

## SPELLCRAFT 551

### SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

#### Chapter 551: The Emperor [Pt 2]

"O-okay, calm down. Please?"

"You know the only thing that I listen to, Kuzon." The intensity all around me rose again.

A brief moment of tense silence pervaded the air, and even I found myself gulping in suspense.

"Um... ah, this is embarrassing..." Kuzon rubbed his hand on his face and sighed.

For some reason, it felt like he was reporting to his mother, or a superior.

That was the vibe I was getting from the boy's interaction with the Familiar.

'This is crazy!'

"Pweety Pwease?"

"Eh?"

Did Kuzon just make a cute sound, or was it only me that heard it?

I looked behind me, to see my team, and they were all laughing. Ana was blushing for some reason, though.

'Does she find that hot? What a weirdo.'

"Hahaha! Now that's what I like to see. Kuzon, you've sure grown, but you can never outgrow me! Hehehe." The Familiar laughed.

'I shouldn't waste this chance.'

While Kuzon was still in a flustered state, and his Familiar was conversing so casually, I had to take my shot.

'Original Magic... The Tower... and then Vermillion Nova!'

[Vermillion Rupture] would have been better, but that took too long to prepare.

Since I was simply exploiting a window of opportunity, I had to make do with the time I had.

>WHUUUUSHHHHH<

My body was shrouded in Mana, and my Memoir appeared, right on time.

Flipping its pages in a flash, I felt the space around me warp. The destructive Mana of my Spell began converging, and I prepared to devastate the targets.

"Oh? What's this? Mana?" The flaming lady glanced in my direction.

'Uh?!' Did she notice what I was doing?

I was using [The Tower] Arcana to conceal the immense Mana I was gathering.

By teleporting the Spell to their location so it would explode at point-blank, I would ensure complete accuracy.

However—

'How did she figure it out?

—The flaming lady's eyes were sharply on me.

"You interrupted our conversation. That's quite rude, you know? You want me to handle this guy for you, Kuzon?"

"No. There's no need for you to do it. I just need a bit of your power."

"Hmmm? Okay then."

For some reason, the Familiar didn't bother with the Spell I was preparing. Was it really going to be powerless before the might of both Kuzon and the flaming lady?

[Vermillion Nova] was one of my most destructive Spells, and since I could use it quickly, it was simple.

'So far, I've not gotten nearly enough information to record in my Great Sage's Memoir...'

I couldn't get very close, so feeling things out was the best I could do.

>VWUUUUSSSHHH<

The flaming lady merged with Kuzon, and I saw his body glow for a moment until it returned to normal.

'Nothing happened? No, wait... he feels different from before.'

I couldn't describe it, but the Mana I felt around and on Kuzon had vanished. At this point, I could only feel energy.

And it was intense.

"Let's try this again, shall we?"

Several more of his golden blades appeared, formed by his threads weaved together.

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

Once again, they launched at me with blinding speed.

I didn't need to react to the golden blurs, so I once again went for my Anti Magic option. However—

'Uh?! It didn't wor—'

The blades were already close to piercing my body and impaling me on all ends.

Fortunately, I got teleported to a different location thanks to my Original Magic's response.

'A-ahh... Haa...?!'

I was now looking around in utter confusion.

'Why didn't Anti-Magic work?'

It was working earlier, but suddenly...

'It must be due to that Familiar's interference. But, what did she do?'

More questions sprang up in my head, so I decided to observe a little more.

"Now that I know it works, I'll be finishing this quickly."

>SWUUUUSSSHHHHH!!!<

Kuzon's golden threads swirled around, and several Magic Beasts were formed with nothing but his thin wires.

The creatures all looked like genuine beasts, having distinct features.

Not only were they humongous, but they appeared feral, and the concentration of energy on them was immense.

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

The golden beasts lunged at me, and I teleported every time they got close.

'Running away is getting annoying!' I snapped in annoyance, ready to retaliate.

'[Vermillion Nova]'

I manifested the vermilion orb that was filled with condensed energy.

Its power was enough to clear the entire area, and I launched it at the center of the creatures.

>BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!<

"That packs quite the punch," Kuzon murmured.

As the smoke cleared, I noticed he was unharmed.

'Then, what of the constructs...?' My eyes bulged as I noticed that they too... were unharmed.

The entire area had suffered damage, yet the golden creatures were completely fine?

'How is this?!'

One of them jumped at me, but I instantly made to switch positions with it, making its attacks futile.

But...

'It's not working?!'

... Nothing was effective!

'Does Kuzon have Anti-Magic too?'

I found myself hung up on so many questions. This wasn't a battle any longer. I was simply trying to unravel a mystery.

'I'll have to use Spellcraft!'

>VWUUUUSSSHHH<

Using Grand Fusion Mode, Mage Mode, and Elemental Chamber all at once, I felt my body swell with power.

It was time to take this fight seriously.

With several elements, like particles of light, dancing around me, I hovered in the air within an indestructible orb of Mana.

My body glowed brightly, a culmination of several Familiars—half bright, and half dark.

'I'll be using Mana and Miasma in tandem, alongside Anti Magic...'

If I utilized Spellcraft, the attacks would be even more lethal.

My Original Magic would also respond to any situation I couldn't foresee.

Kuzon was giving me more trouble than I expected—and he seemed to be holding back—but I was sick of playing defense.

'I should wrap this up quickly... and make him join our group!'

>WHOOOOOSSSHHHH<

I darted in Kuzon's direction, fully aware of the threads that always danced around him.

The concentration of energy grew denser the closer I approached, but I could use Spellcraft to turn everything in my favor!

'U-uh...?!' I noticed something as soon as I got closer to Kuzon.

My eyes widened, and I saw a smile form on his face.

At that moment, I knew... that something was awfully wrong with the situation.

"What's wrong with your face, Jared?" Kuzon's smile grew more intense as he stood still and watched.

He seemed to be enjoying the show.

"Teleporting around, testing the waters, critically examining me... it makes no difference." Taking one step forward, Kuzon sent shivers down my spine.

"In the end, no one beats the Emperor."

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

**Chapter 552: The Inevitable Loser**

My Automatons and Golems were pulverized.

Anti Magic was ineffective.

Original Magic was barely hanging on.

I thought I could turn the tide by using more power and forcing the situation back in my favor.

Using my powerful transformations in addition to my ultimate weapon, Spellcraft.

However, I realized something when I drew closer to Kuzon.

