

SPELLCRAFT 991

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

Chapter 991: Grand Federation Base [Pt 1]

As our spacecraft cruised through the vastness of space, a tinge of frustration gnawed at me. And it was all due to one unprecedented problem.

"Urgh..."

"Are we there yet?"

"Not even close..."

The journey to our target destination seemed interminable, the distance stretching out before us like an insurmountable barrier. It became painfully clear that our vessel's speed was woefully insufficient for the task at hand.

We needed a solution, something that could propel us forward at an unprecedented pace.

'Looking at what seems like the fuel gauge, I think we won't even have enough juice to reach our destination.'

It was my fault for thinking a spacecraft built for merely exploring neighboring planets could take us far and fast. 'But why is there a map of the entire solar system, then?'

If I had to guess, maybe it came with the product. The Gatoians and Avarians weren't artisans in any way. They must have bought their tech from a dealer.

'The dealer must have installed the map. Guess it's standard issue.'

"Why couldn't they make this thing go any faster, though?" I groaned.

The spacecraft was moving relatively fast if I was being honest. However, compared to the distance we had to reach, and my own speed, this was sorely lacking.

I was sure Kuzon and Aloe also thought the same.

'But we can't just start flying in foreign space like we own the place.' That meant there had to be another way.

Determined not to be deterred by the sluggishness of our craft, I turned to my friends, Kuzon and Aloe, with a resolute gleam in my eyes.

"I'll use an Arcana." Blurting out, I summoned my [Great Sage's Memoir], and its pages automatically flipped to my desired location.

"This should work."

Drawing upon my connection with the Aether around us and within me, I focused my thoughts on the specific Arcana Spell—[The Chariot].

[The Chariot] granted me the power to control technology with extraordinary precision and imbue them with my will. Using it on a single spacecraft wouldn't be too much, would it?

"Of course not!" My grin grew wider as a warm glow of light coursed through me and seeped into the vessel.

The time had come to harness its might and transform our spacecraft into a vessel of unimaginable speed.

Closing my eyes, I visualized the intricate patterns of energy that comprised the [The Chariot]. A surge of power surged through my veins, resonating with the depths of my being. The spacecraft responded, its metallic frame humming with newfound energy.

I could feel it changing, slightly altering its form to suit my purposes. More importantly, it was coated with a dense skin of Aether. My Aether.

"This should be enough. Let's see the differen—"

>VWUUUUUMMMMMMMM!!!<

In an instant, our vessel surged forward, hurtling through the cosmic expanse at an exhilarating velocity.

The stars blurred into streaks of light, painting a mesmerizing tapestry across the windowpane. The once-distant destination now loomed closer with each passing second.

"W-what in the—?!"

"Now we're talking!" Kuzon burst out in an excited roar, and even Aloe was screaming and laughing at the same time.

If I knew things were going to turn out this way, I would have done this way sooner. But, well, it wasn't too late.

"We should reach our destination in a couple of minutes, at this rate." Kuzon smiled in excitement.

Anything that granted the advantage of speed and efficiency seemed to resonate well with him, since he was in a hurry to return home.

But, well, I couldn't disagree with him this time.

"A couple of minutes, huh?" A thought flashed in my mind.

With the newfound speed at our disposal, I seized the opportunity to delve into the mechanics of our spacecraft.

'I should learn as much as I can about it. If I can understand it better, then...'

And within the next couple of minutes, I did exactly that.

As I studied the intricate consoles and control panels, using [The Chariot] as my guide, I discovered a myriad of functions that piqued my interest.

I was able to completely incorporate The Translator of the Spacecraft outside it, tapping into all of its mechanisms.

I examined its inner workings, noting the complex algorithms and intricate neural networks that allowed for seamless communication across alien tongues. That way, I would be able to communicate with any race even outside the Spacecraft.

The same applied to the map system, the navigation protocols, and the intricate mechanisms that made our journey more manageable.

Time seemed to slip away as I immersed myself in this pursuit of knowledge. The spacecraft hummed with life, its inner workings a symphony of purpose and design.

'Looks like I made it in time, after all.' I smiled, looking through the powerful windows of the spacecraft at what we were closing in on.

As we drew closer, the Grand Federation Base emerged into our view, resembling a breathtaking city encapsulated within a massive glass-like container.

The transparent walls stretched high into the infinite sky, allowing the celestial wonders beyond to cast their enchanting glow upon the bustling streets below. It was as if we were gazing at a piece of art, a magnificent fusion of technology and nature suspended in the vacuum of space.

The base was adorned with gleaming towers and intricate architecture, its metallic structures reflecting the brilliant hues of distant stars. Bridges and walkways crisscrossed between buildings, linking them like arteries in a vibrant, living organism.

Glowing lights, resembling a constellation of their own, illuminated the pathways and plazas, lending an ethereal quality to the entire scene.

Surrounding the base was a network of stellite-like structures, encircling it protectively like loyal guardians.

These satellites served not only as a defense system but also as docking stations for the myriad of spacecraft that arrived daily, bringing people from all corners of the galaxy. Their sleek, streamlined shapes were a testament to the advancements of engineering and design achieved by the Grand Federation.

As we descended towards the landing platform, I marveled at the sheer scale of the base. It was a bustling hub of activity, teeming with people from different planets, species, and walks of life. T

he air hummed with anticipation, mingling with the distant echoes of interstellar communication and the soft hum of anti-gravity vehicles zipping through the air.

Once our spacecraft touched down, we stepped out onto the landing platform, joining the countless individuals who had come before us.

Aloe's eyes sparkled with curiosity as she eagerly absorbed the sights and sounds of the base, while Kuzon's calculating mind was no doubt already pondering how we would navigate our way through this place.

'It really is something, huh?' A wry smile formed on my face as I inhaled deeply.

Together, we took our first steps into the grand city, already one step closer to finding our lost friend.

... Even if we didn't really know it yet.

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Chapter 992: Grand Federation Base [Pt 2]

After we ventured deeper into the bustling base, we found ourselves reaching a threshold.

The maze of streets and corridors led us to a checkpoint manned by an officer of the Grand Federation, dressed in the official uniform adorned with insignias of authority.

Their face resembled an octopus, and the coiling tentacles made it somewhat impossible to look away. I wondered if the people in charge placed this person here intentionally.

The officer's stern expression and focused gaze made it clear that adherence to protocol was paramount, so we straightened our stances and walked in.

Coming to a halt before the officer, I heard it utter in a somewhat gruff tone, "Please state your business here."

I instantly observed the puzzled look on Kuzon and Aloe's faces as the officer's words were in a language unfamiliar to both of them.

'Thankfully, I have a mobile translator with me.' I knew it was up to me to bridge this linguistic divide and convey our purpose.

Taking a deep breath, I stepped forward and met the officer's gaze with unwavering determination. "We are travelers seeking to obtain new Translator Devices and an Interstellar map," I replied, my voice resonating with a mix of confidence and respect.

The officer's skeptical gaze lingered upon us, their expression betraying a hint of doubt. "Prove your claim," they demanded, crossing their arms in a gesture of authority.

"Identification, please."

