's heart, and the crouching despair that slowly enveloped him slowly began to consume his very being.

'N-no...' His thoughts whispered to him. '... I can't lose now.'

Not yet! He hadn't gone all-out yet!

Yes... what else hadn't he done yet? There had to be something he was yet to try.

"No matter what you do, I will win." Jared's voice annoyingly rang in his ears, and his muscles trembled the more he heard his taunts.

'I... I am not weak. Not anymore! NOT ANYMORE!!!'

>VWUUUUUUUUUMMMMMM!!!<

There was one final thing he could do. It was exempted from the fight because it was going to shift the balance one way or the other, but Edward could no longer see any other way out.

This was his ultimate path to victory—the only one he had left.

"Martial Zone..." He whispered.

"Hey, Edward, what are you—??!" Kuzon's distant voice was silenced by the special dimension that swallowed both Edward and Jared, transporting them to the special realm Edward created through his Martial will.

'I won't lose... not yet!'

Despite Jared mentioning despair, Edward felt perfectly fine. He no longer felt the crushing weight of such negative emotion on him, but rather it was the opposite.

Edward never felt more alive!

"Oh? We're back here again. This Martial Zone of yours... it's amazing." Jared's voice echoed in the vast expanse that surrounded them.

The nebulae that occupied the sea of space. The glittering stars around. The brilliant contrast of both light and darkness.

Edward knew his Martial Zone was beautiful.

"You don't seem too bothered. None of your Arcanas will work in Martial Zone."

This was a world made by him. It functioned according to his own rules, was manifested according to his will, and the concepts within were all established by him.

No one was allowed to alter anything.

"Your Magic will also be limited. In contrast, I will be able to do anything I desire within this space."

An immeasurable incorporeal swords appeared instantly, all larger than the single massive Mind Blade he had summoned back during his fight with Jared.

Their numbers were overwhelmingly staggering.

And yet... despite all of this, Jared merely broke into a smile.

"I am well aware." He simply uttered.

'Where is this hubris of his coming from??' Edward found himself constantly confounded by Jared's line of thought and his arrogant words.

It infuriated him to no end.

"I have trained for hundreds of years just for this moment. I am far stronger than I was before, and in this Martial Zone, I am absolute!"

What could Jared possibly do against those odds?

"Absolute, huh? That's an interesting proposition..." An insulting laughter proceeded from Jared's lips.

"Why don't we test that out?"

"What will you do? Make another Arcana? You have something else that can combat this, huh? Is that it?!" Edward bellowed out, his realm quaking as a result of his rising rage.

"Not exactly." Jared's response was short and simple.

"Then—"

"I don't need to make an Arcana to stop you. Frankly, it takes too much Aether, and I'm almost out..."

That was even more good news! It only made sense that after doing so many impossible deeds, Jared had finally reached his limits.

'But if that's the case, why is he telling me all of this?!'

What was his angle?

"That's why I'll show you something instead. Once you experience it, I'll let you decide."

"Decide what? Who wins this battle?" Edward abruptly responded.

"No. Whether you're really absolute."

"Tch! You..." Edward's teeth grated with each other, causing the blades he created to intensify in power and double in size.

"... This is the end!"

The blades lunged at him with perfect speed, each packing enough power to utterly obliterate him.

"I agree. It is the end..."

Edward felt like he was suddenly thrust into a world where time was still.

The blades he launched towards Jared were seemingly stopped in motion, and so was Jared.

Everything was still, including him.

'W-what is...'

"Your Martial Zone is lovely, but why don't I show you something more interesting?" A voice echoed from all across the Martial Zone Edward dominated.

It sent shivers down his spine, and he trembled at the sudden authority that assailed him.

"It's still incomplete, but..."

Edward felt his Martial Zone being overwritten at a rapid pace, and everything around him being swallowed by something bigger—greater than himself and everything he knew.

"... Primeval Magic..."

Edward's eyes widened at the new world that he was forcefully thrust into, his entire body entirely overwhelmed by the infinite expanse that overrode his senses.

"... [Great Sage's Archives]."

Gone was the Martial Zone he had crafted with meticulous detail, now reduced to a minuscule speck amidst countless galaxies that stretched out before him.

His eyes widened in disbelief as he beheld the breathtaking beauty that unfolded in every direction.

Endless nebulae swirled in vibrant hues, cascading across the cosmic canvas like ethereal brushstrokes. Stars, each one a brilliant jewel, dotted the celestial expanse, their radiance illuminating the vastness of this new world.

The dimension stretched out endlessly in every direction, a seemingly infinite multiverse housing countless universes within its embrace. Stratas and layers intertwined, forming a tapestry of existence that defied comprehension.

Edward's gaze swept across the celestial expanse, his eyes tracing the interweaving threads of universes that stretched far beyond his line of sight.

He witnessed galaxies upon galaxies, sprawling across the cosmic canvas like luminescent tendrils. Colors danced and swirled, painting the backdrop of this unfathomable dimension with a kaleidoscope of cosmic energies.

The boundaries between universes blurred, allowing glimpses into other dimensions that coexisted in harmonious chaos.

Edward witnessed realms of ethereal beauty, where landscapes defied earthly logic and imagination ran wild.

Forests of crystalline trees flourished under starlit skies, their branches whispering secrets of ancient wisdom.

Mountains rose like sentinels, their peaks brushing against clouds of swirling stardust.

In another dimension, he witnessed a cityscape of shimmering towers, their architecture defying the constraints of earthly materials.

A cacophony of sounds, both alien and familiar, filled the air as beings from countless worlds mingled and coexisted, celebrating the diversity of existence.

Edward's gaze roamed across the immense panorama, his previous creation relegated to a mere collection amidst the grandeur that surrounded him.

The Emperor's Domain, Ainzlark Academy, The Nether Cult's Headquarters, all of them now stood as individual structures among countless other vast dimensions and realms that formed just a fraction of this extraordinary tapestry.

But amidst the splendor and majesty, his attention was drawn inexorably towards the center of it all.

There, an imposing figure loomed, dwarfing everything else in its presence. Edward felt an inexplicable pull, as if the very fabric of this dimension bent towards this immense being.

As he approached, he realized that even the scale of his new surroundings was irrelevant in comparison to the sheer magnitude of the entity before him.

He felt smaller than an ant, a mere speck in the cosmic scheme of things. The being turned its gaze upon him, and Edward felt a mixture of trepidation and awe coursing through his veins.

A smile, warm and enigmatic, stretched across the being's countenance, radiating a sense of unfathomable power and wisdom.

In that instant, Edward recognized the entity before him.

It was Jared!

"Welcome to my domain." The voice echoed, and at that moment, the final vestiges of the will to fight vanished from him.

"I told you, Edward. The one who stands at the top is the one who initiates change." Jared's voice danced in Edward's ears, irresistible, yet soft.

Edward finally understood Jared's words from earlier. He could finally comprehend why Jared couldn't accept the proposition he made about him being absolute.

Compared to the tiny speck of dust that was his Martial Zone, Jared's [Great Sage's Archives] constantly grew and evolved, and was vaster than anything he could ever comprehend.

It was infinitely changing and growing.

There was no longer any doubt in Edward's mind as he finally admitted his loss. He couldn't deny it any longer.

'The absolute one... is Jared.'

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Chapter 1032: The Great Sage's Archives

The Great Sage's Archives—it was a culmination of all the spells and worlds I had ever experienced.

An ever-growing tapestry of knowledge and power, woven together into one vast realm. Within its confines, I held absolute control and unrivaled understanding.

It was a world that functioned as an extension of myself, granting me the gifts of omniscience and omnipotence.