I understood why all my Automatons were pulverized, even before his Familiar made an appearance.

'T-this is—?!'

Spellcraft wasn't working!!!'

"You get it now, don't you?" Golden lightning manifested on the boy's body as he smiled at me.

Several golden threads converged in various locations and formed arsenals of weapons around me.

Without Spellcraft, and the viability of Anti Magic, I had nothing to defend myself from the barrage of attacks he was sending.

I had many abilities at my disposal, but the quality of Kuzon's Magic was superior.

'I have to retreat. I'll use my Original Magic to—!'

To my shock, even my Original Magic dissolved.

"What?!"

My transformation became undone, and I was stripped of all the power I accumulated in an instant.

'What is going on here?!'

I didn't understand anything. It happened so quickly, and in such a strange way, that I couldn't comprehend the slightest bit of it.

"This should finish things."

Now willing his suspended blades to move, Kuzon aimed all of them at my defenseless body.

'I can't use all the Spells in my Original Magic anymore. That meant I can't teleport away, use any of my other Arcanas or summon shields for myself.'

Spellcraft was also useless, and using a Spell from scratch seemed to be the only alternative.

'I'll defend myself and—'

The moment I activated a Spell, it was deactivated.

"Shit!" I watched the blades move slightly.

They were going to launch at any moment.

'It seems whatever Mana or Magic that leaves my body loses effect.'

Since I understood the effects of Anti Magic—Kuzon had to be using something similar—I decided to use the loophole.

'I'll just enhance myself and escape!' With that in mind, I used Mana to strengthen myself from within.

I would just resort to physical abilities.

Once I got out of his range, I would summon my blade and other Magic Items.

It was best to use those rather than raw power.

'Martial Arts should do the trick, considering he still isn't superior in that aspect.'

If I used [The Hermit] to quicken my body, and [The Sun] to strengthen myself further, I could guarantee victory.

It was risky to use the latter, but I was going to be careful. In the end, I just had to win!

'U-uh...?!' I realized something after thinking about what to do next.

'I... can't move...?!'

So many weird and unexpected things had happened, but I didn't expect things to reach this degree.

'Is he binding me with his threads? No, I don't think so...'

Still, I felt something holding me down.

I couldn't move. I simply stood still, seemingly under the control of some higher power.

Just as gravity kept every person down, it felt as natural as that. As though I was naturally bound by the laws of whatever was holding me in my position.

"You have some Arcanas in your possession, Jared. Didn't you ever think for a second that I would have one too?" Kuzon interrupted my thoughts with his usual smile.

Of course, I factored that into my calculations. But, without knowing the Arcana he possessed, I couldn't prepare countermeasures.

Besides, it wasn't like I knew the abilities of every single Arcana. The most I could do was make guesses based on inference.

In essence, Kuzon had the element of surprise.

'But, I figured I had an advantage considering I have four... hold on!' My eyes bulged the moment I realized there was one more Arcana I had yet to take into account.

[Strength].

"This is your loss, Jared."

With that, the golden blades came crashing down.

>BOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!<

An instant gust of power erupted from my position, destroying the blades that nearly got me.

"Haa... that was a close one." I smiled, emerging from the center of the blast.

The energy around me shone in multiple colors—and it was still very unstable—but it felt similar to the kind of power I felt from Kuzon.

"You saved me, Merlin." I smiled at the glowing Arcana with relief.

I was desperate back when Kuzon was about to end things, so I resonated with the Arcana in my pocket.

Fortunately, it responded to my call and created a wave of energy.

If it hadn't been for its interference, I would have been done for.

"So you had a card up your sleeves? [Strength], uh? That's an interesting pick. Do you even know what it does?"

'Just how much does Kuzon know? He knows of this Arcana's effects?'

I gritted my teeth and readied my stance, bracing for the next attack.

'I can move!' Upon realizing this, I hurriedly escaped from Kuzon's reach before it was too late.

However—

>SWUUUSHHH<

—Kuzon suddenly appeared before me in a golden flash of lightning.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Before I could say or do anything else, he grabbed me by my throat, sending an immeasurable amount of his golden electricity.

As I felt the currents course through me, I found myself unable to do anything—not even resonate with the Arcana in my grasp.

The pain alone could drive any person insane, and the only reason I could hold on to my sanity was because of my immense fortitude.

Plus, I was protecting myself internally. That was the best I could do with the current situation.

"GAHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Kuzon mercilessly kept his attack up, refusing to stop.

I thought it was going to last forever, when—

"I should stop now."

—He suddenly released me of his own volition.

Falling to the ground with a thud, I let out a relieved gasp.

Sparks of lightning danced around my body, causing me to spasm in agony.

"Sorry, Jared. I went too far. I forgot... that I wasn't trying to kill you."

The look in his eyes showed he genuinely meant what he said—both the apology and the intent to kill.

I shuddered instantly.

"With this, it looks like I'm the victor... right?"

### **SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar**

#### **Chapter 553: Parting Ways**

"Do you disagree? Would you like to go on?" Kuzon stared at me.

His smile was condescending, but I realized that he had every right to look at me in that way.

We had both come a long way since our Ainzlark days, but some things never truly changed.

'I lost... and overwhelmingly so at that.'

This had to be the first time I would suffer such defeat in battle ever since I was a kid.

It felt really shitty.

"So, Jared, my information."

"Y-your... wha—?!"

"My information. The location of the Nether Cult."

'Ah, that...!' For a moment, I had forgotten the reason why we started fighting in the first place.

"One... sec..."

Now capable of using my Magic, I used Healing Magic on myself and also used a potion from my Special Storage.

Fortunately, none of my internal organs were affected, so it wasn't fatal.

I healed up in no time.

"A-ah, much better..." Rising from my position, I looked in Neron's direction and signaled him to bring down the barrier.

Once he did so, the members of our team slowly began moving in our direction.

"Jared, the location," Kuzon said impatiently.

'He's leaving already, uh?'

I tried my best to make him stay, but I wasn't strong enough.

The reason he agreed to our match was probably because he knew the outcome already.



I had thought I was in the big leagues thanks to the whole Demon saga, but was I really just at the starting point?

"It's located at the very center of the world, between the four continents." I sighed, glancing at Kuzon's stoic face.

"There's nothing there's though."

"That's what they want us to think. I tracked one of their members there."

"And you think they didn't notice?"

"They did mid-meeting, but it was already too late by then. I had gotten my information."

