

## Vile 161

### Chapter 161: Conspiracies

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:

"So we finally found the cultist hideout, thanks to the clues given by Eren. but it seems we were too late.

The place was already in ruins by the time we got there. And..."

Marla took some time before replying:

"And there was no cultist alive at the scene. We don't know who, someone who might or might not belong to another cultist organization, had raided the place before us. And they didn't just stop at the raid. They also killed all the cultists present at the hideout.

The scene would have been gory, to say the least by our preliminary investigations. But other than that, the city's historians are having a hard time getting anything else from the scene.

They are saying there's some kind of residual mana collusion that is affecting their class-specific spells. That's why we don't know the identity of the person who committed a massacre there. Or if he was with his team. Because this does not look like a one-man job."

'That's right, babe. It was a three-person job.'

Eren said this in his head before raising a question to his master:

"Master Marla, why are you saying that there's a possibility that it might be another cultist organization that did the massacre? Wasn't Beast Bloods a cultist organization itself? I'd imagine birds of the feather flock together."

Marla looked at Eren as if only now coming to understand that he was, in fact, a teen. He had shocked her with his wits and intelligence so much that she had started to treat him as an adult. She chided herself for that before replying:

"Eren, you might see the cultists as normal rankers. But they are not. And they don't operate as normal rankers do. They have their own set of rules that are based on a certain ideology: survival of the fittest.

We rankers also believe in that ideology. But we are not fanatics about it. But cultist organizations would never hesitate to lose an inch to win a mile. They don't care about the members of their organization. Do you think they'll care about others just because they are also cultists like them?

Only profits and power are eternal in a cultist organization. They can easily make cooperative bonds within themselves depending upon the situation. And they can break them just as easily if and when there's profit involved in doing that."

Sai Marla after looking first at Eren and then at Ken. The latter also nodded his head after that, confirming to her that he had understood.

“But what benefits can a rival cultist gang have to raid the place? And isn’t this time too coincidental? Someone raided the place just before it was discovered by us. Did they want us to find the place in the exact condition we found it to be?”

Eren asked with confusion written all over his face. The butcher was just trying to dig into what information the investigation team had collected so far. That’s why he asked the question in that way.

“Eren, you are smart. But you don’t know about how cultists work it seems. Ask Agatha when you have free time, she’ll tell you. Cultists only look for benefits. And there’s a benefit involved in raiding other cultist organizations’ hideouts.

We found the treasury that was looted from the place. That could be the motive. Another could be that Beast Bloods itself wanted to get rid of some of their members for some reason.

But it’s as you said. Some clues had been deliberately behind.

We have also come to the same conclusion that the ones who destroyed this hideout wanted us to find out about it. The chase Eren was involved in might have been staged from the get-go. Maybe just to close the case on this for good.”

Marla concluded her statement and looked at Almera with a meaningful expression. The latter couldn’t help but blurt out suddenly:

“The city administration!”

Almera looked at the D-Ranker and the latter nodded at her before continuing:

“That’s right. That’s why I didn’t want us to talk about this subject within the city’s limits. Some of the close confidantes I have in the city of Silvermoon’s administration department think that this hideout was brought out in the light to close a case on something we are not aware of as of yet.

Up till now, we had only suspected that someone in the city’s administration is involved with the cultists. But this incident confirms it.”

‘Boy, I love me some conspiracies. They are the best covers for guys like me.

I didn’t even have to take much effort in nudging them in the right direction. They’ll be at each other’s throats without me even doing anything about it anymore. As long as my cover stays safe that is.’

Eren could finally take a breath of relief after hearing updates about his latest missions from Marla. The part of the city administration that was loyal to the kingdom was suspecting the unknown force within it that had gone to the cultists’ side.

And Eren was sure, Arizihana would think that this cull of cultists in the shadows was organized by the city administration itself. And she was kept out of the loop because it suspected her of betrayal. This seed of suspicion planted in the minds of people from both sides will allow Eren to keep his involvement under the wraps. At least that’s what it looked like to him.’

“That’s all fine, Adapt Marla. But what about our rewards?”

The scrooge in Eren finally spoke up. Agatha couldn't help but shake her head after hearing what her master had just said. The guy had just looted a hideout all to himself. And he was still seeking petty rewards.

"Oh, shush you miser boy. You will get them. In Merps of course. Wait till we get back to LA."

Marla said and made her colt gallop ahead. The team was returning to where it came from.

## **Chapter 162: Mon Cheri**

"Why did you betray us?"

Arizihana Agnoth heard the question directed at her. She was at an underground facility and talking to a spectral image that was projected above an array eye. The question was asked by this spectral image that seemed to have a blurry and unrecognizable visual profile

Ari was pissed by hearing the question directed at her. She gripped her sword's hilt hard before replying:

"Me betraying you? I should be the one asking the same question to you. You told me you would initiate contact with me in a few days. And I was waiting for days on end.

And suddenly I got the news that one of your hideouts has been found out. My payment is due and the ones who were going to do that just had to go down in cinders.

How are you going to compensate me for my promised payment plus this delay now?"

The spectral image was silent for a while before replying:

"The city of Silvermoon is up to something. Did any news leak from your end?"

"Nope. Why would I jeopardize myself by telling anyone about anything related to you guys? It seems I was wrong in listening to you. You were always going to stab me in the back, didn't you?"

The spectral shadow couldn't help but chuckle after hearing Ari's response. It wasn't long before it clapped back:

"Ari, my mon Cheri. Why would Beast Bloods betray you when it was just about to receive its biggest award from you? I think there's some misunderstanding between us.

And it's fine if you don't want to trust cultists. Because the cultists are the bad guys right? But can't you trust your lover in this?"

Ari's anger was at its peak when she heard a hypocritical answer from that spectral shadow:

"Trust your lover? You were the one who started with "why did you betray us?". And you are telling me I should trust you because we are in a relationship."

The spectral image took a long sigh before trying to pacify the woman who had been scorned:

"I was just testing you, Mon Cheri. Of course, I didn't mean that. I have a few responsibilities to my organization, you see. The ones that force me to ask such questions and be done with it.

But you can trust me when I say that we didn't betray the deal we had from our end."