Every spell I had ever encountered, every world I had ever explored—they converged within the Archives, becoming a part of me.

The realm itself embodied my collective consciousness and experiences, making it a force beyond measure. Within its boundaries, Spellcraft was always activated, and the very fabric of reality bent to my will.

It was this inherent advantage that Edward, despite his determination and skills, never stood a chance against.

The moment he stepped foot into the Great Sage's Archives, the realm recognized him as an intruder, an entity to be eliminated.

Its defenses, fueled by my knowledge and understanding, would swiftly cut him down before he even had a chance to make a move.

As I watched him, dwelling in the height of my power, a mix of emotions swirled within me. On one hand, I felt a sense relief that I was able to defeat Edward despite his growing strength.

Yet, at the same time, a tinge of melancholy crept into my thoughts. It was true that Edward had been overpowered by the might of the Great Sage's Archives, but I couldn't help but wonder what he could have achieved had the circumstances been different.

What could he have become if given the opportunity to forge his own path after defeating me?

However, dwelling on such thoughts was futile. The rules of this realm were clear, and Edward's defeat served as a reminder of the hierarchy that governed our existence.

As friends and comrades, we would continue to support and guide each other, but the Great Sage's Archives remained my domain, my source of unparalleled power.

'And I remain stronger...'

With a deep breath, I refocused my attention on the present moment. The fight was over, and all that remained was the aftermath.

The Great Sage's Archives would continue to expand and evolve, encompassing new spells and worlds as we ventured forward.

And as for Edward, well, he would find his own path. Whether he would grow stronger in his own way or find his own sources of power, only time would tell.

'He hasn't reached the limits just yet...'

For now, I would cherish the lessons learned and hope we could continue growing together. Because in the end...

'... That's all that matters.'

Edward and I returned to the Golden Palace almost as soon as we left, and I could see the gazes of everyone rush us the moment we made our appearance.

It was clear who had emerged victorious based on our countenance alone, so no one bothered to ask.

We hadn't really spoken since I won the fight, and I could tell he was feeling pretty defeated. He admitted that he lost and recognized that I had way more power than him, but he still needed time to swallow it all.

'No shame in that, really.'

I glanced at our buddies—Aloe, Ciara, and especially Kuzon—and saw the surprise and curiosity written all over their faces.

Kuzon, in particular, had this look like he was wondering who would win if he and I threw down.

Well, I knew exactly what was going through his head. It was a question that hung between us, sparking some excitement and maybe a little nervousness.

'We'll find out eventually...' I couldn't help but smirk to myself.

I personally looked forward to when our powers would collide. It was going to be one heck of a showdown. The unknown always gets me pumped, and I was ready for the ride.

Turning back to Edward, I smiled as we made eye contact. Nodding slowly, I finally spoke.

"You're not weak at all. You're the strongest I've fought in a while."

Perhaps those words wouldn't do very much to satiate his dissatisfaction, but that was all I could say.

"T-that's all I wanted to hear." His words, solemn and calm, finally echoed from his lips as streams of tears slowly dripped from his eyes.

'Haa... this guy.'

Tears fell from Edward's eyes, and I stared at him uncomfortably, trying my hardest to keep my emotions in check. Still, I had to admit... he had really come a long way.

'Some things just never change, I guess.'

Kuzon felt conflicted as he stared at Jared from where he stood. What just happened had defied all his expectations, and he was still bound for even greater shock.

'What did you think of the entire exchange, Leo? I didn't see the grand finale of the fight, but Jared was clearly superior throughout.'

~I detect a trace of Primeval Magic emanating from him. It seems he's advanced even further than you realized.~

Kuzon's eyes instantly widened in utter shock.

"Primeval Magic? From Jared? But how?" he murmured, his mind racing to grasp the implications of this revelation.

Leo continued, his deep voice resonating within Kuzon's core. "Though incomplete, the Primeval Magic within Jared is still considerable. It signifies a level of power and understanding that surpasses what we previously perceived."

A mix of awe and trepidation washed over Kuzon. He had always recognized Jared's strength, but this revelation revealed a depth he had not fully comprehended.

Memories of the recent fight, and Jared's ability to triumph over Edward, despite the latter's Constellation Familiar, flooded his thoughts.

Realization dawned upon him. 'Leo... you were right. Jared's strength goes beyond raw power. He has a way of winning even when he's not necessarily stronger than his opponent,' Kuzon acknowledged, a hint of caution coloring his voice.

Using the Arcanas and his understanding of Magic, Jared had turned the tides and achieved a feat no one could have predicted.

It was terribly intimidating.

~You might find it odd that I say this, Kuzon, but power alone does not guarantee victory. It is the fusion of strategy, skill, and the depths of one's understanding that can tip the scales in one's favor.~

For a Constellation whose Representation was 'Authority' to say something like that, Kuzon knew the words carried weight.

~In Jared's case, it seems he has both. That makes him even more formidable. In the instance where the both of you fight, it seems Jared has a higher chance of winning.~

A sense of determination flickered within Kuzon's eyes as he heard Leo's conclusion to the question that had been bothering him.

... As well as a deep sense of intimidation.

'If that's the case, then I just have to get even stronger. I refuse to be left behind.'

It wasn't out of envy or animosity, or at least Kuzon didn't think it was. He simply felt the desire to win.

'Jared really is like a rival to me.'

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Chapter 1033: The Divine Revolution

[Moments Later]

As I stood at the precipice of the primitive society in the world, a certain weight of responsibility settled upon my shoulders like a heavy mantle.

Before me stood not only Edward, but also a gathering of people whose lives were about to be forever changed.

This primitive world, with its untapped potential, awaited our touch, our guidance, our vision. Together, we had made the decision to embark on the monumental task of nurturing and developing this budding civilization, each of us bringing our unique skills and knowledge to shape its future.

I understood that the first step on this transformative journey was to awaken the dormant potential within each individual, to unlock the depths of their hidden power.

With a focused gaze, I reached out, delving into the very essence of their being, touching their souls with the spark of awakening.

There were three distinct kinds of energy that the humans in this world could wield, and I had used my Aether to harness them. Resonating them with my Arcana [The Magician], I could produce them in large quantities too.

And that included condensing them in order to form active and functional Cores.

One by one, I infused the people before me with Cores, mystical conduits that would allow them to harness the boundless energy that surrounded them.

In that sacred moment, I witnessed a surge of energy, a symphony of power and possibility, as the Cores awakened within them.

I named these conduits, these fountains of energy, Mana, Chi, and Ki, each representing a distinct facet of their potential.

Some were gifted with Mana Cores, granting them the ability to tap into the supernatural currents of Magic.

Others were bestowed with Ki Cores, empowering them to channel their inner energy, mastering Martial Arts and physical prowess.

And for those with Chi Cores, they possessed a delicate balance, a harmony of both magic and martial ability, enabling them to traverse the realms of possibility.

Yet, in this awakening, doubts lingered among the people.

They had been taught that magic was inferior to the might of Martial arts by their deity and ruler, the God King. Skepticism cast a shadow upon their faces, their belief systems wavering in uncertainty.

'If only they knew how badly their God King lost to me...'

In order to preserve Edward's dignity, though, I refrained from saying anything. We were all seen as Transcendental Beings anyway.

The people still clung to their very inaccurate beliefs, until Edward finally had to step forward to stop this bias, his voice infused with conviction.

"Magic is not a weakness, my friends. It is a gift, a tool that will help us shape our destiny," he proclaimed, his words resonating with authority. "Embrace it, and it will unlock the true potential within you."

