

Plot Summary of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and Analysis of Character Interrelations

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Summary

First broadcasted in 1995, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is set 20 years in the future from its release (2015). The events of the series take place in a post-apocalyptic world caused by the Second Impact, a global cataclysm responsible for the annihilation of almost half the human population. The Second impact took place in September 2000 as a result of a ‘Contact Experiment’ during the Katsuragi expedition to the South Pole—led by Misato Katsuragi’s father—to research and experiment with Adam, also known as the First Angel.

Angels are enigmatic entities, descendants of Adam, one of the two Seeds of Life that collide on Earth. While they are said to have a genome that is 99.89 percent identical to that of humans, their appearances do not seem to follow any pattern, and there is no shared shape or physical traits among them: An Angel’s size can range widely, ranging from microscopic beings to gigantic creatures. To kill an Angel, the core (usually a red sphere) must be destroyed. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 15 different angels are depicted as Adam’s progeny (Sachiel, Shamshel, Ramiel, Gaghiel, Israfil, Sandalphon, Matariel, Sahaquiel, Ireul, Leliel, Bardiel, Zeruel, Arael, Armisael and the human-shaped vessel Tabris, also known as Kaworu Nagisa). The second Seed of Life and Adam’s counterpart, Lilith, is sometimes considered as the second Angel, and it is the progenitor of the human race (also known as Lilin). Although the Angels’ origin is unknown, their eventual arrival was predicted in the Dead Sea Manuscripts possessed by SEELE, a secret worldwide society shrouded in mystery.

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Following the catastrophic events of the Second Impact, the United Nations commissions the defence of humanity against Angels to NERV, a paramilitary private organization commanded by Gendō Ikari, an enigmatic scientist and father to the main character, Shinji Ikari. Established out of the research organization GEHIRN, throughout the series, NERV becomes increasingly autonomous in its decision making under Commander Ikari's direction. NERV central headquarters is located in the Geo-Front (under the city of Tokyo 3), where they are in charge of research, maintenance and deployment of large humanoid biomechanical combat units, also known as Eva. Exclusively piloted by teenagers, Evas can be equipped with specific tools to fight against the Angels, and despite their biological basis, they are usually protected by thick layers of armor, giving them a robotic look. In order to defeat Angels, Evas share some unique traits with their enemies, such as the AT Field, an almost impenetrable force-field barrier capable of rendering conventional weapons useless.

In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, there are two main and intertwined plots: on the one hand, a lighter and more conventional approach to the genre, revolving around melee combat strategies for fighting against the Angels; on the other, an underlying narrative focused on the mental and emotional state of the characters, wounded by deep personal trauma, which is increased by their ongoing exposure to Evas. As the series progresses, the fight between Evas and Angels becomes secondary to the subjective perspective of the protagonists, whose search for their own identities is increasingly foregrounded.

As the episodes elapse, some mysteries regarding the different characters and the obscure organizations involved are eventually revealed: NERV—whose primary role was to defend humanity from the Angels—seems to be undermined by its parent organization SEELE, which appears to seek the triggering of the Third Impact, a key event for the culmination of the Human Instrumentality Project. This

mysterious plan aims to release human beings from their physical bodies and merge them into a large primordial liquid mass. As a result of this project, human beings would lose their individuality and form a unique existence made up of all their souls. For SEELE, the Human Instrumentality Project is meant to answer humanity's distressing evolution—where pain, frustration and negative feelings prevail—by means of a reinforced collective existence.

Showing the dramatic events taking place in the external world, the film *The End of Evangelion* depicts the forces of SEELE and NERV as engaged in a battle, resulting in the eventual execution of the Human Instrumentality Project and the eventual destruction of life on earth. However, the final two episodes (25 and 26) of the TV series show a different point of view, presenting Shinji's introspective journey. Shinji's psyche is depicted as an empty stage filled with his thoughts and fears. Some previously unknown secrets from the past and details of the characters' lives are revealed, but they are presented in cryptic and complex ways. Ultimately, Shinji seems to come to terms with his own persona, and the series ends with him surrounded by all his friends and family, after he decides that he wants to be himself and continue living in the world. Taken together, the denouement of the series does not explicitly provide a single conclusive ending, but is left open with multiple possible meanings.

Main Characters

Eva unit pilots

Shinji Ikari

Shinji Ikari is a 14-year-old boy, Evangelion Unit-01 pilot, and protagonist of the series. Also known as the Third Child, Shinji was chosen by NERV to drive the Eva-01 and fight against the Angels, consequently reuniting with his father—Commander Gendō Ikari—after having been



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apart from him for 11 years. A number of dangerous situations as pilot triggers his frustration and forces him to face his fears, while pushing him to accept himself and ultimately allowing for personal growth.

