

SPELLCRAFT 811

SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar

Chapter 811: Converging Bewilderness

A dark place.

I found myself in an extremely dark place when I opened my eyes.

'W-what is going on...?!'

My memories of Legris, Ciel, and everything that had happened instantly returned to me and I swiftly made to observe my surroundings in response to the dread that enveloped my body.

'H-huh?!'

Something instantly didn't feel right.

Not only could I not use Spellcraft, but my surroundings felt different—like it wasn't suited for me? No, I couldn't quite explain this.

It was completely weird!

>SWOOOOOOOSSSHHHHHH!!!<

I heard a sound suddenly rush towards me and I also felt strong bloodlust emanate from the person.

'W-what the—?!'

I was barely able to strengthen myself and escape their assault—as I lost control of any Mana that leaked out of my body.

The strange sensations that invaded my body still made me completely dazed by what was going on.

"Whoever you are, show yourself." I took a defensive stance, making sure to properly respond in case another attack came.

"I mean you no harm."

For a moment, silence enveloped the room.

And then...

"No harm? You must be kidding!" A familiar voice echoed in my ears, causing my eyes to bulge in shock.

The dark veils were lifted and light suddenly permeated the air. The vast hall I was in became revealed and the face of my assaulter was shown.

It was none other than the woman I had been searching for all this time.

"K-Karlia?!"

The smile on my face couldn't be described and I heaved a sigh of relief.

"I've been searching for you for so long. Ever since you were taken by the—" I stopped myself when I noticed the blood-lusted gaze she gave me.

'Why is she looking at me like that?'

The glare on her face was so extreme that it felt like she wanted me dead. It seemed like it took all of her self-control to stand still and watch me in both caution and sheer hatred.

'What is... going on? Why is Karlia—'

"Don't be so foolish to engage yet, Karlia." Another familiar voice emerged across from me and a swordsman garbed in a kimono drew nearer.

He had dark auburn hair and a blade in his hand. He looked much younger than I remembered too, but this man was firmly burned in my memory.

It was the Martial Blade God!

'He's also looking at me the same way as Karlia... this pure hate!' Even when he had been alive, the Martial Blade God had wanted to kill me.

However, it hadn't been like this.

"Damn... how do you think he found our base?" Another familiar voice surged forth.

"Magic. Duh." Yet another.

"I wasn't expecting this." And another.

As each of the approaching individuals exposed themselves to the light, my eyes nearly popped out of their sockets in shock.

Beruel stepped forth. And then there was Vaizer. I also spotted Stefan Netherlore beside an older fellow whom I recognized as Reed Sterling.

'No... no... what is this? What's going on here?'

A man with golden hair, who had to be Kido—if I wasn't mistaken—also appeared.

They all surrounded me, eyes filled with indignation and their postures represented pure animosity.

'Damn... the Nether Cult? How in the world did this happen?'

As I tried to contemplate my current problem and what solution I could employ, I heard the most familiar voice echo into the air.

"Halt!"

The voice resonated within me and it seemed it did the same to everyone around me.

They instantly stopped, stepping back while glaring daggers at me. Somehow, it felt like Karlia's glare was the most intense.

Perhaps it simply hurt more.

"I've told you guys already. Stop being rash..."

The speaker stepped into the light, revealing himself as he stood right in front of me.

His dark hair complimented his pure black eyes. He had a stoic expression on his face and a dignifying dark apparel accompanied him as he halted while gazing at me.

This man... he was...

'N-Neron?!'

"When confronting an enemy, always be cautious." He drew a blade, and his eyes narrowed at me.

My thoughts were a mess, but I understood my situation enough to tell me how completely screwed I was.

I barely had any Magic to use and my senses were constantly disturbed. Everything was a mess and I just had to be surrounded by the strongest guys I had ever known to exist.

Things couldn't get any worse.

"Neron is right." A melodious voice rang forth and at her word, the people around me swiftly turned in her direction.

I could see a different look—one of adoration—wash over them as they looked at her.

Her pure white form and her pale skin made her look absolutely enthralling. Her clear eyes and her cute smile reminded me of the disaster that nearly plunged my world to ruin.

No, she didn't just remind me of that... she was THAT!

Ciel herself!

"We should all be cautious in the presence of an enemy." She spoke softly, her gaze on me as she smiled.

Ciel? Smiling at me?

No, that wasn't the only strange thing about all of this. She was also... very young.

About ten or twelve years old. She had Ana's height, so I could only estimate that much. It puzzled me greatly.

As Ciel took steps forward, I felt myself growing fearful.

Not only did these extremely powerful people desire to kill me, but now the most dangerous lady in the world was with them.

Neron was a member of this Nether Cult organization and it seemed like they all saw me as their enemy.

"I-I'm Jared Leonard. I was formerly Lewis Griffith. I hope we can talk. I mean no har—"

"Shut up, you monster!" Karlia yelled, pure fury raging in her eyes.

The others also seemed more infuriated when I said this, but Neron's expression remained unchanged. Out of everyone here, he seemed the calmest.

"Oh, we know who you are." Ciel smiled, drawing even nearer.

"Jared. Lewis. It's all the same when it comes to reincarnation." Her whispers seemed to contain more meaning than I could decipher.

There was nothing I could do but powerlessly watch as these extremely powerful entities closed in on me.

Neron. The Martial Blade God. Karlia. Kido. Stefan. Reed. Vaizer. And now... Ciel.

I didn't need anyone to interpret how messed up my situation was.

'Is this the end?!'

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Chapter 812: The Malefactor Grins

On a far coast, deep within a cave, a young man sat shivering.

His legs were huddled together and his eyes were bulging as he trembled violently.

He muttered incoherent words—a sign that he could be mad—and his face clearly told of the horrors he had seen.

Everything about him, from his emaciated form to his ever-shaking body, proved to be very miserable. His dark cloak hung loosely on his body as he sat in despondency.

Once or twice, he would bite his nails, but he was usually just huddled miserably in this cave... recounting the trauma of the past and the life he had lived right up to this moment.

The glorious life he was meant to live.

The reason it got shattered.

The one who shattered it.

"M-Maria... J-Jared... damnit..." He muttered incoherently and with a trembling tone.

As he uttered these statements, two figures suddenly appeared within the cave. From a patch of darkness, they surged forth, looking at the young boy with contrasting expressions.