"I see... It's just highly doubtful that they wouldn't have sensed something I was able to."

"Well, I used a different method."

Our conversation was so fluid that I almost didn't believe we were fighting just moments earlier.

"Alright then. I believe you." Kuzon said, smiling at me differently.

"What?"

It felt weird that he wasn't giving his usual cold expression or mocking gaze.

"I just thought you didn't do very bad, Jared. You performed better than expected. We were just a poor match." He shrugged.

"Tch. Whatever. Now that you've gotten what you want, you can leave."

Neron and the others arrived right in time, and the first to speak was—of course—Lemi.

"Hahaha! Serves you right, Jared! This is the first time I've seen you get beaten like this. It feels strangely satisfying."

"S-stop that..." I murmured, not even having enough strength to resist her teasing.

It felt horrible, though.

'My own daughter...' I almost wept in shame and disappointment.

"Not so fast, Jared. You said I could have whatever I wanted if I won. I've still not done that." Kuzon smiled ruefully.

His expression now looked more like the snobby dude I knew him to be.

"Urgh, alright. What do you want? And don't say my Arcanas, cus I'm not giving."

"What? Arcanas? Hmm, that could work, but that won't be necessary. I already have one, so it's fine..." Kuzon shrugged.

"So, what do you want?"

I could feel some gazes on me, while others were on Kuzon. It was really embarrassing that I lost to him when everyone was watching, but there was nothing to do about it now.

'I'll just grant his request so he can leave. We have a lot to cover in our search, after all.'

"I think I'll need one member of your group to help me with something... a mission."

"What?"

"That's what I want. You're not going to deny me that right after I beat you up so much, right?"

I had no right to refuse, but what was this guy saying now?

"Didn't you say all of us were dead weight?"

"Not all of you. Also, I apologize for calling you dead weight. You're far more capable than I gave you credit for."

'Yet I still lost. Just how capable did he think I was before now?' This thought troubled me but I simply decided to listen to what he had to say.

"So, who do you have in mind? Me?"

For a moment, silence pervaded our vicinity. Kuzon blankly stared at me, and I also blankly looked around me.

"I would like to have your expertise, but I'm not cruel enough to stand in the way of your mission. I'll take a member that won't affect the productivity of your team—at least, not too much."

'Who could that be? Is there someone here who's not dead weight and is also not too essential to our search for the Arcanas?'

Kuzon's eyes darted in a particular direction, and before I could turn to look, he had already vanished and grabbed the person to his side.

"Hiyaaakkk!!" The girl's thin voice pierced the air as she was both flustered and confused.

"I'll be taking you." He carried her like a sack by his side—that was how small the person of his choice was.

"W-what are you doing? Let me go!" Ana yelled, trying her best to break free, but failing nonetheless.

"A deal is a deal. Isn't that right, Jared?" Kuzon smiled, looking at me for confirmation.

"Well..." I met Ana's gaze.

Though she was complaining, I could tell that she was enjoying this. It also seemed like she liked Kuzon a lot.

As for him... I wasn't sure yet.

Still, I didn't want to stand in the way of whatever was going on between them. Plus, we had a deal.

"Will she be safe with you?"

"I'm not sure. But it's not like she'll be any safer by your side."

That stung a bit, but I accepted Kuzon's words anyway.

He wasn't wrong, after all.

"Fine. A deal is a deal."

"JAREEED?!" Ana yelled at me with disbelief in her eyes.

"What are you doing, Jared? You're letting that dude take Ana!" Lemi yelled at me in disbelief.

"Well, I better take my leave now. I don't want to get into this conflict. Also, it seems you've become more popular with the ladies, Jared... must be tough making a choice."

"Wha—?! You bastar—"

Before I said anything more, Kuzon vanished in a flash of lightning.

"That guy..."

I found myself conflicted about what to think of the young Midas.

Truth be told, my memories of what I knew of the Midas Empire were a blur. But, I still had some fraction of it.

'Are they all powerful monsters like him... those Royals?' I smiled to myself.

In the end, I never gained any special Magic or additional knowledge from Kuzon.

It felt like a total waste of time... well, almost.

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#### **Chapter 554: Awkward Realization**

After Kuzon left with Ana, and our team lost one member, awkward silence took control...

... But only for a few seconds.

"Why did you let him take her? Why does Ana have to pay for your defeat?"

The person speaking was, of course, Lemi.

I sighed at the girl, not knowing if she would understand the reason behind what I did. Perhaps not even Ana would appreciate it at the moment.

'There's no point explaining it...' I glanced at Maria, and her expressionless face spoke volumes.

A glance at Aloe Vida gave me the assurance that at least she was on my side.

"Let's all calm ourselves." Neron stepped up.

It was probably a good choice, considering I was tired at the moment.

"It's been a long day, so why don't we return to our base and relax?"

"Yeah, good call..." Lemi murmured, finally leaving me alone.

I could tell that she was still angry, though. Considering the fact that Ana was the closest person to her at the moment, I made a big blunder by separating the two.

'I should apologize later... maybe.'

"Are you feeling okay?" A voice echoed beside me.

It belonged to Edward.

We hadn't had the opportunity to talk very often due to how occupied he was with training... or gawking at my Half-Elf daughter.

"Not really."

"Why? Because of Ana, or the fight?"

"I think both..." I sighed.

Despite everything, I felt Edward was still a reliable person I could count on—like a sturdy pillar or an unbreakable wall.

"Yeah, that wasn't a pretty sight to see—you getting beat up like that. At least now you know how we feel all the time."

"Hm? What do you mean?" I looked at the buff guy with surprise.

"That feeling of inadequacy you have when you're pummeled... it drives you to be better, and the restlessness that comes with it makes you push on to overcome your limits."

"I feel inadequate all the time. I never proclaimed to be the strongest person around."

"Well, maybe you're right. But, at least you have one more reason. Besides... I don't think seeing you lose was a bad thing." Edward's lips curled up to form a smile.

"I was beginning to wonder if someone could sucker punch you one day—considering I've never seen you lose in a fight."

"Hahaha, really?"

Edward nodded.

"Yeah. Inadequacy should have a balance. Your position as a sturdy and powerful leader is excellent, but unless you show some vulnerability, your followers will only feel more inadequate."

I was surprised to hear such profound words from Edward.

"I see... I guess you aren't such a meathead, after all."