“Didn’t betray you say. You didn’t even tell me the side effects of the potion recipe you gave me to break into D-Rank. I would have died in a few years if it wasn’t detected at this stage.”

Said Arizihana while taking long breaths. Her chest was rising and lowering rapidly, a testament to the kind of visible anger she felt towards the spectral image. The spectral image again went silent before saying melancholically:

“The bastards didn’t tell me. They were planning to kill you with the deal and were using me as the medium. I mean, I knew the water was always murky with the cultists. But I didn’t know that they could be so insidious as well.”

“So you’re telling me you didn’t know about the potion’s side effects?”

“No, Mon Cheri. Honest. Why would I let my beloved Ari go through the deal if I knew it was rigged from the beginning? Are you sure about the side effects though?”

“Yes. I’m sure. I checked with the city’s finest healer and came to know about the same.”

Ari answered.

She was still angry. But one could say that it was subsidising.

“Are you alright? The side effects are gone?”

The spectral image asked with concern. Ari just puffed her cheeks before answering:

“I’m fine, no thanks to you. The side effects are still there. But they’ll be gone in a few months. Nothing to worry about anymore. Not that you seem to care anyway.”

“And how did you come to know about the potion’s side effects? Because they have to be extremely covert if I know my potioning right.”

Ari gave the spectral shadow answer to her question while pacing about in underground place:

“Yes, the side effects were going to stay hidden until the last moment. My mana circuit was going to erode slowly in the span of a few years before the by-then unstabilized core imploded.

Some Eren kid guessed the side effects, can you believe it? I wonder what that tells you about your potioning skills?”

Ari then told the apparent potioneer about the events that came to pass after she met Eren’s team. The spectral image couldn’t help but conclude what it had on its mind after hearing it got from Ari.

“Eren Idril, huh? The kid must be a prodigy in potioning for him to detect the side effects even I couldn’t foresee. That and his background of working under a C-Rank healer must have helped him.

Anyway. The kid is not important. Tell me more about our darling Marla. Hehe! I’m sure she must be missing me a lot.”

“She is. But that won’t stop her from cutting you in half if you go in front of her. What are we even going to do about her?”

Ari asked with a hint of worry. The spectral shadow seemed to have flicked before replying:

“Well, it’s not like I didn’t try to get her to my side. Only you could understand me and my plight. But she didn’t even make an effort to do so.

To be honest, even I’m clueless about how we should deal with Marla. We’ll need to meet in person to decide something like this. Plus, I haven’t had the pleasure to embrace you in a long time now. This should serve as a good reason. Hehe!”

“Oh? Now you need a reason to spend time with me? Wow!

I should just spank your ass the next time we meet. Unlike you, I don’t need a reason to do that, you see.”

Ari let go of her sword’s hilt and folded her hands under her bosom before replying. One could see that her anger had faded into nothingness at this point. What she was displaying right now was only a tantrum.

The spectral image chuckled and took a sigh before voicing its next concern:

“It seems the side effects are nothing to worry about if you are this dandy about our next rendezvous. I’ll gladly offer my plush ass for you to spank, hehe.

And don’t worry, Mon Cheri. We’ll have our revenge on the Beast Bloods. We were planning to run from the Edinburgh kingdom anyway. I’ll just fu\*k with the cultists too if that’s how they want to play it.

But not right now. They still have something I want. So listen to me one more time. We’ll play it cool. For now, let’s keep things strictly professional. I’ll tell you about my plans later on when the next time I contact you.

That’s it for now, Mon Cheri. Take care and see you soon.”

Said the spectral before disappearing soon after. Ari sighed after seeing the shadow of the person she loved disappearing on her without even giving her a chance to say goodbye. From the looks of things, it didn’t look like she was experiencing this frustration for the first time.

Long-distance relationships were hard. Ari could attest to that. She left soon after that and the underground area was engulfed by darkness.

Eren didn’t know that he had changed the fate of a lot of people along with the city of Silvermoon by his violent actions.

And it’s not like the butcher would have cared even if he did!

### **Chapter 163: [Bonus] Simmering Sienna Up**

At the border check post of LA grounds, a pair of students could be seen engaged in a fast-paced duel. They were both exceptionally skilled for their ages and ranks. But the one who was observing and guiding them didn’t seem too impressed.

“Ken, this is the last time I’m warning you. Don’t pull your punches when you see an opening. Eren is more skilled than you when it comes to countering the attacks. He’ll be able to take your hits.

And Eren, I think you've gotten very skilled in using the arts I taught you in such a short span. But you seem heavily dependent on your response speed and leave some openings.

Adopt a stance such that you don't have to wait for a counter. Even if you are baiting your opponent into it, using the same trick twice won't work on the same opponent.

I'll include some stances and positions for you to practice your body's balance with. You'll have to incorporate them into your daily routine. You too Ken. Your daily routine will change along with Eren. I want to see the improvements I just mentioned in your next duel.

Now take a rest for a few minutes. You guys are on border patrol duty today."

Said Marla and left her two apprentices to their devices. She had finished her work. Now it was time for her to savour the ale that she had brought from the city of Silvermoon. It had been a few days since Eren's team was back on the academy's grounds.

The Frostfoam was the reason the boys were left with a lighter workout. Otherwise, it would have been much worse than their current exhausted condition. Eren and Ken flashed mirthless grins at each other after they were allowed to stop their duels.

The duo was just about to commence their border patrol when they heard a voice from behind them:

"Ken! Ken Riverine. Please wait up."

Eren and Ken both turned simultaneously and saw a vivacious girl heading their way. She had red eyes and black hair. Her face was sleek and her figure was slender and tall. Yet she had curves where they mattered the most.

The girl's skin was clear and had a rosy tinge. And her clothes were all kinds of expensive.

Ken seemed to have recognised the girl and he gave her a welcoming smile. Eren on the other hand tried his hardest to control his killing intent. This was because she was none other than Sienna Slughorn.

"You meanie. I told you I need to learn martial arts from you. You even promised me that you'd provide me with some guidance. But then you just had to go ahead and go out on a mission. I could have used your help to improve my ranking, you know."