The female had a look of indifference, with a hint of contempt. As for the man, he had a very wide grin on his face.

"It seems you've not completely lost your mind, despite the Nether deprivation." He said, finally getting the young man to stop muttering.

"Stefan Netherlore... it's been a while."

With widened eyes, he looked at his two visitors. Their familiar faces were deeply etched into his memory that he couldn't forget—or at least, one was.

"L-Legris... Damien...?"

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Curing Stefan wasn't too difficult a task.

By providing some Nether to soothe his needy body, he became stabilized. Still, however, he wasn't completely cured of the trauma.

Despite the constant ringing in his head, though, he was still capable of telling his tale and conversing with his former colleagues.

Apparently, a Special Magic Tool activated right when his Arcana got taken from him and he was forcibly teleported to a safe zone—this cave.

The cave had special properties, considering it was within a Mana-dense territory. It would easily mask his weak presence, especially when he got stripped of his Nether.

"But now... ah... I feel much better. Thank you, Legris." Stefan sighed, clutching his head and wincing at the pain.

He would have surely died in this cave if no one had intervened. After fighting Maria, he had completely lost his will.

Somehow, Legris had changed that.

"You don't need to thank me, Stefan. I came here with a proposition for you. If you'd like to show your gratitude, then maybe you should join me."

The fact that the Cult Leader's Maiden was now working for Legris—based on the little he saw—could he assume that the Cult Leader was dead? Or perhaps they defected from the Nether Cult?

"The Nether Cult is no more. Its members are gone too. Ciel and I are the only ones left. And yeah, we're no longer the Nether Cult. We have a new goal and you can join us."

Hearing all this new information fazed Stefan a little.

It was bittersweet to hear that he wasn't the only one who failed in the Cult. It seemed none of them had been able to stop Jared and his allies.

It could have been self-patronizing, but he felt less of a loser now.

"Why go out of your way to seek me? I don't understand. Am I integral to your goals?" Stefan asked earnestly, wincing slightly once more.

"Not really. Without you, I think I'd do just fine. However, I just thought it would be fun to have you along. Besides... it's not a bad deal for you, right?"

Stefan heaved a sigh. Legris had always been like this since they had known each other. He just wished he'd known how powerful, or rather, skilful this man was while they had been in the Nether Cult.

"What is your goal exactly?" He asked.

"Everything. I want to obtain everything. If you join me, I can give you a good portion of that. You can have power that defies anything you've ever dreamed of. A power that trumps Maria's or Jared's."

Upon hearing Legris's offer, Stefan sighed heavily and slightly shook his head. He knew Legris had perfectly hit the nail on the head, but there was something fundamentally different now.

He was different.

"Back then... I thought of myself as special—deserving of power. I thought it was my right. When I was compatible with the Nether element, I was overjoyed, because I thought I was special."

However, after his defeat at the hands of Maria, Stefan was ready to face the ugly truth.

"I'm not special. I never was. I really have nothing going for me, and I don't consider myself gifted in any way. Everything I had built up for myself turned out to be a lie."

Legris and Ciel patiently watched as Stefan rose to his feet, on his still-trembling legs.

His slightly bulging eyes displayed a kind of light that hadn't been present there before.

"I... I would simply like to find a new purpose for my life. Whether that leads to power or destruction. I want a path I can take. A path that will lead me to the answers I never knew I wanted to obtain."

Power was superficial. In the end, everyone had it to a certain level. What Stefan sought was something he could call his and his alone.

"You sound like a greedy brat." Legris also stood on his feet, his smile broadening as he looked at Stefan.

"Yeah. Maybe you're right..."

"Don't worry, Stefan. You'll find that purpose you seek with us. I can guarantee that."

Both individuals stared at each other in silence and Ciel simply watched them quietly—a little disturbed by their expression.

"But... what of Jared and the others? They'll get in the way. I'm not doubting your capabilities or plans, but..."

"Jared, Neron, and the other major threats are currently not present. I made sure of that."

"W-what?!" Stefan's eyes widened further than before.

He didn't understand when this happened. However, if Legris was telling the truth, then this world's power to resist had just fallen to a very terrifying low.

"Serah, Maria, and a few others are still present. However, they won't prove to be a threat on their own. In the end, things will proceed according to the plan."

Hearing all of this made Stefan excited, though he did his best to hide it.

"Okay, Legris. I'm in. Where do we start?"

Legris grinned upon hearing those words. His dark brown hair fluttered with the air in the cave and his gleaming eyes expressed pleasure.

"The first order of business would have been to initiate the Amalgamation Process. Unfortunately, Neron badly damaged my Domain, so I don't have enough power to start it."

Stefan didn't understand what Legris was implying by 'The Amalgamation Process' and one look at Ciel showed that even she didn't get it.

"We'll need a very powerful source to achieve it. Fortunately, I already have the perfect plan for obtaining it."

And the best part about his plan was simple.

"With Jared and the other pesky pests gone... there's no one who can stop me."

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Chapter 813: Another World

Silence pervaded the room as my muscles ached.

My heart raced faster than I could endure and I felt sweat forming all over my body. Considering my current situation, this was a well-deserved response.

At the moment, I was surrounded by inconceivably powerful enemies.

The Nether Cult!

They looked a little different from how I remembered them. For one, Ciel looked like a child, The Martial Blade God seemed younger and less dignified and Karlia seemed absolutely furious with me.

Other than that, though, there was another main difference.

Neron was a member of the Cult!

And he was looking at me with complete caution and utter suspicion—something that chilled me to my bones.

If I was in top form, perhaps I could at least devise a method of escape. Perhaps I would have even the slightest chance—though I highly doubted it.

However, things were different here.

I couldn't properly use Magic, and Spellcraft was invalid. I couldn't even sense the energy around me and I lost control over any energy that leaked out of my body

In essence, this was the worst possible condition.

'Is there even any doubt about it?' I thought to myself as I stared at the people who were after my life.

'I'm totally screwed.'

"All of you should stand down. This man is not our enemy."

In a surprising turn of events, Ciel—the one I had least expected to say such a thing—spoke up and addressed the bloodthirsty crowd.

"W-what are you talking about, Ciel? This is Jared Leonard!" Karlia instantly protested this.

She really wanted to kill me, huh?

The Karlia I knew was averse to violence, except when necessary. What caused her to change so much? Or rather... was this really her?