"Y-yeah, I guess you could say that." Edward's gaze shifted in a particular direction, but I decided to simply take that as him being flustered.

Unless...

"Hold on, did someone put you up to this?"

"W-what are you talking about?" Edward looked even more flustered.

"I knew it! You were probably just repeating after them as they telepathically gave you the message. Who's the person?" I sharply glanced in the direction where Edward looked before and found Maria quickly walking away.

'It came from her?'

"Edward... why...?" I gave my friend a tap on the shoulder and shook my head.

His teary eyes made him look like a baby, and I could see the guilt on his face.

"She... she made me do it."

"Why did you lie? What did she offer in exchange?"

The boy shyly looked to the ground. For a man who looked so powerful, he seemed so fragile in face of that question.

"W-well... she said... she would help me out..."

"Really? Let me guess, with Lemi?"

"Shhhh! Keep your voice down, man." Edward looked panicky and jumpy.

'This dude...' I nearly sighed.

To think even Edward had fallen this deep. Initially, I was a little upset that my friend was so interested in my daughter.

However, at the moment, my relationship with Lemi was so strained that I couldn't even consider us family.

'I am not Lewis Griffith, after all...' With that in mind, I put my hands on Edward's shoulders and smiled.

"You can do it. Just be confident. Maybe it's just me, but I have a feeling she likes you too."

"R-really?!"

"Yeah. She's always ogling you with her eyes."

'Well, there's a possibility she wants to use you as her lab specimen, but...' I decided not to add that bit.

Edward beamed brightly. He must have been overjoyed with the possibility that his feelings weren't one-sided.

'Ah, the joy of youth...' I truly could not relate.

Still... Maria, eh?

A smile spread across my face and I decided to do some thinking.

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Looking to my right, I observed Neron and Serah. To my left, there were Ciara and Jerry. Edward was already speaking to Lemi, and Asa was being catered for by Aloe Vida.

To be honest, everyone was so busy forming bonds, but it felt like I simply couldn't.

'Even Ana and Kuzon...' It almost sounded like a dream.

A lot of things had changed, and so many things were still changing.

'I can't compromise now, though...'

There was a serious conflict ahead, and romance wasn't going to fix it.

Still, despite understanding that, why was everyone still giving themselves to their hearts?

'The logical thing to do is to forego emotional attachments and focus on the challenge ahead... right?'

However, my memories returned to the Celestial War—back when I was still Lewis Griffith.

Upon remembering the special moments I shared with Emilia despite the rising conflict, and how our love was born from war, I realized...

'... I'm just giving excuses.'

The problem wasn't the situation, but me.

I was simply afraid of something, or maybe I didn't want romance, but it was unfair of me to pin it on the war with Demons, or the current Nether Cult issue.

'There's always going to be something...'

In the end, I was just being a hypocrite, wasn't I?

With a smile on my face, I looked to the sky. Somehow, realizing that about myself made me happier.

'Thank you, Maria.'

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

#### **Chapter 555: Big News**

As Neron suggested, we rested well for that day.

The next morning, however, I called for a meeting, and everyone attended.

Lemi showed up last, and her attitude pretty much reeked of rebellion and defiance.

'I'll just ignore her...' With that in mind, I didn't address her silent protest and initiated the meeting properly.

We were in a vast field, the campsite we were using to coordinate our activities.

As the fresh morning breeze welcomed us, I organized my thoughts and commenced my speech.

"First of all, I want to tell everyone how happy I am about our success in the first mission. We got our first Arcana." I displayed the [Strength] Card to everyone, and even let them pass it along to each other.

"This is only the beginning, though. We have a couple more to go—six, to be exact." I smiled.

Using Magic, I retrieved the [Strength] Arcana from the last person to observe it and regained possession.

"Since Kuzon has an Arcana in his possession, that rules out one of our targets, hence, the number six remaining."

"Do you have an inkling about the Arcana in his possession?" Neron's voice softly rang in my ears.

"Yeah, I do. He most likely possesses [The Emperor] Arcana, and—"

"Oh? Why do you say so?" Lemi's nagging voice interrupted.

At this point, she seemed to be looking for attention.

'Is this her way of protesting Ana's sudden removal from the team?' Ignoring her once more, I continued.

"He seemed oddly interested in [The Empress] Arcana. Considering he's of Midas descent as well, I find that they're linked."

Plus, he did tell me that 'No one beats the Emperor,' or something similar to that.

So, I suppose we had to cross that off his list. Considering his ability to manipulate so many things in the space around him, [The Emperor]'s abilities really seemed like a feasible explanation.

"The Arcanas that are yet to be found are; The Fool. The Pope. Wheel Of Fortune. The Moon. Judgment. Finally, The World."

I had compiled so much data on several mentions of these Arcanas, but there was nothing at all that pointed me in the direction of the latter—well, except the name [The World].

Since there were 22 Arcanas, and adding it as the last piece completed the number, I found it acceptable to add [The World] to the list of items we were searching for.

As for clues or descriptions, I had no information on it.

"Now, for the most important aspect of this meeting..."

There were two major things I wanted to discuss.

First was my conversation with Merlin.

I explained everything in detail, making sure I emphasized the terms I wasn't familiar with.

"So, we're to stop someone called Ciel, and ensure the Nether doesn't return? Who are these Apostles Of Aether?"

Everyone was equally as confused as I was. Even Neron... uh...?

"Neron, are you okay?" I asked, noticing he looked dazed for a moment.

"Y-yeah, what's the matter?" Snapping out of it, he returned to normal.

His eyes regained their dark shades, and his expression was stoic—as always.

Still, I felt like something was off.

"You looked out of it for a moment there. Do you perchance know about what that Merlin character was talking about?"

A brief moment of silence ensued as Neron rubbed his chin for a while.

My heart leaped for a moment, hoping to get another clue, or at least some new information that would allow me to make sense of the many confusions wrapped in my head.

"No. No, I have no idea." He finally retorted.

"Ah, I see. That's too bad."

Neron still appeared to be in thought, but I knew there was no way he would hide something this important from me.

"Alright then, I guess that's something we have to keep in mind. Now, as for the second matter for discussion, which is actually the crux of this meeting..."

Everyone had shifty gazes, and I paused for a few moments before landing.

"I'm dissolving the team."

"WHAT?!!"

Their loud reactions nearly blew me away. Every hair on my skin stood as I felt everyone's glare greet me.

"Relax. Relax. It's not what you think! Let me explain!"