Shinji's character is defined by his past traumas—the death of his mother, bioengineer Yui Ikari, and being abandoned by his father—showing behavioral disorders and existential doubt. He is usually portrayed as a sensitive, fragile and confused child. Despite being the hero in the series, his traits differ deeply from those of the hero archetype. Due to his low self-esteem, his lonely, introverted personality and his vulnerability, Shinji often seeks approval and love from the adults around him. Shinji's longing for closeness with others produces various points of conflict for him, addressed in the series as the Hedgehog's Dilemma. On the one hand, personal contact brings him distress and uneasiness, causing him suffering. On the other, the more he stays away from relationships, the more he feels the anguish and pain of loneliness.



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Rei Ayanami

Rei is a 14-year-old girl and is known as the First Child. Chosen by Gendō Ikari to pilot Eva-00, at the beginning of the series her background is mostly unknown, with no information about her origins, childhood or family. Rei is a distant and unaccessible person, introverted, quiet and enigmatic; sometimes unable to express her own feelings or understand other people's emotions. Throughout the series, Rei feels pushed to question her own existence and to define her identity. As a fellow pilot of the Eva units, Rei quickly catches Shinji's attention, ultimately establishing a relationship of empathy and mutual affection.

Asuka Langley Sohryu

Asuka is a 14-year-old girl of German-Japanese-American origin and the Second Child, the pilot of the Eva-02. She has a strong personality and a rebellious temper, but she also craves social approval. She possesses remarkable intelligence, but despite her obvious childish

overtones, she constantly struggles to be considered by others as an adult, often in an attempt to get away from her troubled past. Her self-confidence and competitive attitude are presented as reflections of her superiority complex, occasionally making her violent and offensive toward others. In some senses, Asuka is the emotional opposite of Shinji, even though they both share an unhappy childhood.

Asuka tries to justify her own existence as the result of her lack of maternal recognition (her mother goes insane, ignores her daughter and eventually commits suicide). Although she hides her feelings to avoid being hurt, Asuka's cold and hostile behavior toward others eventually changes. She shares a twisted love/hate relationship with Shinji. While they seem to feel attracted to each other, both end up shutting out their mutual feelings. Moreover, Asuka sometimes replies to Shinji with contempt and abuse, or teases him by pointing to her sexuality.

Tōji Suzuhara

Tōji is one of Shinji's classmates. Despite their initial disagreements, they end up becoming good friends, learning to respect each other. As the story unfolds, Tōji is revealed to be the Fourth Child, chosen to drive Eva-03. However, his unit ends up being possessed by an Angel on the test run, and he is gravely injured after his Eva is torn apart by unit-01. Despite his overall joyful disposition, Tōji has a protective temperament, revealed early on, when he attacks Shinji, blaming him for his younger sister's critical injuries from one of the Angel attacks. Tōji is generally presented as a strong-tempered boy with a spirited character, rough around the edges, but a kind, honest and loyal friend.

Kaworu Nagisa

Kaworu is a 15-year-old boy, first presented in episode 24, and designated as the Fifth Child by SEELE, in order to replace Asuka. Kaworu immediately shows an open and honest personality, quickly gaining Shinji's trust and admiration, who ultimately finds in him the ideal companion. However, as events unfold, Kaworu is revealed to



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be Tabris, the 17th Angel. Chased by Shinji on board the Eva-01, Kaworu is killed by his friend in Terminal Dogma before he tries to unleash the Third Impact.

NERV staff

Commander Gendō Ikari

Also known as Gendō Rokubungi, Gendō Ikari (48 years old) is NERV's supreme commander and director of Project E. In his youth, he married Yui Ikari, taking on her family name, and fathered Shinji. However, after Yui's death, he entirely devoted himself to his research, abandoning Shinji and erasing any paternal feelings. Gendō is mostly driven by his personal ambition and remarkable qualities as a scientist. Moreover, he stands out as a cold, calculating and almost inhuman person, placing the young pilots in danger's way without remorse. As NERV's Commander, he poses as someone obsessive, severe and quite authoritarian.

His life's goal initially appears to be to avoid the Third Impact—and thus the end of human life—by destroying the Angels. However, it is later revealed that his true aim is the completion of the Human Instrumentality Project, following the directives of the secret society SEELE, but under his own scenario, presumably to reunite with Yui.

Major Misato Katsuragi

Misato is a NERV officer in charge of the Tactical Operations branch, responsible for making battle plans and coordinating the Eva units in combat. In the absence of Commander Ikari, Misato is responsible for the military operations against the Angels. She is a smart, hard-working and independent woman, skilled in combat tactics. She usually displays an overall cheerful disposition, but becomes very serious during battle plans. Upon Shinji's arrival at NERV, she acts as the boy's guardian and mentor. Moreover, once Asuka arrives in Japan, the three of them live in Misato's apartment.