"Yeah! We shouldn't even be wasting time deliberating this! An opportunity has presented itself to us." Stefan, who also wanted to kill me more than anyone else, spoke up.

"Relax. Do you think it would be that easy to kill Jared Leonard?" Neron's calm voice soothed the crowd and he remained composed, despite the commotion.

To be honest, even though he was my enemy, I still couldn't help but admire him. It seemed like he noticed that too.

"Let's hear what Lady Ciel has to say, first." He added.

With his voice of reason permeating the group, the members accepted it grudgingly. It seemed they respected both Neron and Ciel too much to allow their personal desires take over.

"Thank you, Neron. Now then... back to the topic at hand." Ciel shifted her gaze from each of the Nether Cult members and then stared at me.

"Young man... who do you think I am?" She asked.

Was she talking to me? Did she just call me a 'young man'? That was a little odd, coming from a little midget like her.

Well, considering how old Ciel was, then I suppose it wasn't really weird.

'Should I play ball? Should I be honest with a conversation, or—'

"Hey! Answer Lady Ciel already!" Karlia yelled at me—her eyes nearly exploding in a threatening fashion.

'Yikes! I better just be honest here. Since she stopped everyone, then it means she at least wants a conversation... right? But this doesn't make any sense, right? All of this is so strange and weird!'

"Fret not, Jared. Or should I call you Lewis? I am not your enemy. I simply want to confirm something. So tell me... who do you think I am?"

Ciel was flashing me a very innocent, harmless smile. The one I knew could easily smile the same way and it wouldn't count for squat. However, I strangely felt the need to at least trust this one.

Whether or not that would yield a positive result still remained uncertain. Then again, it wasn't like I had much of a choice.

"You're Ciel. The true leader of the Nether Cult and the depraved woman who sacrificed her child just so she could bring back the Nether to destroy all that exists."

I was leaving out a lot, but that was the gist of it.

There was no way I could be fooled by her seemingly innocent demeanour. Underneath that facade was a monster.

'More importantly, didn't she appear with Legris and crash our party? Wasn't that the reason I got sent here? What of the others?'

Right before everything went blank, I thought I heard Neron's voice in my head. It told me something about how Maria and the others were safe.

If I was to take him at his word, then I just needed to worry about how to get myself out of this mess—not that it would be possible in the slightest.

Now that I had spilt the beans, there was no longer any doubt that I knew all about Ciel's evil act and her grand goal.

The Nether Cult was evil through and through—and I knew all of that.

"What the hell is he talking about?"

"Look, he's out of his mind! This is the perfect time to end his life!"

"Looks like practising all that Dark Magic has finally affected his brain. He's vulnerable now!"

It seemed these hungry wolves were ready to devour me. However, Ciel raised her hand and stopped them.

'Why?' I couldn't understand the reason.

However, she still maintained her creepy smile and approached me without any form of ill will or caution.

"I knew it..." She whispered and drew closer.

It honestly creeped me out, but I held my ground.

"All of those things you said... they aren't of me."

Did she really think I would buy that? But, come to think of it, it was weird that everyone around thought I was insane for saying the truth as it was.

Why did it feel like I was the one who was crazy?

"You must be referring to a different Ciel." Once she said this, my eyes widened and I suddenly realized something I had been too confused to think about.

"I am not the Ciel you know." I nodded slowly as she spoke.

She was right, after all. It was entirely possible that I was the one mistaken this whole time.

This place... these people... this world...

... They were different from the ones I knew.

"You're not the Jared we know, are you?"

"No, I'm not." I responded, now convinced that something was indeed off with everything so far.

I hadn't completely figured it out, but this seemed like the most reasonable conclusion—especially after all the signs.

"I'm in another world."

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Chapter 814: An Alternate Explanation [Pt 1]

[A Few Hours Later]

I sat alone, in a confined space.

It felt very similar to a detention center, but considering the situation, I couldn't complain too much about anything.

These people were well within their rights.

According to what Ciel had explained to me, after we both confirmed that our realities were indeed different from each other, they weren't the Nether Cult.

Their true identity was the 'Outgroup'—popularly known as Outers.

They were indeed perceived to be the enemies of this world and its factions, but for good reason. I had no cause to think they were evil, and after confirming that my reality was different from theirs, Ciel decided to show more courtesy.

At this point, I was mooching off them.

'I'm confused and in a strange place. I need them more than they need me.'

Besides, they could kill me at any moment. I was at their mercy, so it was better to cooperate.

'But, wow... this feels unreal.'

Aether did tell me about the nigh-infinite branches connected to the stem and then the Root. I never knew I would be crossing branches anytime soon.

'Is this what Legris is after? He must have done this with [The World].'

That meant he was up to no good!

If he got rid of me, he must have gotten rid of the others that would prove to be threats to him. Neron and Kuzon were a definite.

'If they're out of our reality, then what happens next? Who'll be able to stop Legris?'

I had faith in my friends, but I couldn't put them in such obvious danger—especially where Legris was concerned.

I knew about Neron's history with him and how dangerous he was. We still didn't know his goals, making the threat he posed much more dangerous.

'I need to get back... and fast!'

>CREAK<

The door to my room opened and a man entered.

"I apologize for the wait and the inconvenience." He gently spoke, a calm demeanor on his clear face.

'Neron... and he's alone?'

The room has a large table at the center, with my chair on one end and two chairs on the other. I had expected Ciel to be the one here—perhaps with Neron in tow.

But to think he came alone...

"If you're wondering about Lady Ciel, then she has gone into meditation. She won't be able to attend to you now." He took his seat opposite me.

"I'll be representing her and the Outgroup as the Team Leader."

So Neron was the leader of the Outgroup? Why wasn't I surprised? However, if he was the head, then who was Ciel?

What was her position in their organization?

"Firstly, I would like to apologize for my team's behaviour. You suddenly appeared in our base and it didn't make matters better that you have the face of our enemy."

When he put it that way, it was even a surprise that they didn't eliminate me quickly. Never before had I been thankful for the fact that I could communicate with them.

If we spoke different languages, things would have devolved far quicker.

"I should be the one thanking you all. You were understanding enough to give me a chance to explain myself. Even now, I'm sure a good number of you are still suspicious of me. Thanks for giving me the benefit of the doubt."

"Well... we weren't really giving you a chance to explain yourself." Neron muttered, scratching his black hair a little.