'Uh oh...!' My eyes twitched and my confidence plummeted instantly.

Why didn't I think of this before? None of us had any identifications, and the vessel we used to traverse this area was a stolen one, to begin with.

"Well, the thing is..."

"Haaa..." I heard a sigh of exasperation suddenly echo from Kuzon.

"You're wasting time, Jared. Leave this to me."

Kuzon stepped forward and confronted the officer, whispering only a few words which I heard very clearly from where I stood.

"[The Absolute Emperor]."

With a subtle gesture, Kuzon's power coursed through him, reaching out to ensnare the officer's mind. It only took a moment, and the effects were just what we needed on the spot.

The officer's skepticism dissolved, replaced by a compliant expression. In a soft, distant voice, they muttered, "You may proceed. Welcome to the Grand Federation Base, Zone 19-E."

Each Zone represented a Galaxy, and the letters behind them represented the Solar System.

Since this was Zone 19, that made us closer to the main headquarters, which was in Zone 1. We would have been in quite the pickle if something terrible unfolded at that moment.

~That's how you get things done. You overcomplicate everything, Jared.~ Kuzon's thoughts echoed in my mind.

'...' I went silent internally, and a glum expression accompanied me as all three of us were granted access to the great citadel.

'Maybe he has a point.'

As we entered the bustling lobby of the base, a vibrant tapestry of alien races and species greeted us.

My senses tingled with anticipation as I observed the kaleidoscope of colors, shapes, and sizes that populated the area. Conversations echoed in a myriad of languages, merging into a symphony of voices.

Eager to gather information and make sense of our surroundings, I reached out with my magical senses, seeking to detect the subtle energies emanating from the diverse beings around us.

'Looks like Kuzon and Aloe are doing the same.' I smiled, observing them spread out their senses as well.

However, to my surprise, my attempts were met with interference.

'What...?' My eyes widened slightly, and I looked around me in a slight hint of confusion.

The technology within the base seemed to dampen the effects of my magical perception, leaving me with only faint glimpses of the auras and energies that usually filled my awareness.

'This is... unexpected.' I glanced over at the other two.

Kuzon and Aloe, equally intrigued, experimented with their own magical abilities, hoping to pierce through the technological interference. Yet, they faced the same limitations as I did.

It was as if the base itself shielded its inhabitants, intentionally restricting the influence of our abilities within its walls.

'Hmmm... I see now.'

An explosion suddenly interrupted my words as soon as they were uttered, drowning my voice in a loud eruption of both flames and electricity.

"ARRRRRRHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Panic swept through the crowd as chaos erupted. Shards of glass-like material rained down from above, and the once vibrant and harmonious space devolved into a scene of confusion and fear.

A stampede instantly formed as everybody in the area began running in a frenzy. In this chaos, I knew there was only one thing to do.

"Haa... [The Hermit]."

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Chapter 993: The Fugitive [Pt 1]

[A Few Moments Earlier]

[Zone 19, Grand Federation Base E-1]

The air crackled with tension as the woman stood at the entrance of a dimly lit, high-tech corridor.

Dressed in a sleek and form-fitting bodysuit that shimmered with high-end technology, she exuded an air of confidence and determination.

Her glowing blue eyes, hidden behind a sturdy helmet, glinted with a mix of focus and defiance, and her brunette hair cascaded down her back in loose waves. She adjusted the holographic helmet on her face, ensuring it was securely in place before engaging the enemy.

"As expected. This place is well-guarded." She whispered, her gaze settling on the opponents who obstructed her.

Alien guards, towering in stature and armed with otherworldly weapons, lined the corridor, their reptilian features contorted with malice. They had matching armored uniforms, all belonging to the Grand Federation.

They were elite guards; the cream of the crop. And their mission was simple... preventing the woman before them from getting past them, or even leaving this Grand Federation Base alive.

The atmosphere hummed with the sound of energy pulsating through the weapons they held. Undeterred, the woman took a step forward, her body perfectly poised for action.

As the first guard lunged towards her with lightning speed, she evaded his attack effortlessly, ducking under his outstretched arm.

She swiftly retaliated, her hand whirling to reveal a small device that emitted a dazzling burst of light. The alien guard staggered back, temporarily disoriented by the blinding flash.

The woman's movements were fluid and precise as she danced between her adversaries, each encounter a choreographed display of grace and power.

She somersaulted through the air, flipping over an alien guard's head and delivering a swift kick to his back, sending him crashing into his comrades.

A group of guards attempted to overwhelm her, their synchronized assault meant to trap her in a barrage of strikes. Sensing their strategy, the woman's eyes narrowed, and determination etched across her face.

With a flick of her wrist, a hidden compartment on her forearm released a flurry of miniature projectiles, each honing in on its target with deadly accuracy. The guards recoiled in pain as the tiny darts found their mark, incapacitating them one by one.

But they were relentless. Regaining their footing, the remaining guards closed in, surrounding her on all sides.

As they converged upon her, the woman drew upon a hidden power within her suit. Her eyes blazed with a fierce intensity as she summoned the energy, a swirling force field shimmering into existence around her.

The alien guards' attacks were repelled effortlessly by the force field, their blows rendered useless against the woman's impenetrable shield.

"You're a nuisance." With a swift wave of her hand, a surge of energy rippled out, sending all her opponents flying.

As she took a step forward, yet another group of alien guards materialized from the shadows, their gleaming armor reflecting the pale light.

"So you already called for backup before I jammed communications, huh? Not bad..." She grinned within her helmet, preparing for another round.

The officers brandished their weapons, the reptilian faces contorted into menacing snarls as they encircled the woman.

"FIRE!!!"

In that instant, a barrage of energy beams was fired in her direction, meant to burrow into her armor and rip her to pieces.

Undeterred, she instinctively activated a small panel on her wrist, causing translucent energy shields to materialize around her forearms.

And then, she moved like a blurred streak of light.

>WHOOOOSSSHHHH!!!<

With incredible agility, the woman ducked beneath the first guard, her movements fluid and precise.

She swiftly spun around, delivering a powerful kick that sent her attacker staggering backward, crashing into his comrades. Her enhanced reflexes allowed her to anticipate their every move, effortlessly dodging even their energy bullets, while blocking the rest, with calculated grace.

A series of rapid clicks echoed through the air as the woman's bodysuit deployed a hidden arsenal of gadgets.

She flicked her wrist, causing thin metal wires to shoot out from her gauntlet, wrapping around the legs of two guards. With a swift pull, she brought them crashing to the ground, incapacitating them temporarily.

As the remaining guards realized their growing predicament, they lunged at her, attempting to overpower her with their sheer numbers.

The woman gracefully sidestepped their coordinated assault, her lithe figure a blur of movement. With a precise touch, she activated a hidden mechanism in her suit, and a swarm of miniature drones emerged, buzzing around her like a protective shield.

Sensing an opportunity, she raised her hand, and the drones swarmed toward the guards, emitting focused beams of energy that disintegrated their armor on contact.

The guards' cries of anguish were drowned out by the whirring of the drones as they efficiently dispatched their adversaries, one by one.