Edward's words carried weight, his identity as the God King bolstering their trust in his guidance.

With newfound determination, they embraced the challenge before them, setting forth on the path of learning and mastering magic, their hearts alight with the flame of discovery.

It was actually in the midst of this transformative process, that I made a profound discovery about the effects of these energies within the people.

Those blessed with Ki Cores possessed a natural affinity for martial arts, an instinctive connection to the physical realm.

It became clear to me that Edward, with his unparalleled expertise in the field, would be their ideal mentor, their guide along the path of discipline and skill.

And so, I entrusted him with the task of training those with Ki Cores, allowing him to impart his wisdom and expertise, shaping them into formidable warriors.

Meanwhile, my focus shifted to the individuals blessed with Mana and Chi Cores.

I delved deeper into the intricate arts of magic, unraveling the mysteries of Spells, Grades, and the basic principles that governed them.

I had to admit... it was pretty exciting.

However, I encountered a challenge with those who possessed Chi Cores. The delicate balance of energies within them sought a harmonious support to remain stable.

It was then that inspiration struck, and I realized that Familiars could be the key.

These mystical creatures, bound to individuals and sharing their essence, would provide the much-needed equilibrium for those with Chi Cores.

'I have more than enough that I'm not using anyway. Might as well give others so they're useful...'

Drawing upon the weaker Familiars that resided within myself, I shared them with the people, forging connections between them and the Familiars.

This symbiotic bond allowed the people to harness their Chi more effectively, providing a nurturing support for their energy. The Familiars became their constant companions, guiding them, strengthening their Chi, and aiding in their journey towards mastery.

As the days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months, I marveled at the progress made by the people.

Of course, I was using [The Hermit] to grant me more time in the space, allowing me to fully nurture them.

Their mastery of magic, their honing of martial skills, and their harmonious control over their energy began to flourish. It was a testament to their unwavering dedication, their indomitable spirit, and the boundless potential that lay dormant within each of them.

As my time among them drew to a close, a bittersweet feeling washed over me. The civilization we had nurtured would continue to grow and flourish, long after we were gone. They had become the torchbearers of a new era, the custodians of knowledge, and the guardians of their world.

With their newfound power and wisdom, they were equipped to shape their own destinies, to protect and guide their people with the strength and wisdom we had imparted.

They would be the architects of a future that held infinite possibilities.

And as I stood there, witnessing the transformation taking place before my eyes, I knew that the mission had been a resounding success.

Edward and I had left an indelible mark upon this world, empowering its inhabitants to strive for greatness, to conquer their own limitations, and to embrace the ever-unfolding tapestry of their own potential.

Ciara was busy doing nothing in the meantime, though she mentioned something about training, so that was probably it.

Kuzon and Aloe arrived as soon as I canceled the effects of [The Hermit], right on time. I had to wonder what he and her could have taught them in such a limited amount of time, considering the fact that they didn't have the power to control the flow of time like I did.

They mentioned something about simply evolving the species, and leaving behind a memento to help guide them into the future.

"Kuzon did most of the training, to be honest. I only helped build their technology and improve their way of living a little."

'What did he do?' I had to wonder to myself.

Using my sensory abilities, I sensed essences of Kuzon in every single Demon that existed at the center of the forest, appearing like worms.

I also noticed something akin to a being made of strings, most likely created by his [Marionette], staying with the Demons.

He most likely meant to allow the puppet to teach them in his absence. It wasn't a bad call at all.

'Now I understand what he means by evolution...'

I smiled, realizing we were done with our mission here, and it was finally time for the next step.

'And this one is the most important of all...'

We had to focus on what to do about Neron.

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Chapter 1034: Group Decision

Now within Kuzon's Golden Palace, separated from the world beyond, we all sat opposite each other, most our gazes on the man of the hour.

Kuzon's voice broke through the silence, his tone heavy with grim determination.

"I suppose it's time I told you all why we're here..."

He was the one who approached us on the prospect of a meeting, and I could tell that everyone was anxiously waiting for what he would say. Since we had concluded our business in this world, there was nothing else that tied us here.

Nothing except the apprehension that leaked from Kuzon.

"It's about Neron." Just as I expected, he revealed the root cause.

The atmosphere in the room grew tense as Kuzon's words hung in the air, their weight pressing upon most of us like an unspoken truth.

Aloa and I pretty much knew what the topic was about, and Ciara seemed to get the gist of the situation. Only Edward was left completely lost, and from his confused expression, it was left obvious.

"What about Neron? What's going on?" he asked, his brows furrowing with concern.

I exchanged a knowing glance with Kuzon, my mind already racing with possibilities.

Neron was our hero. We all knew how dear he was to each of us, so it was natural that this sort of discussion would be difficult to have.

I wasn't personally in support of it, since I felt we could just confront Neron on the issue, but merely doing that wouldn't satisfy Kuzon.

... And he was the one who had the key to take us home, so I just had to go along with it.

"It's about whether or not we should get him," I replied, my voice laced with a mixture of caution and determination.

I fixed my gaze upon Kuzon, a slight smile on my face. "Right?"

Kuzon nodded solemnly, his eyes reflecting the gravity of the situation. "We need to discuss the steps we should take concerning Neron and whether we can trust him going forward."

Curiosity and concern flickered in Edward's eyes as he leaned forward, his voice filled with inquiry. "What do you mean? Can't we trust him?"

Aloe's voice cut through the room, its edges sharp with caution. "Neron might not be all he seems to be. We cannot ignore the possibility that he might be an enemy in disguise. Or at least have some hidden agendas that will cause us more harm than good."

The weight of Aloe's words settled upon Edward, casting a somber pall over the room. The realization that someone we had come to rely on, someone who had basically saved the world, could potentially be plotting against us seemed absurd... or was I the only one who considered that?

"I personally feel we should just trust Neron. His methods might make us uncomfortable, but maybe..."

"Are you ignoring the fact that we've met other variants of Neron, Jared? Crazy Neron said not to trust any of them, and guess what? He's been proven right every time!"

"The Neron I encountered in the world I was transported to wasn't like that!"

"Are you so sure?"

"W-well..." I mean, from everything I noticed, he wasn't a villain at all.

He did everything for those he loved, and he genuinely cared about the world. He was more similar to the Neron from our world than any other version we encountered.

"We should consider all angles," Aloe interjected, her voice firm. "If it is determined that Neron poses a threat, we need to be prepared to eliminate him."

Silence followed her words as the gravity of our situation sunk in. Kuzon and Ciara nodded gently, all in agreement, while Edward still seemed confused.

"You guys... have you considered the possibility that Legris planned all of this to intentionally sow discord between us and Neron?"

"Jared. I don't think that excuses Neron's intentional inaction to send us sprawling across the branches without even telling us anything." Kuzon narrowed his gaze in a glare.

"He must have had his reasons." I realized how weak my argument was but I genuinely thought so.

"You're just being blinded by bias," Aloe sharply responded.

It was surprising that Aloe, of all people, would take this stance, but I could understand why. It must have been due to her interaction with Chad.

"Neron is our most powerful ally. You realize we need all the help we can get with the way things are going now, right? We can't just turn against Neron at a critical time like this."

"I know. Which is why I'm not suggesting we turn against him. I'm just saying we should be prepared for the worst. We can't fully trust him, so until we can determine whether or not we can trust him, we shouldn't rely on that possibility."

Edward, after receiving a refresher course from me through the use of Magic to bring him up to speed, finally spoke up.

"But how can we be certain? Based on what you're saying, how do we even determine if we can trust him?"

I nodded, snapping my fingers as I acknowledged the validity of his concern. "You're exactly right, Edward. At this point, what will satisfy you all to the point where he can be absolved of suspicion?"