"We were just being cautious. If we knew we could take you, we would have eliminated you as soon as you showed up."

I instantly gulped at his cold statement. How lucky was I that they considered me a threat big enough to cautiously approach?

"O-of course, we're deeply sorry for how we treated you. Ciel has explained the details to me, so I'll fill you in on what you want to know. Hopefully, we can share information and benefit from this conversation." Neron gave a strained smile.

Clearly, he wasn't used to it.

Still, even though this wasn't my world and the people here were different, Neron seemed the most similar to the original. He was just as level-headed and courteous.

It would be safe to assume the same of his strength.

"Yeah, I hope we can get along too. And I also look forward to sharing information with you."

I didn't know why Ciel was meditating, or what the other members were doing, but it was most likely the wisest choice for Neron to be here.

He was the best person I could be comfortable around.

"The only issue is where to begin." I added with a sigh.

I was completely lost.

Based on how they sounded, and how everyone was different, I could deduce that this alternate reality had a different history from mine. The people here lived different lives too.

If I was ever to comprehend this reality, then I would have to throw out any of the preconceived notions I had about my world.

"Why don't we start from the very beginning? The most important parts, of course... like the reason behind the ongoing war and the purpose behind our existence."

It seemed there was a lot to cover.

"Please tell me what happened here." I bowed slowly, ready to be enlightened.

Neron nodded and began to tell his tale.

Believe me... I could never have imagined it being this crazy.

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Chapter 815: An Alternate Explanation [Pt 2]

It sounded unbelievable... but it was true.

Thousands of years ago, a group widely known as the Cult of Darkness sought to dominate this world and the worlds outside it by utilizing a strange power.

This power was known as Dark Magic.

Dark Magic had the power to nullify and corrode anything, making it supreme. It was a widely coveted power, but also dangerous.

The Cult of Darkness sought to use this power to take over everything. However, a certain follower of good would not allow it.

The Priestess of Light, also known as Ciel, was chosen by the very universe to stop them. She was given the laws of nature, as well as the understanding of hidden things.

Using these gifts bestowed upon her by the world's will, she was able to save everyone and defeat all those who desired world domination. In exchange for her life, of course.

Unfortunately... even that hadn't been enough.

Merlin, the leader of the Cult, had found a way to preserve his Soul using this evil Magic. If she had left the world without any protection, it was bound to suffer at Merlin's hands.

As a result, using the last of her power, she sent herself into the stream of time and ignited a process of Reincarnation.

Out of time and out of energy, she was not able to properly control the Reincarnation and so ended up being born in this era... where the damage had already been done, with the world already plunged into chaos.

That was the tragic history of this world.

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'It's totally different from my reality. That's crazy.'

Just how different were things in other branches?

I understood that different worlds meant different events and that with small modifications, bigger changes were bound to happen—thus creating a ripple effect that would spread out and completely alter events that would have otherwise happened.

As I digested everything Neron told me, more questions popped up in my mind. One of those was about the identity of my doppelganger in this world.

'No. Now isn't the time. I'll let Neron keep talking.'

"After thousands of years of peace and relative progress... there finally came the dark point of humanity." Neron said, his eyes narrowed in slight hesitance.

"Oh? Is that why you are all on edge and—"

"No. This happened over five hundred years ago. It was the birth of the monster that would completely change this world."

'Five hundred years ago? Monster? Could he mean...?!' My eyes widened as he stared deeply into them with his dark irises.

"Lewis Griffith, the Deranged Sage, was born."

Deranged Sage? That was ridiculous! Just how much history changed?

"We know very little about his past. We know he grew up in a rural community and he attended Ainzclark Academy, rapidly growing in power and influence. Even though he was Inept, he kept surprising everyone with his research and scientific progress."

Everything Neron said seemed to tally with my actions in the past. What exactly was so wrong with it?

"However, Lewis Griffith suddenly changed one day. He was discovered to be delving into Dark Magic, killing people and using them for research purposes."

Okay... now things were getting a bit out of hand.

"He was so obsessed with Magic that the lengths he went to had no limits. He made so many horrible creations and committed so many terrible acts..."

Hearing about the evils that I had wrought on this world felt strange. I knew this guy wasn't me, yet why did I feel a little pain in my chest?

"Ciel believes that this was due to Merlin's interference. He must have come into contact with Lewis at some point and corrupted him. That's how Lewis was able to quickly develop Magic, as well as propound so many Magical breakthroughs."

"So, what happened to him? Was he stopped?"

Neron shook his head at my question, sighing slowly.

"Lewis Griffith must have known of the limits he had with an Inept body. He would have eventually grown old and died—there was no way around it. As a result, he did the unthinkable in his lifetime..." I suddenly felt a chill all over my body.

"He figured out the trick to Reincarnation Magic."

My eyes bulged almost as instantly as Neron said it.

'He figured it out? That's insane!'

I was Reincarnated due to Neron's interference in my world, but this guy actually Reincarnated intentionally?

"The world celebrated his demise and we used what we could in his research to further improve our Magic and civilization. How were we supposed to know he would return as the child of the most influential Duke Household in the Eastern Continent."

'Ah, I see...'

"The Leonard Ducal Household had both Magical Power and Political Authority. They were the perfect target for a parasite like Lewis to feed on. Thus, he reincarnated as the baby, Jared Leonard, and began his rise to power."

Neron further explained their history to me.

As Jared increased in strength, he was able to take over the entire Eastern continent and quickly spread his influence to the other Nations in the world.

He took over the Western Region pretty easily, considering one of his major allies was an influential figure there. She was able to swiftly launch a coup, driving the original King from the throne.

"Jane Ursula took over the Fairy Kingdom from Beruel, nearly killing him in the process."

Neron told me how Beruel had managed to escape and how he found him before Jane Ursula's army caught up to him.

It was shocking that Jane would turn over to the side of evil like that. Sure, this world was warped, but the only reason she performed the coup in my world was for the welfare of her people.

Even that had changed.

"What of the Elven Kingdom? What became of it?"

I wanted to know if this world's version of Emilia ever had a connection with Lewis or Jared. If so, what became of the whole saga?

"That... is another tragic tale."

[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#) **Chapter 816: An Alternate Explanation [Pt 3]**

"W-what?! The Elves are no more?"

My eyes widened with both shock and anger as I looked at Neron. I knew this wasn't my world and my raging emotions were useless, but I couldn't help it at this point.