Suddenly, the air crackled with energy as the woman summoned a surge of power within her. A blinding aura enveloped her, radiating a force that pushed back the remaining guards, their bodies flung against the walls.

The sheer magnitude of her strength was awe-inspiring as she effortlessly repelled their combined assault.

With the last guard incapacitated, the woman stood triumphant amidst the wreckage, her chest rising and falling with controlled breaths.

"That should be the last of them..."

Slowly, she reached up and removed the holographic helmet that concealed her face, revealing a cascade of lustrous brunette hair, with a hint of purple, and piercing bright blue eyes that sparkled with a mixture of determination and resolve.

"Did they really think they stood a chance?" A low chuckle escaped her lips as she left the sea of courses behind her and made her way to the secret vault that she came for.

'I'm Ciara Epsilon, for god's sake.'

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Chapter 994: The Fugitive [Pt 2]

Ciara Epsilon stepped into the spacious office of the Grand Federation Base, her presence a stark contrast to the polished surroundings.

They adorned the walls with holographic displays, showcasing intergalactic conquests and achievements. The head of the base, a distinguished alien man named Giovani, looked up from his desk, his expression a mix of surprise and concern.

"Ciara? Is that really you?" Giovanni's voice wavered, disbelief etched across his face. Memories of their shared past echoed through his mind, revealing a deep-rooted connection.

Ciara's gaze met his, her emerald eyes glinting with a combination of determination and something darker. The corners of her lips curled into a cold smile, sending shivers down Giovanni's spine.

"Yes, Giovanni. It's me," she replied, her voice carrying an unmistakable edge.

"What... what happened to the guards? What have you done?" Giovanni's voice trembled with a mix of fear and genuine concern. He couldn't reconcile the memories of the woman he once knew with the formidable figure standing before him.

Ciara's smile deepened, the shadows of her past deeds dancing in her eyes. She leaned against the edge of the desk, her gaze piercing into Giovanni's soul.

"You can ask them yourself when you join them in the grave," she responded, her voice dripping with icy resolve.

Giovanni's breath caught in his throat as he absorbed the weight of her words. A sense of regret washed over him, mingling with the haunting memories of their shared history. He found himself reaching out, pleading for her to stop, to reconsider the path she had chosen.

"Ciara, please... forgive me for what happened back then," Giovanni's voice quivered, his eyes pleading for redemption. "It's not too late for you to turn away from this madness."

Deep down, he must have known... what was about to happen.

Ciara's expression hardened, her resolve unyielding. She pushed herself away from the desk, standing tall and defiant.

"Forgiveness? Redemption?" she scoffed, her voice laced with bitter amusement. "It's far too late for that, Giovanni. I've gone too far to turn back now."

A heavy silence settled between them, the weight of their shared history hanging in the air like an invisible barrier. Giovanni's gaze bore into Ciara's, filled with both desperation and an unwavering belief that there was still good within her.

"There's still a chance, Ciara. We can find a way to make amends, to set things right," he pleaded, his voice filled with fragile hope.

Ciara's eyes flickered with a mix of emotions, the remnants of their past still lingering within her. But then, something darker consumed her gaze, extinguishing any flicker of doubt.

Her eyes became dead cold in an instant.

"No, Giovanni," she said, her voice now laced with a chilling finality. "I don't want to make amends. I don't want to set things right. I want them to burn, to feel the pain they've inflicted. To suffer at the hands of the monster they made."

Giovani recoiled, realizing that the woman he once knew had transformed into something else entirely. The room was filled with an oppressive silence, heavy with unspoken truths and the irrevocable choices that had led them down this path.

"You had your chance, Giovanni. Now it's time for you to face the consequences," she said, her voice laden with a chilling finality as she slowly began to draw closer to him.

"I... wai—!"

Suddenly, a very low but powerful hum interrupted his words.

"Gurgh!"

As Ciara pressed closer to Giovanni, an intense wave of pain surged through his body. His eyes widened in shock, and he clutched his head, desperately trying to alleviate the excruciating sensation pulsating within his skull.

"How... how are you able to use your abilities here? The Dampeners should prevent this!" Giovanni managed to gasp amidst his agony, his voice strained and filled with disbelief.

Ciara's expression twisted into a sinister grin, her eyes gleaming with a mixture of triumph and malice. She leaned in, her voice a low, menacing whisper.

"Isotope XY," she hissed, her words laced with dark satisfaction. "I stole it earlier this week. It nullifies the effect of the Dampeners, allowing me to unleash my power without restraint."

A dawning realization washed over Giovanni's face, his features contorting with a mix of horror and dread. Isotope XY was a highly dangerous and forbidden substance, known for its ability to counteract and manipulate energy fields.

Its possession and use were strictly regulated due to the immense risks it posed.

Ciara's gaze held an intensity that chilled Giovanni to the core. She drew even closer, her voice dripping with sinister intent.

"I will take your memories, Giovanni," she declared, her words slicing through the air like a macabre promise. "And then, one by one, I will come for the others. None of you will be spared."

A surge of raw power emanated from Ciara as she placed her hand on Giovanni's temple, her fingers emitting a faint, ethereal glow. The room filled with his anguished screams, echoing off the walls and suffusing the air with an aura of despair.

Memories were ripped from Giovanni's mind, his past slipping away piece by piece as the pain intensified. Images, emotions, and fragments of his identity were torn asunder, consumed by the ruthless force of Ciara's abilities.

As the ordeal continued, the once formidable leader of the Zone 19 Grand Federation Base E-1 crumpled to his knees, his body trembling with the aftershocks of agony. His eyes, once filled with determination and authority, now reflected only emptiness.

Ciara stood over him, a chilling satisfaction painting her features.

The echoes of Giovanni's torment slowly faded, leaving a haunting silence in their wake. With a cold detachment, she released her grip on him, allowing his limp form to slump to the ground.

The office, once a symbol of power and control, now bore the weight of despair.

Ciara turned on her heel, her gaze fixed on the door. Before exiting, she cast one final glance over her shoulder, a shard of darkness glinting in her eyes.

"Don't worry, Giovanni. The rest will be joining you soon enough."

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Chapter 995: The Fugitive [Pt 3]

With her mind infused with Giovanni's memories, Ciara moved swiftly through the corridors of the base, easily cutting down any resistance that dared to stand in her path.

The knowledge she had obtained allowed her to navigate the complex layout with uncanny precision, bypassing security measures and outmaneuvering the remaining guards.

She only had one goal now... The Control Center!

As she arrived at the Control Center, a grim determination burned in her eyes. She surveyed the room, the nerve center of the entire base, filled with flashing screens and consoles. Without hesitation, she approached the main control panel, her fingers dancing across the holographic interface.

With a series of swift keystrokes and encrypted commands, Ciara overrode the control protocols, disabling the safety measures that held the destructive potential of the base at bay.

Alarms nearly blared, and warning lights began to flash, but she remained unyielding in her purpose.

In no time, everything went dead silent and dark, leaving her in complete control.

"This should do it." A wicked smile curled on Ciara's lips as she initiated a sequence of random, uncontrolled explosions throughout the base.

