

Vile 151

Chapter 151: Two Lil Nuggets

Somewhere outside the city of Silvermoon. Late at night, a teen ranker could be seen traversing through the forest zone. He was constantly looking at a disk in his hands that had one arrow pointed towards the place the teen ranker heading towards.

'Hmm. There's an unknown F-Ranker some distance away from here. Reen, rejoice you'll get to have your late-night snack.'

Eren said to his demon beast. He wasn't going to hand the cultists to Marla after capturing them like he was ordered to do. Neither was he going to secretly follow them.

If one of the big shots of the city of Silvermoon was connected with the cultist, he didn't want to paint a bull's eye on his back by helping the case in any way. And he had his pet to feed anyway.

'Erni, don't use your katars for handling the food. You ruin it with your attacks and waste so much away. Waste not, want not. Let me take care of it nice and easy.'

Reen didn't want her food getting mutilated by her master. She voiced her displeasure openly while separating herself from his body. She took on the shape of a young girl with just the right features. The demon beast was donned track pants and a hunter's wear as she shapeshifted right into it.

"Here! Wear this mask."

Eren handed her a mask and wore one for himself as well. Reen was not happy about the design of the mask though:

"Why do I have to wear these weirdly embroidered masks as well? They don't look good Erni. I hope you know that."

"Hahaha! This style is something I picked up from the guy named Tumko Darata. He'll get famous for his deeds in the future.

Anyway. The mask is eye-catching for a reason. It's so that the enemy registers the mask's design the most and our other detail get blurred as a result. So you have to wear it.

Remember Reen, never underestimate any ranker. They have so many ways to get back to you if you leave any clue behind."

Eren had worn the mask while saying these things to his demon beast. He had also shapeshifted into Ron Damian to collude his mana signature. The mask was just a decoy. The cynic in him always thought about the worst outcomes and forced him to prepare a few countermeasures.

"Aren't you going to at least try to investigate as you've been told to do?"

Reen asked curiously. She knew her master always did things carefully. If he has abandoned his mission that was given by an Adept ranker, there had to be a reason behind it.

"Not really. The F-Rankers we will deal with won't know much than what we already know. This combing operation is mostly for targeting E-Rankers and above. The F-Rank small fries are just for the show."

“But you always say that no matter how low a possibility was, we need to take them into the equation as long as they are not zero.”

Reen asked while keeping the same pace as Eren while heading towards their target. She had already spread her mana sense, ready to pinpoint the food she was craving for so long.

“This is not about the high or low possibility of something, Reen. This is about what those possibilities entail. If we don’t find any lead, we get home safely without getting ourselves involved in the mess.

But if we do find something, no matter what Marla says, we are going to be added to the mess. That is something I wish to avoid. Plus, this girl Lensa suspects something about me. It is better if we get to leave the city without interacting with her again.”

“Hm! Target up ahead, 2 O clock from here. Will you come with me or state here?”

Reen had finally located her target with her mana sense. Her saliva was oozing out as she talked:

“I’ll come. No point watching their move when you can one-shot them with ease.”

“Stealth or frontal?”

“Stealth, always. Remember, stab your enemy in the back when you have the terrain advantage. Don’t waste time in the killing.”

Eren guided his demon beast about their battle plan that mostly relied solely on her. The latter followed his order to a T and decreased her speed and movement sounds.

“Man, what are we doing here? Are you sure that the person would show up here? We were up all night yesterday and didn’t find any trace of them.”

A guy in his early 20s asked his only partner. They were traversing the same area Eren was assigned to. The cultists were marching straight to their doom without knowing about their grim destinies.

“Well, they say that the person has been contract-bound to help us for a certain number of instances. And the higher-ups have used one of the instances to call that person here and aid us in our mission during these few days.”

The other guy looked to be in his late 20s. He was just a step away from crossing the F-Rank as compared to his impatient colleague who had just barely made it to the solid stage of the same rank.

“Hm. But couldn’t that person tell us exact time and place so that we could avoid such pain-int-ass exploration?”

“Well, if we consider these steps as countermeasures to something, then it means that the person knows we are going to get tracked for our activities. So keep your voice down and focus on the task at hand. We are only supposed to make contact with that person.

We let our leader know right away and retreat from there. I don’t want to...”

“Too late for that.”

The person in his late 20s was going to complete what he had to say but he was interrupted by a young girl's voice. They couldn't locate the source of that voice. But they didn't have to.

Because Reen appeared right in the middle of them with her mouth dripping from saliva. It was time for her late-night snack.

Chapter 152: Et Tu Ari?

"Too late for that."

This was the last line the guy in his early 20s heard. After that, his vision got darker and he stopped feeling his body.

This was because Reen transformed into her original form and attacked the weakest link of the duo, as taught by her master. She spread her slimy mass and coated the guy's entire body within it. The guy had almost died inside, making little to no movements when trapped by a C-Rank beast. It was just his body getting dissolved inside.

The guy that was with him was horrified by the scenes unfolding in front of him. A mana beast of unknown rank had attacked them. And it was devouring one of them like it was no big deal.

He tried to run away. But Reen created a rope from her slimy mass and extended it towards the man, tying his legs up as quickly as the guy thought of escaping.

"Help! Someone, please help us."

The guy started shouting and calling for help. Someone in the shadows was irked by his actions.

"Reen, from now on, you are to prioritize your food doesn't talk when it is being had. Target its mouth first to achieve that."

Eren came out of hiding after saying that.

"You! Brat, come here and help me. I'll give you all the money and resources that I have."

The cultist tried his last resort into tempting someone who unbeknownst to him was his attacker. The latter laughed after hearing the deal he was pitched:

"As cliched as it may sound, you can not bribe me with something which is going to be mine anyway. Reen, quick, we are on a schedule here."

Eren ordered his demon beast to hurry up who was playing with her food. The side dish didn't stop striving for his chance to survive through:

"Motherfu*ker! Who are you?"

Wait...