Not after hearing what he just told me.

"Over five hundred years ago, before Lewis Griffith died, we suspect that he released some sort of Magical virus on the Demon Race. It slowly drove them mad and they became a savage Race. This eventually devolved into something else, and they ultimately sought out violence and destruction."

"B-but why?"

"We initially thought it was just one of his evil antics—a way to spread destruction and chaos even in his absence. However, how could we have known of his future plans?"

The Demon Race went after their closest neighbours—the Elf Kingdom. Due to their sheer numbers and brutal nature, the Elves didn't stand a chance.

All of them—without exception—were wiped out.

'So, the Demon War never happened. Instead, Jared instigated them to kill all the Elves and carry out a massacre? What a monster...'

I had also committed Mass Genocide before, but that had been for many unavoidable reasons. Why would this world's version of myself go to such lengths?

It was no wonder these people hated him.

"When this happened, the Fairy Kingdom feared they would be next, so they partnered up with the other Nations, and together, the world eradicated the Demon Race."

"How did you solve the Miasma Problem?"

"Miasma?" Neron cocked his head in confusion when I asked the question.

"Uh... the energy Demons emit."

"They emit the same kind we do... Mana."

Ah, then it all made sense. The Elves only lost because they were outnumbered and outmatched. As for the Demons, they lost because of the very same reason.

They must have also been exhausted after fighting the Elves, so the alliance used that in their favour.

"The world thought Demons were too dangerous, at that point, so the Alliance decided to exterminate them as well."

It was no surprise—considering the damage the Demons had wrought. Plus, their berserk states made them unreasonable, no doubt.

"As a result, two of the world powers vanished from the face of the Earth, without a trace. Karlia is the only survivor." Neron added.

No wonder she despised me so much. From her perspective, I was responsible for the death of her people.

"She's a mutant, so the virus didn't have any effect on her. She had no other choice but to watch as her people slowly descended into darkness. In the end, she couldn't save any of them."

Neron went on to tell me how Lewis, after reincarnating as Jared, was able to easily take over the world thanks to the lower number of nations that stood in his way.

The Demons and Elves had some of the highest combat power thanks to their dexterity and affinity with Mana.

Yet... they were killed off before they even had a chance to resist him.

'This world's version of me is just as smart—no, he's probably smarter than I am. He could be getting help from this Merlin guy, but still...'

Hearing about Karlia's story made me curious about the others, so I asked Neron to tell me—if he wanted to, of course.

"Stefan Netherlore was Jared's classmate back when he attended Ainzlark Academy. In his words, his cousin, Maria Helmsworth, had a huge crush on Jared at the time. Unfortunately, she was killed by Jared when he took over Ainzlark Academy during the Monster Invasion on the school."

In more detail, this world's Jared used some monsters to attack Ainzlark Academy, making it easy for him to gain complete control over the Magic Institute.

Stefan saw how his cousin, and very close friend, was killed in the Invasion, and when he realized that it was intentionally caused by Jared, he couldn't forgive him.

"Stefan is very talented, you see. He's a genius that outclasses any human I know. He resisted Jared's ascent with all his might, but even he couldn't stop that bastard from taking over the school. He would have died trying too..."

I was shocked to hear all of this. Stefan, Ainzlark... everything was so different.

"Reed Sterling was the Headmaster back then and he was the one who led the students to try to resist Jared's uprising. Unfortunately, even he was no match for the boy. In the end, his efforts were in vain and a trap was set for the resisters."

Jared slaughtered every single person who went up against him that day.

"Reed had contacted me earlier that day, so I went to the scene to help. I saw the carnage firsthand. Unfortunately, when I arrived, Reed and Stefan were the only ones who were still alive."

Neron saved them, and they were only able to escape with his help.

"Reed still blames himself for the deaths of all those students and Stefan cries on some nights due to the loss of his cousin."

It seemed all of them had lost one thing or the other thanks to this evil version of myself.

"Vaizer's situation is similar to Beruel's case. They were both ousted from their Kingdom as a result of Jared's quest for power. It's worse for Vaizer because his wives and children were all slaughtered before his eyes by the new Beast King."

"D-don't tell me it's... Gerard?!"

"Yes. It seems you know him from your world. Gerard became Jared's loyal subordinate after being offered a cure for the Beastfolk's short lifespan, as well as increased power."

'A-ah... that...' I kept my lips shut this time, pretending I knew nothing about it.

"I was able to save Vaizer since I had been monitoring the Beast Kingdom when the incident occurred. I already suspected Jared would attack the place next. Unfortunately, I was only able to save Vaizer."

After the Beastfolk Conquest, Jared enslaved the Dwarves as well. In essence, the Deranged Slave had practically conquered the world.

"Well, almost. There remains one powerful nation that remains standing despite all of Jared's efforts to take it down." Neron interrupted my thought, raising a finger.

"The Midas Empire."

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Chapter 817: Neron's Shocking Revelation

"The Midas Empire is being ruled by Kuzon Midas, and they've taken control of the Northern Continent, making it their stronghold."

When Nerom told me this, I couldn't control the smile on my face. It seemed not everyone was a problem, after all.

'The Midas Empire still stands in this reality? That's amazing!'

"Kuzon has formed an alliance with the Magic Beasts and they're currently warding off Jared's forces. In any case, that's the current state of this world—The Midas Empire versus Jared's United Nations." He sighed.

For some reason, Neron didn't seem too happy about the resistance Kuzon made against Jared. Perhaps things weren't as simple as I thought.

"Why not ally yourselves with the Midas Empire and help them stop Jared?" I asked.

Neron sighed even more, confirming my earlier suspicions. It seemed something more was wrong with the Midas Empire and Kuzon.

"If only we could reason with Kuzon Midas. Unfortunately, ever since Jared killed his parents, he has been blinded by pure rage and he has led his nation into an all-out war against Jared's forces."

Neron continued to tell me how much of a tyrant Kuzon was and I instantly realized that this guy was totally different from the Kuzon I remembered.

"Kido, his uncle, tried to knock some sense into him. He tried to let him consider a better way to win without an all-out sacrificial war, but he was shunned by Kuzon. In the end, Kido joined us so we could stop Jared before Kuzon slipped further into darkness."