Each detonation would echo through the corridors, ripping apart sections of the facility with merciless force. Panic would ensue as the chaos consumed the once orderly stronghold.

'I can't allow any breach in information to be leaked from this place...'

The fact that she had interrogated Giovanni and gotten information from him, and the fact that her next target was already determined... she couldn't let her enemies ever suspect those things.

And just as when she stole Isotope XY, she intended to remove the tiniest shred of evidence that she was present here.

... Even if that meant the death of innocents.

'Collateral damage.' Her hollow thoughts echoed as she stared at the control panel that displayed the timer before the process would be initiated.

'I should go.' Knowing the time was limited, Ciara swiftly left the Control Center, leaving chaos and destruction in her wake.

The path was littered with fallen guards and pools of blood, evidence of the carnage she had wrought. She paid none of them any mind as she deftly arrived at her target location.

Reaching her spacecraft, she entered the cockpit and swiftly prepared for departure. The engines roared to life, vibrating with the anticipation of imminent escape.

The base, which would soon now be a smoldering wreck, stood on the precipice of its ultimate demise.

"This is goodbye..."

And thus, as she began to take flight...

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!~

... The explosions began.

Drawing upon the wellspring of Aether within me, I allowed its raw power to surge through my veins, far surpassing the capacity of the dampeners that sought to suppress it.

With an outpouring of pure energy, I invoked [The Hermit], freezing time within the confines of the base.

As the luminous waves of magic rippled outward, the world around me came to a standstill. Every living being and object was suspended in a tableau of suspended animation, trapped in the ethereal grasp of stillness.

Only I remained untethered, moving freely in this temporal sanctuary.

Kuzon and Aloe stood before me, their figures locked in motionless poses, their expressions frozen in a mix of surprise and concern at the suddenness of the blast.

I knew that their abilities were still suppressed, their powers held in check by the ingenious dampeners that dotted the base.

'Their abilities are still suppressed, and since they've not tried to break through the dampeners, they'll most likely remain in stasis.'

Exerting such control over time exacted a heavy toll. Though I possessed the ability to exempt Kuzon and Aloe from the effects of [The Hermit], doing so would require an immense surge of Aether, far beyond what I could afford to expend.

With the dampeners overridden, I was already channeling an unprecedented amount of energy. The spell itself, an immense drain on my reserves, threatened to deplete me by the second.

The luxury of tripling my energy consumption was one I could not afford.

'Plus, I still don't know what is behind all of this. It might require me to expend even more power.'

Taking flight through the immobile lobby, I propelled myself toward the epicenter of the explosion.

"[Spatial Awareness]." I muttered.

The spell granted me the ability to extend my senses across the entire base, probing the fluctuating energies that permeated the air, seeking out anomalies that might hold the key to unraveling this enigma.

'I see. The problem is the control center...'

Using [The Chariot], in addition to Spellcraft, I remotely began to solve the problem that would have doomed the entire Base. In no time, literally, I was going to stop the imminent chaos.

However...

'This reeks of sabotage. Someone must be behind this.' My thoughts echoed.

And amidst the frozen tableau, my heightened perception caught sight of a spacecraft attempting to depart.

The energy emanating from the craft possessed an unmistakable peculiarity, distinct from the harmonious hum that resonated within the base.

'What is this?' Intrigue gnawed at my consciousness, compelling me to press forward, driven by an insatiable thirst for the truth.

>VWUSSSHHH!<

In an instant, I vanished from my location and appeared right on top of the object of interest.

I alighted upon the spacecraft, its sleek exterior poised for departure, yet frozen in time just before it could escape the embrace of the base.

'Suspicious...'

'[The Tower]' Merging with the ethereal essence of the vessel, I phased through its metallic walls, materializing within the confined space of the cockpit.

My gaze fell upon the pilot, their countenance etched with a mixture of determination, satisfaction, and a hint of guilt.

"What... is this?" My eyes widened in shock as I took in the sight of a familiar face.

Her brown hair appeared wilder than I remembered, and the purple dye that was strewn among some strands was foreign to me, but still... there was no way I could ever mistake such a face.

"Ciara?"

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Chapter 996: Conflicted Encounter

I stood there, suspended in the frozen moment, my gaze fixated upon Ciara, studying her intently.

'This is... Ciara?'

I didn't think it would be so easy to find her. I thought we would have to take some time investigating and exploring before we finally encountered our comrade in this world, but to think it happened so fast.

'And it's Ciara this time, huh? That leaves Edward and Neron...'

Still, I felt an odd feeling as I kept staring at her.

There was something undeniably amiss, a nagging sensation that crawled beneath my skin, warning me of a discrepancy that transcended the physical realm.

'The very wavelength of her energy seems distorted. It doesn't align with what I know...'

Doubt began to gnaw at the edges of my consciousness. Could this truly be the Ciara I knew?

The notion of variants, alternate versions of individuals from different dimensions or timelines, flickered through my mind. It was an unsettling thought, one that had become all too familiar in my travels across the branches.

Could this be a variant of Ciara, a different iteration of her existence that had somehow found its way to this moment, to this spacecraft on the brink of departure?

'That seems like a possibility, doesn't it?' My doubts began to grow, and more questions surfaced.

As I contemplated the existence of variants, the lingering questions clung to the recesses of my mind, further convincing me that this could very well not be the Ciara from my original world.

"The notion that she would orchestrate such devastation, attempting to blow up the Grand Federation Base and endanger countless innocent lives, seems inconceivable."

Confusion danced in my eyes, mirroring the whirlwind of thoughts that swirled within me.

Curiosity propelled me forward, driving me to seek answers, to determine the truth.

"There's are ways to find out for sure." I stretched out my hand, reaching out to make physical contact with her.

Either through Resonance or using [Judgement] to read her mind, and also [The Fool] to sort through her memories. My hand trembled as I reached out, fingers extended in anticipation, longing for contact.

The moment my touch grazed her form, a sudden buzz coursed through my veins.

'What in the—?!' My eyes widened as I felt a distortion in [The Hermit]'s effects, and the world around me erupted into motion once more.

No, that wasn't it. It was just my immediate surrounding. The spacecraft... and Ciara!

As I cautiously stared at Ciara, her frozen visage had already melted away and she blinked in surprise, locking her gaze with mine.

A symphony of emotions played across our faces—shock, recognition, and a myriad of unspoken questions.

The silence between us held an electric charge, pregnant with the weight of revelations yet to be unveiled. In that fleeting instant, as our eyes locked in mutual surprise.

"C-Ciara, you—"

"Bounty Hunter? How did you...?" Her tone was completely different from what I expected, and before I could even understand what she meant by that, I felt a surge of energy course through her body, pushing me back as it glowed brighter.

"Wait, Ciara!"

"You shouldn't have come here!"

At that moment, as I looked into her eyes, I could see no form of warmth in her recognition. Just cold hostility that threatened to engulf the moment.

Was she Ciara? Was she not Ciara? I had to find out!

"I want to take you back, Ciara. I'm here with the others. Come back with us!"

I would have liked to use my powers. Perhaps to stop time, or to get past the ever-growing pulse that Ciara was generating, but I felt too much interference to do anything.