Sienna complained as soon as she caught up with Ken. The latter couldn't help but chuckle before replying:

"Hahaha! I couldn't help it. Master Marla had a mission for us. We had to go do a few things in the city of Silvermoon. But I'm back now. I can probably give you a few pointers tomorrow. At this time and place."

Sienna flashed her million Eddies smile after hearing her sugar daddy's reply. She was about to enjoy her small victory and nudge the white knight into interacting more with her. But a spoiler came from behind, barging into the duo's conversation with a carefree attitude. He patted Ken's shoulder before replying loudly:

"Look at this guy. Can't hide his joy after all. Telling everyone he had done "a few things" at the city of Silvermoon. Hehe! I wouldn't belittle them like this, my man."

Eren looked at Sienna and grinned at her. She could see the guy seemed happy about his friend's achievements, whatever they might be. But there was something about his smile that irked her. She couldn't help but ask the intruder what he was talking about:

"Hello. Name's Sienna Slughorn. You seem to be Eren Idril, the guy Ken often talks about. A pleasure to finally meet you."

"Oh, hello Miss Sienna. Who doesn't know the scion from the Slughorn household coming to LA? Hehe! Pleasure's all mine."

"Um... Eren, can you tell me what you meant when you said Ken was belittling his achievements? I know he often does that. That's why I never get straight answers from him. So I'd like it if you could shed some light on that if you don't mind."

Sienna said while pinching Ken's arm. She tried to act all cosy. But one could say that Ken seemed a little uncomfortable interacting with her now.

That was starting to irk Sienna even more. She felt that there was something wrong with her approach to catch Ken in her net. It wasn't working as effectively as it used to be.

"Oh, so you don't know? I had heard that you guys were good friends. So I assumed that you would be kept in the loop. But it seems that my man Ken is too shy to say the kind of stunt he had pulled in the city. Hehe! Who can blame him anyway."

Eren slipped a subtle meaning that Sienna wasn't trusted by Ken anymore to share his secrets with. And the meaning landed right on its intended spot. Sienna furrowed her brows. Then she smiled awkwardly before retorting:

"Hehe! What can I say? Ken is just a tight-lipped fellow you see."

"Oh, he wasn't so tight-lipped when he was in the city Silvermoon. His lips were all over the place on someone. At least I assume they were. My man here has now started living his life to the fullest, I'd say!"

Eren said that and gave a meaningful pat on Ken's back before chuckling slyly. The latter just scratched his head before smiling awkwardly in response. Sienna had a grim foreboding after looking at the boys' interaction. It was the kind of interaction she had seen guys do when they had some "good times" with their dates.

"What do you mean, Eren? State things."

One could hear a tinge of irritation in Sienna's voice no matter how skillfully she tried to make it. But Eren didn't mind. He was enjoying the reaction. The girl's face was changing colours as she subconsciously understood what must have happened with Ken.

The butcher decided to hammer the final nail in the coffin with his joyous statement:

"You'd be surprised after hearing Sienna. Ken's luck is too awesome, to say the least. My man now has a beautiful elf fiance. Hehe!"

Said Eren and planted a punch at Ken's stomach lightly. Then he saw Sienna's reaction with the corner of his eyes.

## Chapter 164: Raising a Ranger

“You’d be surprised after hearing this Sienna. Ken’s luck is too awesome, to say the least. My man now has a beautiful elf fiancé. Hehe!”

Said Eren and planted a punch at Ken’s stomach lightly. Then he saw Sienna’s reaction with the corner of his eyes. And he wasn’t disappointed with what he saw.

The rosy tint on Sienna’s face was replaced with pale countenance before the redness came back again. But this new shade of red wasn’t an indication of her charm. But rather than of the anger that was bubbling inside her.

“Ken, what does this guy mean?”

Sienna asked Ken loudly. Ken made a weird face at her reaction but then he shrugged it off and told her everything. Of course, Eren spiced things up than what was necessary and thoroughly enjoyed another pay-per-view he was craving to see.

Sienna left abruptly. Ken wanted to follow her but Eren held him back, saying they had border patrol to finish. The guy couldn’t help leaving Sienna to her devices on the advice of someone who was the mastermind behind his misfortune turned into a fortune.

Eren wanted to burn the bitch up on a stake for what she did to him in the previous timeline. But he knew now was not the time. And death would be an easy release. He wanted her to keep on living in anger, agony and everything in between, the same way he had lived in his past life.

But his plans on the bitch had to be put on a halt. He had too many things to do in his hands these days.

The duo soon completed their task and was back at the check post in the early evening. They were only required to patrol a limited area after all. Someone was waiting on Eren and Ken when they were about to part ways.

“Good job, boys. Open up your ID stone interfaces. I’ll update your daily routine on Adept Marla’s behalf.”

Eren and Ken looked at each other weirdly but they followed Almera’s orders. But not without Eren asking the latter about the D-Ranker’s whereabouts.

“\*Sigh. She OD’d on the Froastfoam and now shivering inside her room. That’s why I had to take special privileges from her to update your routine.”

Eren had beads of sweat after looking at the updated daily routine. He was just beginning to get comfortable with his current schedule. But this progressive overload of exercise along with newly added stance practices made things difficult for him again.

Ken wasn’t in better condition either. But Eren knew the white knight’s chiselled body was capable of handling any exercise Marla could throw his way.

“That is enough for the day. You can leave it there’s nothing else. And don’t slack off. We might need to go on a few missions sooner than you think.”



Ken nodded at Almera, patted Eren back and left on his own. But the butcher stayed behind. He wanted to try his luck and request something from Almera.

“What is it, Eren?”

“Oh, it’s nothing Ace Almera. I was just wondering if you can teach the in and outs of ranger to one of my friends.”

Eren was talking about Renita Diabreo of course. The girl needed serious training in her class that wasn’t limited to combat abilities. He wanted her to be proficient in the non-combat expertise of a ranger and there was only one way to do it.

Make her learn from a good ranger. A ranger like Almera. Eren had seen her ranger capabilities when they were on their first mission together. He was very satisfied with the way the ranger performed.

Renita used mana guns while Almera used crossbows. So there wasn’t much the former could pick up from the latter. But Eren felt that his ranger’s battle capabilities were up to par for her as of now and they didn’t need much refining.

But Renita could use some help from someone like Almera when it comes to non-combat skills.