It seemed quite selfless for Kido to go so far for his bratty nephew. From the little I knew about him—after hearing Beruel and Kuzon speak about him in my original world—the dude was an asshole.

'If he's kind here, then that's an improvement for sure.'

It seemed the situation was more dire than I thought. This world was caught between two extremely powerful factions—Jared, the world-conquering maniac, and Kuzon, the tyrannical ruler.

Both sides were at loggerheads and so the world burned as they engaged in conflict.

"That's why we exist. As the Outgroup, we take it upon ourselves to intervene in ways that Kuzon won't. We covertly attack Jared's supply points, we reduce his manpower, we set traps, and we do whatever we can to stop them—or at least slow them down."

"To what end, though?" I asked.

"Merlin had a plan, and it seems Jared is also following in his footsteps. Ciel fears that they might be trying to rain Dark Magic upon this world, just like what happened those years ago."

"I see..."

The Outgroup, though consisting of only a few members, seemed to be doing very important work. It was impressive that their little group had been able to hold on for so long.

... Or was it?

'This doesn't add up at all.' I thought to myself.

These people were equivalent to the Nether Cult in my world. Those guys really caused us a lot of trouble, and in the end, they won—at least, until Aether intervened.

If these guys had the same roster—with Karlia, Neron, the Martial Blade God, and Kido leading the charge... what was stopping them from winning?

After listening to the tales of each member and seeing how Neron intervened, it puzzled me that he couldn't do more than rescue the victims.

For example, when he saved Stefan and Reed during the Ainzlark takeover... Why couldn't he have defeated Jared right then and there?

During the Beastfolk coup, why hadn't he helped Vaizer more than he did? It made no sense, considering the fact that Neron was the strongest person I knew.

Unless...

"How powerful is this group... no, how powerful are you? What level are you at in Magic? Peak? Transcendent?" I didn't want to say any further, since that would be too much.

Or was I looking at this wrong? Perhaps it wasn't that the Outgroup was weaker than I thought, but that Jared's team was just much more superior.

Maybe I already surpassed Neron in this world.

"We measure our Magic by stars. One star is the weakest... and Nine stars is the highest." Neron spoke, interrupting my thoughts.

'Ah, so even their concept of Magic is different.'

Still, I had no doubts that Neron would place somewhere rather high up.

"Those who can't practice Magic don't qualify for this classification though, and I'm one of them. I am an Inept."

... Eh?

'Did I just hear that right?'

"You're... inept...?"

Suddenly, I began to piece everything together. The reason why the team didn't seem as powerful as I thought they would be, and the reason Neron hadn't solved the problem at this point.

He couldn't use Magic!

"I assume the Neron in your world could utilize Magic." He smiled a little. "Based on that look you're giving me."

Oh boy, he had no idea just how much magic he could use!

The Neron in my world was a beast on another level. Everyone knew that!

'I shouldn't say anything. It's better that way.' I told myself, bleeding for this version of Neron as I held back my tears.

"Y-yeah. He had Magic." I simply replied, stuttering for a second.

"I see. Was he strong? Could he have averted this crisis?" He went on to ask.

I shivered instantly. What was this guy's deal? How could he ask such leading questions? It seemed no matter the world, Neron was still as clever as always.

"Yeah, most likely. The Neron in my world is strong enough to save the world many times over."

"I see... thanks for telling me." A sad smile formed on his face.

"Sometimes, I have these feelings of dissatisfaction swirl up within me. I want to do more... to be more—and it always feels like I should be able to achieve it. Yet..."

I could relate with Neron, considering the fact that I was Inept in my past life as well.

"But, I've long made my peace with my lack of Magical Abilities. After all, there's more than one way to win a fight."

I watched as Neron broke into a bright, charismatic smile. His face was shining with such blinding hope that I could only watch in awe.

Rather than feel despair, or pat himself on the back in pity, Neron kept pressing forward.

"We will win this war... and we won't fail."

It seemed no matter what reality, Neron was still the same. And I couldn't help but smile at this.

'That's good.'

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Chapter 818: Unbending Will

"Edward teaches me Martial Arts, so I'm pretty competent in that respect. My true strength, however, lies in developing Magic Items and strategies."

Neron told me about how he had learned how to manipulate Magic artificially by using what he called 'Mana Magnets'. By using them, he made Magic Items as a kid, and he became better and better as time went on.

He had cultivated this talent himself as well. Although he had also attended Ainzlark, so part of his knowledge had been gained from the school. His talent and skill had been the reason that he and Reed became close during his stay at the school, and even after that.

'As expected of Neron. Even if he is an Inept, he still ends up being a badass.'

There was one thing he'd said that stood out about everything he had explained so far, though.

"Edward? Who exactly are you referring to?"

Did that mean that my Ainzlark friends were here too? No, according to what Neron said, only Stefan and Reed were from Ainzlark. If Edward existed in this world, he would most likely be dead.

"You met him earlier. That big oaf with the blade."

Hold on... who exactly was he calling Edward? Was it actually...

"... The Martial Blade God?!"

"Martial Blade God? Edward? Please don't let him hear you say that." After chuckling for some time, Neron's face suddenly turned straight and he stared plainly at me. "Seriously, don't."

What was the problem now? Maybe... oh no... was the Martial Blade God nerfed in this world too? At this point, I could only assume that to be the current situation.

"Edward has been walking on the path of immortality for so many centuries that even he has lost count of how long he has lived. Unfortunately, he never had the required talent to back up all his hard work. As a result, despite all his efforts as a Martial Artist, he was never able to break past the fifth star of being a Martial Artist."

Based on my calculations, that would make him close to the Peak Stage, but not quite there yet. That was a massive downplay of what I knew of him in my world!

"How is he not dead yet?" I asked with a short laugh. "He couldn't have possibly reached a point where he could conquer death, right?"

He even looked younger than he did in my world.

"Apparently, he met an Immortal Shaman by the name of Lilith. She had been the one to grant him a never-ending life since he wished to be able to practice Martial Arts forever."

My eyes bulged the moment he mentioned that name and beads of sweat dripped down my face.

"L-Lilith? Did you just say Lilith? She really made Edward immortal?"

"Yes."

What in the world was going on? Why would she do something like that? Yes, I knew this world was different, and that this world's Lilith was different from the one I knew.

But still...

'She would never do that. Not with the consequences that would definitely follow. Unless...'