'Unless... should I do tha—?'

"I'm not going back! You should just stop now!"

Hold on, did she just say she wasn't going back? My face warped in confusion as I stared deeply into Ciara's glowing eyes.

"But... why? We came here just for you. You don't belong here. We need your help to—"

"I've made up my mind already. Don't look for me anymore." Some form of warmth coursed through her statement, and I found myself struggling with confusion.

'What is she talking about? What is more important than returning home?'

"I don't... want to kill you. Jerry considered you a friend. So, please..." Her tone both contained sadness and firm resolve.

"... Stay away from me!"

And with that, the pulse grew brighter, pushing me away and completely swallowing Ciara in its bright light.

Before I could stop her or utter any more words of resistance...

>VWUUUUSSSSHHHH!!!<

... She vanished.

After watching Ciara teleport, I also vanished from the spacecraft, teleporting the entire vehicle into my special dimension.

Returning to my previous position beside my comrades, I relinquished my connection to the frozen moment, allowing time to reclaim its hold on the world around me.

As the veil of stillness lifted, reality surged back into motion.

Kuzon and Aloe, freed from their temporal stasis, blinked in bewilderment, their eyes darting around the lobby, searching for answers. Their gazes settled upon me, filled with a mix of anticipation and concern.

"What happened?" Kuzon asked, his voice tinged with urgency. "The explosion—"

I met their questioning stares, my mind racing to piece together the fragments of the recent encounter.

"I'll explain everything later," I replied, my voice steady but laced with an undertone of determination.

"Right now, we need to leave."

The base had descended into chaos. The explosion had triggered a security breach protocol, sending the entire facility into lockdown.

Panic rippled through the air as alarms blared, red emergency lights casting an eerie glow over the bustling throng of alien races and species. By now, the authorities would have discovered the lifeless bodies of officers, evidence of criminal activity that had infiltrated the heart of the Grand Federation Base.

Realizing the severity of the situation, I turned to Kuzon and Aloe, a sense of urgency igniting within me.

"We have to go," I urged, my voice firm.

"They're locking down the base, sealing off all escape routes. We're leaving before things get any worse."

Freezing time once more seemed to be the best solution to our current predicament. We would steal away before anyone even noticed.

'I should still have enough energy for the three of us.'

But as I focused my thoughts, ready to invoke [The Hermit], a sudden wave of dizziness washed over me.

"E-eh...?" I stumbled, my mind clouded and my senses swirling in a disorienting haze. The world around me blurred, transforming into a maelstrom of fragmented images and sounds.

Fighting against the encroaching unconsciousness, I clung to fleeting moments of clarity. The weight of my exhaustion bore down upon me, a heavy burden that threatened to consume my every thought.

'W-what is... happening?'

Darkness beckoned at the edges of my vision, pulling me deeper into its embrace.

My last conscious act was a faltering gasp for breath, as I succumbed to the overpowering haze, falling into the abyss of unconsciousness.

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

Chapter 997: The Second Jared

[Grand Federation Calendar: Year 3,567]

[Zone 19, Lost Planet E-A345]

The battlefield crackled with tension as the two warring alien races locked in a fierce and merciless conflict. Destruction and chaos surrounded me, but I stood at the center, my resolve solidifying with each passing moment.

The time had come to wield my powers and put an end to this senseless violence.

"I'm sick of this." Undoing [Unknowable], I materialized above the warring parties, looking down on them as they engaged in meaningless conflict.

The moment I appeared, floating in the sky, both sides instantly took note of me. Their grotesque faces focused on my stable form, now gearing their violence in my direction, regarding me as an enemy.

Was it due to the immense amount of energy I had? Was it because I had suddenly popped out of nowhere? Was it due to the suspicion each had for the other?

None of that mattered to me. Nothing but the mission.

Drawing upon the depths of my magical abilities, I channeled the raw energy within me. Sparks danced along my fingertips as I unleashed an unstoppable burst of energy, directed towards the warring factions.

The power of the [The Sun] Arcana surged forth, ripping through the battlefield like a celestial inferno, easily eviscerating my targets without any resistance.

The blasts of energy struck their mark, engulfing numerous combatants in blindingly pure energy, completely altering the landscape into a molten pool of lava.

Their surviving forces scattered, overcome by the sheer force of my attack. The ground trembled beneath my feet, remnants of the devastating power I had unleashed.

Sensing the urgency of the moment, I summoned the power of [The Pope]. With a commanding gesture, an impenetrable barrier shimmered into existence, encasing me and shielding me from the remaining onslaught.

"KILL THAT THING!"

"DESTROY THAT MONSTER!!"

"DIEEEEE!!!"

The violence crashed against the barrier like waves against a rock, futile in their attempts to breach my defenses.

Nothing in their arsenal; not their bombs, bullets, or blades, could even put as much as a scratch on the surface of my barrier.

It was all useless.

As I stood protected within my sanctuary, I turned my attention to those who dared oppose me. Utilizing the power of [The Star], I manipulated gravity itself, bending it to my will. I effortlessly lifted and slammed my adversaries, their bodies crushed under the weight of unseen forces.

They were powerless against the might I commanded, their efforts feeble in the face of my absolute control.

"Die." Effortlessly tightening my grip, I crushed the muscles and bones of those whom I had put under my control, killing them off instantly.

The once defiant soldiers began to waver and dwindle, their spirits broken by my overwhelming power. A sense of awe and fear hung in the air as they witnessed the extent of my abilities.

It was then, with the weight of their surrender hanging heavy, that I invoked yet another aspect of my dominion—the power of [The Emperor].

With a commanding voice that reverberated through the battlefield, I declared my decree. "I have watched your senseless violence, your unwarranted destruction. I am sick of it. From this moment forth, I shall take control!"

A palpable silence descended upon the battleground as the soldiers, once enemies, now knelt before me, their will shattered, their defiance replaced by resignation. I looked upon them, a mixture of sadness and determination in my eyes.

"I will guide you towards a new path," I declared, my voice resonating with authority. "A path of unity, understanding, and peace. No longer shall your differences be settled through bloodshed. Together, we shall forge a future free from violence."

'And now... for the carrot.'

The battlefield lay in ruins, scarred by the ravages of war. Broken bodies and twisted wreckage littered the once-vibrant landscape.

A somber silence hung heavy in the air, a testament to the devastation that had unfolded. But amidst the desolation, a glimmer of grace flickered within me, fueled by the powers that surged through my veins.

With determination etched upon my face, I extended my hands, palms upturned, and closed my eyes, channeling the essence of [The Hanged Man]. The air around me crackled with a peculiar energy, as if time itself were suspended, awaiting my command.

From the depths of my being, a force emerged, swirling and spiraling like ethereal tendrils. It weaved through the torn fabric of reality, reaching out to the fallen, to the souls adrift in the ruined world.

With gentle yet unwavering purpose, I summoned them forth, calling their essence to converge upon the devastated battlefield.

In a mesmerizing dance of light and shadow, the souls materialized, hovering above their lifeless bodies. They shimmered with a soft, ethereal glow, the very essence of their being rekindled by my power. Each soul held a story, a journey abruptly cut short by the horrors of war.