Nothing could change the fact that Neron lied to us, or rather, refused to tell us the truth about everything until it was too late.

He risked the lives of our friends and families, and all without consulting anyone.

"Even if he should present a valid reason, his actions remain. I'm sure you'll find it hard to trust anything he says regardless of what he posits."

Kuzon's voice cut through the heavy silence, filled with determination. "We cannot afford to be complacent, Jared. I don't dislike Neron, but I refuse to have blind faith."

"I'm with Kuzon on this one." Aloe raised her hand. "If Neron decided to play God, he should be capable enough to justify himself."

With both Aloe and Kuzon on the other end, I stared at Ciara to see her take on the issue.

"Neron has always been a stranger to me. The fact that he separated me from Jerry is enough to warrant my dissatisfaction."

I knew it! Even Ciara was on the opposite end.

"But, I won't antagonize him or anything. I don't think we could stop him even if we tried."

This was yet another issue they had to account for.

"Neron is currently more powerful than any of us. Even if we discover he has bad intentions, what can we do about it?"

"I recommend taking a detour. Let's simply not save Neron, and just return home." Ciara snapped her fingers.

At that moment, we all stared at her with raised brows.

'Haaa... why did we even involve her? She just wants to quicken the journey so she can see Jerry faster.'

"I couldn't do that even if I wanted to. The Blu Blu automatically takes us to our destination, and I can't properly operate it." Kuzon admitted with a shrug.

'I'm sure he's thought of it, but since he doesn't have the expertise, he decided to let it be.'

I tried using [The Chariot] to connect to the device—at least to see if I could replicate it, but the interference was too strong that my Arcana didn't work at all.

Crazy Neron must have made this thing to be exempt from tinkering.

"What do you think Edward?" I asked, turning to the unusually silent God King.

"I think we should have more trust in Neron. Even if he did this for a selfish end, he has saved all of us in the past. Shouldn't we at least hear him out with an open mind?"

A smile formed on my face as I heard Edward's proposal.

It was the kind I would expect from someone like him.

"I agree with Edward." Declaring calmly, I established my position. "Neron is my friend, and he's someone who hasn't given us a reason to doubt him before."

He saved my life. He taught me how to grow stronger. He defeated the Aether, and despite all his power, he never really sought any selfish gain.

Why would he start doing so now? What could he possibly hope to gain?

"Well, Jared... I hope you and Edward are right." Kuzon made a wry smile. "And I hope we don't have to pay for your naivete."

I could tell that Kuzon was in stark disagreement with me, yet it didn't seem like he was going to reject my proposition.

"Fine, then. We'll trust him and see what he'll do."

"Thank you, Kuzon." I was glad he placed his trust in me.

"Not so fast, Jared. I'm only doing this because I owe Neron too."

I heard it was Neron who brought Kuzon into Ainzlark Academy and catered for him while he was in the Eastern Kingdom.

It must have taken a lot of gall for Kuzon to suddenly suspect him, so I understood what a tough call he had to make.

"But Jared, if Neron isn't who he says he is..." Kuzon's eyes narrowed as he stared at me.

It felt like his gaze was burrowing deep into my soul, and the silence felt utterly overwhelming.

"... It's all on you."

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Chapter 1035: What Neron Is Up To

[Ruined World]

"It's been a few months since we've started this journey, and yet we're not anywhere close to the goal..."

Neron and his doppelganger, a young Neron, sat beside a crackling campfire on a desolate planet.

They had been traveling together for months, searching for the scattered Arcanas that could help them achieve their individual goals.

For the older Neron, it was to return home, while for the younger one, it was to fix his world.

So far, they had found nine, but the older Neron couldn't help but express a tinge of disappointment.

He let out a sigh, his thoughts heavy on his mind.

Young Neron glanced at his older counterpart, his eyes reflecting curiosity. "What's bothering you, Neron? You seem kind of down."

The older Neron mustered a half-hearted smile. "Ah, it's nothing, kid. Just... thinking about our mission, you know?"

Young Neron raised an eyebrow. "Yeah? What about it? We're doing pretty good so far, aren't we?"

Neron shrugged, his gaze fixed on the dancing flames.

"Yeah, I guess. But it's just that... well, we've been at this for a while, and we've only found nine Arcanas. I was hoping for more progress by now."

"Arcanas aren't that easy to find, are they? According to what you told me, they're extremely difficult. It's almost a miracle we were able to find nine this easily."

"Hmm... maybe you're right." Neron murmured, his eyes focused on the flames.

Young Neron frowned, his brow furrowing. "Hey, don't sweat it, man. We'll find the rest soon enough. It's just a matter of time."

Perhaps it was because the lad was inexperienced, he has that cheerful and optimistic vibe around him.

Neron could see the twinkle in his eyes, and an expression of slight envy coursed through him.

When last was he able to depict such innocence?

He let out a rueful chuckle. "I hope you're right, kid. But that's not the only thing weighing on my mind."

Curiosity sparked in the young boy's eyes. "What else, then?"

Neron hesitated for a moment, searching for the right words. "Well... I can't help but wonder about the people I left behind."

"Your friends? You're worried about them?" The younger one asked, his brows raised slightly.

Throughout their journey, Neron hardly mentioned them in their conversations.

They usually just spoke about this world, and several other things like Magic and concepts.

"I'm not. Not really, anyway. They're probably even mad at me right now."

Young Neron leaned in, his voice filled with genuine concern. "Why would they be mad? You're trying to fix everything, aren't you?"

A hint of sadness colored older Neron's voice. "Yeah, I suppose so. But I made some important decisions without talking to them first."

His sad smile deepened and he sighed. "I reckon they might not be too happy about that."

Silence permeated the two as the cackling flames surged around them.

Young Neron's face contorted with surprise. "Wait, seriously? But... why? You're trying to do what's right, aren't you?"

Neron nodded, a tinge of remorse in his eyes. "Yeah, I am. But sometimes people get scared or lose hope. They might not understand the choices I've made. That's why I'm searching for the Arcanas as a backup plan, in case they don't come to rescue me."

Young Neron's gaze softened, a newfound understanding dawning on him. "So, you're tryinh to find another way, even if they give up on you?"

"Yeah. Or else there's the likelihood that I'll be trapped here."

That grim reality dawned on the young lad, causing him to gulp. If Neron was to fail in his mission, then who would help revive this world?

"You can't give up yet, am I right?"

Neron nodded again, determination etched on his face. "Exactly, kid. I won't give up, not for them or for myself. The Arcanas hold the answers we both need, and I'll keep looking, no matter what obstacles we face."

The two Neron counterparts sat in silence, the crackling fire providing the only soundtrack.

Bonded by their shared purpose and burdened by their individual responsibilities, they knew their journey was a test of their resilience and unwavering belief.

Together, they would continue their search for the scattered Arcanas, fueled by the hope that they would uncover the keys to their intertwined destinies.

'Jared and everyone else should be almost done gathering by now.' A soft smile formed on his face.

Images of his friend and lover rippled across his mind, and he found himself indulging in those thoughts.

He couldn't deny that he missed them.

'Which is why I should be prepared for the worst case scenario...' Neron's gaze fell on the dancing flames.

'It's all for the best...'

[Several Months Later]

Months had passed since their conversation by the campfire, and the Neron counterparts continued their tireless search for the remaining Arcanas.

As they ventured through treacherous landscapes and faced formidable challenges, their perseverance finally bore fruit.

Young Neron's voice rang out, filled with excitement and triumph.