"Does the Martial Bla— I mean, does Edward experience any sort of side effects due to his immortality?" I asked Neron while trying to breathe through my sudden state of panic.

"No... not that I know of. He's always in healthy shape. Though, if you ask me, he takes things a little too far. Because he knows he can't die, he's always putting himself in all sorts of danger."

'Ah... it's no wonder, then.' I smiled to myself.

So, in this world, Lilith perfected it. It all made perfect sense now.

"Why would she make him immortal, though?"

"Well, he grew up under her tutelage. According to him, he spent the first couple decades of his life learning Martial Arts from her."

Ah, yes. Lilith was a monster who excelled at both Martial Arts and Magic. I had never seen anyone surpass her in that regard in either of my lives.

"She told him he had no talent for it, but he kept being stubborn and determined. In the end, she allowed him to keep practising so he could achieve his goals. Afterwards, she disappeared, and he hasn't seen her since."

'That's an interesting story. So, Lilith brought up the Martial Blade God in this world. She always wanted kids, but...'

"It's a shame, though. If only we could find her so she could join our cause. According to Edward, she's very powerful."

Some things just never changed, I guess.

"So, how did you and Edward meet?" I asked with a lighthearted smile.

Somehow, it felt good to hear that this world's Lilith was doing just fine. I knew it didn't change what happened in my reality, but... it still brought me some level of satisfaction.

Perhaps I was just being self-patronizing.

"I stumbled upon a cave where he had been in seclusion. Apparently, he had been in the cave for so long that he didn't even know about the chaotic state of the world. I had been a teenager back then, so we sort of got along well."

Edward and Neron hit it off pretty easily and they eventually became the best of friends it seems.

Neron then went on to tell me about how Ciel appeared in front of them and told them all about herself. After she explained the destructive events of the past and the fate of the world to come, he knew he had to create a group to help everyone.

Edward had been the first member of the Outgroup, and after some time, they increased in number.

"A good number of our comrades are dead. Damien Lawcroft had been a good man. He hadn't been as talented as Reed or Stefan, but I knew him when we had both been at Ainzlark. We were good friends in school..."

Ah, to think even this would happen once again.

"He sacrificed himself for the cause, as did a couple of others. But, we've managed to survive this long. This world needs us and we can't give up now."

I honestly felt moved by Neron's words. It was no surprise that he was the leader. Still, his ideals didn't mean much if their members were too weak to achieve their desired results.

Surely, he had to be aware of that.

"So, tell me... what exactly is your trump card? What makes you so confident that you guys can win this war?" There had to be a driving reason behind his continuous efforts.

"Well... we aren't very strong individually, but we work extremely well as a team. Besides..." Neron's smile widened and he suddenly became even more happy.

"... You've already met our Ace. She's the very heart of this group—the one who kickstarted this whole movement."

Ah, yes. How could I forget her? Even in my world, she had been the one who made the Nether Cult emerge victorious in the end.

"Ciel."

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Chapter 819: Resolve To Advance

"Ciel trains us in Magic and teaches us ancient Spells lost to civilization. She also reveals the things that happened in the past, helping us make sense of the present."

I could sense a great deal of respect in Neron's tone as he spoke. He and Ciel must have really come a long way.

"You really trust her, huh?"

Neron smiled slightly and nodded.

"She doesn't have most of her former powers, and her connection to the world has thinned considerably. It takes a lot of time for her to gather enough power to affect the laws of this world, but without a doubt... Ciel is the strongest."

In essence, thanks to her abrupt and rushed reincarnation process, Ciel was nerfed.

'Their team is obviously outgunned.' I thought to myself.

I had expected something more spectacular, but if this was all they could boast of, I was a bit worried about us.

Even Karlia and Kido, who were plenty powerful in my world were bound to have some sort of limit in this world.

"I realize what you might be thinking. This seems like a losing war, doesn't it? However, we have a plan."

My body twitched a little upon hearing my favourite word. Instantly, anticipation filled my eyes and I looked at Neron with expectation.

"What plan?"

"By coordinating our attacks to look random on the surface, and attacking strategic sites which will definitely affect Jared's world Empire." Neron began, his eyes narrowing with seriousness.

"We plan on launching a sting operation on one of those facilities today. It's a weapon production site. Destroying it will not be enough to stop Jared, but it'll slow the effects of his tyranny down."

I liked how Neron was as pragmatic as he was hopeful. It would still take a long time to deal any damage to this Evil Jared himself at their current pace, but I recognized what their efforts would achieve.

"That's pretty good."

"Thank you. I'm only telling you all of this because Ciel told me not to withhold information from you."

I perfectly understood this. In fact, I was already pretty excited about the whole thing that I eventually had to raise my hand to make a suggestion.

"Why don't I help you guys?" A smile leaked from my face.

"Help us? How?"

"W-well, with Magic. Back in my world, I'm pretty strong, you know? Not as strong as Neron, but still very powerful."

"Oh? Really? That's great, then. Maybe next time."

'... Eh?'

I was actually offering my help just now.... And Neron just politely refused it at point blank.

"Do not take offence at my words. It's simply because you are an unaccounted variable in the plan. I can't add you to the team so abruptly since that would mean a whole lot more planning and restrategizing. And we're leaving today."

Once he said that, I realized I was the one being inconsiderate.

The more people who had to be teleported or protected, the more power one would have to expend. If they were truly trying their best to conserve energy, and they had made a perfectly functional plan without me, then I would just be a nuisance.

Besides...

'I don't think I can help much anyway. My power is still on the fritz.' I thought to myself. 'I need to figure out how to stabilise my power... and fast!'

"There's also the fact that you still don't know a lot about this world, and my teammates don't wholly trust you." Neron's calm voice permeated the room.

Afterwards, for a while, we both descended into silence.

"How about you? Do you trust me?"

Neron's stoic face hardly moved as he shrugged his shoulders, rising to his feet in the process.

"Strangely enough, I do. I don't have a particularly good reason for believing you. I guess you could call it my intuition."

"There's a lot more to say and I would like to hear all about your world too, but there's hardly much time left. I have to go now."

Neron made for the room's exit, opening the door slowly.

"You should remain here until we get back. The Magic barrier here gets deactivated after a day, so if we're not here by then, consider yourself free to go."

So there WAS a Magic Barrier. As expected.

'Yet, I didn't notice it. How weak have I gotten?'