With a sweeping gesture, I guided the souls back into their once-forsaken vessels.

Threads of pure energy wove through the air, reconnecting severed limbs, mending shattered bones, and healing wounds with a divine touch. The fallen warriors were reassembled, their bodies made whole once more.

A symphony of whispered breaths filled the air, as the revitalized soldiers gasped for life, their eyes fluttering open in astonishment. The once-lifeless battlefield had become a scene of miraculous rebirth, a testament to the power I wielded as the conduit of [The Hanged Man].

The Gatorians and Avarians, their eyes wide with awe, watched in rapt attention. The weight of their past grievances and the echoes of the battlefield were momentarily forgotten as they beheld the resurrection unfolding before them.

Hope flickered within their hearts, mingled with disbelief and gratitude.

As the last warrior rose, an array of emotions played across their faces—bewilderment, relief, and an indescribable sense of wonder. They exchanged glances, a silent understanding passing between them, transcending the animosity that had driven them to battle.

In this extraordinary moment, the true power of [The Hanged Man] revealed itself. It was not just the ability to summon souls or raise the dead—it was the catalyst for change, for the resurrection of hope and the rekindling of unity.

And now, the people I had just killed could see the might I possessed—the literal power to control life or death.

The fallen warriors, now miraculously restored, cast their gaze upon me, their savior and harbinger of transformation. Gratitude and respect shone in their eyes, a newfound appreciation for the bonds that connected them all.

As I stood amidst the resurrected soldiers, the scars of war fading into insignificance, I knew that the path forward would be challenging.

Rebuilding trust and fostering unity would require effort and dedication. Yet, in this transformative moment, I had planted the seed of possibility—a glimmer of hope that would guide the Gatorians and Avarians towards a future of harmony and understanding.

'And the one who will lead them to all of that... IS ME!'

"Now, then, you must choose. Defy me and walk down the path of destruction carved by your disobedience... or swear allegiance to me and you will never have to suffer."

This was the easiest way to subdue these people and garner complete loyalty. Possessing the power to dispense the ultimate punishment, as well as provide the ultimate comfort, I had become a god to these people.

... Just as I wanted.

With my proclamation echoing in their hearts, I extended my hand, offering them a chance at redemption. One by one, they rose from their knees, their gaze filled with a mix of awe, uncertainty, and hope.

"WE WILL FOLLOW YOU, MIGHTY ONE!"

As I stood at the center of the battlefield, surrounded by former adversaries now turned followers, I knew that the true challenge lay ahead. Guiding these warring factions towards harmony would not be an easy task, but with their will broken and their spirits open to change, there was a glimmer of possibility.

'Plus, I'll have to properly show them how to manage their environment and become a prosperous race.'

From this moment forth, I would be the catalyst for transformation, steering these once-warring alien races towards a future of understanding and cooperation.

The battles may have ceased, but the true test of my power and leadership had just begun.

With determination burning in my heart, I took my first steps towards a world reshaped by peace and unity.

'I wonder what my other half is up to, though...'

A wide grin formed on my face as I thought about him, or should I say me? It felt strange how unburdened and focused I was now that I had split into two.

I had a feeling he was also experiencing the same.

'Well, what matters now is the mission. Nothing else. Once I've done all I can do here, and he's done with his task, we'll merge and leave this place.'

'So I can finally focus on my search for Karlia...'

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

Chapter 998: Kuzon's Resolute Decision

My consciousness stirred from the depths of the darkness, a gentle whisper coaxing me back to awareness.

"... red..."

'Huh? What's that?' I heard a voice, soft and familiar, resonating with concern.

"... Jared...?"

It was Aloe's voice, a melody that danced on the edges of my perception. Slowly, I parted my heavy eyelids, my vision adjusting to the gentle glow that enveloped the room.

As my eyes fluttered open, I found myself lying upon a sumptuous golden bed, the opulence of the surroundings captivating my senses. The air carried a subtle fragrance of exotic spices, mingling with the warm embrace of the lavish chamber.

The room I found myself in was a sight of opulence beyond imagination, a resplendent palace forged from the very essence of wealth and grandeur.

The walls, adorned with intricate carvings of mythical creatures and celestial motifs, seemed to pulsate with an ethereal radiance. Golden pillars rose majestically, reaching towards a ceiling that disappeared into a tapestry of clouds painted with hues of sunrise.

The sunlight filtered through large, stained glass windows, casting colorful patterns of light across the polished marble floors.

Every corner of the room exuded a sense of extravagance. Luxurious tapestries, woven with golden threads, depicted scenes of epic tales and legendary triumphs.

Elaborate chandeliers hung from the ceiling, their crystal prisms refracting the sunlight into a kaleidoscope of sparkling beams that danced across the room.

"Jared... you're finally awake." I heard Aloe's voice, and instinctively turned in the direction it came from.

"Haa... yeah..." I muttered, smiling as I cast my gaze upon her.

Aloe sat nearby, perched on an equally luxurious chair, her features etched with relief and weariness.

I struggled to sit up, my muscles protesting against the effort, but an overwhelming curiosity urged me forward. "Where are we?" I rasped, my voice hoarse from my recent ordeal. "And what happened after I... passed out?"

I still wasn't completely sure what happened, or what was happening, but after I tried using [The Hermit], I felt drained for some reason and passed out.

'I should have had more than enough energy to use it. Sure, I was concerned about energy usage earlier, but that was because I didn't know what to expect.'

How could I have collapsed that easily? Perhaps it was an attack, then? I didn't know what to think, so I could only look to Aloe for help.

Aloe's eyes met mine, a flicker of concern shining within their depths. She reached out a comforting hand, her touch grounding me in the present moment.

"Take it slow, Jared," she cautioned, her voice gentle yet laced with a hint of unease. "You were unconscious for quite some time."

I nodded, acquiescing to her plea for patience. Gradually, my gaze swept across the opulent chamber, taking in the golden hues and intricate tapestries that adorned the walls.

It calmed me a little, but also reminded me of someone.

"Where's Kuzon?" I asked, my voice filled with a mix of anticipation and worry.

Aloe's expression faltered for a moment, her eyes flickering with a hint of worry before she composed herself.

"Kuzon... he's not here." She replied, her voice tinged with a touch of concern and uncertainty. "But please, let me explain everything. I'm actually pretty disoriented myself."

I nodded, a heaviness settling within me as I braced myself for the revelations that awaited. With a steady breath, I leaned forward, giving Aloe my full attention, ready to hear the truth unfold in her words.

[Moments Earlier]

[Zone 19, Grand Federation Base E-1]

Amidst the backdrop of a frenzied alien city, alarms blared, sending shrill echoes reverberating through the air. The massive plaza teemed with panicked individuals, their alien features contorted with fear and confusion.

In this chaotic environment, Jared's body slumped to the ground, leaving Aloe and Kuzon disoriented and bewildered. Puzzled glances were exchanged, their furrowed brows mirroring the concern etched upon their faces.

"What just happened?" Aloe's voice trembled with worry as she cast an anxious gaze upon Jared's prone form. "Did he just... pass out?"