"Neron! I found it! I found the last Arcana!" he called out, holding the final piece triumphantly in his hands.

The glowing card had an immense energy, as one would expect of an Arcana, and the brightness of the young boy's eyes was enough to sell anyone of the fact.

A mixture of relief and joy washed over Neron's face as he looked upon the complete set.

With all twenty-one Arcanas in their possession, they could now forge the ultimate one—[The World].

This final Arcana held the power for Neron to return to his own world and with all of them gathered together, Neron could finally save his junior's shattered reality.

It was the culmination of their arduous journey.

A wide smile graced Neron's face as he held the assembled Arcanas, feeling the weight of his accomplishment.

"We did it, kid," he said, his voice filled with satisfaction. "We have everything we need."

The younger Neron's eyes gleamed with a mixture of awe and curiosity. He glanced at Neron, his voice tinged with a touch of bitterness.

"You know, all this time, your friends never came for you," he remarked, his tone laced with disappointment. "Now that you've found another way home, do you even care about them anymore?"

Neron's smile remained unwavering as he met the young boy's gaze.

"Of course I do," he replied sincerely. He paused for a moment, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "In fact, there's a little secret I've been keeping from you."

Young Neron's eyebrows furrowed, his curiosity piqued. "A secret? What do you mean?"

Neron leaned in closer, his voice barely above a whisper.

"You see, kid, the truth is, I never really needed the Arcanas to save your world. I could have done it all on my own."

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Chapter 1036: The Cause Of Ruin

Confusion painted the younger Neron's face as he processed this revelation that his senior was bestowing on him.

The fact that his world could have been saved at any time.

"Then why... Why would you choose not to help, Neron? Why go through all these months of searching if you didn't need to?"

Neron's smile widened, a hint of mischief in his gaze. "Because I didn't want to," he replied simply.

Young Neron's confusion turned into frustration and hurt.

What was happening? Why was this happening? Even after months of traveling together, forging a respectful friendship... how could this happen?!

"I trusted you, Neron! I never should have. You betrayed me!"

In response, Neron's expression shifted, his eyes narrowing and his smile turning cold.

He met the young boy's gaze with an intensity that sent a shiver down his spine.

"Don't you already know...?" He stated, his voice icy.

"You should never trust a Neron,"

"S-shut up! I thought I could trust you! You said you would trust me too! Why did you suddenly become like this? After everything we've been through?"

Silence.

"Is it because you've finally gotten the Arcanas? You no longer need me, do you? You... you monster!"

Neron listened to the young boy's words, his expression calm and composed.

He knew he didn't have to address the confusion and hurt that filled the air between them.

'But whatever. Might as well...'

With a sigh, he began to unravel the truth that he had long suspected.

"Neron," He began, his voice tinged with a mixture of both lethargy and coldness.

"From the very beginning, I found it odd that a version of myself, no matter how young or inexperienced, would fail to save his own world and simply mope around about it."

Young Neron's eyes widened in surprise, the realization dawning on him. "What are you saying, Neron? What do you mean?"

Neron leaned back against a rocky outcrop, a wistful smile playing on his lips.

"You see, Nerons across the branches are often enigmatic personalities, tending to be either too selfish or too selfless in their pursuits. If I were to classify myself, I would fall into the selfish category."

Young Neron's brow furrowed in confusion. "Selfish? But why? What do you want?"

Neron's smile softened, and he locked eyes with the young boy.

"I want to be happy," he confessed, his voice filled with a mix of longing and determination. "But true happiness, for me, involves everyone I care about being happy as well."

Young Neron's voice trembled with a hint of frustration as he asked, "But even after all this time we've spent together, why don't you care about me? I've stuck by your side, unlike your friends who abandoned you."

Neron chuckled lightly, his eyes glinting with a hint of mischief.

"Oh, you really are such a fool," he remarked, his voice laced with a sense of amusement. "My friends didn't abandon me. It hasn't even been up three months since I arrived in this world. It just seemed much longer."

Confusion clouded the young boy's face as he struggled to grasp Neron's words.

"What do you mean? It's been almost a year already. They... they never came back for you!"

"Had it really? I already know about the temporal field, Neron. You manipulated time to make it seem like we had spent so long together. Not much time has elapsed since that conversation we had beside the campfire."

"W-what are you saying...?!" The young one's eyes twitched as he took a step back.

"Still going to play dumb, huh? Do you know why I intentionally made it seem like I probably had no assured other means of going home except the Arcanas, despite having complete trust in my friends?"

"I... what...?!"

"It's because I knew you would pull this move."

"W-why would I... do something like that? Why are you accusing me of these things? We've been together for so long, yet—!!!"

Neron's smile widened, his gaze unwavering. "Because I know you've been lying to me this whole time," he declared, his tone firm.

"I intentionally played along, waiting for the moment to reveal the truth."

Young Neron's eyes widened in shock and confusion, his voice barely a whisper. "What... What truth? I don't understand."

Neron's gaze bore into the young boy, his smile unwavering.

"The truth is, my dear Neron, that your world wasn't destroyed by some external force like the Nether or an extraterrestrial threat," he revealed, his voice cutting through the air.

"It was destroyed by you."

The young boy's mouth gaped open, his eyes filled with disbelief. He stammered, trying to find words to defend himself. "No, that... That can't be true! I... I didn't..."

Neron's voice grew cold and calculated.

"Save your lies. The jig is up," he said, his voice dripping with certainty.

"I know everything. There's no point in pretending any further.

The young boy's façade cracked, his shock and confusion slowly melting away.

"I see. So you realized that, huh?"

"Yes. I know these Arcanas aren't the actual thing. You just set up this whole farce if an Arcana hunt because you didn't want to seem too suspicious.

"Haaa... I see." Slowly, a twisted smile began to form on the young boy's face.

"You wanted me to try to use the Arcanas and create [The World] so that you could travel to my world and destroy it... the same way you destroyed this place."

"Pfft! You even knew about that, huh? I guess I really underestimated you."

At this point, the young Neron no longer had the cute and innocent expression one would expect from a kid his age.

Instead, a sinister gaze rested on his face, and his lips twisted to form an amused smile.

"I made you underestimate me, so it's not really your fault. From the very beginning, I knew you were already in possession of the Arcanas, but I pretended not to know anything. You intentionally spread out the search of the Arcanas, making them difficult to find—based on how I told you they were."

Truthfully, Neron's senses could cover the entire universe if he tried.

Finding an Arcana, or pretty much anything substantial, wasn't going to pose a problem to him.

Yet it took months to find all of them.

"You operated on my narrative this whole time. And while you must have desperately wanted me to use the Arcanas so you could find a way to my world, you also thought my friends could come for, granting you yet another access, so you decided to hide your time."

But the moment Neron made it seem uncertain that his friends would even show up, the younger Neron switched up his tactics and decided to use Time Magic to quicken the process of finding the rest of the Arcanas while probably replacing himself with a duplicate within the time-dilated reality.

"That's pretty much the whole thing, isn't it?"

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Chapter 1037: Evil Neron

The young Neron smiled devilishly at the older fellow before him, his mind racing with a mixture of astonishment and admiration.

He couldn't help but be impressed by his opponent's ability to uncover his carefully crafted plan.

Never before had he encountered someone who had managed to lead him on and deceive him for such an extended period of time.

The older Neron's intelligence shone through, and he couldn't deny that he had been outwitted.

A smile played on the younger Neron's lips as he looked at his counterpart, his eyes filled with a mix of intrigue and excitement.

"But what of it?" he said, his voice laced with a hint of amusement.

"You've discovered my little game, Neron. But so what?"