Their glares intensified, but I could see one or two faces that still stared suspiciously at me.

'Ah, I guess I said it in the wrong way.'

"It's more like I'm splitting the team into fractions—five groups, to be precise."

"OHHHHHH..." Their eyes widened in surprise, and the realization of my true intentions began to seep in.

'I should really work on my conversation skills. I get misunderstood a lot.'

"But why are we being split up?" Edward asked.

Well, that was a wonderful question.

I expected Lemi to ask, but maybe Edward knew that and decided to take the lead.

Such an idiot.

"There's hardly any time left, and I would like us to be as efficient as possible. Besides, this was my intention from the start. It's why I didn't place too much emphasis on organized teamwork in our training."



I only boosted their individual abilities and split them into simple groups when there was combat training.

It was all for this moment.

'Kuzon also has the right idea. Having too many people would just be dead weight. It's best if we function separately, while coordinating our movements...'

"But, isn't that dangerous? There's safety in numbers, after all." Aloe Vida asked.

Her worried expression was most likely directed at people like Asa, or the other members of the team, rather than herself.

Just what did I expect from the good-natured Aloe?

"Well, it could be. But, this mission itself entails danger. If we want to play it safe and end up giving the enemy a chance to obtain more Arcanas, then we've lost."

Aloe nodded, albeit still looking worried.

"I understand how you feel. Don't worry, I'll provide Teleportation Spell Cards for everyone. That way, you can retreat.

Also, I'll ensure to track everyone. If anything happens, I'll come running to your aid immediately."

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#### **Chapter 556: Splitting Up**

It seemed my response was satisfactory, as Aloe was beginning to grow calmer.

"Just to be safe, I'd like to have you all carry my 'Soul Brand' with you. Of course, this is simply optional. You can choose not to have one."

After explaining the relevance of a Soul Brand, and how incredibly useful it would be in coordination, my audience was more adept at it.

Of course, the kind of Soul Brand I was going to establish would not have any coercing element.

It would be as equals—sort of like how Jane and I did in the past.

"No."

"I'll have to refuse."

Two people vehemently disagreed, which was fine too.

After explaining the importance, if they weren't willing to go through with it, there was nothing that could be done.

"Since Lemi and Ciara have decided against it, I'll just do it with everyone else."

Of course, I toned down the function of the Soul Brand, so we couldn't randomly hear each other's thoughts or anything.

The purpose of the Brand was to track their whereabouts and directly contact them even if there was Interference Magic involved.

My current Magic Tools that allowed long-range communication would be rendered obsolete if someone interfered with it using Magic.

The only way out of that predicament was to use a Soul Brand.

"For those who have chosen to go along with it, I'll be sure to remove the Brand once we're done with this mission.

Fortunately, they all understood.

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Once we were done, it was finally time to split our team into five distinct groups.

To be honest, it was a somewhat tricky choice, considering we were a total of twelve, now that Ana wasn't present.

However, after taking everyone's strengths and weaknesses into account, I created the perfect team.

\*\*\*\*\*

[TEAM 1]

Neron Kaelid

Serah Crimson

[TEAM 2]

Edward Karl Leon

Lemi Vindiel

Ivan Smith

[TEAM 3]

Maro Smith

Aloe Vida

Asa

[TEAM 4]

Jerry Keller

Ciara Epilson

And finally...

[TEAM 5]

Jared Leonard

Maria Helmsworth

\*\*\*\*\*

Maria's eyes widened as I mentioned how we would be splitting our teams.

She must have been surprised that I placed her on the same team as me. I had to admit, that was a bit of bias on my part.

But...

... I felt it was necessary.

'Maybe I should try spending time with her. No harm in that.'

It could have just been a reason I gave myself to ease my guilt, or perhaps I wanted to explore what feelings I had for Maria, and what feelings she had for me.

In any case, I made sure every other team was balanced.

"Does anyone have any complaints about the team arrangements?"

I scanned the audience, but there seemed to be no problem.

Ciara was even beaming at me, giving me a thumbs-up for some reason. It had to be because I placed her on the same team as Jerry.

With no one else in their group, she was free to keep fraternizing with the boy... or whatever it was that they were doing.

Even I didn't understand their relationship, at this point.

"I'll be using today to learn more about this Arcana. You can all focus on training while we spend the day. You can choose to prepare for tomorrow as well."

There was so much to learn about the [Strength] Arcana, considering it was the first one in my possession that I never interacted with in my past life.

"Well, that's it for the meeting."

After concluding the meeting, everyone slowly dispersed.

"Lemi, a word?"

"What?" The girl's response was cold.

It broke my heart to see her look at me with such eyes.

I never for one thought about acting as her replacement Dad, considering I had no right to.

What I could do was teach her and guide her in the best way I could. Of course, if it was friendship she desired, I was going to try my hardest.

Unfortunately, things didn't work out well. Lemi didn't trust me, and it seemed anything I tried to do only made things worse.

'Maybe I just suck at relationships...' I bit my lip to hold back any emotion that displayed weakness.

I couldn't afford anything of that sort at the moment.

"Nothing. Never mind." I smiled, turning away from the girl.

My sensory perception kicked in and I noticed that she stood still for a few moments, before finally leaving for whatever she wanted to do.

'You suck, Jared. You really suck.'

I teleported away from my position and decided to dedicate the entire day as a shut-in.

Distracting myself from the pain I felt by wholeheartedly focusing on a task was the best way I knew to cope.

\*\*\*\*\*

"You were right, Miss Serah! It worked!"

Maria was currently happy beyond description.

Right in front of her was Serah Crimson, Grand Mage of the Eastern Empire, as well as the sweetheart of Neron Kaelid.

She was Maria's mentor in both Magic and Love, and her advice on how to handle Jared had finally begun to show results.

"I thought our relationship got worse, but I think we're moving in the right direction."

"I told you, Maria. You only needed to trust me."

"I'm so sorry I doubted you in the past." Maria looked earnest as she tightened both hands and prepared herself to keep working hard.

The last advance she made on Jared, watching over him when he was naked and flirting with him afterward... everything came from Serah's counsel.

Her mentor was always right in these matters, as Maria had come to learn.

'Jared finally made a conscious effort to put the both of us in the same team.' Maria smiled, her cheeks turning pink.

"But, you can't relax now, Maria. This is where the true battle begins." Serah smiled at the pure and innocent girl—ready to dye Maria once again in her color.