"I understand. I'll try to figure things out on my end too. Thanks for your time." I replied with a genuine smile.

"It's fine. Rest well."

With that, Neron exited the room and shut it behind him, leaving me alone to ponder my current predicament in this strange world.

'My connection to Aether was severed back then, so I can only resort to Mana and Miasma. However, for some reason, I can't use them properly here. Why?'

If I had to develop a theory, it would be because of wavelength. I couldn't sense the Mana here, so the wavelength of this world must be different from mine.

After all, this world has its own set of rules, and as a foreigner, I would need to learn them in order to realise how to apply my abilities to them, so that they would work.

In essence, I would have to build my Magic from scratch. If I was to choose a method, it would begin with my Mana Cores.

I didn't have the time, opportunity, or need to do this back in my old world, after the war, but perhaps it was finally time to begin.

'First, I'll compress my Mana and Miasma Cores, purifying them to the utmost degree so I can form an active Aether Core.'

I didn't know how many Cores I would need to sacrifice to achieve this feat, but it was necessary. Then, there was the other thing.

'I also have to figure out how to properly use Magic in accordance with this world's wavelength and see if I can use Spellcraft while I'm at it.'

With no Arcana or enough Magic to fuel my Original Magic, I was stuck in this world. I still had a lot to learn and plenty of things to do, so the sooner I got started, the better.

'Looks like I'll have to resume my hardcore training.'

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Chapter 820: Strategic Meeting [Pt 1]

"So, how did it go with that shady guy?"

Neron had just been walking into the Meeting Room when he heard a voice ask him about his meeting with Jared.

It came from none other than Karlia who was currently scowling while standing in a corner in the room.

"If you hadn't left there after five more minutes, I would have stormed in there and dismantled his body, pulling it apart limb by limb." She added, her sharp teeth bared, thanks to her wide, malevolent smile.

"Relax. He's not dangerous or evil. He seems good." Neron sighed, looking at the rest of his teammates—some of whom gave him looks of disbelief.

"You really trust him, Neron?" Edward asked, his arms folded as he leaned against the wall while standing in a different corner of the room. His eyes were closed and he was in a cool and composed pose with his kimono.

"Yeah, I do." Neron ignored the swordsman's attempt to look cool and instead drew closer to Karlia.

"At first, I only decided to give him a chance because of Lady Ciel. However, after observing and having a conversation with him, I can say for sure that I trust him."

Neron's statement and his soft smile shocked everyone in the room.

"You're not the trusting type, Neron." Karlia reminded him, placing her hands on his cheeks while staring straight into his eyes.

"Really? I'm pretty sure I trusted you well enough." He said this as his smile grew wider. "Or have you forgotten?"

"Perhaps I have. Care to remind me?" Was the Succubus' reply.

Everyone in the room knew what was coming, so they instantly averted their gazes from the two in front of them.

Even Stefan, who was interested in the whole thing, had his eyes covered by Reed Sterling.

"You're not ready for this yet." The man said to the boy.

Neron and Karlia ignored everyone in the room and crushed their lips on each other, enjoying a warm and loving kiss. It got rid of all the tension in the room—replacing it with a different kind.

The perfect solution they needed at the moment.

"You two need to get a room." Edward groaned. "I practice celibacy, so I don't think you need to rub all of this in my face, you know?"

"Yeah, right. You're just keeping yourself for Lilith."

"H-hey! That's Master Lilith for you!"

The group burst into laughter, fully taking advantage of the brand-new atmosphere that allowed them to laugh and smile so freely.

Of course, even this didn't last for too long.

"Alright, let's get down to business." Neron began, spreading out a large map on the large table at the centre of the room.

Other than that, no piece of furniture existed.

The whole team gathered around the very detailed map that he was showing them.

"My Scout Golem took a live footage from above the site and I compiled it to form this."

The extensive structure of the sight was at least half a dozen acres of land, and the ominous-looking terrain would have been enough to intimidate anyone.

But not these Outers.

No, they had a mission to fulfil.

"Lady Ciel is currently gathering enough energy for the trip. Once she's done, we'll set out immediately."

The longer they delayed, the less accurate this map would be. They had to strike as soon as possible.

"I believe in all of us and our abilities." Neron stared at his comrades with a confident smile.

"Edward..." His best friend.

"Karlia..." The woman he loved with all of his heart.

"Kido..." The man he sympathized with the most.

"Reed..." His old mentor and friend.

"Stefan..." His adopted younger brother.

"Beruel..." His drinking partner and brother-in-arms.

"Vaizer..." His most respected comrade.

These were the people he had risked his life for and with. He trusted them with everything he had, and they trusted him in return.

Along with Lady Ciel, who gave him a purpose, this group of people were his family.

And that was never going to change.

"... Let's do our best!"

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[MEANWHILE]

In a dark castle to the far East, there was a room that remained untouched—out of the reach of many others, save for a few.

Within this room were four individuals, all standing in the presence of a massive throne. Usually one would need to constantly bow before this throne, but things were different for these four.

The dark room was exquisitely furnished, considering this was a luxurious place to be.

The chandeliers that hung from the ceiling, and the twisted murals that were illustrated on the walls, all of them depicted fine luxury. The gleaming stones that were placed strategically and the trophy of weapons across the space also told of the majesty of the man on the throne.

... That is, if he could be called a man.

"I welcome you all, my friends." A very youthful voice surged forth from the throne and the lights all over the room instantly flashed.

The brightness revealed the four who stood before the elevated throne and the one who sat on it.

"Jane, Elrich, Gerard... and Abellion." The supreme ruler spoke as he narrowed his eyes at the four of them.

His four generals.

Steadily drumming his fingers on the exquisite golden throne, he looked beyond the flight of stairs that separated him from the base where they stood.

"It has been some time..." Gerard spoke with a tone of reverence.

"Indeed, I hope you have been well..." Abellion followed.

"It is indeed an honour..." Elrich smiled.

"Did you miss me...?"

All their eyes focused on the man worthy of their attention, loyalty, and adoration.

"... Lord Jared."

He smiled as he listened to his generals greet him.

Garbed in a regal black and gold attire, with a golden crown on his head, and bleached white hair, Jared silently watched their display of reverence.

It never failed to amuse him.

"Now that you're all here, let us begin the meeting." He rose from his throne and his royal outfit flowed seamlessly behind him.

"There's a lot to discuss."