“Hm? Do you want me to teach one of your party members about the path of a ranger? But Eren...”

Almera tried to get out of the additional responsibility heading her way. But Eren used his glib tongue again and influenced her to take Renita as her unofficial apprentice.

This was not without a cost. Almera asked Eren for a hefty amount of Merps as a one-time payment. Which the latter did begrudgingly from the outside. But he was laughing on the inside from experiencing how cheap it was.

Of course, Eren wasn’t doing this to help his teammate but himself. He knew the importance of having a good ranger in the team. So he was investing in his future so he doesn’t end up with the same fate Isaac’s party had to face.

The second reason Eren did that was to get Renita off his back. The girl had lowered her persistence to learn from him. But she would follow and keep track of his movements nonetheless whenever he was around. That bothered Eren a bit.

Almera told Eren that he should ask Renita to meet her. They’ll decide on their schedule separately. And since it wasn’t approved by LA, they’ll have to use their personal time to do so without benefits from the academy supporting them.

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“So you’ll have to meet up with Ace Almera and she’ll help you polish your ranger skills.”

Eren held a meeting of his team the next day. The inter-year battle was soon going to be upon them. They needed thorough preparations just to not lose pathetically. At least almost all the first-year students were seeing it this way.

Eren's party members were no different. They were also tense about the upcoming event. Because the second-year students had become active these days. This ranking war was going to be a treat for them.

Second-year students would never be happy with the minimum betting amount. So they would approach their junior opponents as soon as the battle was established. They would then demand a sky-high betting amount.

This was a protection tax the second-year students called it. If the first-year students agreed, they'll not be beaten up as badly as they might be if they didn't pay the protection tax.

But that was not all. The first-year students would then be targeted by the second-year students that fought them overtly or covertly just so that they would have a rematch. And the rematch condition was the same as the previous condition: sky-high betting amount.

That's why Eren had said that it was better for his party members if they get apprenticed under an Adept. The bullying would decrease a lot if you had someone standing behind you, even if only in name.

### **Chapter 165: Opponents Turning Allies**

Eren briefed Renita about the arrangement he had made for her with Ace Almera. The girl was very impressed with him as a result, thinking to herself that the guy cared for her in his own way even when he acted recluse.

Renita agreed to Eren's arrangement without a second's thought. She had meant it when she said she'd follow his advice to a T. Eren also breathed a sigh of relief knowing that most of the girl's free time would now be spent on her class-specific training instead of following him that borderline on stalking.

Eren wished to do the same with all the other members of his team. Jake needed a tank to show him that sometimes having one versatile spell in one's arsenal wasn't enough.

Steve needed a capable berserker to tell him doubting his strength was the worst thing a ranker like him could do. And Becky needed a fine-tuning in controlling her mana consumption.

Ana and Bel had officially started their ranking journey, thanks to Eren's aid. The butcher had provided them with the tried-and-tested potions to help them breakthrough into F-Rank safely after he returned from his mission.

Things were sorted with Ana. She was already working as an apprentice under a D-Rank healer in one of the academy's infirmaries. Eren didn't need to worry about her. Bel was also self-sufficient in his class-specific skills. But the guy needed combat training. He was completely opposite to Renita in this regard.

Eren was guiding his team members as he always did at their usual place when he heard a voice from behind him.

"Yo. Steve and the cunning asshole Eren. What's up?"

Eren furrowed his brow when he heard that. He was cunning, he knew that. But he hadn't shown his assholeish to anybody yet. And he certainly didn't permit anyone to spit facts about him.

So he looked behind him. And saw Ron's Raiders coming towards his team. The other members White Raven were sent on the edge after it saw the opponent's team led by its dual berserkers- Ron and Dino.

“You bastard, Dino. What do you mean by cunning...”

“Steve, calm down. I’m sure our friends didn’t mean it in that way. Let’s talk with them. The rest of you guys, stay here.”

Eren calmed Steve down before things went out of control. The skirmishes needed to happen inside the battlegrounds. The ones that happened outside the battlegrounds would be heavily penalized by the academy. The scrooge in Eren always thought about his Merps before he let his other emotions take over.

A calm-looking Eren and a pissed-off-looking Steve headed to their ex-opponents. The former had told his team to stay behind and they had obliged. Ron also ordered his team to halt at a distance before marching forward with Dino in tow.

The two pairs met in the middle. And had a brief staring contest. It was Ron who broke the silence first:

“Eren Idril, how are you? Don’t pay attention to this loudmouth. He is still salty about his loss at your hands.”

“Oh, I’m fine, Ron. Thanks for asking. And I certainly don’t mind a dog that barks. You know what they say about barking dogs right?”

Eren smirked at Ron without paying any heed to Dino who was looking at him menacingly. The butcher would normally ignore the jeers thrown his way. But something told him the opposite team had come here to negotiate. The first rule of negotiation was never to appear as the weaker side.

“You damn rat. You had gotten lucky that day. And our teammates were shi...”

“Dino, shut the fu\*ck up before I lose my cool here. We are here to talk business. Not settle the old scores. Now’s not the time.”

Eren had a chuckle after he heard Ron’s statement. It looked like he was confronting Dino and criticising him for his impolite actions. But Eren could see that Ron was just as pissed about his loss as Dino, if not more. He just didn’t let it cloud his judgement.

“Eren, we’ve come here on an important business. Let’s keep any differences we have on the sidelines. And make a truce. You know why we are suggesting this, right?”

“The inter-year ranking wars.”

Eren didn’t waste time dragging the conversation. He had already figured out why these dual berserkers had come to him. Ron nodded his head before continuing:

“That’s right. The inter-year ranking wars are always a lose-lose situation for first-year students. And almost nobody can get away from it, no matter how strong their background or battle prowess was.

But what if we join hands together to go through this situation?”

Ron tucked his hands inside his trousers’ pockets and waited for Eren’s reply. Something told him the guy who had beat him fair and square knew what he was talking about.

“You mean forming two teams out of the team White Raven Crew and Ron’s Raiders. One team would be geared towards absolute loss. While the other would have a fighting chance to win their ranking war. Correct me if I’m wrong of course.”