Are you saying you control this horrible creature? Please I'm begging you, don't do this to me. If it's wealth you want on me, I can give it to you..."

Eren didn't want to answer the guy but he kept on yelling in his direction. Reen was too engrossed in having her current food that she ignored her master's order of shushing her side dish.

So the dark knight had to say something to shut him up.

“You misunderstand. What you have on you might be tempting. But it is not our main goal, Mr.cultist. What my demon beast want from you is your body. She is starving you see.”

Only now did the captured cultist realize that these attackers were looking for him. They were probably a part of the squad from the city of Silvermoon.

The cultist knew the chances of his survival were low if he didn't do anything about his current situation.

“Aren't your protocols dictate that the cultists should be taken prisoners first to draw the information from them. I have a lot of information about the current plan the cultists have regarding the city of Silvermoon.”

The guy tried to milk the fact that he was needed by these rankers to investigate the cultists' activities. Too bad, he met with a certain someone who didn't care about any of that.

“Yeah. Not interested. Keep that information to yourself and die with it for all I care. Reen, hurry up girl.”

The cultist almost spat blood after hearing Eren's response. He hadn't come across anyone from the rankers' faction who breached the protocols assigned to them so brazenly.

“Wait. I know who we are supposed to meet. I haven't told this to anybody because I only heard my leader say this in passing. I can tell you...”

The cultist tried to sell the most important information he had in exchange for his life. He thanked his stars he hadn't signed a mana contract with his cultist organization because of his F-Rank. Otherwise, he would have died before leaking such information. Too bad, there was no buyer to what he was trying hard to give on discount:

“My man, do you even understand what I just said? We are not interested.”

Reen finished her first meal. The trace of the first guy she had eaten was nowhere to be found except the ID Stone on him. Then she started enveloping her tentacles onto her next meal.

The meal-to-be cultist knew this was a life and death moment for him. He didn't care about the attacker reciprocating his wishes or not and said what he knew as a last resort:

“Hold on. Listen to me. The person who we are supposed to meet has an exclusive stock of Frostfoam elven ale. This is what I know. Now please...”

The guy gave out the information he had once heard by chance to his attacker. Hoping the attacker at least takes him under custody after hearing that. But opposite to what he was expecting took place at that time.

“Fuc*k, fu*k, fuc*k. Your dense motherfuc*er. I had told you I don't want to know. Yet you still gave me the worst information I could ask for. Reen, kill this fuc*ker this instant for me.”

Erens' anger irrupted after hearing the guy's response. He didn't want to involve himself in this shadow brawl between the cultists and the city of Silvermoon. And yet this idiot of a cultist who just had to value his life more than the information he had came clean to Eren against his wishes.

Reen felt a strong surge of hatred her master had for this guy in her psyche. That prevented her from taking her leisure time to having her food. She quickly snapped the guy's neck with one of her tentacles and absorbed him into her slimy mass next.

"What do we do now, Erni? Should we give this information to that Marla woman?"

Reen assumed her young girl form after having two human nuggets. She adjusted her clothes while asking her master about their next set of plans:

"Why the fu*ck would I say anything to Marla? It's her fuc*king friend Arizihana Agnoth who is involved with the cultists if what the guy said was true. I'll just let the woman do her dirty work in the background. Why the fuc*k should I care about what happens to the city of Silvermoon or its citizen?"

Now let's clean the traces you have left on the field, collect the ID Stones, and get away from this place asap."

Eren ordered his demon beast with a grim face and foul mood. He had figured out who the trojan's horse was inside the city of Silvermoon as soon as the guy talked about the stockpile of Frostfoam ale.

Chapter 153: Agatha's Agony

"Did you make contact with the cultists? Or do you have any leads?"

Marla asked her team the next morning after they met up at the inn as they had planned. But all she got was a negative response from all of the teammates. She sighed after knowing her recon plan wasn't bearing any fruit.

"Alright. Tonight will be the last day. If we don't find anyone tonight as well, then we will have to go back to LA without producing any results.

This would affect our mission rewards severely but I'm not too worried about that. What I'm worried about is that the city of Silvermoon might fall into cultists' hands.

There are already campaigns taking place in random regions that are drawing races apart from each other. The cultists are funding this cause and someone from the inside is helping them. Yet we can't destroy this channel even when we know so much about it. This is kinda frustrating."

Marla said with disappointment laced in her voice. She wanted to help her friend in defending her city. Unknown to the fact that the very friend had shaken hands with the city's enemies.

But this was not all. Marla finally gave Eren the news he was waiting for.

"Eren, your request has been processed. You will be presented with the official slave owner contract today by the city's administration. Do remember that you will be held responsible for whatever crimes your slave commits after they sign the slavery contract.

The slavery duration is 20 years. After which, Agatha will be set free if her conduct is good and she hasn't committed any crime during her slavery."

Eren was instructed about the master-slave contract. The former listened to the explanation clearly before asking another question:

"Adept Marla, can I use my slave tonight in completing my mission after the contract formalities get completed today?"

"I don't see why you can't. Feel free to use her. And don't do anything naughty with her just because you can. Hehe!"

Marla said this and chuckled. She knew Eren didn't come across as a horndog as most teens his age were known to be. She just tried teasing her apprentice a little.

"She is not my type, Adept Marla."

Eren replied calmly. He didn't become flustered as she thought he would be.

"Hmm? What is your type then?"

Marla asked with some anticipation in her voice. This was not the first time Eren had replied boldly to her without caring about the difference in their backgrounds. And she appreciated his straight-shooter attitude every time she came across with.

"Why, it's you, of course, Master Marla. I mean your type. A beautiful yet fierce woman who can take care of me when I'm in a pinch. Hehe!"

The butcher readily admitted having no problem on having to depend on his woman. As if he was trying to find a sugar mommy instead of a partner for him.

"Hahaha! Cheeky. Alright. You guys can rest for the day. Let's commence our mission in the evening as we've done so far. Eren, someone from the city admin's office will call you today and help you sign the contract."