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Misato suffered the consequences of the Second Impact in her childhood. Her father was the chief scientist of the expedition to Antarctica, and she was at the site when the catastrophe took place, ultimately being saved by her father and becoming the sole survivor of the expedition. After dealing with her heavy injuries and serious personal trauma, she joins NERV determined to destroy the Angels and avoid the Third Impact.

Misato is friends with NERV's chief scientist Ritsuko Akagi and Ryōji Kaji, sharing an intense physical and emotional relationship with the latter. Her bond with Shinji goes beyond her duty as guardian, including support and mutual protection. Ultimately, both Shinji and Misato share social problems, but they deal with them through different mechanisms.

Dr. Ritsuko Akagi

Ritsuko is NERV's chief scientist, in charge of the Technological branch. She is also responsible for the Evangelion units research project and the supercomputer Magi System. This supercomputer was created by Ritsuko's mother, Dr. Naoko Akagi, and consists of three advanced organic computers, featuring three different aspects of her creator's personality—woman, scientist and mother. Although Ritsuko is an incredibly talented scientist, her career is mostly defined by the life choices and innovations developed by her mother. This situation ultimately drives Ritsuko into an existential crisis, struggling to define her own identity and showing contradictory feelings toward her mother, admiring her as a scientist and a scholar, but despising her as a mother. Moreover, Ritsuko is in a romantic relationship with Gendō—despite his apparent lack of interest—who was himself also involved with her mother.

Ritsuko has been friends with Misato and Kaji since the time they spent together in college. Through the series, their friendship becomes strained due to ethical differences and Ritsuko's involvement in the Human Instrumentality Project. In fact, Ritsuko—together with



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Gendō Ikari and Kōzō Fuyutsuki—knows the real nature of the Eva units and the Human Instrumentality Project.

Ryōji Kaji

Kaji is a triple agent working as a NERV observer, SEELE's operative and a spy for the Japanese government. Former boyfriend of Misato in college, they resume their romantic relationship upon his arrival to Japan. Among other tasks, he is responsible for delivering Adam's embryo, recovered from Antarctica, to Gendō Ikari.

Kaji is a mysterious character, ultimately driven by his personal quest for truth. He is an independent, calm and seductive man. Moreover, he often acts as a fatherly character toward Shinji, showing him a friendly side. Kaji's righteous and honorable nature is repeatedly proven before he meets his end.



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Kōzō Fuyutsuki

Dr. Fuyutsuki (58 years old) is a scientific advisor, NERV's Vice-Commander and Gendō Ikari's most trusted associate. He is a former Kyoto University professor, and there he met Yui Ikari, who made an impression on him as a promising young scientist. After the Second Impact, he joined the official research expedition led by the United Nations to the South Pole, in an attempt to find out the truth hidden behind the catastrophe and SEELE's secret purpose. Dr. Fuyutsuki is invested in supporting the Human Instrumentality Project, but he shows a calm and hard-working nature under Gendō's command.