Said Eren and looked at the remaining members of Ron’s Raiders standing behind Ron’s back. The odds still didn’t look promising to him even if they were to apply this tried and tested method of first-years.

“\*Sigh. Dino was not wrong about the cunning part he said about you. That’s right. Let’s break our teams temporarily for this inter-year ranking war and minimize our losses. What do you say?”

Ron sent the ball in Eren’s court after that. By now he had realized that Eren held a very important position in the White Raven Crew. he wasn’t sure about Steve’s standing so he preferred talking to the close-combat expert for now.

“Well, the idea is not bad. It’s tempting even. But we’ll only agree to co-operate with you under one condition.”

Eren said and looked at Steve. But now the berserker had gotten used to acting like a silent leader. So he folded his hands and waited for the real leader of the team to make a deal with the potential allies. All he had to do now was look stoic and act like he knew what Eren was talking about.

“And what is this condition you speak of?”

Ron raised his brows and asked that. He had an inkling that Eren’s condition wasn’t going to be in his team’s interest.

### **Chapter 166: Unfair Split**

“And what is this condition you speak of?”

Ron raised his brows and asked that. He had an inkling that Eren’s condition wasn’t going to be in his team’s best interest.

“We want a 70:30 split in our favour.”

Said Eren with a straight face. Dino opened his eyes wide in surprise while Ron looked like he was shocked to silence.

“I told you Ron, this guy’s nuts. We don’t need him for anything. I say we...”

“What did I tell you?”

“But...!”

“.....”

“Al... alright. I’ll just zip it.”

Ron finally silenced loudmouth Dino with his blank face and sharp gaze. Then he looked at Eren with the same intensity before replying:

“Eren, we want to be in alliance with you. Not turn into your slaves, you know. Surely, we can come to a mutual understanding. But there’s nothing mutual about that split.”

Eren didn't budge an inch and pressed on:

"It can be mutual if we consider who brings the most benefit to the alliance."

"Eren, I agree that your battle prowess is exceptional. But it's still not much against the second-year students to completely dominate them. Even we..."

Ron wanted to talk some more but was interrupted by Eren with his next statement:

"I'm not talking about my battle powers. And I know that you know what I'm talking about as well."

Eren looked straight into Ron's eyes after he said that. The latter understood what he was talking about and sighed. Only Steve was confused about what Eren was implying. He asked Eren by opening a private audio channel with him.

'Eren, what are you guys talking about?'

'Battle passes, Steve. They want me to use my battle passes in the inter-year war and benefit from them. The ones that I haven't disclosed till now.'

Only then did the realization dawn on Steve. The battle passes. The perks and advantages the first-year students would receive by winning the intra-class and inter-class battles with exceptional performances.

The top-tier first-year students who had won the battle passes would only use them in the inter-year ranking wars to tilt the match in their favour. This was how the first-year students had been given a fighting chance to score a win against second-year students. If they could pull this off of course.

Ron knew that Eren must have won a good battle pass because of the performance he displayed against them. The cunning berserker thought that he should gain some advantage out of his loss.

"60:40 in your favour. That's my bottom line."

Ron said and clenched his fist. He wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the battle pass. He knew that some exceptional battle passes gave the first-year students the advantage they needed to bulldoze over the second-year students.

The price for winning against the second-year squad was extremely tempting. The sheer amount of Merps the second-year had to pay was one thing. That's because the second-year students would have to pay at least ten times the betting amount if they lost against first-years. And that multiplier would go higher if it was pre-planned before the starting of the match.

But the Merps payload was not the only thing. LA also offered attractive rewards that could only be gained by winning these matches.

"There's no such thing as a bottom line, Ron. it's just in your head. You'll come to realize this if you live long enough.

Anyway, A 65:35 in our favour. And let me tell you one thing before you decide to refuse this offer. It certainly ain't our bottom line, if you know what I mean."

Said Eren seriously and folded his hands. Steve also subconsciously decided to follow the butcher's lead and folded his hands as well. Then he resumed his previous position, thinking that he would look like a copycat if he were to follow everything Eren does.

Ron understood what Eren meant when he said this wasn't his bottom line. Eren was going to say something deal-breaking if he didn't take his offer now.

Ron realized that they were the weaker side in the negotiation. Eren had at least two battle passes that he knew of while they had only one. Technically, Eren's team had more leverage to ally with any other team, which might gladly accept his absurd split after thinking about the potential reward.

Ron clenched his lips under his teeth before finally nodding. Dino wanted to say something at that point but Ron kept his index finger over his lips, shushing the loudmouth.

Then he looked at Eren again and said:

"Now that you have your way, can we finally get back to the alliance formation? I suggest our team A should be..."

"There seems to be some misunderstanding, Ron. I'll tell you how we are going to split our teams. And you'll have to follow my suggestions to a T."

"And why would I do that?"

Ron asked with suppressed anger. He was going to lose it talking to this cunning asshole.

"Because I know my passes. Let's just say one of them would only be effective when it is used with the split I'll be suggesting."

"Then tell me about your battle pass first."

"Hahaha! You are funny, Ron. I'll give you that. That was a good one. Why don't you tell me which battle pass you've received first?"

Ron sighed before shaking his head. He was just trying his luck here. He knew the first-year students would never declare which battle passes they received until the moment they used it. This was done to prevent any leak from taking place and opponents taking countermeasures against those passes.

Eren was confident Ron would budge from his position. That was because he had more battle passes than them. The edge he would bring to the alliance could not be scoffed at. And his predictions were on point.

"Alright. The split will take place as per your suggestions as well. Now tell us your strategy."

Said Ron after dropping his shoulders. Then he called his teammates over. Eren and Steve also did the same. It was time the alliance decided how it was going to score big in the upcoming inter-year ranking war.

## **Chapter 167: Inter-Year Ranking War**

"Next match in the inter-year ranking war. The Ravens of first-year students vs the Roody's Wreckers. The match will start in five minutes."

The referee announced while standing in the middle of the battle ring and then retreated to his original position. Today was the second day of the inter-year ranking war. The compulsory matches were going to get held for a few more days. And this match was one of them.

The Ravens was the name of the party that had first-year students. Eren was one of them and Renita was the other. The rest of the teammates were taken from Ron's Raiders. They were Ron, Dino, and the earth-element tank that Eren had trashed in the previous match.