Marla dispersed her team after saying that. Eren went to his room and rested while awaiting the call from the city's administration.

"What am I doing here, you terrorist? Let me go. It's you who have hurt us. You should be punished for your vile acts. Not people like us."

Eren's inn room now had a loud resident. It was Agatha of course. She was sitting on the floor and was unable to move. Because Eren had told her so.

The terrorist Agatha talked about was having his tea while looking outside the window. He could shut her up with one command of his. But he let his new slave rage on. As if he was testing her breaking point.

"Why are you not even looking at me? Listen, I can't be any use to you. Why don't you let me go? And I can compensate you with something."

Agatha said this while looking at her new master with determination in her eyes. She was going to do everything in her power to get rid of the forced enslavement placed on her.

“Hm? What can a lowly slave offer me? Do tell in detail.”

Eren finally looked at Agatha from head to toe after he said that. The latter felt goosebumps raised on her back after he did that. But she controlled her nerves and replied boldly:

“Listen. I don’t know much about the cultists’ plans. But I can show you one of their hideouts I was at.”

Agatha was hopeful the fish will take the bait. But alas, what she was fishing was not something that could be attracted with such a weak bait:

“That hideout is as good as gone after you were captured. Most probably, it must have been turned into a trap so that you can lead me there and get rid of me. So I’ll pass. What else?”

Eren swooshed his hands like he was swatting a fly while saying that. Agatha controlled her anger after looking at that gesture. This guy was too arrogant, she thought to herself.

She came to realize that her parlour tricks won’t work against this little terrorist. She needed to give him something solid.

“Ok. Here’s another something that might be important to you. I believe, there is someone in the city of Silvermoon...”

“If you are talking about someone from the city of Silvermoon in cahoots with the cultists, we already know about it. And I’m not interested in any of that either.”

“But this city...”

“I already know about the person who has betrayed the city.”

“Whaaaaa? You do? Even I don’t know about that. But then why are you not telling...”

“Because there’s no benefit for me in doing that. So I’m not interested. What else do you have to buy your freedom with?”

Agatha was left speechless after knowing her terrorist master’s ideologies. Who was the cultist between them exactly? This guy was even worse than the cultists who created unrest in the kingdoms because they wanted to break the shackles placed on the exchange of knowledge about magic and ranking journey.

Her new master didn’t place importance on philosophical things. He only looked for his benefits and was willing to cross the boundaries of morality like it was no big thing.

Agatha took a long breath after throwing the last card she had held onto as a last resort.

“I... I can tell you more about the Beast Bloods and how they turn humans into Anthrops.”

Eren finally smiled after hearing what he was craving to hear:

“I’m all ears.”

He said while finishing what remained of the tea in his cup.

Chapter 154: Therianthropy

“I’m all ears.”

Eren said while finishing what remained of the tea in his cup. He fixated his eyes on his slave and gestured her to take a seat nearby where he was.

“Wha... What do you want to know about Beast Bloods?”

Agatha felt nervous after sitting near her new master. Her instincts were now telling her that this person should never be harmed by her hands. Under any means, at all costs. Otherwise, she would have to face grim repercussions.

“For starters, tell me what is the object of the Beast Bloods? From what I know about you guys, every cultist organization focuses on a certain lost path of magic. All that it has done is doing, and will be doing will be linked to that path.

So it is easier to predict the Beast Bloods’ next moves if I know about their motives. Tell me what you know about this first.”

Eren said while tapping his fingers on the surface of the desk table nearby. The tapping sound could be distinctly heard by the young slave, which created a subtle pressure on her psyche. She had to admit that her new master could see through a lot of deceptions with enough information at his disposal.

“Beast Blood’s main objective is to successfully revive the lost branch of magic that turns humans into demi-humans. Becoming a therianthrope is the first major one needs to take before they can turn into full-fledged demi-humans.”

Agatha explained slowly. She watched as the terrorist in front of her, who was lost in a bunch of thoughts, suddenly asked her another question:

“Demi-humans, huh? I’ve heard some legends. But that’s not important right now.

You can partially transform into a mana beast, right? Aren’t you a demi-human then? And on that matter, what is the difference between a therianthrope and a demi-human?”

Agatha seemed like she was expecting those questions to hit her sooner than later. She cleared her throat before answering:

“The clear distinction between a therianthrope and a demi-human is how they can increase their numbers.

The therianthropes cannot pass down their beastly traits to their progeny whereas the demi-humans should be capable of doing so in theory. This is the most straightforward definition I’ve heard from my superiors.

They also say that the real demi-human transformation is not something we therianthropes can hope to achieve. This path’s end goal is for a human to completely transform into a beast when they need to and revert to their original whenever they want to.”

Agatha finished and looked at another empty teacup set as well as a neat-looking tea kettle placed on the desk table. There were also some snacks present. She was tempted to have those. The prison she was in only took care of her daily necessities.

So Agatha was ready to change her palate after all her time spent in that gloomy prison. But she was waiting on the terrorist to allow her to have those. She wouldn't dare touch them otherwise.

Eren saw that the girl was looking at the snacks kept on the table. But he ignored her silent request and verbally marched on:

"I get that the ranking prowess one could exert while being a demi-human might be more in comparison than what normal humans can do. And that's a good advantage to seek.

But I still don't understand why having the ability to pass down your demi-human traits to your progeny is such a big deal? I mean isn't becoming a therianthrope enough of a success for you guys?

If you want to turn your kids like you, you can always do that when they are born. And then wait for them to start their ranking journey before making them go through the same therianthrope process you did. Simple as that. Why go the extra mile?"

Eren didn't know much about the cultists in his previous timelines.

He had hunted a few for the bounties on their heads. But he didn't trouble himself to know about their goals or power structure.

But the whole thing regarding Reen had made Eren take an interest in the path Beast Bloods was treading on. That's why he started asking about the organization's information.