Neron's eyes narrowed slightly as he studied the younger version, his voice firm and steady. "Well... for starters, I'll make sure you don't get to destroy my world."

A flash of defiance sparked in the younger Neron's eyes as he stepped forward, his voice dripping with dark satisfaction.

"You misunderstand, Neron. My path is not one of destruction for destruction's sake. It is about the thrill, the stimulation, the chaos."

Neron's brow furrowed, his expression a mix of concern and resolve.

"You speak of stimulation, but at what cost? The lives you've destroyed, the suffering you've caused. Is it worth it?"

A sly grin curved the younger Neron's lips as he raised a hand, fingers crackling with a dark energy.

"You speak of cost as if it holds any meaning to me. I have conquered countless worlds, laid them to ruin, and reveled in the chaos I've wrought."

The older Neron's eyes remained unimpressed as he shrugged.

"You revel in chaos and destruction? You take pleasure in causing pain and suffering? You aren't the first I've seen who's that messed up in the head."

The younger Neron's laughter echoed through the air, chilling in its tone.

"Oh, Neron, you see, I have grown bored with such pursuits. They no longer hold the same thrill for me. But you, you possess the potential to bring excitement back into my existence."

"Oh? How so?"

"Think about it! All these worlds I've conquered, all these lives I've destroyed... they are inconsequential to me. They hold no value at all! They're nothing more than Lumos of meat. That lack of sentiment gives me no satisfaction as I put an end to their miserable existence."

"I see. So you want to destroy my world in particular because you got to know me well. Is that it?"
Neron smiled, sighing gently.

"Precisely! It's the reason why I never simply resorted to a mere clone, but decided to share all these months with you—talking and getting closer to you. It would be more stimulating killing your friends and family knowing that I was once close to you!"

"Damn. That's some twisted logic right there."

"Is it? I mean, I had to kill my parents, my friends, my family... everyone back in my original world for stimulation. I haven't quite felt that same high again, but maybe with you, it could be different!" The younger Neron's eyes glinted with an unsettling mix of amusement and challenge.

"If it brings you any comfort, I killed my biological parents too. I guess we're similar in that respect, though the circumstances are quite different..."

In the end, one was downright cold blooded murder, while the other was... complicated.

"Hahaha! You amuse me, Neron! How about we form an alliance? I want you as a partner, an equal. Together, we can create a symphony of chaos, a dance of manipulation that will leave our mark on countless worlds."

More echoes of maniacal laughter echoed from the younger Neron, whose face now contorted in ugly malevolence

Neron's gaze bore into the younger version, his voice as casual as it was nonchalant.

"I think I'll pass."

A flicker of disappointment passed across the younger Neron's face, quickly replaced by a wicked grin.

"You may resist now, Neron, but I can sense it deep within you. The allure of chaos, the craving for stimulation. It calls to you, just as it calls to me."

"You are right. In a way, I was seeking stimulation. I have always been pursuing some sort of meaning—an interesting prospect to keep me engaged. To make me feel alive."

"See? See?! You get it! You get it completely!!!"

"Even when I first met Jared, I found him interesting, which is why I got close to him. I didn't have my memories then, but he was just intriguing. Particular because I sensed a portion of myself in him."

"Well, I don't know about all that, but I can see we're similar, Neron. So why don't you join me?" The young boy offered, his loud voice echoing nothing but a dark expectation

"Can I ask you something first?" Neron stared at the younger version, his eyes filled with curiosity.

"Huh? What is it?"

"Tell me, what do you think about magic? Or power in general?"

The younger Neron tilted his head, contemplating the question for a moment. A small smirk tugged at the corner of his lips as he responded

"Magic, to me, is merely a means to an end. It has always come so easily to me, like second nature. But it became mundane, lacking the challenge and excitement I craved. That's why I sought another form of stimulation, something that would give me purpose."

Neron nodded, a glimmer of understanding in his eyes.

"We truly are similar, you and I," he remarked, his voice tinged with a hint of admiration. "We both possess a hunger for something greater, a thirst for power and the thrill of the unknown. But there is one critical difference between us."

The younger Neron raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "And what might that be, Neron?"

Neron's smile widened as he leaned in, his gaze intense.

"Purpose."

"What?!"

"I have realized the purpose behind my power, the reason for my existence," he explained, his voice carrying a note of conviction.

Confusion flickered across the younger Neron's face as he furrowed his brow. "What do you mean? What purpose could there possibly be?"

Neron's eyes bore into the younger version, his voice steady and resolute. "Power without purpose is empty. It is merely a tool, a force that can be wielded, but lacks true direction. It is this understanding that sets us apart. It is why I will be the one to win."

"You speak of purpose, but what purpose could be in Magic other than the pursuit of power? In the end, you either get stronger or weaker."

"Precisely." Neron spoke, taking a step closer to the young one before him. "The stronger you are, the more you can do, the weaker you are, the less you are able to achieve."

"It's just as my Master taught me back then..." He smiled, remembering his past with the only woman he ever felt was truly stronger than he was.

"... We make our own meaning through power. The more power you have, the more meaning you can make. The greater the possibilities are, and the less the limitations apply to you."

"You're just using fancy words to justify your thirst for more power, aren't you? You sick bastard! Don't pretend you're better than me!"

Neron's smile turned wistful, tinged with a hint of sadness. "Not exactly. Believe it or not, but I never really liked Magic, to begin with."

The air crackled with tension as the two Nerons stared at each other.

"But the people I met... the experiences I had... they changed my perception of everything I once knew."

Silence radiated from their confrontation as Neron took steps forward, undeterred by the glare he received.

"Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely..." Neron smiled.

"But truly unlimited power is a blank canvas. As long as I am the artist... there will never exist fools like you."

"W-what are you trying to say? What do you think you're trying to do? You think you can stop me?"

The Evil Neron, however, called upon his own powers, channeling shadows that swirled around him like a tempest, negating the effects of the lightning.

The battle continued unabated, their movements fluid and precise. Neron conjured a swirling vortex of fire that engulfed the younger evil Neron, engulfing him in a blazing inferno.

But just as it seemed the flames would consume his adversary, the younger evil Neron unleashed a counter spell, summoning a freezing blizzard that extinguished the flames and encased Neron in ice.

With a lackluster roar, Neron shattered his icy prison, shards of ice exploding outward in a dazzling display.

He retaliated with a wave of raw telekinetic force, hurtling debris at his doppelganger with devastating speed.

The younger evil Neron responded by manipulating gravity itself, causing the debris to veer off course, harmlessly floating away.

The battle raged on, each Neron displaying unparalleled mastery over their powers. Reality itself strained under the weight of their relentless assaults.

Stars were torn asunder, galaxies collapsed in on themselves, and celestial bodies were reduced to cosmic dust.

Their powers clashed in an intricate dance, neither giving an inch as they fought for dominance.

"[Celestial Pillars Of Light]."

Neron summoned pillars of light that pierced through the darkness, illuminating the battlefield with blinding radiance.

But the younger Neron, tapping into his darker abilities, conjured tendrils of shadow that snaked through the brilliance, smothering the light with an impenetrable darkness.

The clash between them reached a crescendo, a cataclysmic eruption of power that rent the very fabric of space.

They weaved through the chaos, exchanging blows with astonishing speed and precision. Their movements were a blur, a symphony of violence and destruction.

"[Re:Creation]."

A surge of energy coursed through Neron's being as he unleashed a spell of unparalleled magnitude.

The very fabric of reality trembled as the Spell of Creation surged forth, restoring what had been torn asunder, healing the wounds inflicted upon the universe.

However, this wasn't an actor of benevolence. at all.