Eren's team only had one line of defence. The tank. Something to fall back on in case they need a breather. The rest of the team members were all fighters. The team was akin to a giant ball of kamikaze attack.

Roody Orton's team also contained five members including him. But his team looked more balanced than what the first-year students had come up with. All his members also looked more intimidating than the first-year newbies because of the subtle mana signatures they released out in the open.

All of the members of Roody's team were in the liquid stage of the F-Rank. And all of their BTP values had crossed the mark of 20. That meant individually, the second years were superior to the first-year students.

That meant, Eren's team could only depend on the team play. They couldn't carry out individual raids. The butcher didn't like that but he had already committed. And he was enough to play by the books when it suited him.

The five minutes were up quickly. And the teams were called into the battle ring they were assigned to.

"Do you have anything to declare?"

The referee asked formally both the team leaders. Eren was assigned as the leader of his team. He came forward before stating out loud to the referee and his opponent team:

"Roody Orton, a word."

Roody came forward uncaringly. He was intending to talk with the first-years anyway. He verbally shot forth as soon as Eren stood right in front of him:

"Eren, is it? I've heard from you. Lightning element close combat expert. Weren't those three your opponents in the inter-class war?"

"Yepp. What about it?"

"Hehe! Nothing. It just means you guys understand your situation better. So, what were you going to talk about? I have a few things of my own to add as well. Let's just get this over with."

Roody said after he looked at the referee. The match was a foregone conclusion according to him. So he didn't want to waste much time on it.

"I'd like to discuss the betting amount."

Roody acted like he expected this from Eren. He smiled before saying:

“Eren, you already know what the standard rate is these days. The second-year students don’t go below 15000 Merps as their betting amount. The most I can do is make it 12K.”

“Well, I don’t care about the “so-called” standard rate. I wish to change the betting amount.”

Said Eren with a stoic expression. Ron had creases on his forehead after he heard that.

‘These first-year students won’t learn the situation they are in.’

Thought Roody before replying with equally stoic countenance:

“Listen here, brat. I’ve tried to be nice. You can’t go below 12K and that is something you can’t negotiate on. Otherwise, you know the consequences.”

“Oh! It seems there’s a bit of misunderstanding. Who said anything about lowering the prices?”

Said Eren with puzzled expressions. Roody thought for a while before replying:

“You wish to accept the standard rate?”

“No. I want to go beyond that. 30,000 Merps!”

Roody had blank expressions on his face. Ron and Dino’s expressions weren’t too different either. It took a while for Orton Jr. to confirm what he just heard:

“You mean, you wish to bet 30K Merps on a single match? How loaded are you and why do you wish to lose all that wealth in one go?”

Second-year students can go hard on you guys. But that’s just how the academy works. You don’t have to bend it backwards for us, you know.”

Roody thought that the guy was just scared of the second-year students’ bullying. So he tried to console him. But Eren didn’t give him much time.

“Oh, we are not planning to lose here. Are you on board with the betting amount or not?”

Eren said and smiled at Roody. The latter smiled mirthlessly after hearing his young opponent’s plans.

‘I might have underestimated the delusion that comes from winning a few matches in the first year against other first-years. Who am I kidding? I was like this guy as well when I was in the first year.

I’ll just make him realize the difference in our strength even when the average difference in our BTP values is no more than three digits.’

Thought Roody to himself before agreeing to Eren’s offer. There was no point in talking with the first-year delusional lunatic anymore.

Eren smiled wholeheartedly after getting Roody on board. He called forth the referee and updated him about the new betting amount. The referee thought that it was the second-year student who was bullying the first-year students into submissions.



He tried to talk Eren out of this deal. But the latter assured him that the proposed betting amount was something he had asked from Roody. Not the other way around. The referee of course didn't believe him. But this time he didn't argue and just approved the updated amount.

But this was not all Eren had to say:

"We wish to use a battle pass on Roody's Wreckers."

Roody raised his eyebrows after hearing that. He was expecting this to happen. Since the guy was so confident about the sky-high betting amount, Roody thought that Eren must have had a good trick up his sleeve for him to act this way.

### **Chapter 168: [Bonus]Keep One Out**

"We wish to use a battle pass on Roody's Wreckers."

Roody was curious about the battle pass Eren was going to use on them. He was hoping it wouldn't be too detrimental to his team, making him score a pyrrhic victory. But he never once thought that a single battle pass would be enough to bridge the gap between the battle potentials of first and second-year students.

Alas, Roody was in for a rude awakening.

Because he could only maintain his thoughts of dominating first-years until he got to know Eren's battle pass.

"Eren Idril is using his self-earned battle pass Keep One Out. He can make anyone team member of his opponent team leave the match. The Ron's Wreckers will have to fight with only four members in this match.

Eren Idril, choose the student you wish from the opponent team to get dropped out of the match."

Eren smiled devilishly at Roody after he heard the referee's confirmation.

"Fu\*ck! Eren, listen here..."

"I wish Roody Orton to sit this match out."

Eren didn't let Roody continue his statement and declared his wish to make the enemy captain abandon his team. He already knew that Roody was the most capable ranker in his team. Plus, the lack of leadership would send his team into disarray.

Roody looked hatefully at Eren but the latter didn't take back his decision. He had no choice but to leave the battle area. But not before telling his team members a few strategies he came up with within that short amount of time.

Eren and Renita had practised a little with the dual berserkers and their tank Sharmin for a few days before the start of the inter-year ranking war. They had come up with some simple tactics that they could use to make maximum use of their DPS-centric team formation.

Roody's Wreckers was wrecked from the get-go because of the absence of their leader. But it wasn't like the team members had become completely useless. They still had higher BTP values backing each of them up. And their experiences in LA had also trained them for various scenarios in ranking wars.

Roody's Wreckers had a rogue, a mage, a healer, and a tank in their team. Roody was their berserker, someone who took care of their mid-range attacks. Something they were missing because of him dropping out.

A rogue was akin to a close combat expert. But they'd use crafty tricks in their attacks to sneak behind their enemies. Unlike the close combat experts, they won't engage with their opponent in a frontal assault.