"Um. I'm not too sure about that. They say that the superficial transformation that the therianthropes are used to doing is not enough to tap into the true power of being a demi-human.

The real demi-humans would have the bloodline of both the human and mana beast present within them. But the therianthropes only store that blood in their body and trigger a superficial transformation. The beast's blood does not get integrated with our blood in our case."

Agatha honestly told Eren what she knew. The young therianthrope knew that her master was able to discern her lies from truth, thanks to the enslavement contract.

"Hm. If the integration of blood is the key in turning humans into demi-humans, then shouldn't that have been achieved by now? Isn't that what happens with the beast contract?"

What is stopping you guys from becoming a demi-human?"

"They say it is not easy to get integrated with something that doesn't naturally belong to you. Becoming a demi-human sort of goes against nature. So it's not something that you can achieve on your whims.

About the beast contract spell. Yes, it can be regarded as the same as becoming an Anthropos in more ways than one. But it has a few key differences.

Firstly, we don't need a beast's soul trapped within us for it to function the way it should. The beast contract spell requires you to choose the beast that is compatible with your element and inherent nature before forming a contract.

We don't need to do that. At most, the Anthropos-to-be will only worry about the elemental compatibility. The procedure to turn humans into a therianthrope will harmonize the rest. It will form a symbiotic link between humans and their newly acquired beastly traits while eliminating the beast soul."

Agatha said that and looked away from the desk table. She shouldn't torture herself in false anticipation if this wretched terrorist was not going to offer her the snacks that were just a few inches away from her.

Eren's face painted a clear picture that he was confused about something. He voiced his query without wasting time:

"Isn't therianthropy a better version of the beast contract spell then? Why is the former hidden from the populace and illegal when compared to the latter?"

Agatha couldn't help herself from forming a smile on her face after hearing Eren's question.

"Exactly. We cultists don't seem crazy now, do we?"

Chapter 155: Link Between Beast Contract Spell & Therianthropy

"Exactly. We cultists don't seem crazy now, do we?"

The slave smirked at her master with that retort. But Eren gave her no response, indicating that she should proceed further.

"Yes. The Beast contract spell is an inferior version of the path of therianthropy. The ability to call forth the beast soul and make it inhabit the semi-corporal body made of mana might look like an advantage the contract spell has over Anthropos, but trust me when I say that it is not.

You have seen my rapid regeneration abilities. Do you think the integration of beastly features on a superficial level through the contract spell would have been enough for me to survive the tragedy you had bestowed on me? You and I both know it wouldn't.

Although what we follow isn't a real deal, it at least goes closer to it. The beast contract spell seems like an amalgamation of multiple schools into one just so that it could function and mimic the effects of therianthropy to some level.

So the contract spell can be considered as a copy of something that is deemed as a copy of the original thing. They just added the beast manifestation part by introducing the beast tattoo in the mix to make the spell more attractive than the effects of therianthropy.

And this is when I'm only in the F-Rank. The power of therianthropes exceeds far beyond your imagination when compared to normal Ace rankers and beyond.

My superior said that the reason various kingdoms came up with the beast contract spell and legalized it within their territories was to prevent us from gaining rebel rankers as loyal followers. Because of that

spell, the path of therianthropy was automatically preferred less by the rankers who wanted a boost in their ranking powers.

And the kingdoms won in the end. The path of therianthropy was left behind, thanks to the beast contract spell. The kingdoms would charge hefty money to give access to that spell. And rankers would still buy it anyway. Because it didn't contain as many risks as the therianthropy."

Agatha finished her statements and looked sneakily at the snacks. She knew that the guy in front of her would not allow her to eat anything from that snack rack. Therefore, now she was trying to salvage her dignity by not coming across as a starving person. Unfortunately for her, she was doing a poor job at it.

"This is interesting. Very interesting. So the kingdoms created the beast contract spell to counter the path of therianthropy the cultists have. It's like an economic tug of war between two merchants trying to sell the same kind of goods.

Looks like I really didn't know how the world worked even back then. I need more data regarding this path of therianthropy.

Wait a minute! If the path of misanthropy is so mysterious and the kingdoms don't want rankers exploring that path, why did they allow you to be enslaved by me? Unless..."

Eren narrowed his eyes as he paused what he had to say and observed Agatha closely. The latter couldn't help but smile mirthlessly before replying:

"That's right. The path of therianthropy has a major drawback. The therianthropes can't use normal ranking techniques or spells meant for humans. Spells are not much of an issue. But the ranking techniques for us are really scarce to the point that they can now be regarded as non-existent.

And that's not all. The therianthropes face bigger hurdles than normal rankers when they are breaking through the major ranks. The bottleneck can be so frustrating that some therianthropes choose to try extreme means and end up dying in the process.

That's why therianthropy is not as widely popular as the beast contract spell anymore. That transcendent spell has many shortcomings but is it better than the path of therianthropy in this regard."

Agatha declared the fatal flaw of the therianthropy. Eren frowned after hearing what he had just heard before continuing further:

"So that's why they let you be my slave. They know the chances for you to break into the next rank are almost non-existent. A slave who can not progress much in their ranking path is only good for mundane slavery.

As for the secrecy of the therianthropy path, I can guess that what you've just told me is something most top rankers already know and are researching covertly or overtly. And the biggest disadvantage of this path is enough to discourage the beginner rankers who've just started in their journeys if and when they come to know about the topic."

Agatha shook her head before replying:

“That’s not all. They must have also looked through your history and your behavioural profile. The fact that they gave you a therianthrope as a legal slave who also happened to be an ex-cultist means that everything in your file is as per their liking.

Plus, that guard’s captain has more influence on the city administration than you can imagine.”

Agatha smelled the air that contained the aroma of baked cookies and sandwiches after she said that. She tried her hardest not to give in to the desires that wanted her to just snatch that snack tray away. But her stomach was now making loud growling sounds. She knew Eren must have heard those but was acting like he didn’t.