"Oh? What's the next step? What should I do next?"

Maria's eyes shone like diamonds as she readily waited to hear the wise words of her teacher and mentor.



Repeating those words so much that one might think he is insane, this man keeps making this statement.

His heart churns, and he feels an unexplainable loss. Everything and everyone he loves... they don't exist anymore.

However—

"You're a sight for sore eyes, Neron."

"It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my—"

The black-haired man stops his mantra and looks forward. His head is raised and his shoulders slump.

There is another being standing right in front of him.

The being looks human, but the grieving soul knows that his true self is far from it.

"You..."

"Don't look at me that way. Isn't this a result of our efforts?"

"This... this isn't what I wanted! You lied to me! You... I thought we were friends!"

"Hahaha, well... I guess that's one way of putting it."

"You bastard! You and Ciel tricked me! You... why...?!"

"It was unavoidable. I don't really care either way, but apparently, she's the one who wanted this outcome."

"W-why...?"

"Well, the work is done. Sooner or later, I'll get what I want. It's a shame, though. This world is doomed..."

"N-no..."

"Yes. The Nether is here, after all. It's only a matter of time."

The man called Neron can only shudder and wither away as he feels even more despair.

He curses himself, regretting everything he has ever done.

But, it's just as the other being says.

Everything will end.

The world. Existence. Himself.

"I..."

Neron raises his head and his jet black eyes slowly show a glimmer of light.

"... I won't allow it!"

Suddenly, the entire area is enveloped in white light, and the shock is enough to send ripples of distortions flying around every corner of the world.

Enough to finally...

"Uargh!"

... Wake up the dreamer.

\*\*\*\*\*

Neron's body was covered in cold sweat, but that was only for a moment.

His body reset, and he felt perfectly normal afterward.

Still, his mind couldn't help but focus on the nightmare he just had.

"That dream... what the hell?"

Truthfully, Neron had been having certain memory flashes and sudden thoughts, but this was the first time he had dreamt so vividly about it.

"What happened?"

Neron couldn't make sense of the matter.

It had been a while since he felt this way—so confused and lost.

Now sitting up on his wide bed, he looked beside him and spotted Serah sleeping peacefully.

While she was overactive during the day, the woman was quite a deep sleeper.

Neron liked how she looked so cute and peaceful as she slept. He made to caress her cheek, smiling to himself.

However—

'I'm... so sorry.'

—Another flash of memories stopped him.

In his head, Serah was killed, and while they shared their final moments together, it was too painful.

"Keuk!" Neron clutched his heart in pain, looking at his lover with conflicted eyes.

"What exactly happened? Are these memories of the past... or the future?"

At this point, he had to imagine if this was an effect of the Hermit Arcana, or perhaps a new aspect of the power he needed to explore.

'They're getting more vivid... especially after Jared spoke about Merlin and—'

Neron recollected the words the boy said—about Ciel... and the Nether.

'Do I know them?'

Neron was worried. In the advent that the flashes he was seeing in his memories were real, then that meant chaos.

'I should tell Jared...' Neron thought to himself.

However, after thinking it through, the man decided not to.

'He has a lot on his plate, and unverified information like mine will simply put him on more edge.'

Deciding to reveal the matter once the time was ripe and he had more to go on, Neron sighed to himself and looked at Serah one more time.

"I don't know if all those memories are real, but..." He caressed the cheeks of his lover and smiled lovingly at her.

"... I will never let anything happen to you."

He didn't know about the 'Neron' that existed in his dreams and memory flashes, but the black-haired man resolutely decided never to lose his own Serah.

'I've been having memory flashes since I was a kid, haven't I? It's just been more of intuitions and guidance... never has it been so intense.'

Neron went back to bed, hugging Serah close to him.

The latter moaned slightly, whispering Neron's name as they both fell asleep in each other's embrace.

With a satisfied smile of comfort and love, Neron returned to paradise.

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#### **Chapter 558: Ana's Disposition**

"Looks like everyone had a lovely night." I smiled at everyone.

They seemed raring to go, each armed with their respective tools and clustered in their allocated groups.

It was early in the morning, and the sun was yet to completely rise, but every team was ready for their respective journey

"Well, let's all be careful, but also give it your best."

I didn't want a situation where they would be overly cautious and let an opportunity slip past them.

They were allowed to be reckless as long as they fulfilled their mission.

'Of course, I won't be allowing all of you to die.'

"If you encounter the swordsman from Neron's description, flee immediately. As for other members of the Cult, act based on your discretion."

To be honest, the version of Beruel I fought was stronger than most of the people on the mission.



"Beruel is the Fourth Seat, and a mere machine from him is strong enough to give a lot of you trouble. If you meet the real one, or any of the higher Seat Members, I'll advise you to flee."

At least, that would preserve their lives. In the advent that their Souls could be destroyed, it would take even more time and resources to get them back.

"I have no definite idea what the enemy is capable of. But, since I have ways of tracking everyone, I'll come to the aid of anyone who is in danger."

If there was anything I refused to happen, it would be the death of my allies.

"Let's get those Arcanas and win."

My speech was accompanied by cheers, and I happily split up the teams.

Granting each team an Automaton as a guard, I teleported them to the areas where I suspected the Arcanas to be.

Of course, retrieving them was completely left to them.

>VWUUUUSSSH<

"Are you ready?" I appeared out of the blue portal, meeting only Maria in the vast field.

Now that everyone else had gone, it was only me and her that was left.

"Yeah."

"Alright then... let's get this show on the road." Patting her shoulders, I created a spatial distortion and moved us to the place where we would be having some time alone... together.

'Hopefully this kills two birds with one stone.'

The portal swallowed the both of us, and I could feel everything shifting to our new location.

Before I finally arrived at the designated plane, a thought resonated in my head, and I smiled a little.

'I wonder what Ana is doing now?'

\*\*\*\*\*

Tense silence permeated the room as two people shared the vast space.

There was quite a distance separating the two of them, but a certain person's reaction made it seem as though there wasn't nearly enough space apart.

Her frown was evident, and her gaze was cold.

She was fiddling with a tool, completely ignoring the man who watched her at certain intervals.

"Are you really going to keep ignoring me?" His voice was calm.

The boy's golden hair glowed, in the finely luxurious hall.

The short blond girl he was talking to didn't even stare in his direction. She was busy in thought, and the whole thing she was doing with the tool was to calm her nerves.

In actuality...