The rogue in the Roody's Wreckers had an affinity with the derived element of fog. That alone with his element-specific spells allowed the guy to generate and control a dense amount of fog in his surroundings.

The referee started the countdown. And soon a bell rang in the surrounding area, indicating the start of the match.

Eren knew the battle was not going to be won over easily just because he had used the battle pass. He never underestimated his opponents. But his OCD-ish behaviour kicked in for real when he knew the opponent this time was superior to him in BTP value.

As soon as the ring was heard, Eren launched him towards the rogue. The latter also had the same idea it seemed. Because his spells and fighting style made it difficult for his team members to help him.

Eren was not alone. He was accompanied by Renita. He had told the dual berserkers and their tank to hold the fort while he took care of the rogue. If left unchecked, the rogue had the potential to tilt the scales in the enemy's favour with his sneak attacks at crucial times. Eren's team needed to take care of him first.

"Boy, you seem pretty confident in fighting it out with a second-year. You at least have guts. But sometimes they are not everything, you know. Hahaha!"

Eren kept quiet at the opponent's remark as they were about to clash. He didn't like to use talk-talk techniques to engage with his opponents. That was reserved for either before the battle to incite them. Or after it when he won over them to rub salt over their wounds.

Sedated Perception was activated by Eren as soon as the fog started building up in the surroundings with the rogue being at its epicentre. He wasn't taking any chances to watch how the enemy reacted. The pre-emptive strike was his favourite move anyway.

The rogue could only see Eren disappearing in the white fog he had created with his spell. But he only smiled devilishly after he saw that move. In the domain of fog, only his opponents could go blind. Not him.

That's because the rogue's spell also acted as an extra sense for him to know the precise location of his opponent within the domain of fog. It would also interfere with the opponent's mana sense and make it almost impossible for them to know his location.

In a way, the rogue's spell and his element was a perfect counter to Eren's Sedated Perception. The butcher still had exceptional speed and reflexes due to his spell and class. But he couldn't make the best use of them in the domain of fog.

Eren vanished from the rogue's sight but found himself getting surrounded by his opponent's fog. His mana sense was also sending him mixed signals so he retracted it to avoid confusion.

'Damn it. How do I search the fuc\*ker in this blinding fog.'

Eren took his two katars out and ran Blitz Bolt through them. He was ready for the opponent's strike. He thought that maybe he had used Sedated Perception hastily without understanding the enemy's battle strategy.

What if he decides to draw out the match? Or if he leaves the domain of fog while Eren is inside waiting on him to attack? Eren started doubting his moves when he heard a familiar yet not-so-familiar voice in his head:

'Enemy incoming. 4 O clock.'

The gem has talked again.

### **Chapter 169: Nasal Mutilation**

'Enemy incoming. 4 O clock.'

The gem has talked again. This time to warn him of incoming danger heading his way.

'Thanks.'

Eren could only come up with a simple reply because he had a rogue on his tail now. The Sedated Perception was still active. Yet the fog release was unnaturally fast. Eren's time-element spell barely gave him the advantage to prepare for the counterattack.

But the gem's intervention was timely. It allowed Eren to narrow down his area to focus on and make full use of his time-element spell.

Eren informed Renita that came with him to stay at a certain point within the domain of fog and wait for him there. The ranger wanted to ask him how they were going to locate each other in this situation after they separated but Eren's look told her that his orders weren't disputable. She sighed and followed Eren's directions and disappeared in the fog.

The rogue seemingly appeared out of nowhere as soon as Renita was gone. He thought that he had caught Eren off guard with his spell. But he was shocked to see that Eren was staring right at him when he showed himself.

The rogue still had his share of battle experiences and his higher BTP value. Plus, he was akin to a ruler in his domain of fog. So he tried to find a chink in Eren's defence by heading straight at him.

Eren was already prepared. His sense of time was different from that of his opponent. So he was paying close attention to the enemy's moves. A rogue coming straight at him only meant one thing. He had another insidious trick he could use on him.

Eren was right. The rogue had drawn out a whip artefact from his storage. But instead of the attached rope, it was now generating strings of fog that almost looked tangible.

Eren didn't want the rogue to use that artefact on him. He had already started his attack with the combo of Blitz Bolt and Blitz Steps with Sedated Perception in the backdrop.

All the enemy could see was a few tongues of lightning making their presence known every once in a while when Eren attacked him. But thanks to the fog's skewed perception, the rogue was barely able to defend himself from Eren's attack.

Eren knew time was of the essence. If he kept on fighting with this for longer than necessary, his team was going to lose. That's why he thought of using an AoE right after he finished executing the Blitz Bolt through his katars.

But his opponent was too smart to stay at the same place in his domain of fog. He retreated into an unknown direction. And his retreat was covered by an even denser release of fog that interfered with Eren's senses.

The rogue had beads of sweat on his head after he saw the ferocity with which Eren fought. That too when he had odds set against him. The rogue was sure things would have become more difficult if he hadn't won this spell in the auction event and used it here against the butcher.

The rogue was trying to come up with new strategies while he took a breather, thinking Eren would be busy finding him and assuming a defensive stance. Unfortunately, his opponent didn't wait for him to finish his preparations.

Eren wouldn't have found out his opponent's location if it wasn't for the gem. It told him exactly where the rogue was busy plotting things, hiding behind a smokescreen.

The butcher didn't waste time. He executed Blitz Storm as soon as the opponent was within the AoE spell's range. Executing an AoE on a single opponent was usually considered wasteful. But for this situation, Eren thought otherwise.

The Blitz Storm lit up the fog and it gave off the impression that the raging rainy clouds had descended on the ground. But Eren wasn't admiring the little wonder he created with his spell. He was focused on his next move.

The Blitz Storm finally caught the rogue off guard. The tongues of lightning descended on him. He was just a few moments away from coating himself with a dense layer of fog that would have lightened the attack's effect.

But unlike him, Eren was more decisive with his attacks. He took advantage of the fact that the rogue was stunned because of being hit by the Blitz Storm and executed Blitz Steps.

Eren got close to the rogue, ran Blitz Bolt at full power through his katars and swung one of them in front of the opponent's face while he defended the whip attack with the other. Eren knew the whip's swing was weak and only done to scare him.