"[Absolute Center]."

A flash of light flickered on Neron's finger as he pointed it at his opponent.

"I thought you would be stronger, though..."

"Hahahah! Big words!" With a burst of energy, the younger evil Neron launched himself at Neron, fists crackling with dark energy.

The clash of their blows sent shockwaves rippling through the cosmos, causing celestial bodies to shatter and reality to warp.

The battle raged on, each Neron countering the other's attacks with precision and skill. Their powers intertwined, creating dazzling displays of light and darkness that tore through space itself.

Planets were reduced to dust, and galaxies trembled at the sheer force of their clash.

Evil Neron laughed, his voice dripping with malevolence.

"You can't defeat me, Neron. It'll be a battle of attrition, wearing each other down until one of us finally succumbs."

Neron's eyes sparkled with a mix of determination and amusement.

"Ah, but you forget, dear counterpart. I have something you lack," he muttered, his voice barely audible amidst the chaos.

Evil Neron raised an eyebrow, curiosity piqued. "And what might that be, Neron? What advantage could you possibly possess?"

"Help... I guess?"

"Hahaha! And where's the help?"

Evil Neron's eyes widened in realization, a mixture of disgust and condescension crossing his features.

"So that's how it is. You're buying time for your friends to come, aren't you?" he growled.

"Well..."

"If that's the case, then I should just end your life and wait for them to arrive. Once they do, I'll use them to return to your world, Neron. You realize what that means, don't you?"

Suddenly, Evil Neron's body burst in celestial energy, and his Arcanas danced around him with glorious splendor.

"... I have no use for you any longer."

The clash intensified as the Arcanas unleashed their incredible energies, amplifying Evil Neron's already formidable abilities.

Stars exploded in bursts of cosmic energy, creating shockwaves that rippled across the universe.

Reality warped and twisted under the strain, threatening to unravel.

Amidst the chaos, Neron's voice cut through the tumultuous maelstrom.

"Why are you so weak, though?" he taunted, his words carrying a hint of pity.

"This isn't so different from before."

Evil Neron's face contorted with anger, his eyes burning with rage. "Weak? Me? I am not weak!" he bellowed, unleashing a devastating wave of destruction.

Neron's smile remained unyielding as he deflected the attack effortlessly.

"No, you are. When you said you had destroyed countless worlds and mowed down innumerable civilizations, I expected more."

The younger evil Neron roared in fury, launching a relentless assault. But Neron danced through the chaos, his movements fluid and precise.

"But I think I understand why you were able to succeed thus far..."

He weaved through the onslaught, countering with calculated strikes that struck at the core of his counterpart's being.

"You never encountered an actual challenge. You never met people like Jared, or my Master."

Their battle continued, a symphony of destruction that stretched across the cosmos.

The clash of their powers shattered stars, ruptured galaxies, and tore through the very fabric of existence.

"If you had, you probably wouldn't be here right now. How fortunate for you. Of all the infinite branches, the ones you managed to conquer were easy."

"SHUUUUUT UUUUUUUP!!!"

As their powers collided with unparalleled fury, the universe trembled under the weight of their conflict.

Evil Neron unleashed an all-encompassing attack that threatened to swallow everything whole, including Neron, but the man was still not fazed.

"You truly do not know what absolute power is, do you? In that case..." Neron's eyes gleamed even brighter, and his glorious form undertook another transformation.

"Let me show you. Libra. Sagittarius. Capricorn... it's your turn."

In that instant, Neron's appearance changed.

He now had flowing white apparel, with what appeared to be a scale floating on his right shoulder, an arrow on his left one, and a majestic incorporeal clock behind him.

His white hair grew even longer and a strange design appeared on his face, around his eyes and on his forehead, resembling a universal concept that defined explanation.

Finally, in front of him appeared a concept similar to a small universe. It was woven to resemble an orb, but it literally depicted the cosmos, galaxies, and innumerable stars within it.

"W-what is... what is that?!" The younger counterpart froze in his tracks, his Aether and the culmination of all his Arcanas seeming like fragile embers compared to the immeasurable power that manifested before him.

"This is why I said you're weak." Neron smiled, stretching his hand towards the paralyzed foe while donning nothing short of a bored expression.

An immense cluster of light formed on his palm, locked onto the despairing Neron that stood powerless and unable to move in the slightest.

"N-no... please no...."

"I won't even need Primeval Magic to finish this."

The light erupted, bathing the entire universe in its might.

"NOOOOOOOO!!!" The boy's voice echoed in the void, but Neron's unattached gaze showed it no concern whatsoever.

"Don't worry. It'll be as though you never existed."

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Chapter 1039: Connecting Pieces

After the cataclysmic battle, the universe lay in ruins, its once majestic stars reduced to flickering embers.

Neron stood amidst the devastation, his body still charged with the remnants of power.

The Arcanas, which had once been the major source of Evil Neron's power, now floated around him, their glow dimmed, almost as if acknowledging the gravity of the events that had unfolded.

As the dust settled, Neron gazed around, taking in the extent of the destruction. He knew that the consequences of this battle extended far beyond this single universe.

'But none of that matters at this point...'

Evil Neron's temporal erasure meant that not only had he been erased from existence, but the causality of countless other universes that the lunatic had destroyed would also be restored.

This one included.

'It would be as if he never existed.'

~I can't believe you summoned three of us just for that. How underwhelming...~

The moment Neron heard Capricorn's words, he sense a good amount of tongue-lashing heading his way.

Using the powers of Constellations to fight back the Nether was one thing, but to simply use all three of them on an opponent like the one he just defeated was another issue entirely.

~I know, right? Neron, you should be more responsible with your power.~ Sagittarius sighed, and Neron could feel it shaking its head.

The two who complained were self-proclaimed members of the upper echelon in the Constellation ranks, though Neron doubted such a thing really even existed.

Sagittarius and Capricorn wouldn't stand for the casual use of their powers.

'Well, they represent Adaptability and Liberation, so I can understand their skepticism...'

~You should both calm down and understand. He did this to save all those other universes. Right, Neron?~ Libra, always the voice of reason, gently spoke up in his defense.

She was always so nice and understanding when it came to him. As expected of the Representation of Balance.

"Um..." Neron didn't know what to say since he knew deep down that he mostly did what he did out of pettiness.

'I actually just wanted to show off a little...'

Sure, he planned on saving all those other worlds, but he could have carried that out in another way.

"Well, it doesn't matter. All's well that ends well." Neron shrugged aside the complaints of his nagging Familiars.

~Whatever...~

~I mean, it was slightly stimulating...~

~You did well, Neron!~

Sometimes, Neron felt like a kid when he was talking to these three. The Constellations felt like his parents or older siblings.

Though he knew they wouldn't hesitate to heed his call if he wanted.

"Thanks, you three. What would I ever do without you?"

~Hehe... as long as you know that!~

~Well, I wouldn't mind coming to play next time too.~

~You know I'll do anything for you, Neron!~

'... And sometimes they act like kids.' Neron smiled as he felt their warmth course through his soul.

With a deep breath, Neron finally deactivated his Grand Fusion State.

The immense power that had surged through his veins slowly dissipated, leaving him feeling drained but content.

He looked down at the universal landscape, his gaze traveling over the scars and marks that bore testimony to the intensity of the fight.

It was over, and he had emerged victorious.

"And now, it begins..."

As he focused his attention on the universe around him, he saw a sight that filled him with awe.

The Temporal Erasure Spell had begun its work, erasing every trace of Evil Neron's existence. In response, the fabric of reality itself seemed to stitch itself back together, restoring the universe to its former glory.