Kuzon heaved a weary sigh, frustration etched deeply in his features. "It seems that way. What could have happened this time?"

Now that they couldn't stop time, Kuzon settled for obscuring Aloe, Jared, and himself from the notice of everyone around, completely rendering all of them invisible.

'[Camouflage Threads]...' His thoughts trailed, as he watched the thin, invisible wires encapsulate his immediate surroundings.

While Kuzon did this, Aloe hastened to Jared's side, her movements urgent as she knelt beside him and tenderly pressed her hand against his forehead. The touch revealed an unsettling truth—Jared's body felt unnaturally cold, drained of its vitality.

A wave of disbelief washed over Kuzon's face as he shook his head in utter denial. "But that's impossible. Why would he reach that point? Something is definitely wrong."

As Kuzon wrestled with the enigma before them, he paused, his fingers absently caressing his chin in deep contemplation.

The weight of responsibility settled upon him, and with a resigned acceptance, he exhaled another sigh, acknowledging that he would be the one tasked with unraveling this perplexing predicament.

"I don't understand most of what's happening," Kuzon confessed, his voice tinged with frustration, "but it seems like I'll have to find out."

Summoning resolve, Kuzon took a steadying breath and extended his hand, gently placing it upon Jared's head. With Jared's diminished energy acting as a feeble barrier, Kuzon found it easier to access his memories.

With unwavering determination, he delved into the recesses of Jared's recent experiences, piecing together the crucial fragments he sought.

Time seemed to stretch into eternity as Kuzon absorbed the memories, his mind tirelessly sifting through the jumble of information.

"Haa... this idiot." He whispered, finally opening his eyes.

"Why did he go and do that? And it seems we have another problem. This wouldn't have happened if he just listened."

Kuzon's tone echoed annoyance, but it only lasted for a brief moment.

Eventually, he rose to his feet, his expression a blend of determination and unwavering resolve. Turning towards Aloe, he spoke with a steady voice laced with urgency.

"I'll handle things from here," He declared, his words imbued with a resolute finality. "Take care of Jared. Ensure his safety."

"But what are yo—"

Before Aloe could say anything more, a burst of energy shot from Kuzon. His body easily resisted the dampeners, and he felt invigorated as he felt his energy pour all over him.

'[Camouflage Threads] should block even this from external perception.' He noted to himself, looking at Aloe's confused face.

"I'll be fine, don't worry." In a swift motion, he encapsulated Aloe and Jared in his energy, easily overpowering them with little to no resistance.

Kuzon transported both Aloe and Jared to his alternate dimension, The Emperor's Domain, leaving him standing within his invisible cocoon, all alone.

"It's better this way. I'll deal with this my way."

With that, Kuzon returned his energy to his body, eventually doing the same to the threads around him.

'Just stay out of this, Jared.'

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

Chapter 999: Severity Of An Arcana

"That's what happened. The next thing I remember, I was here... with you."

The weight of Aloe's words settled upon my shoulders as she concluded her account of what happened.

I had listened intently, every syllable carving deeper into the tapestry of my own existence. And when her voice faded into the silence of the room, a heavy sigh escaped my lips, a mingling of regret and understanding.

"It's my fault," I murmured, my voice barely a whisper, as if confessing to the very essence of my being.

"If Kuzon saw those memories... then he knows."

Aloe's gaze softened, her eyes reflecting a mixture of empathy and reassurance. "Jared, what do you mean by that?" She asked gently, her voice imbued with sincerity. "I'm totally confused, to be honest."

Hesitation clutched my heart as I stared at her. Guilt, mixed with a genuine reflection of my actions began to surface.

"You have to tell me, Jared. First Kuzon, and now you. I don't like the way you two just hide things from me, and I'm left completely unaware of everything."

Her words stung, considering that was how I had been treating both of them all this time. I was wrapped in my own world, while spoonfeeding them whatever I wanted when it was convenient.

And now, it had blown in my face.

"No more secrets, Jared. I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt at least. I'll hear you out, so please..." She stopped speaking, her widened eyes waiting for my response.

I nodded my head slowly, acknowledging the truth in her words, yet unable to absolve myself of the weight of responsibility.

"I... used [The Moon]. I split myself into two. I did it so I could help those Aliens and also continue the mission."

Aloe's eyes widened in recognition, the realization dawning upon her features. "Kazen's Arcana," she whispered, the words hanging in the air. "[The Moon]'s replication ability... you actually used it?"

I nodded, a mixture of regret and self-awareness washing over me. "Yes," I admitted, my voice heavy with the weight of my own mistakes.

"I somehow convinced myself I was doing it for the good of those people, but now that I think about it... I was just indulging in my curiosity."

I wanted to try something out, finding a loophole to the constraint we had. So, I used the Arcana without telling anyone.

"I suspect what I did is what is currently affecting me."

"Jared... I don't think you realize just how dangerous and volatile that Arcana is." Aloe began to mutter, her voice breaking a little while concern was etched on her face.

"What do you mean?"

"It's Kazen's Arcana. I studied under her to understand and master Aether, and while doing so, she told me details about [The Moon]." She sighed.

'Ah, that's true...'

"Sure, you should already know of its ability to replicate the essence or structure of anything perfectly." She began, her voice carrying a gentle tone of explanation, though I could sense a dark foreboding behind it.

"Like a reflection on a completely still surface, it'll give you an exact replica of what you desire."

What made [The Moon] so amazing was its ability to even apply this ability to living things, or soul-based entities and concepts.

"There exist no two things that are alike, especially those living. We possess different markers, and are comprised of different properties, no matter how little. Yet, [The Moon] defies that logic and manages to create an exact copy of anything."

All she said were in tandem with what I already knew. However, it seemed like this was only just the surface.

"While it allows the user to create an exact copy of themselves or an object, down to the smallest detail, the replication process is delicate, requiring precise expertise and an intricate ratio." Her tone suddenly grew heavier, and I could see the seriousness in her eyes.

"Just as how a distorted surface will yield an unbalanced result, or will generate an altered form that is different from the original, so also does [The Moon]."

"Are you saying I generated an altered duplicate? But that doesn't justify how I feel weakened, or why my personality seems a bit different from what I remember." I asked, my fingers twitching a little.

"[The Moon] doesn't just generate out of thin air. It uses pre-existing materials to it. Usually, it scans the user, creating a duplicate of them from the balance. It acts like fusion and fission, complete and equal, with both sides being equal and perfectly balanced. However... in the case where the surface is distorted, it can add or subtract from the source material to the duplicate."

"What are you saying, Aloe?"

"I'm saying that you may have had some elements of yourself removed in the fission process, leaving you incomplete." As she said this, my eyes widened.

"What?!"

I wasn't surprised. No, this was actually confirming a gnawing fear of mine. The fact that Aloe reinforced what I was already beginning to think was the problem.

"Looks like I messed up."

"Big time. I don't know what caused you to pass out, to be honest. It could be an effect of [The Moon], or maybe something else. But the fact that you seem to be agreeing with me shows that there are some parts of yourself that you've realized are missing."