But the slave owner wasn’t paying attention to his slave’s small life struggles. He looked at the ceiling as if some understanding had dawned on him:

“Oh. That means they are counting on my recluse ass to keep things discreet whenever and wherever I can. Well, I can do that.

Hm? You know awfully a lot about how this stuff works. What were you doing before you became a cultist?”

Eren suddenly realized that the slave in front of him must have lived a life before turning into a cultist. Agatha’s face became grim after she was asked the question she wasn’t expecting in this round of questioning:

“You want to know what I was doing before turning into a cultist? I’ll tell you if you help me get my revenge.”

Chapter 156: Scaring Agatha Into Submission

“You want to know what I was doing before turning into a cultist? I’ll tell you if you help me get my revenge.”

Agatha looked at Eren with seriousness written all over her face. This was a long shot, her asking for this terrorist to help her get her due revenge on people who had messed up her entire life. But as expected, Eren didn’t seem interested. He just shrugged his shoulders before replying:

“What is your revenge has got to do with me? I’m not here to run your errands. You are to do that for me. You should forget about your revenge and focus on mine.”

Agatha almost spat blood after hearing what the terrorist had just declared casually. He didn’t even show a tinge of emotion while saying he wasn’t interested in knowing her background. What’s more? The guy had his to-do revenge list pre-planned and he wanted her help in achieving the same.

“Are you really a teen like me? Why do I feel like I am talking to an old man who is too fed up with the world to care about anything other than what he needs?”

Agatha sighed sadly after looking at her new master.

“You don’t need to worry about me. I am plenty young where it counts and with enough wisdom where it needs. Hehe!

But one thing I still don't understand. Even if you do achieve your goal and successfully find your way to turn into demi-humans, you'll forever have to stay in hiding. The kingdoms will open a joint front to tackle the guys like you.

What lies after you find your way to attain demi-human status?"

Eren asked after he got up from his side. He had again started pacing around the room with his hands folded behind his back. As far as he knew and could tell from his experiences, the cultists were radical extremists. But they weren't stupid.

That's why he had figured out that their end goal can't simply be to walk on the lost paths of magic or liberate its knowledge from the clutches of the kingdoms. No sane person would think about the well-being of the world before thinking about themselves first.

"Oh! Ace Renar had told me about this. All the cultist organizations are planning to join hands together and form a free kingdom of their own. All the cultists can become its citizens. And it would be the sole kingdom in which the knowledge related to the ranking techniques and most spells would not remain restricted.

At least that's what all the low ranker cultists believe. The Beast Bloods organization has also been promised an important place within the proposed kingdom. I don't know much apart from this.

Now, I've told you all I could. Now can we talk about my freedom? What will be your next condition? If it's sleeping with me, then I can..."

Agatha wasn't stupid in thinking that giving the information that her new master had demanded from her was all that it was going to take for him to release her. She believed that the guy would think from his groins and make another "personal" request. That's why she made that part of her deal as well.

But she was yet to understand the kind of person her master was:

"Hehe! The information you've given me is still not enough."

Agatha had expected this card to get pulled on her. So she remained calm despite the bubble of anger building in her mind and replied:

"The information I've given is all I have. You can not expect an F-Ranker to know about everything to know about such secretive organizations, can you? You'd be called stupid if you were aiming to gain the juicy details about the cultists from a stray like me."

Agatha felt good after dissing her new master indirectly. She knew the slave contract won't harm her since she was only referring to a possibility. The ex-cultist was expecting another rebuttal. But surprisingly the ex-Ken agreed to that statement:

"You are right. But it is still not enough to buy your freedom.

To be honest, nothing can be enough for me to give you freedom. I just made it look like I was willing to exchange my slave ownership with the information you provided. It was done so that it would encourage you to talk in-depth about your initiative.

The best form of investigation is when the target is influenced to take the lead to get investigated without anyone doing anything about it. Hehe!

Yet, I can still grant you a different form of freedom if you want one.”

Eren said this and smiled sweetly. Agatha had goosebumps after witnessing that smile. She asked the butcher with doubt and suspicion laced in her shaky voice.

“What... What kind of freedom are we talking about?”

“Eternal freedom of course. The freedom from all miseries that this life has served in your platter. Tell me quickly, do you wish to have this freedom?”

Agatha finally understood what Eren wanted to convey. He was ready to silence her for good in the name of granting her freedom. Her instincts to survive the potential threat coming her way triggered her to cast her therianthropic transformation while she said this:

“I’d suggest you don’t assume that things will go smoothly like the last time they did for you. Here, in this room, you can not use those bombs. And my transformation is enough...”

“Hahaha! Little lass, you forgot that I can do whatever I want with you while ordering you to not retaliate. Although I will be questioned for my slave’s death, it won’t be too bothersome for me. Especially since you were an ex-cultist.

Plus, who said anything about using potion bombs?

Reen, come out.”

Eren was right. Agatha had nearly forgotten at that brief moment that she was now a slave of Eren who could do anything with her. And her eyes opened wide in horror because she received another shock.

Chapter 157: Targeting Cultist Hideout

“Reen, come out.”

Eren was right. Agatha had nearly forgotten at that brief moment that she was now a slave of Eren who could do anything with her. And her eyes opened wide in horror because she received another shock.

Reen suddenly manifested in front of Agatha as soon as her master called her out. The former looked at the slave in disgust before saying:

“This won’t even be an appetizer for me, Erni. You should have arranged for more food.”

Said the demon beast in a young girl’s voice that was laced with a lot of complaints. Then she opened her mouth unnaturally and showed her sawtooth-like teeth that were glistening with saliva.

Agatha felt like her soul had left her body. The visual horror of seeing a young girl open her mouth like that was horrible enough. But Reen also released a hint of her mana signature which scared the sh*t out of Agatha.

‘A C-Ranker!? No... A C-Rank beast. That too in a human form. This thing here is a demon beast.’