'Urgh, I hate this.'

... She was very dissatisfied.

'Damn that Jared. Even you, Kuzon. I don't need any of you, after all.'

Not only did Kuzon call her dead weight, he also said her absence wouldn't negatively impact the team.

Jared, whom she thought would argue on her behalf, actually sold her away because of his own loss.

It was annoying, to say the least.

'I feel so stupid. Why was I deluded into thinking they had feelings for me?'

However, worse than that, she felt even more foolish for having feelings for them both—especially Jared.

'He's the worst...!' Gritting her teeth, she kept fiddling with the robotic construct—utterly ignoring Kuzon's stare.

Ana and Kuzon were currently in a vast house made by Kuzon.

It was created from Magic Threads—Kuzon's Original Magic.

Not only was the exterior incredibly dense, in case of an assault, the interior was very comfortable.

It has a warm, golden ambiance that made it seem no different from a finely furnished home—no, it was most likely even better.

Ana and Kuzon had been seated in the parlor for hours now, and the former was beginning to wonder what would happen next.

Ever since Kuzon took her from the rest of the team the previous day, she had not seen him do anything in particular.

He simply told her to rest and make herself at home. They had not left the house, and despite saying he was busy, Kuzon was idle.

It was probably because of this that Ana felt his gaze strongly concentrated on her.

"Urgh! Will you stop staring?" She couldn't take it any longer.

"Hm? Did I do something wrong?"

"Yeah! It's difficult to concentrate when you keep looking at me!"

"Well, why didn't you go to your room then? That way, you won't feel my stare or anything..."

Ana bit her lip.

Kuzon raised a valid point. Why didn't she thought of that before now?

"Alright then. I'm off."

"Wait."

Ana paused and stared at the golden haired boy.

For some reason, his expression didn't seem as cold as it was back when he was conversing with Jared and everyone else. There was something in his eyes that sucked her in, but Ana fought any form of feelings she had toward him.

"You don't... have to go." He spoke calmly.

"What was that?" Her voice was raised, and despite being of a much smaller build, Ana seemed domineering at this point.

"I said, you can stay if you want." Kuzon sighed, resting back on the sofa he made.

"And why would I do that?"

"Because I asked?"

One raised brow from Ana told Kuzon that his assertion wasn't even nearly enough to make her stay.

"Fine. I won't stare again. You can do what you like."

Ana stared at him with suspicion, and after a brief moment of internal debate, she decided to remain in the parlor.

"Hmph!" Now returning to her fiddling, Ana's pout remained on her face.

"At least you're not ignoring me anymore..." With that whisper, Kuzon closed his eyes and decided to simply use his perception to observe the girl.

'... How cute.'

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

#### **Chapter 559: Kuzon and Ana [Pt 1]**

"Are you just going to keep lazing around there?"

At this point, Ana couldn't take it anymore.

She was bored with fiddling with her tool, and while there were a bunch of other things she could do, the Loli found it hard to ignore the boy in front of her.

"I'm not lazing around," Kuzon replied, now gazing at her.

"S-sure, you aren't..." She found herself stuttering, unable to keep up with his handsome features.

Upon seeing this, Kuzon smiled.

"What's that grin on your face for?"

"Nothing."

"You sure?"

"Yeah..."

"Hmmm..." Ana felt weird vibes from Kuzon.

To be honest, he wasn't much different from the guy she knew.

They hung out and talked a lot, just like this. Of course, Kuzon never really talked much about himself and Ana carried most of the conversation.

Still, why did he seem so much like the Kuzon of the past now than he did during their first meeting?

"Alright, spill." Ana sighed, deciding to finally have a conversation with the boy.

'He might be a jerk, but I'm not.'

She was used to having male friends, like Edward, who would try to hide things from her. She could tell from Kuzon's face that he was hiding a great deal.

The golden haired boy gave a slightly surprised expression at her statement.

"I've not forgiven you for leaving me yet, but..." Her eyes met with his—clear blue with golden—and she heaved a sigh.

"... I guess I'll listen to you for a moment."

Kuzon broke into a smile instantly.

"You really haven't changed at all."

"H-hey! I've grown in a lot of ways, you know?"

"Yeah, I know." He narrowed his eyes and widened his smile.

This caused Ana to shiver since it almost felt like Kuzon was ogling her body.

"J-just say something already! This is a limited edition coupon. It won't last forever, you know?"

"Ah, really now?"

Ana closed her eyes and nodded with a false sense of superiority.

"Yup! I'm just taking a break."

"Interesting..."

"What's interesting about that?"

"Nothing."

"Urgh! You really..." Ana's glare was slowly returning.

She began to reconsider talking to Kuzon. It wasn't a very good idea, to begin with.

"I guess I'll just return to—"

"How have you been?" Kuzon's voice gently came forth.

His eyes showed sincerity, and a warm smile permeated his face.

Ana found herself melting as she witnessed this.

"W-wha—?"

"After I left... how have you been? You've grown into a fine young woman. A lot must have happened, right? You even killed a Demon Lord, and I've been hearing good stuff about your work. So... how are you?"

To be frank, Ana never expected that question... especially from Kuzon.

But, his gaze didn't seem to have any hidden intentions behind them. It was the opposite, actually.

It was almost like he truly, genuinely cared about how she felt.

'I won't get deceived by you a second time!' Ana shut her heart and hardened her face.

"I was... fine." Her response was short.

"Hmm, I see." Kuzon's response was sullen, his face displaying slight disappointment.

"And you? How have you been since you left?" Ana returned the question to him.

To be fair, she knew nothing about him. As much as she didn't like Kuzon—or tried not to—it was difficult trying to eliminate her curiosity.

"Busy. I was busy."

"Yeah? You don't seem so busy now. We've been waiting here without doing anything tangible." Ana gave Kuzon a suspicious eye.

"Well, that's because I was waiting for something."

"And what's that?"

"For you to talk to me."

"W-wha—?!" Ana's face turned pink instantly, and she was unable to hide her flustered, jumbled feelings.

The fact that Kuzon's expression was calm made Ana feel much worse.

"It would be too boring if were to journey together, and there's nothing to talk about."

"Is that so?" Her face instantly fell.

"Yeah."

Silence pervaded the area, and both of them engaged in a brief staring contest.

The first to look away was, of course, Ana.

"And? Now that I'm talking to you... are you satisfied?"

"Not really. You seem upset at me for some reason. What did I do to you?"