Yet he still defended himself from that attack. Because he knew the element of fog was special. It held the power to interfere with his senses. He didn't want to get stunned as well while he was in the process of attacking the rogue.

The katar's swing was lethal. It chopped off the tip of the rogue's nose. Eren disabled the Sedated Perception after that. His job was almost done.

"Haha! I cut off your ego along with your nose. How does it feel, Mr. rogue."

The rogue looked hatefully at Eren as he held his nose. He was pissed by the guy's savage way of attack-and-retreat. He immediately launched himself towards Eren, a dense cloud of fog surging behind him that attested to the anger he felt.

Eren turned back and bolted. He was now chased by the rogue within the domain of the fog. He didn't forget to taunt him some more while he did that:

"Why aren't you speaking now, Mr. rogue? You were so chatty Cathy before. Cat got your tongue? Or perhaps your nose? Haha!"

Eren jeered him some more as he ran off in a certain direction.

'Where is she?'

Eren asked the gem. He was counting on the gem's help to pull this move. Thankfully, the gem didn't disappoint and told him what he wanted to hear:

'She's 10 O'clock from your position. Contact in next 10 seconds.'

### **Chapter 170: Eren & Renita's Teampay**

'She's 10 O'clock from your position. Contact in next 10 seconds.'

Eren smiled after he heard that.

'Why do you always talk to me when I'm in the midst of a battle? Not that I'm complaining. Anyway, Thanks again.'

Said Eren and bolted to the direction the gem pointed him. With the rogue chasing right behind him. He was mostly uninjured except for his nose. And he was pissed on Eren for cutting his nose. It was a humiliating act no ranker would perform on the other.

In his rage, the rogue had forgotten that Eren was not the only one that had entered his domain of fog.

Eren purposefully fell behind to let the rogue catch up to him. Once he was within his range, the butcher executed Blitz Storm once again.

This time the rogue was ready. He coated his body in a dense layer of tangible fog just before the wild streams of lightning hit him. It didn't do much damage to him like the last time. It only hindered his march and froze him in his tracks.

But that was what Eren was aiming for anyway. He bolted in a different direction while shouting at seemingly nobody:

“Renita, now!”

Renita came out of the fog with both her guns pointed straight at the rogue. She fired at him without wasting a moment as soon as she turned visible.

‘Ah, fu\*ck! This bit\*ch was hiding here.’

The rogue could only have the spare time to think about this thought before his torso was riddled with mana bullets.

The mana bullets whizzed through the air and landed right on the stunned rogue’s chest and stomach. Renita had purposefully missed the vital spots.

Renita’s bullets were meant for long-range attacks. So when she fired from mid-range that borderline on being close-range, the impact each of the rightly landed bullets generated was not something to be taken lightly of.

The rogue’s body was shaken and pushed back with each bullet hitting him. But that was not all. Eren followed that attack with his Blitz Storm once again. The butcher thought that he was lacking in mid-range spells that targeted an individual at that time.

Eren had used the spell to keep a safe distance from the guy. He knew his attacks won’t be as effective as he wanted them to be. And dragging the match by engaging with the guy was going to be detrimental to him even if he came out on top in the duel.

The Blitz Storm was executed for its stun effect. Not for Eren to get close to the guy. But for Renita.

The ranger made her mana guns disappear into thin air. She too had an AoE spell of her own. One that made Eren almost lose his first match with her.

But Renita needed time to execute that spell. And that time was provided by Eren’s spell execution.

Renita manifested loads of wind shurikens around her with her wind-element spell.

She willed the wind shurikens to target the rogue while guiding them with her mana sense.

The sheer number of wind shurikens made it difficult for the rogue to guard himself against even with his dense layer of tangible fog that kept on getting dissolved and rematerialized. The barrage of wind shurikens soon surpassed the rate at which the fog was getting rematerialized.

The wind shurikens soon made contact with the rogue and his skin was finally pierced due to the lack of mana layer protecting him. The rogue was heavily injured. Renita tried her best not to make any fatal injuries. But the AoE attack was still potent enough to make the guy go on his knees.

Eren didn’t show any mercy. He approached the fallen guy quickly, grabbed his head, and executed Blitz Bolt.

The fog tried to create a weak defence against his contact. And it tried to climb Eren’s hand.

But it soon stopped ascending on Eren’s arm before getting dispersed into the surroundings. That was because Eren’s Blitz Bolt had landed on its intended target. The rogue was finally zapped out of his consciousness as his body lost the strength to stay on the knees.

The unconscious rogue was still supported by Eren's hand as he still held his head in his vice-like grip. The rogue landed flat on his face soon after Eren released his grip. His cut nose started bleeding again, making the battleground have a taste of his blood.

The rogue had circulated his mana and made it saturate on his wound to stop the bleeding temporarily during the battle. But that mana control was lost when the guy lost consciousness. And his cut started acting normally again.

But the mutilator who had cut the rogue didn't care about his opponent's well-being. That would be the job of the academy. He quickly signalled Renita to follow him. And headed outside the waning domain of fog with his ranger on the tow.

When the duo came out, it witnessed a discouraging sight. Sharmin, the team's only tank, was on his knees. His earth shield was getting crumpled by the barrage of fireballs executed by the opponent team's mage.

The opponent's mage didn't have to take any risks. She was protected by her team's tank. And was supported by her healer teammate.

Ron and Dino tried alternatively to attack the opponent's tank. But the mage's spells were flexible. Sometimes simple was the best. It held especially true for classes like mages who depended heavily on their spell's execution time.

The fire element made it difficult for the dual berserkers to approach the trio who stuck together. Their metal skin spells would send the berserkers' senses on overdrive. They would feel that the temperature of their skin would rise sharply every time the fireball spells hit them.

So they stopped their attacks and went on defence. They supported their tank while making use of his earth shield to keep safe from the mage's fireball. But the tank could only handle so many insistent attacks.

He soon ran out of mana and his shield crumpled. The enemy's mage had beads of sweat on her head. But she wasn't as tired. Nor was she out of mana. That's because her healer teammate supported her mana consumption with supporting spells of her own.

Ron and Dino made the same conclusion after looking at the situation they had found themselves in.

They needed that wretched close combat expert's help.