Agatha's pale face was finally painted with a grim realization. She couldn't have imagined that her new master was the owner of a demon beast as well, apart from her. Only now did the ex-cultist realize that her act of rebelling against her new master was not only foolish but also suicidal.

And now Agatha was going to get eaten alive by the demon beast. This was the worst way to die for her. She wanted to exact her revenge before she met the angel of death. But it would have to remain a dream if she doesn't do anything about it.

"Sir Eren. I'm sorry. I was mistaken to ask for the annulment of the contract before its due completion date.

I promise that I'll do all I can to follow your commands from now on. Please don't kill me."

Agatha finally made a desperate attempt to save her life. She kowtowed in front of Reen and Eren while she made her plea.

"Let me be clear that you won't be free from us even when the contract gets completed. Not the way you want at least. Tell me, are you still ready to serve me?"

Said Eren while closing in on Agatha, walking behind Reen. He said that amusingly, but the target of that statement didn't find anything funny in it. And yet, she couldn't help but smile mirthlessly before replying:

"Al... alright. I'll stay as your slave forever. Please spare my life."

Agatha thought what she said was enough to halt the demon beast's march. But the latter just kept heading her way.

"Whaaa... What are you doing? I've cooperated in every way, Sir Eren. And I won't even..."

"Hehehehe!"

Agatha was trying to pitch her case but was interrupted by Reen's fun laughter. The former thought her end was near when the demon beast stood right in front of her, looking down on her potential food.

"Don't worry. This was just to nudge you in the right direction. I was talking to Eren about the snacks on the table behind you.

Now step aside."

Said Reen and waited for Agatha to step aside. She had kowtowed near the chair so it was difficult to get to the snacks before pulling the chair.

It took a while for the young therianthrope to understand what Reen was saying. She hastily moved to the side after hearing that Reen wasn't targeting her.

Reen started walking again. And said something in a low voice when she went past the ex-cultist:

"From now on, avoid sneaking a peek at food meant for me. I don't like it when my food is being ogled by others. Hmph!"

“Aaah! Yes, madam. Thanks... thank you for letting me know about your habits. I’ll certainly remember that. And I apologize for staring at your food. It wasn’t my intention to do that.”

“*Sigh. Stop that. Erni doesn’t like a subservient attitude at all. Act normally like you always do. Just follow the orders given to you and you’ll be good.”

Said Reen without looking back at Agatha. She sat on the chair Eren had used then started eating the snacks the inn had provided.

“Get up now Agatha. What can you tell me about these tokens?”

Eren threw two tokens that had a bunch of beast carvings at one side and a runic mini-array at the other. They were some form of access tokens. But Eren couldn’t figure out much after that point.

Eren had seized these tokens from Reen’s cultist victims that she had just recently. They were stored inside the guys’ ID stones respectively.

“Oh. These are standard-issue Beast Blood tokens meant to be used by F-Rankers. But where did you get these from?”

“Reen’s food sometimes gives souvenirs. Anyway, what are these tokens used for?”

Agatha tried not to think about the grim fates her fellow cultists must have faced in the hands of these two monsters. But she was failing miserably at the task.

“Um... These tokens are used to access our hideouts. But the one I know doesn’t use these tokens. They must belong to another hideout that I’m not aware of.”

Agatha answered honestly. She had figured out that her fate was now tied to this vile duo. There was no running away from them. She might as well cooperate with them fully to score some brownie points in their books.

One had to admit that Agatha was a flexible person. And she had a survivor’s spirit.

“Hmm. It seems you have started to warm up to us. Hehe! Good.

Now, how can we locate the new hideout? Do you have any means?”

Eren asked Agatha who answered him after nodding at him:

“Yes. Every Beast Blood F-Ranker has been given an element-neutral spell that can pinpoint the location of the hideout if you have the respective token with you. This is done so that the members don’t get lost while returning from completing their missions.”

Eren and Reen smiled at each other after they heard Agatha’s statement. They knew tonight’s recon was going to be more than fruitful for them.

Chapter 158: Not Taking Prisoners

“So? Where do we go from here?”

Eren asked Agatha who had held the Beast Blood token in her hand. She would often close her eyes from time to time and tighten her grip around the token to confirm that she was going in the right direction. The direction was shown by the spectral arrow projected over the token.

Eren's small squad was out to comb the area for potential cultist activities. That was the official mission given to them anyway. But Eren used this opportunity to launch a sneak attack on another hideout he got to know, thanks to Agatha and two cultist victims of Reen.

"Just up ahead. Around 300 meters from here. What are we going to do once we get there? I don't think members from this hideout will recognize me."

Agatha expressed her worries as she kept on travelling ahead of Eren and Reen. All three of them were all wearing Tumko Darata-style face masks, making them look like some form of rebellious rankers squad.

"What else? Plunder all this hideout has on therianthropy as well as money, and other resources in store."

Eren said it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"And what about the people inside?"

"What about them?"

Eren and Reen both looked at Agatha confusingly when she asked about how they were going to deal with the cultists present at the base. It was obvious to them that their death was a foregone conclusion.

Eren had asked about the possible level of rankers present at the hideouts to Agatha. The ex-cultist had informed him that the hideouts that are accessed by F-Rankers shouldn't contain a presence beyond E-Ranker.

"Why are we shifting our base of operation all of a sudden?"

A young cultist asked her senior when she was helping her pack some stuff up. They were inside what looked to be a smugglers' den inside a large and wide cave.

"Because we suspect the causality of two F-Rankers who belonged to this hideout. It seems that the city of Silvermoon doesn't know about their deaths or isn't involved in the same.

But we can never be too sure about something. The higher-ups don't want to take chances."

The lady who was packing the stuff replied while continuing her work. She was asked to complete the procedure for total abandonment of this base as soon as possible. She too had some questions of her own regarding the order she had received from her higher-ups. But for now, she decided it was best to ensure her safety first.

"But this is the most secure place we know. I don't think we can find a geographically advantageous place like this anytime soon."