'She catches on quickly...' I thought to myself, nodding at her words.

"Care to give an example?"

There were very obvious examples I could tell her, so I did.

The fact that I felt more timid and unsure of everything was one. I lacked something within me that caused me to be so confident and decisive.

Perhaps my other half had it.

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

Chapter 1000: Jared's Reflection

'There's something else. Something deeper...'

Amid all of these things I noticed, there was this extremely unpleasant void that formed in my depths. It was a gaping hole that I was beginning to notice ever since I started critically examining myself.

'I... no longer feel a thing for Karlia?'

It wasn't just in the aspect of romantic feelings or sexual attractions. I actually didn't seem to care or bother about her.

'It's strange...' A sigh escaped my lips.

Fortunately, I was able to notice that slight change in me. What of the other subtle ones? What of the ones I was yet to discover?

My personality, thoughts, and the elements that made me up were the things that informed my action. Without those critical components and biases, I could turn into a completely different person.

The moment I realized all of this, Aloe's words began to make a lot more sense to me. I could only hope that the other changes and deficiencies within me were limited to my preferences in food and other mundane things.

"I was too careless with my actions. I underestimated the technicalities of the replication process. I was reckless."

Aloe reached out, her hand finding mine in a comforting gesture. "We all make mistakes, Jared," she said softly. "What matters now is how we move forward, how we find a way to make things right."

As always, Aloe remained the bright and shining light that guided me in times of doubt such as this.

"Thanks, Aloe. I really appreciate it."

"You're welcome, Jared. Anytime."

It felt lighter now that I had gotten a lot of my burden off my chest. I honestly couldn't thank her enough.

'Looks like I'll have to merge with my second half as soon as possible. With [The Lovers], it shouldn't be a problem.'

"Looks like you already know what you have to do. That's good."

"Yeah. All thanks to you."

"Pfft. Please..."

We both burst out laughing, our voices echoing within the large hall. It honestly felt good to laugh so wholeheartedly like this.

With my guilt dissipating, and my thoughts now clearer, my mind returned to the most pertinent matter at hand.

"Aloe... I saw Ciara."

"What?!"

As the weight of my encounter with Ciara rested heavily on my mind, I divulged the whole thing to Aloe, eager to share my experience and seek her insights. Sitting together in the golden palace, the air filled with a mix of anticipation and uncertainty.

"When I touched her, there was a strange buzz, and she unfroze. She could interfere with my power, which is strange in itself." I added, a hint of hesitation in my eyes.

"She recognized me, Aloe, and yet she refused to come back with me. It was like she was a different person."

Aloe furrowed her brows, her eyes filled with contemplation. "It's possible that this Ciara is a variant," she mused, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

I nodded, acknowledging her words, but doubt still lingered within me.

"I understand the concept of variants, Aloe," I replied, my voice tinged with a hint of skepticism. "But for her to recognize me, to know who I am, it feels too coincidental. And there's more, Aloe. She mentioned Jerry."

Aloe's eyes widened, her expression mirroring my own curiosity. "Jerry? That's...unexpected," she murmured, her voice tinged with intrigue.

"There could be a possibility that there's a variant of you in this world, Jared. And perhaps this variant Ciara knows that Jared. The same applies to Jerry."

I sighed, feeling the weight of uncertainty settling upon my shoulders.

"It's a stretch," I admitted, my voice tinged with frustration. "There are too many similarities, too many connections. It feels like there's a missing piece to this puzzle, and until we find it, we won't have the complete picture."

Aloe's gaze softened, her voice filled with understanding. "I know it's challenging. But we won't find the answers by standing still. We just need to find her to find out."

"True..."

Even though I said that, my voice was hollow. Aloe must have noticed it, considering she drew closer to me and uttered her next question.

"Jared, what do you plan to do now?"

I pondered her question for a moment, contemplating the best course of action. At this point, I honestly wanted to think some more. There were a lot of things to consider.

"You know, Aloe, I think it's time I put my trust in Kuzon," I finally replied, a hint of determination coloring my words.

"He's seen my memories, so he knows what's going on. Maybe it's time I let him take the lead and see what he can do."

"You sure?" She raised her brows a little, and I could see hints of surprise etched on her face.

"Yeah. What do you think?"

Aloe's gaze softened, and she nodded in agreement. "You're right. I guess it's time we trust in his abilities and judgment."

A sense of relief washed over me, knowing that Aloe was on the same page. "Exactly, Aloe," I affirmed, my voice filled with newfound certainty.

"We'll stay here in the Emperor's Domain and place our trust in Kuzon's plans, while also trying to find out more about what else has changed with me. I think that's the support we can render to him now."

It warmed my heart that Aloe agreed with me. I had to take this time to do some serious reflections.

"I feel a little stiff on this bed. Want to take a walk? This place seems grand and all. Might as well look around."

"Pfft!"

Aloe and I burst out laughing for no reason. I wasn't completely sure, but a wave of ease just enveloped the two of us.

"Sure, Jared. Let's do it!"

[Meanwhile...]

[Zone 2, Grand Federation Military Academy]

The massive hall reverberated with anticipation as cadets from diverse alien races and forms filled the rows and columns, their uniforms a symphony of colors and designs.

The atmosphere crackled with energy as an intimidating figure ascended the central stage, his authoritative presence commanding attention.

He was clearly in charge here.

His voice boomed through the hall, filling every corner with power and purpose. "Welcome, cadets, to the Grand Federation Military Academy!" he declared, his words ringing with a sense of pride and solemnity.

"You have proven yourselves worthy by passing the arduous exams, demonstrating not only your exceptional skills but also your unwavering commitment to the order and harmony of the universe."

The commander's words stirred a sense of pride within those who listened, and their attention remained fixed on him.

"As cadets of the Grand Federation Military Academy, you will undergo rigorous training, forging yourselves into elite defenders of peace and justice," the commander continued, his voice resonating with a mix of admiration and expectation.

"You will learn not only the art of combat but also the virtues of compassion, diplomacy, and unwavering loyalty."

Among those who listened was a young man who seemed human for the most part. His golden hair stood out as he stood tall among his peers, his posture radiating confidence. His presence exuded an aura of leadership and resilience, enough to distract those around him.

"Remember, cadets, that your journey here is not only about personal growth and achievement," the commander emphasized, his voice carrying the weight of responsibility. "You are part of something greater—a force dedicated to safeguarding the delicate balance of the universe and upholding the values of unity and harmony."

As the commander's speech drew to a close, the hall erupted in thunderous applause. Cadets exchanged glances of determination and camaraderie. The energy in the room surged, a collective resolve etched on the faces of those who had chosen this noble path.

In the midst of the applause, the smile of this golden haired boy remained, his eyes gleaming with some unknown purpose.

"All hail the Grand Federation!" The commander yelled.

"ALL HAIL THE GRAND FEDERATION!" Every cadet shouted, making their best salutes.

'Oh boy... this never gets old.' The young man smiled as he rolled his eyes amid all of what he considered to be nothing short of a farce.

Still, Kuzon Midas joined everyone in their salutes and choruses.

"All hail the Grand Federation!"