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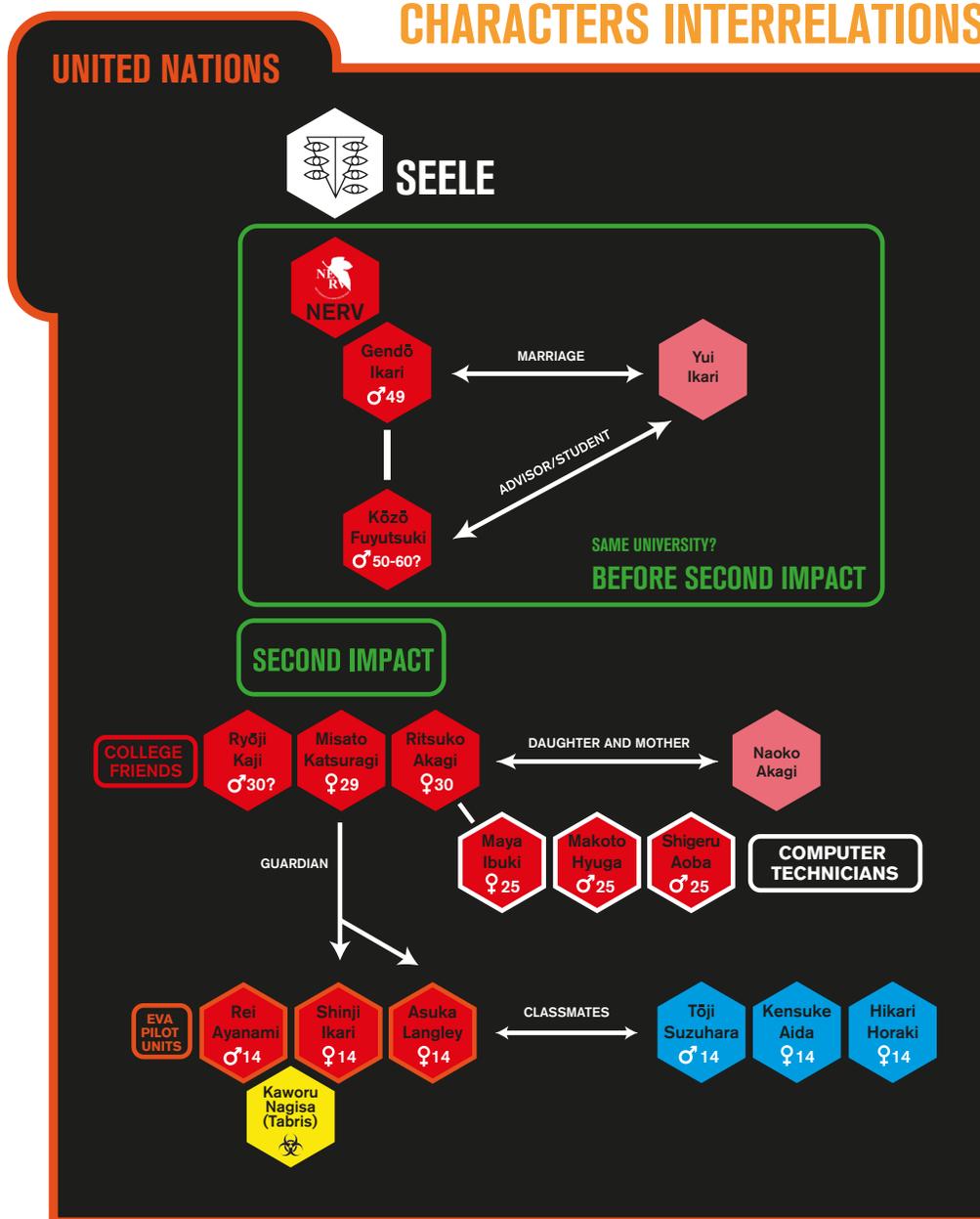


Table of character's interrelations. License: CC BY 4.0.

Anime

Neon Genesis Evangelion (in this volume abbreviated to *EVA*) is an anime featuring 26 episodes, first broadcasted between October 1995 and March 1996. Created by Studio GAINAX and directed by Hideaki Anno, the production also involved Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's work on character design, and Yoh Yoshinari and Hiroyuki Imaishi on the design and animation departments.

Death & Rebirth is the first movie of the franchise, premiering in Japan in March 1997, and summarizing the main events that took place in the first 24 episodes of the series. A second film entitled *The End of Evangelion* debuted in July 1997, showing the events taking place in the real world during Shinji's introspective journey in episodes 25 and 26 of the original series. Finally, *Revival of Evangelion* merges both films into a single one. It was first shown in March 1998. Including some short additional scenes, it is a remastered edition improving sound and video quality.

Years later, a new tetralogy called *Rebuild of Evangelion* was announced, produced by Studio Khara in partnership with GAINAX. The international titles of the four movies are *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone* (2007), *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance* (2009), *Evangelion: 3.0 You Can (Not) Redo* (2012) and *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (2021). Presenting alternative events from those of the initial *Neon Genesis Evangelion* series and films, the *Rebuild of Evangelion* tetralogy is usually considered a reboot of the original series rather than a remake.

Manga

Closely following most of the events and characters presented in the original anime series, Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's manga adaptation *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (NGE) was published by Kadokawa Shoten in *Shōnen Ace* magazine (from December 1994 to 2008) and *Young Ace* magazine (from July 2009 and June 2013), with some breaks in between, and eventually collected into 14 volumes.

Nonetheless, there are other manga titles which expand EVA's world-setting and characters. *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Angelic Days*, by Fumino Hayashi, was published in *Monthly Asuka* from November 2003 to December 2005 (collected in six volumes). Osamu Takahashi adapted the namesake video-game into the manga series *Shinji Ikari Raising Project*, published by *Monthly Shōnen Ace* from June 2005 to February 2016, later collected in 18 volumes. Between May 2007 and September 2009, *Petit Eva: Evangelion@School* by Ryūsuke Hamamoto was serialized in the *Shōnen Ace* magazine. Also starting in 2007 (in October and running to September 2009), *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Campus Apocalypse* by Ming Ming was serialized in the *Young Ace* magazine, with a different look for the characters and events and situations apart from the original series.

Between February 2010 and November 2010, *Monthly Asuka* published a new comedy series entitled *The Shinji Ikari Detective Diary*. Depicting a similarly parodic sense of humor, *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The Legend of the Piko Piko Middle School Students* by Yūshi Kawata and Yukito was published in *Young Ace* from 2014 to 2009 (later collected in five volumes).