The cave's entrance was protected by the array. And it was also hidden from the outside world, thanks to the illusion are created. Only the Beast Blood cultist members that had access to the tokens could get inside.

This was an auxiliary base for the Beast Bloods, separate from the regular base that was active in the region. Not every member of the organization had access to it. They didn't even know about its existence.

The young cultist thought that the higher-ups were acting scared without a valid reason behind their actions. Things were finally going good for him. He now had a normal life that was kept apart from the usual cultist activities he had to do. And this was all thanks to the proximity this base had with the city of Silvermoon. He wasn't too keen on moving out of this base because of that.

"I still think this is a hasty decision. This base is as safe as safe can be. Maybe we should..."

The guy was going to continue his pestering but was interrupted by something in his throat. He looked down and saw that a katar had pierced his throat from the back. The sharp pointy end of the weapon had made it through the guy's Adam's apple and was now coated in the blood.

The guy, who thought that the base of their operation was safe, died at this moment. Before even knowing what his mistake was. The date he had planned in the city of Silvermoon under the guise of being a normal ranker had been punctured along with his windpipe.

The guy's senior soon joined him in the afterlife. He died from his head getting separated from his torso.

"Please. I'm telling you. The cultists are not the monsters you think we are. At least not these F-Rankers. Why must you kill them when you can scare them off and still get what you want from this place?"

Agatha pleaded with her master and his demon beast to leave the low ranker cultists alive. She joined the duo from behind who was busy planning how to reap more lives.

"Agatha, I don't want to enforce the slavery restrictions on you because it is too bothersome and distracting. But I will if you don't start lifting your weight in this team. Do you understand?"

"You want me to kill them?"

"Why do you sound so surprised? It is very hypocritical of you to only attack rankers for your gain and leave the cultists be just because they might be like you, forced by the circumstances to join the organization."

Eren said while cleaning the edge of the katar with the guy's clothes he had just killed. But Agatha wanted to defend her stance:

"Aren't we all hypocritical then? You want to remain a ranker while studying the lost paths adopted by the cultists. You are on the "so-called" right side of things, yet you are killing the cultists that can be let go with lighter punishments."

Agatha thought she had won the war of words against her master with the statement she had made. But Eren just chuckled in response after hearing about his slave's retort.

“I’m not the hypocrite here. At least not right now. This is no manhunt of cultists like you think it is. You are wrong if you think that I don’t hesitate to kill them just because they happen to be cultists.

I would have killed them anyway if they were normal rankers, all the same. Now less talking, more killing.

Reen, Agatha. Start killing all the cultists and rankers in this area. I don’t want a single survivor. And we are not taking any prisoners.”

Said Eren before marching forward. He had just issued a massacre of cultists with his brief speech.

Chapter 159: Massacre

A scene of massacre unfolded in front of Agatha’s eyes. She saw mutilated bodies laid on the ground that were releasing a thick smell of blood. But she couldn’t see the pool of blood as the den was poorly lit. She could find solace in the fact that the cultists didn’t care about optimizing the visibility inside the den.

And it wasn’t like she wasn’t involved in this massacre. Her hands and her clothes were painted in the cultists’ blood as well. She had to do her master’s bidding after all.

Numerically, most damages were done by her master’s demon beast. Reen’s mere presence was enough to make the poor cultists freeze in their tracks. And then she would just take her sweet time digesting them up. But her killings would not leave any bodies behind.

Eren on the other hand would just hack through his opponents like an unstoppable force. Sometimes it was hard for Agatha to follow his movements with her eyes. The teen would just disappear from his place only to appear a few meters away from his initial positions. And the opponent would have already lost their limbs by the time that happened.

It was difficult for Agatha to make a sense out of Eren’s way of killing his opponents in the most brutal way possible without even batting an eye. She felt that her master was no teen doing these battle-hardened activities.

Only then she did realize that the terrorist didn’t need the potion bombs to overwhelm her. He could have dealt with her just as easily even when he hadn’t used those explosives.

Collectively, the trio must have killed around 40 F-Rank and 1 E-Rank cultist by now. They had cleared an entire cultist’s organization’s branch all by themselves even without forming a proper party.

“Stop staring like that and get to work. Reen won’t be able to finish all the bodies and my ID storage can only store so much. Use yours to store a few intact ones and get the rest in one place.”

Eren ordered Agatha after he killed the last cultist youngster who was trying to run away from the scene. He had really meant it when he said there would be no survivors.

“Whaaaa... What do you mean by storing bodies in storage? Why would you even think of doing something like this?”

Agatha asked with a shadow of grimness spread on her face. She regretted joining the cult after she stopped being one. Because it was the reason behind her ending up as this monster’s slave.

“Isn’t it obvious? Reen likes fresh food. But she can eat the one in storage when she is feeling a little peckish.”

Agatha felt like puking after she heard that. She thought that her master was taking the bodies to leave fewer clues behind. But he was thinking of feeding his demon beast in his spare time.

In Eren’s defence, he had to be efficient when it came to feeding Reen. her appetite was no joking matter. And he couldn’t just kill random civilians and make him a target of the high-ranked entities.

Killing cultists served multiple purposes for Eren. So he didn’t think about sparing any of them at all from the very beginning.

Agatha had to follow her master’s orders. She and Eren took a few intact bodies in their ID storage. Then they started to gather the remaining ones to create a pile.

A mini mountain of chopped up bodies and organs was created in a while. Agatha already felt numb to all these activities. She still wasn’t comfortable in doing the things her master was asking from her. But her survival nature made her come to terms with her current reality.

“What will we do now? Even if we burn the bodies up, the historians would find some clues or the other.”

Agatha asked while wiping her bloody hands on a piece of fabric she had torn from a dead cultist’s jacket. She had come to realize that Eren wasn’t that stupid to believe that mere burning the bodies would get him out of the massacre he had created here.

“I’ll take care of that.”

Reen reformed herself into that of a young girl and said after finally digesting her last body for the day. She felt content after having a hearty meal after a long time.