"You mean, other than abandoning me for such a long time without maintaining contact?"

"Y-yeah... other than that..." Kuzon's face slightly scrunched up.

For the first time, he appeared flustered as well.

"Well, let's see..." Ana began listing his offenses.

"You called me dead weight. You sent the wrong signals by giving me a mere customary greeting in form of a kiss. Worst of all, you act all innocent and make it very difficult to dislike you!"

"Wait, how is the last one a bad thing? I'm just being myself."

"Well, yourself sucks!"

"Wow, you're really mean."

"See what I'm talking about? How am I the bad guy here? You're the one who kissed a girl and left for that long period without saying anything, then you show up and kiss that same girl again. You whisk her away to your lovely home and suddenly expect that she becomes your chatting buddy."

Kuzon was silent throughout Ana's venting. Patiently listening to her, his gaze never left for a single moment.

He didn't even blink.

"... And that's why I'm mad at you." Ana took in a deep breath after she was done complaining.

She deflated on the golden sofa and sighed.

"I see. Can I ask something first before answering your complaints?"

"What is it?"

"Are you mad at Jared too? Or, rather... what do you think about him?"

"What does that matter to you?"

"It's just a harmless question." Kuzon strained a smile.

Just how much did Ana not trust him?

"Yeah, I'm mad at Jared... probably even more than I am at you. I initially thought he was just a dense idiot, but it turns out... well, it doesn't matter now."

This wasn't just childish rage. Ana's face displayed absolute seriousness.

Both men had wronged her, and she was sick of it.

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

### **Chapter 560: Kuzon And Ana [Pt 2]**

"He found it easy to give me away, probably because he felt it would be easier to have me fall for you than for him to muster the courage to tell me the truth... that he doesn't have feelings for me."

Kuzon's eyes widened slightly upon hearing that last part.

"Ah..."

"I mean, that's just pathetic, isn't it? For someone who has done an outstanding job so far, he's just such a letdown!"

"... I see."

"Yeah. Despite my dissatisfactions, though, I have to admit... he is truly something else. I know you're strong Kuzon, and I know you beat him, but... Jared has done so much—and is still doing so much for the world."

From the event of Ainzlark Academy, to the War, and now the Nether Cult, Jared's acts were for the world as a whole.

Kuzon understood this very much.

Unlike him, who was simply acting on his own selfish impulses, Jared's plans were far more encompassing.

"And for that, I respect him... even though he still pisses me off!" Ana gritted her teeth once more.

"You're a kind girl."

"Where is that coming from?" Ana barked, glaring at Kuzon.

"Relax. That's meant to be a compliment, right?"

"Yeah? Well, it doesn't feel much like one, coming from you."

"I figured..." Kuzon murmured.

Another moment of silence greeted the two and Kuzon decided to stand from his sofa.

He walked toward Ana and squatted so they could at least be on the same level in terms of height.

This embarrassed the girl slightly, causing her face to turn beet red once more.

'I didn't ask to be like this, you know?' She covered her reddened as those thoughts swirled in her head.

"I'm sorry."

Upon hearing those words, Ana's hand slowly dropped her face, revealing a surprised expression from the girl.

"E-eh?"

"I said... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left you abruptly. I also shouldn't have called you dead weight. As for the kiss... it's not what you think."

"What?"

"It's true that the kiss is something similar to a farewell or greeting—used especially when you won't be meeting in a long while..." Kuzon's face softened a bit while speaking.

"... But it's exchanged between close friends and family. I obviously considered you special when I kissed you."

Ana's memory flashed to both events when their lips touched, and her cheeks turned red once again.

"I didn't mean to give the wrong impression, though. That was my bad."

"So, which is it?"

"Hm? What do you mean?"

"Which do you consider me as? Friend or family?"

For the first time, Kuzon's cheeks, especially his ears, turned pink. It was hardly noticeable, though, and it only appeared for a moment.

"A friend, obviously. I consider you my friend, Ana."

"I see. Thank you for being honest with me, at the very least." Ana smiled at the golden haired boy.

"Well, thanks for being honest with me too." Their smiles greeted each other, and for a moment, all either of them could notice was the other's face.

"So, am I forgiven?"

"Nope."

"Dang it."

Both of them instantly burst into laughter, and they found their hearts leaping. It was a strange feeling for Ana, seeing as she hadn't felt this way in a while.

For Kuzon, it was a pleasant emotion that he could only feel around Ana.

'This is why I need you by my side...' He kept laughing with the girl.

He adored her tiny frame and found himself unable to look away.

Her flat chest, her tint body, her adorable glasses, everything about her made him happy for some reason.

Most of all, her expressions.

Unlike him, she couldn't keep her composure and would often move from being annoyed, to bashful, to happy.

These fluctuations in emotions and expressions—Ana's reactions—always amazed him.



'I like this girl.' He smiled.

Kuzon gulped slightly and found his hands moving on their own.

Before he could stop himself, his hand reached the top of Ana's hair and he stroked them.

'I've always wanted to do this!' With his mission complete, Kuzon laughed even more.

Unfortunately, he found out it was only his voice that echoed across the vast room.

"What are you doing?" A voice rang out.

Kuzon's body shivered a bit, but, of course, he maintained his composure.

"This is another custom among my people..."

It was a lie, of course.

Kuzon couldn't simply tell Ana he had a thing for short girls like her—especially patting their heads.

That would be... weird.

"Is that so...?" Ana's voice didn't indicate any form of understanding.

In fact, she was actually giving a very deep glare that made Kuzon immediately retract his hand.

'I got carried away!' He thought to himself in worry.

What had he done? If he offended Ana, she wouldn't talk to him again.

Inasmuch as watching her sulk was a pleasure all on its own, Kuzon liked it more when they talked.

That way, he had access to way more reactions.

"... I see you have chosen death."

Kuzon found it funny that Ana was threatening him with something like that, but he was yet to realize... that there was a lot more to the concept than he realized.

"A-arh!"

A kick to his groin was enough for that reality to set in.

His body swayed backward, recoiling from the shock of having his milkshake maker squashed by a girl's legs.

Pain and pleasure courses through his body—mostly pain though.

"Haa... haaa..." He made small sounds as he fell to the ground.

"Don't you ever pat my head. I'm not a child, you know? I'm. Not. A. Child!"

"D-duly... noted..." Kuzon managed to leak out as his body shuddered.

"Hmph!"