Streaks of vibrant colors streaked across the cosmos, like paint on a vast canvas. Stars that had been extinguished reignited with newfound vigor, their light shimmering through the expanse.

Nebulas danced with renewed vitality, casting their cosmic hues across the celestial landscape. It was a symphony of cosmic rebirth, a visual feast that filled Neron's face with satisfaction.

"Looks like this one occurred late because it was the last world he got to destroy. The other universes should already be restored by now."

He smiled, everything else momentarily forgotten as he witnessed the beauty of the universe's restoration.

"It looks beautiful." He murmured to himself, his voice a mix of admiration and relief.

Neron took a step forward, his feet gliding over the ethereal remnants of the battle. The Arcanas, sensing his tranquility, began to hum softly, their power resonating with the harmony of the universe.

"Well, off you go." With a gentle wave of his hand, he guided the Arcanas, releasing their energy back into the cosmos.

As he stood there, surrounded by the majesty of the restored universe, Neron felt a profound sense of peace.

The purpose that had driven him on this journey remained unchanged, and experiencing sights like this reminded him of the validity of his cause.

"Looks like it's about time now."

>VWUUUUSSSSHHH<

A brilliant golden portal materialized behind Neron, casting a warm glow on his lean figure.

As he turned to face it, the smile on his face broadened. Standing before him were his long-awaited friends—Jared, Kuzon, Edward, Ciara, and Aloe.

"You came," Neron whispered, his voice laced with relief and excitement. However, their expressions were far from the joyous reunion he had anticipated.

Neron's smile wavered as he took in the sternness etched upon their faces. He swallowed hard, the weight of their expectations pressing upon him.

He met their gazes, searching for any signs of forgiveness or understanding, but all he found were eyes filled with questions and disappointment.

'Oh, boy. It really is the worst-case scenario.'

Even Jared didn't seem pleased in the slightest. Neron thought if anyone could understand, it would be him.

Jared took a step forward, his expression grave. The lines on his face deepened, revealing the burden of the knowledge he now possessed.

"Neron..." He began, his voice firm and his eyes filled with objectivity.

The scene froze at that moment, the unspoken tension hanging heavy in the air.

"... You have a lot of explaining to do."

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

Chapter 1040: Neron's Explanation

We all watched Neron in palpable silence, waiting for him to give us an acceptable answer so he could justify himself.

Since we arrived in this world, I had spread my senses as far as I could reach, and nothing really seemed out of the ordinary.

We were currently among the stars, in space, and while Aloe, Kuzon and I could use Aether to protect ourselves, I feared that Ciara would be in trouble.

... Until I noticed she too was using Aether.

'Huh? How...?!'

I wanted to say something, but that could wait until later.

For now, Neron was the center of attraction, and I had to know what his motives were.

'I'm not particularly angry at him too. This is just a front I use to show my objectivity. At the very least, Kuzon won't complain about this.'

With that in tow, I narrowed my gaze on Neron. Nothing about him had changed at all, and I was honestly happy to find him well.

Hopefully, the next words that came out of his mouth would make all of this worthwhile.

"I apologize for not informing you all of the plan. It was selfish and inconsiderate of me. It won't happen again, I promise." Neron bowed his head slowly, and then raised it back up slowly.

"E-eh...?"

I was confused as much as I was surprised.

'Does he really think an apology will cut it?'

Neron was smarter than that, so what was he trying to play? Did he really think we would just let all of this slide?

"Neron... we just want an explanation." I sighed, finally breaking my tense act.

"You must have known all of this would happen, yet you didn't say a thing. We want to know why."

Neron's stoic face didn't seem at all apologetic despite me spelling out the situation to him.

He simply looked at us with a blank expression, as though unsure of what his crime was.

"Isn't that normal when it comes to strategy, though?" He asked.

"What??" This time, Kuzon was the one who exploded.

He had been holding in his frustration since we arrived, deciding I should take the lead role, but it seemed he had reached his wit's end.

"Relax, Kuzon. I already apologized for the inconveniences you experienced. Besides, it seems you're focusing a lot on the disadvantages that you aren't even considering the outweighing advantages." Neron sighed a little.

"That doesn't justify—"

"Jared, thanks to your experiences, I'm sure you've broadened your horizons in Magic. Kuzon, you got trained by that Grand Singularity, and Aloe... you've learned valuable lessons on your journey. Ciara as well. Edward, you had the opportunity to cultivate your power in peace. There are also long-lasting effects of this whole thing that will be unraveled eventually, so it was more to your benefit than not."

Neron's words were already melting away the little source of resistance that existed within me.

'I actually trust him, but a part of me could relate to Kuzon's dissatisfaction...'

And now, that part of me was slowly fading away.

"You say that, but what of the risks involved? You just allowed us to be thrown into a new world without—"

"I won't excuse the impulsiveness of my actions, and I believe I already apologized for them. That's as far as I can go with apologies, unfortunately." Neron glanced at Kuzon especially.

"If you spoke to the Old Man, you should already know that no one is dead. I specifically made sure of that."

Kuzon was already lost for words the moment Neron brought that up.

"The problem with your line of reasoning is that you're focusing a lot on the abruptness of the situation, and I understand that it might be tempting to feel betrayed since I didn't reveal the details of my plan to you, but I expected you all to at least understand that it was necessary."

"You could have just told us." Kuzon insisted.

"I couldn't risk Legris knowing about my intentions. You realize I also hid Information from myself until the appropriate time, right? Why do you think that is?"

I had also wondered why Neron erased his memories of his past failure. People learned from their mistakes, but according to his line of logic, he didn't want to be influenced by his past life's actions, except in smaller details.

Aether already explained it to me, so I understood now.

"The past destruction of the world has been avoided, but Legris' plan is still in motion. He joined the Nether Cult because he wanted to gather the Arcanas, so he could gain access to [The World]."

But what did he want to use [The World] for? Wasn't it to transport us to this world? But if so, then what was his actual plan?

"Legris brought us all here so we wouldn't be a bother to his goals, and I decided to allow it in order to give him the illusion of control. Doesn't that sound familiar to you, Jared?"

'W-what?!' Neron was thinking exactly as I would.

This was what Kuzon was talking about, after all.

I really was taking after Neron.

"You can't just act that way around people. We aren't pawns. We're living individuals."

"You are pawns. This is war, Kuzon. Don't act so naive. With all of existence at stake, do you think I have the time to worry about someone's feelings in order to make the right call?"

Kuzon's glare intensified instantly.

"I took into account that your feelings might be hurt, which is why I apologized. But did you honestly think I would be considerate of your emotions if there was a chance that you and everyone would be destroyed because of it?" Neron didn't appear upset, but his tone indicated some degree of disappointment in all of us.

"Someone has to make the hard choices. It's the epitome of responsibility. If you knew what I know, and saw what I see... you would do exactly the same thing."

Neron's words honestly resonated with me. They sounded so pure and true.

"I care about all of you. It's why I've gone through the trouble of ensuring you follow a set path that leads to optimal results. You can either choose that, or destruction."

It seemed Neron had no intention of being apologetic any longer.

"Ask yourselves a simple question. What would change if I had told you everything? Would it change the fact that you still had to go to those worlds? Would it have changed the fact that you all made it safe and sound here? There are nigh infinite worlds, and the ones you happened to fall into were universes where you were stronger than everyone else. Did you think of that as coincidences?"

Neron must have orchestrated everything with us in mind.

"I protected you all. I protected everyone back home. And I did it in a way that a greater good would come from the experience."

I could finally understand where Neron was coming from.

'From where he stands, he has done nothing particularly wrong.'