“You can’t this mountain now, can you?”

Agatha asked with suspicion on her face. Raising a demon beast who seemed to hit their growth spurt sure wasn’t easy. She thought to herself.

“*sigh. Sadly, no. I mean I can, but it’ll take a while. And Eren doesn’t want us to wait that much here. So I’ll just partially consume them. That will collude with the mana signature residues, making it difficult for the historians to know about us.”

Reen didn’t find anything wrong in telling Agatha about her powers. She knew from Eren’s thoughts that he would never let her go alive once she had been taken in as his slave.

Agatha had asked about how Eren had obtained Reen and from where. He told her just enough to give her some basic understanding of the demon beast.

Reen finished her job. Now the scene of the massacre was difficult to retrospect even with the historian’s spells. Eren found a few barrels of earthen oil inside the den. He used the same oil and lit the whole thing inside it shortly after.

Soon, the fire will consume the entire inside of the Den and spill outside. There would remain only ash as a sign of something that had existed inside this natural cave.

But Eren's team didn't wait that long enough. They had already looted the cultists' treasury located at the inner sanctum of the cave. Now waiting anymore would simply be foolishness they weren't willing to commit.

Agatha had cold shivers as she travelled with her two teammates. They had just committed the mass killing and all these two would do was nod at each other from time to time while making faces that said it wasn't a big deal. It was as if the entire conversation had happened in their heads.

Chapter 160: Wingman

"Did you find anything useful?"

Marla asked her teammates the next day when they met up. She wasn't expecting any result from her last recon either. But surprisingly Eren came forward before reporting:

"Master Marla, I might have found something. I had discovered a presence last night with Agatha's help so I followed it up as per your instructions. The chase lasted for about two hours before my cover was blown.

I tried chasing that person but he just disappeared out of the blue. I can give you the details of my pursuit and show you the place on the map where I lost track of him."

Marla raised her eyebrows before nodding at Eren. She pulled a map scroll from her storage and laid it in front of him. The latter didn't waste time and gave her the "exact" details of his chase.

Marla immediately contacted a few personnel and arranged another squad of E-Rankers with the city administration's help. She was made to believe that Eren was in the proximity of the cultist hideout. Hence the preparations.

Eren knew that the place was going to get found out sooner or later. The city's hotshot captain Arizihana Agnoth was playing on the enemy's side. She would find out something was wrong with her contact in a few days. So there was no merit in keeping the crime scene a secret.

By becoming the information provider, Eren would have a valid reason for traces of his presence near the crime scene. And anything unexplainable would get chalked under the anomaly created by Eren with her mana collusion.

Eren also wanted some form of reward from the city administration for his hard work, even when it wasn't done for his employer. He would never say no to free money and resources.

Plus, the butcher had again struck rich with the hideout's treasury!

And he also had a lot of study material, scrolls, books, and research papers regarding therianthropy and other miscellaneous information about the lost paths of magic. That alone would get sold for a fortune in the black market.

But Eren hadn't robbed these study materials to make bucks off of them. He genuinely wanted to study and learn this path and see if he could make better use of it using his demon beast.

Marla left the inn right after she told the teammates to disperse. She was going to lead the team of E-Rankers. She would eventually find out the crime scene Eren had left for her to find. And then they'd return to LA.

It was going to take another day for that to happen. During this day, Lensa came to meet the team members again. She wanted to talk with Eren more. But the butcher made some excuse and left the inn faster than he left his crime scene.

"Ken, what did your family decide about Lensa?"

Almera asked Ken while they were making their way back to LA. They had completed their mission and found the cultists' burned-to-cinders hideout.

Ken sighed before replying:

"My family only sees profit in the mess I didn't even create willingly. They are more than happy for me to tie the knots with Lensa. Someone from my family will meet with the Carrens and come to a formal arrangement.

For now, Lensa and I have both told our families that we'll be focusing on our studies. But if all goes well according to our families' plans, then an engagement will take place within a year.

We are both helpless. For now, we've decided to become friends. And deal with the issue of the engagement a year after that."

Ken replied with stoic expressions. His face looked perfect when the energising rays of the dawn kissed his skin. It was as if a prince was riding to unknown lands with a cause greater than him and everyone he cared about.

"Isn't it great, Ken? I mean you got an elf for a fiance now. Well, almost a fiance. But she is pretty and seems cool to hang out with too. You have the luck of a protagonist my friend. Makes me envious. Hehe!"

Eren said while guiding his colt. Agatha was right behind him whereas Ken and Almera were on either side. This time, Marla was leading them from the front.

Ken seemed to be touched by his friend's words. He gave his signature smile to the one who had brought that mess on him before replying:

"You are right as always, Eren. And Lensa intends to make friends with you too, you know. She told me that you were all praises for me that day when she asked you about me.

Thanks, man. I now know that you have my back. Oh yeah, Lensa told me that she'd come to meet us in LA sometime. We can find a nice girl for you too by then and go on double dates. That'd be fun. Haha!"

Ken offered to be Eren's wingman magnanimously. Eren could only smile mirthlessly at that. He didn't know what to say to the guy who he had cucked. Without the intention to do so in the beginning.

“Hehe! I hope you guys haven’t bought those strange elven ales in stock. Otherwise, things might go wilder than they did last time.”

Almera’s taunt landed right on Ken who immediately had a sullen face hearing that. It seemed that he would not even go within a mile’s range of someone drinking the debuff potion of an ale.

Eren and Marla laughed heartily at Almera’s timely punch.

But soon the atmosphere became serious when Almera asked the D-Ranker about their mission’s details.

“Adept Marla, what happened to the cultist hideout? And what did you find there?”

Marla furrowed her eyebrows after hearing the question directed at her. Then she took a deep breath before slowing down the speed of her colt.

Marla had told her teammates that they’ll talk about the mission’s results after they left the city of Silvermoon. And it was now time to fulfil that promise: