

## Vile 181

### Chapter 181: [Bonus] Hunter and the Prey

Eren looked at his status window one more time before retracting the spectral screen. He was more or less on schedule with his plans. But for his next set of plans, he needed to be Levine's disciple.

The C-Rank beasts guarding the Malva Hibiscus were the hurdles he needed to take care of first before getting the discipleship. That's why he had requested the killing arrays from Jack Sullivan.

Agatha came to the LA's checkpoint and delivered Eren what he had demanded from Jack. Sullivan Sr. had to pull a lot of strings to provide Eren with two C-Rank killing arrays of the lightning element.

Of course, Eren had paid a hefty amount of money in the form of Extols to get these two array scrolls. He had to spend a sizable chunk of wealth from his cultist hideout fund to get these.

But Eren knew it was going to be worth it as long as he had the intact bodies of the two C-Rank beasts. And things would only turn for the better when he gets his hands on Malva Hibiscus.

Now he needed baits to be placed over the killing arrays. The baits he had prepared for some time now.

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"Ken, I think we should split today's border patrol between the two of us instead of covering the entire area together. What do you say?"

Eren asked Ken at the check-post that connected LA grounds to Beast Sanctuary. The former was confused before replying:

"But Master Marla's instructions said we need to perform border patrol together. Why do you want to change the routine all of a sudden?"

Eren already had his answer ready. He shrugged his shoulders before replying:

"To tell you the truth, I've taken up a few missions from Besanc and I need to complete them. I'll probably go deep into the forest. So I might as well complete my border patrol while I'm at it.

I need some daylight before finding a temporary place to rest. And completing the entire border patrol like usual would make things a little difficult for me in that regard."

Realization dawned on Ken after he heard Eren's truths mixed into lies. He agreed with the latter's suggestion and parted ways from him.

This was the moment Eren was waiting for. He didn't wait any moment and travelled in the opposite direction to Ken, deeper into the forest.

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"Erni, they are still following you like usual. And this time, they seem to stick close to you."

Reen reported to Eren after stretching her mana sense into the surroundings. This was not the first time Eren was getting followed.

The followers were, of course, Ron and Dino. Eren knew and expected that they had been doing recon on him after their alliance was disbanded.

Up till now, Eren had Ken with him on his border patrol. And he hadn't taken up any missions from Besanc to head into the forest. So when Eren went to Besanc and took some missions for himself, he knew the news was going to reach the dual berserkers soon.

What Ron and Dino didn't know was that their covert trailing wasn't so covert to Eren who had Reen's mana sense at his disposal. Yet he didn't change his direction or pace and continued moving forward.

Soon the area that separated the neutral zone from that of the Amazonian region came into Eren's view. He knows things are going to get exciting as soon as he crosses the boundary line and steps into the Amazonian region.

Eren didn't rush. He paused for a while and rested. He also took out his food supplies and started fixing himself a hearty sandwich.

Only after making sure that his preparations were ready did Eren move from his position. This wasn't a completely risk-free endeavour for Eren either. That's why he had cold feet the very first time he had done his study on the C-Rank beasts.

Not long after Eren crossed the boundary line and stepped further into the forest, he heard a voice from behind him:

"Eren Idril, long time no see."

Eren turned around to see Ron and Dino standing not far from him, and his expressions turned grim:

"What are you two doing here? I don't think you have registered yourself with the Besanc. Are you two perhaps following me?"

Said Eren while sharpening his gaze. But Dino and Eren could see a trace amount of fear the butcher was trying to hide behind his brave face. Dino couldn't help gloat in front of his potential prey

"Hehe! Eren Idril, you fucking, conniving, backstabbing, son of a bitch. You've tried our patience, you know that?"

'Son of a bitch? How does he know about my mother so well?'

Thought Eren before replying to the loudmouth

"I've tried your patience? What do you mean by that? And make it quick. I'm running on a schedule here."

Dino started laughing menacingly after hearing Eren's nonchalant reply. He had to take a breather from his laughter to reply to his former opponent:

"Do you know why you could go scot-free after screwing over us the way you did? I think you know. And that made you cocky in pulling those stunts on us.

Harming LA students on LA grounds counts for suspension as the least possible punishment. But it doesn't talk about the incidents that happen outside it, do you know why?

The reason is simple. The academy wants us to be tactical in our ways of settling disputes.

Do you know where we are standing now? Hehe! I'll give you a hint. Not LA grounds, that's for sure."

Eren didn't seemingly get unfazed by Dino's naked threat and verbally bit back:

"Haah! You two remember that you couldn't beat me even after tag-teaming right? Why do you want to humiliate yourself when there's nobody here? You want to get your ass handed to you in secrecy?"

Dino's face turned red after he heard Eren words that stung like aggravated bees. He was about to reply with even more curses directed at Eren. But he was stopped from doing the same with his friend Ron around.

Ron didn't want to gloat like Dino. But he wanted his victim to know about the predicament he had found himself in. So he spoke up next:

"Eren, maybe you haven't realized that you are in trouble here."

'Have you?'

Thought Eren to himself as he maintained his outwardly stoic expressions.

### **Chapter 182: Grim Realization**

"Eren, maybe you haven't realized that you are in trouble here."

Ron said in a threatening tone.

'Have you?'

Thought Eren to himself as he maintained his outwardly stoic expressions.

"What are you planning to do? It's not like I can't defend myself against two of you. My lightning element alone gives me all the advantage I need to bust your balls."

Said Eren while folding his hands. He knew the duo must have taken some countermeasures this time against his lightning element spells for it to be this confident in itself.

"That might have been true. But don't you think we might have known that and we did something about it?"

"Yeah? Like what?"

Said Eren with an uncaring attitude.

"Like this!"

Said Ron and showed Eren what he was wearing under his shirt by pulling the collar to the side.

Eren understood where the berserkers' confidence came from. They were wearing lightning spell proof armour under their clothes. F-Rank disposable artefacts, Eren guessed to himself.

These types of armour wouldn't last long. Because the runes inscribed on them would lose effectiveness with every barrage of spells it was hit with.

But Eren also knew it'd take a lot more effort than he cared to admit for him to exhaust their armour with his lightning element spells. But that didn't deter him from his stance.

"You do that I've also been dabbling in fire element spells, don't you? The artefacts won't protect you from the elemental spells they are not designed to protect you against."

Dino was the one to pitch in this time:

"Hahahaha! Empty threats. We know that you don't have full mastery over your fire element spells. And your derived elemental affinity can only give you so much edge while you are using fire spells.

I think we can deal with those fire spells you throw at us just fine. Want to test out?"

Dino looked eager to beat the shit out of Eren. The latter shook his head after listening to his statement before replying:

"It seems I'll have to teach you that it's not the lightning spells you should be wary about. It's the one who casts them."

Said Eren and ran Blitz Bolt through his arms. The Blitz Steps also showed the signs of being executed on Eren's legs.

Dino and Ron both got tense at that time. They had worn lightning resistant armours, sure. But they knew they couldn't do anything about Eren's close combat attacks that focused on weapon injuries.

They both had their metal skin spells. But that alone could not prevent their attacker from injuring their vital spots through blunt force generated by the weapon's impact.

Dino and Ron both executed their signature spells. They both turned into metal humanoids and drew their weapons.

But what they saw next froze them in their tracks and numbed their minds. That's because the guy that had just threatened them with severe retaliation went ahead and ran from the battlefield.

That's right. Eren ran as soon as he saw the dual berserkers preparing themselves for the battle.

Ron and Dino had thought about Eren's lightning element spells. And they were also confident about the fire element spells that he had displayed during recent battles.

But they had never thought about the possibility that a cold-blooded guy like Eren would run away from them.

Eren's movement spell had reached a new level when his BTP rose to 21. The lightning element, close combat oriented technique he was practising prioritized his Agility stat.

And yet Eren only showed his normal movement speed. Something that he had shown in his ranking battles till now.

That was because Eren wanted the dual berserkers to follow him. Otherwise, he would have left them behind by now.

Therefore Eren ran. And surprisingly, the dual berserkers followed him. They cursed his name and his non-existent family while doing so. The guy had become an unpredictable menace for them. Even taking revenge on him could be considered as putting yourself through a series of torture.

The chase took place for a while. Until Reen informed him about his path laid ahead:

“Erni, the old beast’s territory is up ahead. You’ll enter it in a few moments.”

Eren’s eyes lit up when he heard that. He took out one killing array scroll from his ID stone. The scroll was almost 5ft in vertical length. And it was about five times its vertical length when stretched open horizontally.

Carrying this unusually big array scroll was a tough thing to do when the movement spell was in full effect. That’s why Eren only took out the scroll when it was the right time to do so.

Ron and Dino were not far behind him. Eren had maintained just enough distance for them to follow him and not see what he was up to.

Eren quickly stretched open the array scroll as soon as he barged into the old beast’s territory. And he did the same with another array scroll at a safe distance from the first location.

Eren’s pursuers could be seen coming from him as soon as he finished his preparations. He couldn’t help but smile cunningly after he saw his one set of preys was right on time. And now he only needed the mana beasts to make their entrance, his second set of preys.

By now, the array scroll had been crumpled into dust and the array had been stretched on the ground. The runes were now exuding faint lights. But they weren’t overly prominent yet.

“Have guts to fight us, you conniving rat bastard.”

Dino spoke loudly as soon as Eren was in his sight again.

He could now only see Eren as his target of attention. The berserker didn’t pay attention to the array layout exuding a faint light behind Eren.

But Ron was still level-headed. That small detail didn’t fail to register in his mind, enabling him to have a grim realization.

“It’s a trap!”

He couldn’t help mumble to himself after he connected a few dots.

### **Chapter 183: Trapped Prey P1**

“It’s a trap!”

Ron couldn’t help mumbling to himself after he connected a few dots of the entire event in his head. But Dino was already rushing towards Eren before he could warn his friend about a possible risk involved in approaching their target.

“Dino, you meathead, just stop right there...”

Ron tried to warn his friend about something. But Dino felt like he had waited long enough to take care of this wretched person.

“Ron, if you want to back out for the fear of possible repercussions from anyone from LA, then go ahead and retreat. I’m not going to...”

Dino was saying this while travelling at an even faster pace than before. Ron was right behind him. Eren was almost right within their berserk’s charge range.

Dino retrieved his berserking potion from his storage space. He was a little hotheaded, yes. But he wasn’t stupid enough to think that he’d get rid of the close combat expert in front of him without breaking a sweat.

There was a chance he would have to pay the price of underestimating Eren he couldn’t be able to pay. That’s why Dino decided to go full throttle from the get-go to confront his opponent.

Dino came closer. He was just some meters away from Eren now. He was about to drink the berserking potion when he heard the latter say his next words.

“Reen, now.”

Said Eren and commanded Reen to spread her mana sense and make hostile contact with the two C-Rank beasts in the vicinity. He also made her fuse with his body and elevate his BTP value to that of an E-Ranker.

Then he ran his mana through the pebble-like item that was inscribed with runes. This was the controller of the killing array that was currently standing inside. And Dino was now within the array’s area of effect as well.

All Dino felt with his mana sense was that Eren’s stats had suddenly shot for stars after he heard him say something to someone named Reen. He couldn’t know Eren’s BTP value but the managed signature he gave off at that time enabled Dino to understand that his opponent was not an F-Ranker anymore.

“What the holy fuck? How can you break into E-Rank just like that? I knew there was something fishy going on with you. Hahaha! Ron, here’s another reason for us to proceed with our plans. This guy is a treasure trove of secrets. Secrets we can use and get benefitted from.”

Even after knowing about Eren’s transformation, Dino didn’t stop his advance. Eren had to admit one thing about the guy. He had selected the right path as a ranker. It’s just that his choice in choosing his enemies was something he found faults in.

Eren retreated from the opposite side and suddenly chose a cross-sectioned path. That inspired Dino to chase his opponent even more. But what happened next took the berserker some time to register in his head.

Dino saw Eren’s legs getting coated with a mass of slime. And then that mass of slime coated his entire body in the next moment completely before getting absorbed in his body and changing it. It looked like the skin of Purple Lightning Snake.

It seemed that Eren was using the Beast Contract spell. But Ron and Dino both knew the spell wouldn’t alter the caster’s BTP value and make them change upscale their rank.

And then Eren just disappeared from his initial position and appeared at a distance that was outside the array's area of effect. He showed his real speed equipped with his time-element spells, allowing the dual berserkers to understand that the chase was just a ruse.

Eren didn't mind that his true agility potential was discovered by his enemies. It was too late for them anyway. He then pressed on the centre of the array's control with his mana-imbued fingers. And the whole array let up instantly.

Dino saw the ground beneath him had been lit up with intricate inscriptions he couldn't comprehend. He was confused before a slight shadow of worry crept up from behind in his head.

Dino tried to advance towards the perpetrator of this weird phenomenon. But there was now one problem. He couldn't channel his mana through his body anymore. And his charge soon came to a halt when his feet were stuck to the ground.

The inscriptions had climbed up on Dino's legs, making him freeze in his tracks literally. He was meat on the chopping block because of his current situation.

Dino started cursing Eren. Then he started calling Ron for help. But he soon found his best friend Ron....

He was retreating. He had started retreating the moment he saw the array lit up. By now Ron had come to realize that Eren wasn't someone they could mess with.

The guy's combat potential was one thing. His lightning element spells could also be managed. But he had practically planned this whole event even before they did after he saw the array setup.

And that wasn't all. The conniving bastard could alter his body stats to make himself an E-Ranker. Ron could bet his left kidney on an assumption that this wasn't all Eren had in his arsenal.

But it was all too late. Eren soon caught up with the retreating Ron and grabbed him by his neck from behind. Eren had also changed his stature for better control, and that had made it easy for him to lift Ron in the air by his neck.

Eren then dragged the smart berserker towards the second array he had laid not far from the first one and thrown him inside the array's area of effect. Then he retrieved another array controller and activated the array with its help, putting Ron in the same boat as his friend.

"Eren, listen to us. I don't know what you are up to. But let me be very clear about a few things. We only meant to scare you. Not permanently injure you or kill you. I'm sorry it had to come to this. But we can always start again..."

Ron immediately changed his strategy and tried to talk practically with Eren. but his plans were interrupted by his very own friend:

"Ron, you scaredy-cat. This is just some trapping array. Why are you acting like you are going to die by this wretched rat's hand? Trust me, this conniving bastard doesn't have it in him to..."

Dino was going to continue his dissing of Eren when he suddenly felt a heavy mana sense swept over him. He felt like his heart had stopped beating and the world around him had lost its colour.

This was the effect of a high-ranked entity consciously making its presence known.

## Chapter 184: Trapped Prey P2

Dino was going to continue his dissing of Eren when he suddenly felt a heavy mana sense swept over him. He felt like his heart had stopped beating and the world around him had lost its colour.

Ron wasn't in any better condition either. He felt the same effects as Dino, but unlike his friend, he could actually feel the level of threat coming from that effect.

'D-Rank?'

Ron couldn't gauge the strength of the one who had used their mana sense on them just now so he immediately assigned the threat to the highest-ranking entity he was familiar with.

But soon the intensifying fear Ron felt from the incoming enemy made him change his initial estimation. He had beads of sweat on his forehead as he came to a new possibility:

"C-Rank! It's a motherfu\*cking C-Rank mana beast. Dino, my friend. We are fuc\*ked!"

Eren didn't wait as soon as he sensed that dreaded mana sense washing over him. He made use of Reen's enhancement of his body and ran the Blitz Steps to his fullest potential. His body stats had also been strengthened because of the demon's beast active fusion.

So Eren ran again, this time leaving two baits behind him. Now that the arrays had been activated, butcher operated them through their controllers. And made them stay invisible while retaining the effects they had on dual berserkers.

The old beast came first and saw Dino and Ron both staying within the disputed territory. A territory between it and the young mana beast who was trying to expand its influence. So it focused on Dino first because he was closest to it between them.

Then came the second beast.

Dino pissed his pants after he saw the second mana beast of the same rank making its appearance. He tried his hardest to control his bladder. But the second beast's hostile mana sense just made his body act on his own.

Ron wasn't in any better condition either. He was on his knees, still unable to move. He didn't understand what was happening to him right now. Why did they end up here, in front of two mana beasts whose rank they couldn't comprehend for real?

Ron understood that Eren had used both of them as baits. The mana beasts were very perceptive. They didn't know what the array or its layout was. But they could sense the dangers getting radiated from it all the same.

That's why Eren needed bait in the form of Dino and Ron to make the beasts' basic instincts take over. Instincts to kill the intruders in their territories first before worrying about the consequences.

These instincts had made the beasts challenge Reen's control over them at the time of their mana senses' confrontation. Eren knew that Reen's status as a demon beast wasn't high enough for them to ignore their territorial instincts.

So the beasts would certainly not care anything about two puny F-Rankers. And they would try to eliminate the other party at all costs.

And that's what happened. The beasts growled at each other as if coming to a ceasefire. They then focused their attention on their prey.

Both the beasts stepped into their killing arrays, a moment Eren was waiting for from afar. He activated the trapping mechanism for the arrays at their full strengths.

The beasts were just a few meters away from their prey when they felt their bodies getting devoid of the ability to make use of their mana. Both the beasts felt something was wrong as they tried to bolt from their positions.

But their struggles weren't fruitful. Especially the old beast that was already injured. It felt like it couldn't move at all.

The beasts tried all their methods. They even tried to eliminate the berserkers in front of them, thinking eliminating them was the key behind their liberation.

But just like Dino and Ron, the beasts too had lost the ability to employ mana or make use of their mana sense.

Two sets of prey were trapped. Just as Eren wanted them to. He came out from hiding at that time and reached the area between the two arrays to observe the arrays' functioning.

Eren had two array controllers in each of his hands. He tossed them in the air and did some juggling acts as he paid attention to the beasts' movements.

Eren had to admit that the huge sum he had paid for these arrays was worth every Extol. He wouldn't have even thought of messing with two C-Rank beasts on his own in his current ranking status if it wasn't for these arrays.

Eren was also worried about the arrays' operability. The cynic in him thought that there was a chance that he might get duped. Of course, he wasn't doubting Jack. but those who provided Jack with these products.

So when he saw that the arrays were working just the way they had been advertised, Eren felt some relief. He was about to press the detonation button on the arrays when he heard a faint voice coming from Ron.

Ron was struggling hard to breathe because of his proximity to the C-Rank beast. He was sure that the beast wouldn't have to do anything as he would have passed out in its presence long ago if the array hadn't suppressed its mana.

The way he saw it, Ron had only one way to get out of his situation. Talk with the one who had put them in the very situation. That's why when he saw Eren approaching them, the sane berserker tried to have a word with him.

"Err... Eren Idril. We are sorry for targeting you. We really are. Look, you can take everything that I own in my ID stone as a form of compensation.

These arrays you have used are clearly C-Rank arrays meant for the mana beasts. You... you must have spent a fortune on them... I'll see to it that you get that money back with my connections... And I can..."

Eren shook his head and cut him off with his reply:

"Offer's tempting, Ron. Not going to lie..."

But I don't like to leave loose ends behind if I can help it."

### **Chapter 185: Illegal Slave Contract**

"Offer's tempting, Ron. Not going to lie..."

But I don't like to leave loose ends behind if I can help it."

Eren's nonchalant attitude turned Ron's mood and expressions sour. But he couldn't just give up just like that.

"Eren, what would you gain by killing us? It's not like we have a blood feud. And think about what would happen if LA comes to find out. Your life will be ruined.

I'm saying this to stay alive, I agree. But it doesn't change the fact that it's the truth.

Instead, why don't we sign a contract that's completely in your favour? I'll agree to any condition as long as it's feasible for me."

Eren kept on juggling with his two array controllers while hearing what his prey had to say before he executed what he had decided to do from earlier. He said this while continuing his circus act:

"Well, I can certainly go for the hush-hush contract. But it's not that secure and it can be easily breached. It is more convenient for me to kill you and blame it on the Amazons.

I'll just have to carve the Amazonian symbol on any nearby tree's trunk. Then it'll be taken as you were killed because of trespassing into their territory. It's a weak excuse, but it's the one that'll still work. After all, nobody fuc\*ks with those crazy high-ranked femme fatal. Hehe!"

Ron's eyes opened wide in surprise that immediately turned into his despair. Eren was right. The possibility of Amazonian sentries killing them was low, but never zero. Some of the ladies were known to be hostile to outsiders even without the rhyme or reason.

Ron and Dino thought the Amazonian region to be an ideal place for them to take care of Eren.

But only now did they realize that it was in fact a carefully selected region by their enemy to take care of them while facing the least amount of repercussions. If there were going to be any repercussions heading the vile character's way in the first place.

Knowing Eren till now, Ron was sure the paranoid guy like Eren would have even more countermeasures ready even if things do turn haywire for him.

Ron knew he needed to come up with something that could bring some assurance to the wretched person in front of him to make him spare their lives. A way that can put them at the disadvantage so that Eren will at least consider sparing them.

“Slave contract! We are willing to sign a slave contract with you.”

Eren raised his eyebrows after he heard Ron finally speaking what he wanted him to speak:

“Slave contract, huh? I know how this idea sparked into your head. You must have done a background check on my information again and found out I now have a legal slave.

A slave contract could work. Tighter restrictions. No easy way to breach the contract. And I’ll always know something is wrong if and when that does happen. Good job, Ron. I’m willing to consider your proposal.”

Said Eren and looked at the beasts that were growling in his presence. They have sensed that their lack of movement and entrapment has something to do with him. So they were trying to intimidate him with their gazes.

Too bad, Eren didn’t have any fear of the two beasts. That’s because he was by now confident in the two arrays he had spent a sizable part of his fortune on.

Dino was mad after he heard Ron’s statements that conveyed that the guy had lost all his backbone after the entrapment. He couldn’t help shouting at his old friend:

“Ron, for fuc\*k’s sake, man, have some dignity in dying at least. There’s no need to beg or apologize to this conniving bastard. We... We will die fighting.”

Ron was pretty mad after hearing Dino’s comments. He verbally bit back in response:

“Once a meathead, always a meathead. Get this one thing clear in your head, Dino. you can live with dignity or shame. But there’s no dignity to be had in dying. Dying is dying. And I don’t want to die.

If you want to die while keeping your so-called honour unsullied, go ahead. Be my guest. But don’t drag me into your suicide fest.”

Said Ron while looking angrily at Dino. His gaze told the latter only one thing. Either get killed by Eren or get with the program.

But Ron didn’t need to convince Dino much. Eren’s next words did the job just fine:

“Ron, if the man wants to die, let him die. No need to get angry at him for speaking his mind out. Dino, we both shall kill you nice and easy before pinning it on the Amazons. Hehe!

Here, Ron. take this. A slave contract. You know what to do.”

Just as Ron thought, Eren had come prepared. Then all of this was just pressure tactics. A tactic that worked on him so far because of him caving in. Eren wanted them to be his illegal slaves. He just let him come to that conclusion on his own.

Eren threw the contract Ron’s way and offered him just enough freedom of movement to catch it with his hands via the array’s controller. The latter opened the contract scroll and read the terms and conditions carefully.

This was an illegal slave contract, one which wasn't approved by the Edinburgh kingdom. Carrying and enforcing the contract was a punishable offence to both the owner and slaves bound by the illegal contract.

Hence illegal contracts tended to be even stricter when it came to information breaches compared to their legal counterparts. And the severity of breaching the contract conditions was instant death.

These were the C-Rank contracts Eren had also asked Jack to deliver to him along with the array scrolls. They were costly as well, but compared to the array scrolls, they were basically peanuts.

Eren gave the slave contract to Ron and thought of teasing Dino some more.

The array lit up again after Eren tinkered with its controller. The runes lit up on the ground started producing a buzzing sound. And a few tongues of electricity could be seen getting produced from nowhere.

Dino regretted speaking so boldly. Then he looked at his old friend who didn't even pay him heed. Because he was busy reading the contract.

Even a meathead like Dino had understood that this was all Eren's plan all along. But he was also sure that the wretched person was ready to make him disappear from this world should he decide to not cave in.

"Wait... you mother\*\*\*... Err... I mean Eren. just wait. I... I am ready to sign the slave contract."

Dino finally decided to follow Ron's example.

### **Chapter 186: Array Detonation**

"Wait... you mother\*\*\*... Err... I mean Eren. just wait. I... I am ready to sign the slave contract."

Dino finally decided to follow Ron's example.

Eren made an exaggerated face of surprise before telling the meathead:

"Whatever happened to your dignity, my friend? I thought you were going to die for your honour and glory. And I was kinda beginning to respect your choice for that, you know."

Dino's pale face finally had some colour as it got to read from Eren's remark. He wanted to speak and he raised his hands to do so, but just couldn't find the right words to put his side in the best light.

Then Dino just dropped his head down in shame and regret. He had thought that death was easier than serving this wretched man who was all sorts of trouble. But he needed company in his final endeavour. A company he was expecting from Ron.

Dino had been following Ron all his life since childhood. And his two betrayals in a row did hurt him a bit. But he had already known about this side of his friend.

Ron was someone who would do anything and everything for his friends, except for dying. And Dino was still grateful to the guy for him to provide for his family.

Plus, Ron had his reasons to survive and achieve the things he wanted to do. And Dino respected him for that.

“I... I’m willing to sign the slave contract. Just don’t expect me to grovel to your feet now.”

Said Dino and clenched his fists tightly. Eren wanted to point out that grovelling to one’s feet wasn’t so different from signing the slave contract. But he spared the guy from another verbal abuse and threw another slave contract towards him.

Both the berserkers read the contracts carefully with grim expressions. Any breach in the contract was going to result in the implosion of their mana core, including actively or passively seeking help to breach the contract.

But they had no choice. The array would have an active timer. And it was ticking. Both of them were sure Eren wouldn’t wait long enough and take care of them along with the two beasts if they took up too much time.

Ron was the first to sign the slave contract with his blood getting used as ink, imbued in his mana signature. Dino followed in his footsteps soon after.

Eren retrieved the contract scrolls from the dual berserkers and rechecked the contents as well as the imprints of Ron and Dino on their respective contracts.

He did the same actions as the dual berserkers to imprint the contract as the owner. But he commanded Reen to sign the contract for him by using her mana and mana signature for imprint.

Eren did this to make sure that Dino and Ron stay loyal to him without him getting directly involved. Plus, a high-ranked entity getting in contract with low-ranked entities would always make it difficult for the latter to breach the contract.

Dino and Ron could feel some faint connection with Eren. But they felt like there was some interference. As if it was Eren and wasn’t him at the same time. But they just chalked it under as their first time being slaves to anybody.

Eren had warned them that the slavery they were willing to undertake had no expiry date. They were going to have to stay as his slave or die to get free from their statuses.

But the butcher assured the dual berserkers that most of their daily lifestyles would remain unaffected. And he’d only summon them when he needs them. They could act like usual if and when there was no summon or order from him.

And like this, Eren obtained two more slaves. This time, two illegal ones. He couldn’t make use of the dual berserkers openly. And their slavery statuses needed to be kept hidden for their as well as his sake.

But now Eren could manage the dual berserkers to do a few things without getting his hands dirty. He never wanted to kill the dual berserkers. Just scare them into submission.

Of course, Eren was still not content with the past life experiences he had with dual berserkers. He was going to make them suffer the consequences of that some more.

But he had now come to realize that these two guys were just looking after their interests. And he was just in their way. So they used him to cater to the benefits they could get by being friendly with Sienna.

If the dual-berserkers could make use of him for their reasons, Eren could return the favour to them in the same manner. Plus, killing them would complicate his status with the academy. Even if he takes all the precautions and nothing gets traced back to him, the cynic in Eren believed that “prevention is better than cure.”

Eren controlled the arrays with their controllers and allowed Dino and Ron to get out of their traps. Now only the mana beasts were confined to their respective arrays.

“What are you going to do with them?”

Ron asked while standing behind Eren’s back, on his right side. They were now at an ample distance away from the spot of the two arrays.

Dino was standing on Eren’s left. Eren didn’t need to look behind to answer the guy. He just shrugged his shoulders and said nonchalantly:

“Why, kill them of course. The array can only stay active for so much time.”

Saying this, Eren imbued his mana into the two controls by grabbing them both in each of his hands and willing them to detonate the arrays using his mana sense.

There was no sound. But an unmistakably dominant wave of C-Rank mana spread over the surrounding area.

Two lightning element C-Rank arrays had been detonated!

### **Chapter 187: Pragmatist Slave Owner?**

Two lightning element C-Rank arrays were detonated at that time!

A sudden wave of blue light washed over the trio’s faces. Followed by a tingling sensation on their skin. Two lightning element C-Rank arrays had been detonated after all. It was going to interfere with one’s senses even when the array’s effect was categorized as non-destructive to its surroundings.

There was a sudden surge of C-Rank mana in the surrounding area. A surge that made the witnesses’ mana circuit go haywire for a short time.

The arrays Eren had employed were specially made for trapping the mana beasts while preserving their bodies. The lightning storm that must have taken place inside the array was contained by the spectral shield generated by the array themselves.

Soon everything calmed down. The spectral shields vanished and the array lines on the ground started going dim. Only then did Eren and his two new hush-hush slaves find the courage to approach ground zero again.

Eren saw two almost intact mana beasts bodies of the C-Rank lying around. He didn’t think it to be the case, but just in case the beasts were alive, he sent the dual berserkers to check up on the bodies.

The butcher had used his slaves right from the start to make them accustomed to their treatment. His life was more precious than his slaves' lives after all. He only approached the site for real when his slaves confirmed it to be safe.

The mana beasts bodies were still radiating the aura of how dangerous the beasts were when they were alive.

"Ron, use your ID Stone space to keep these bodies. Mine's full."

Eren asked Ron while looking at the bodies that were going to soon turn into a couple of treasure chests for him.

"But my storage space is full..."

"Well, take everything that you have out in the open then. You too Dino. I'll see what I can keep so that you guys have enough space to store a mana beast's body each."

Ron understood that this was Eren's way of demanding their resources from them. The guy was just being nice with his words. Contrary to the berserker's belief, Eren was a pragmatist slave owner. He sighed before nodding at Dino, who by the way, was taking long breaths to control his anger.

Eren saw the resources the dual berserkers had and considered them to be overwhelmingly poor in front of him. But the scrooge in him decided to pilfer some of their relatively good resources as well.

The bodies were soon retrieved by the dual berserkers in their storage spaces. Eren was going to contact them later on for further procession of the bodies. He was going to hand the bodies to Jack.

Eren was tempted to harvest some body parts of the C-Rank beasts to himself so that he can store them in potion banks' storage. Then he could take them out when he was confident in processing ingredients on those levels.

But Eren knew that could take years on end. And immediate profits were more important to him than long-term gains at this point. So he decided to give up on salvaging some organs. Plus, an intact mana beast's body, that too of the C-Rank, had more value when it was intact than if he decided to dissect it.

"The way you had planned this thing, Eren, I'm sure now. You have a specific reason behind your actions. What are you aiming for now? And why do you need us?"

Ron had retrospectively looked at the whole events leading to his slavery and asked his current owner. Probably, Eren incited them in their ranking war knowing they would react this way. Maybe Eren was counting on their retaliation all along.

That meant Eren wanted them to have them as his slaves. The slave contracts that he retrieved so readily right after he mentioned them further confirmed his suspicion.

Ron didn't like his status. But he was glad that he was alive. And he wanted to remain that way too.

But knowing this wretched person, Ron feared that he would use him and Dino for high-risk tasks that wouldn't be short of suicide missions. Ron had come to sense Eren's nature by now. And he was half sure about his well-educated hunch.

“You want a purpose for being a slave? Hahaha! Don’t think too much about why I do things and the way I do them. And don’t worry for now. I know what you are thinking. Things won’t turn overwhelmingly risky if you follow my orders to a T.

Even if I use you in certain situations, I want you to return from them alive. After all, slaves are more useful when they are alive. Dead slaves can only be used as fertilizers.

You have your personal lives to take care of. And your growth as rankers is entirely dependent on you. I’ll take no part in cultivating or sabotaging them. What I want from you is simple obedience. Do that and I’ll assure you we can have a working relationship.”

Said Eren and looked at Ron and Dino. he was waiting for them to process what he had said to them just now. Dino wasn’t much of a thinker. And he was still salty about being a slave, which was normal for any guy in his shoes.

But Ron was unusually cooperative about his new status. Eren didn’t expect this much level-headedness from the berserker. And he considered Ron’s intelligence to be a risk for him too. He had a wild thought to kill the pawn he had just created.

But Eren knew he was just being a cynic because his plans were executed the way he wanted them to.

Whenever things went his way, Eren would find them suspicious, thinking that a storm was heading his way.

Ron pondered for a while after listening to Eren’s explanations. He couldn’t help asking another question to his owner:

“\*Sigh. I don’t know if anybody has ever told you this, Eren, but your way of explaining things gives rise to more questions in one’s head than answering the intended queries.

Anyway, is it about killing someone in LA? Or kidnapping anyone? Let me be clear about a few things. If that’s the case. We are not ideal rankers for your operations with the way our power and spells work. We are sure to leave traces behind. And that will eventually get tracked back to you.”

Ron tried to discourage Eren from putting them in dangerous situations by giving him a grim possibility. And he considered the worst in his owner and came up with shallow deterrence.

### **Chapter 188: Smartass v2.0**

Ron tried to discourage Eren from putting them in dangerous situations by giving him a grim possibility. And he considered the worst in his owner and came up with shallow deterrence.

“Haha! No need to nudge me in the “so-called” right direction, Ron. In case you forgot, I’m smarter than you. At least related to these things. You being my slaves now is proof of that.

I’ll give you a hint to ease your mind. I want your help in dealing with a certain girl. It’s not risky. And it should not put you in someone’s crosshairs as long as you are careful.”

Eren folded his hands after he said that. Something about dealing with a girl caught Dino’s attention at last as his ears twitched in response to it. He couldn’t help ask his owner about the girl:

“Who are we talking about?”

Eren saw the glint in Dino’s eyes and smiled before shaking his head. He understood that the guy wanted to partake in his self-serving fantasies while not feeling any guilt in his consciousness.

“Don’t overimagine stuff, Dino. Thinking isn’t your forte anyway. And if I tell you the name of that girl now, forget about doing anything to her. You would be so shit-scared, your balls would retract inside you from their sack.”

Dino and Ron both looked at each other after they heard that. Dino wanted Ron to come up with a possibility with his “big brain moves”. Ron didn’t disappoint his childhood friend. He came up with a possible name after employing the theory of Elimination by Aspects.

“Sienna Slughorn!”

Ron said that as soon as he compared the various female rankers Eren knew in LA. The butcher was right. The berserker’s balls struggled to stay in their sack after he heard his hunch being spoken out loud.

Eren, in his own twisted belief, thought that it was poetic justice itself if the same guys who had helped Sienna plot his downfall in the past timeline worked under him to do the same against her at his behest.

The butcher couldn’t extend the same courtesy to Sienna that he had offered to dual berserkers. Nothing was off-limits when it came to punishing her.

She was the root cause behind most of his sufferings after all. The others who had helped her only served her as her pawns. So Eren was willing to learn from his enemies and take the page from their books while he catered to his interests.

Eren was going to make sure that Sienna falls into an even deeper pit than he had found himself in his previous life. But that was difficult for him to pull off alone because of her background.

Eren kept quiet for some time after hearing Ron’s spot-on prediction. A few moments had to pass before he replied with stoic expressions and a serious tone.

“Ron, your intelligence would save you from most dangers, provided you don’t act too smart for your good.”

Said Eren. He was suddenly reminded of Ralph from the Osan Woods after witnessing Ron’s thought process. He couldn’t help asking the guy about the same.

“Ron, are you, by any chance, related to the guy named Ralph who I heard had been killed the Osan Woods Butcher?”

Ron was confused that Eren suddenly made an out-of-the-blue connection with him and Ralph. But he confirmed his suspicions anyway:

“Um... yeah. He is my cousin. Or was. His mother and my mother are sisters. And my uncle Lin Karr is their only brother. Why do you ask?”

'Now it makes sense. The extra smartness runs in the family. Too bad the same could not be said about their uncle Lin Karr.'

Eren thought to himself before looking at the smartass v2.0. Then he just shrugged his shoulders before saying:

"It was just some news I had heard about your connection with the guy who had died by the butcher's hands. Never mind, I'll tell you about what you need to do in a few days. For now, you can disperse."

Said Eren and turned his back on Ron before starting to walk in a certain direction. He still had another task to worry about now that the mana beasts were out of the picture.

Malva Hibiscus.

He didn't need berserkers' help in locating the ingredient. So he could let them go. But Ron wasn't over with his questions it seemed:

"Was that beast contract spell you used back then?"

Eren just nodded in response like the pathological liar he was after listening to Ron's query. He would never trust any person just because they were his slaves after all and come clean with all his secrets:

"But then why haven't you used the spell in your ranking battles till now?"

Eren resumed his walk in the direction of Malva Hibiscus after he heard that question. His slightly distant was heard by Ron, answering his question by not answering it:

"And why would I reveal all my cards for everybody to see? And do you think that's the only card I have? Hehehe!"

Eren seemingly disappeared from his position after he said that. Ron looked at his now-gone figure with sombre expressions. He had realized that he had messed up and gotten himself involved with a ruthless, cold, and calculative personality.

Ron could feel that the societal bottom lines Eren had only existed because he was looking after his self-interests. He didn't follow them for the sake of others. And if there was the possibility that no repercussions would fall on him, Eren would be okay with anything and everything.

Eren was not evil because of his actions. He was evil for the simple fact that he knew how to pretend not to be one. With outright evil, the person confronting them had time to prepare in advance.

The chaotic evil is always on the path of self-destruction. And the lawful evil can be easy to deal with since it doesn't try to break the established system. It was the neutral evil who could cause the most damage to the society if there ever was a benefit for them in doing so.

Ron had come to realize that Eren's personality made him fall under the last category.

'At least I'm alive. And as long as I'm alive, big brother Ralph, there's a chance for me to get revenge on the butcher for killing you. Don't worry. I'll make sure that the fuc\*ker pays somehow.'

Ron consoled himself with such thoughts. His big brother Ralph was his role model and guiding light.

Ron and Ralph were both birthed by their mothers inside a specialized array designed by Lin's parents to boost the newborn child's stats from the moment they were born. The array seemed to prioritize the intelligence stat more though.

Lin's parents were very well-known to create and researching unique arrays like these. And they were very famous and influential because of them. Too bad, their only son couldn't inherit their gifts and sucked balls in the study of arrays.

In conclusion, the role that the array played in both Ron and Ralph's births became the foundation for their talents in analyzing things on a deeper level.

Both the boys grew up in the same environment. But because of their enhanced intelligence, they weren't social to the peers of their age.

Ron and Ralph couldn't connect with others the way they connected because of similar thought processes. That made them look for support in each other.

Things only changed for Ron a little when Dino became his friend. But that didn't make him create a distance between him and his big brother Ralph.

So when news about Ralph's death came, Ron didn't take it too well. He had to process and release his bottled up emotions rationally to come up with the idea of taking revenge on the butcher.

That line of thought got Ron on his feet again and made him put extra effort into his ranking journey. The berserker had also figured out from the rumours that the butcher wasn't a simple person to deal with. But he took it as a challenge rather than a deterrence. After all, his rational brain needed a clear goal to function, no matter how tall it might seem.

Ron thought of taking his time and dealing with the butcher in the future when he became powerful enough to do so. What he couldn't have thought in his wildest dreams was the fact that the butcher who had killed the emotional support of a cousin was the same person he was currently serving as his slave.

## **Chapter 189: Mutagen**

"Do you sense anything?"

Eren asked Reen. They were in the disputed area between the now-killed mana beasts. The dual berserkers had left the region. And Eren was now treasure-hunting with his demon beast to get his hands on Malva Hibiscus.

"I do. There are a few good mana-imbued herbs in the region. But the one with C-Rank mana is the only one as far as I can tell. That's what you are looking for, Erni?"

Reen asked Eren after detecting the presence of herbs in the vicinity through her stretched mana sense. The latter nodded and told her to guide him there to the herb's place.

Reen, the treasure-seeking mean machine led her master towards the ingredient he needed the most at the time. And the latter couldn't help sporting a smile after he saw the herb inside a narrow cave that had only one opening.

Eren didn't approach the C-Rank herb right away. Because some herbs had a defence mechanism in place. Rankers needed a few special techniques to harvest them.

But Eren knew the ingredient wasn't of the harmful kind. Well, not really. But the ingredient was known to release an irritant gas in response to the perceived threats. The butcher had studied the ingredient at the academy's library, knowing about all the information there was to know about the same.

The irritant gas had the harshest ill-effect on the F-Rankers. But it wouldn't work on the C-Rankers. Therefore Eren told Reen to harvest the ingredient by giving her proper directions while he stayed at the back observing the process.

But that was not all Eren had told Reen to do. He had come prepared after knowing about the irritant gas release of the ingredient and decided to harvest that as well.

Therefore, he handed a potioneering F-Rank item to Reen that he had purchased from Jack. It was a simple container in the form of a run-inscribed vial. The user needed to run their non-elementalized mana through the item and it would suck in the surrounding air, safely securing it within itself.

Reen did as she was guided by her master. She had picked up a few of Eren's skills in potioneering as well. So she wasn't a complete amateur when it came to handling potioneering ingredients.

Like this, Eren secured two crucial items from his meticulous planning apart from the two treasure-chests that were the mana beast bodies. Now the path to becoming Levine's disciple was open to him.

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Eren was seen laying on his bed the next day. He was reading a tattered book that didn't look like it was taken from the academy's library.

This was one of the study materials he had seized from the cultist hideout. It seemed like the book contained a general summary on the study of Therianthropy and demi-humans, written by someone in the first-person narration:

Eren read out aloud:

"Mutagen!

This is the elusive genetic element humans need for their successful transformation into that of demi-humans and break their shackles of staying as ordinary rankers.

Mutagen can be considered as the most basic form of a genetic makeup that is based on the stable fusion of human and beastly genes. Ideally, a stable mutagen would be passed down through generations until it regresses into that of a human or beast gene later down the line.

But the study in the field of mutagen is extremely lacking at the time I'm writing this note for myself. Or to be more precise, the core studies that have been done till now are all either destroyed or kept hidden by the kingdoms.

Most of the continent's history of the past 700 years has many loopholes. And some descriptions of now-ruined areas and events are heavily redacted.

If my guess is correct, then the entire continent faced something horrible of an unprecedented level in the past due to the rankers' pursuit of becoming demi-humans. That's why all the kingdoms and empires came to a unanimous decision to get rid of anything that was linked with the study of mutagens and demi-humans.

But this is where the establishments are going wrong. Oppressing the information would only birth the curiosity in rankers' heads and make it grow at an incredible rate. I'm no exception to this rule either.

The study of mutagens and the lost path of becoming a demi-human is fascinating to me. And one day that lost path shall not stay as lost to us anymore.

The previous studies on this path have been kept away from the reach of normal rankers by the establishments. So we will just start things from scratch and arrive at the answer with our efforts.

It's not like we didn't try. We experimented with the shapeshifter demon beasts and made them mate with human partners. But no matter what we did, no pregnancy occurred from those experiments.

We have concluded that human and beast genes are incompatible with normal methods of child conception. They repel each other. We had subjects mate daily for months on end. Yet there were no results.

The path of therianthropy focuses on pseudo-mutagen that is obtained by using only the fusion of human and beast blood at a superficial level. And with all due respect to the rankers who have researched on and taken the path of therianthropy, it is nothing but a cheap imitation of the original.

Therianthropy has many limitations. And it is something that makes you start from scratch with every ranker. That is because the pseudo-mutagen doesn't get passed down through generations.

After all, therianthropy doesn't harmonize the human and beastly genes. The two distinct gene makeups of humans and beasts just get glued together through the use of a permanent spell instead of getting mixed.

The lack of harmony between the human and beastly genes is the reason behind why therianthropy falls short in paving the way for rankers to become demi-humans. It is a half-assed answer to something that is immensely phenomenal.

But I'm not heartbroken. Because I found something of immense value while exploring a nameless ranker's utopia. It was the skeleton of a human ranker with a bone density that was many times greater than the ordinary rankers.

We have run some tests now. And we are sure that it is the skeleton of an actual demi-human. Although we can't do much after that due to the ruined state of the skeleton, we are now sure that demi-humans exist. Or can exist. Because they had existed back then when history was yet to be made and redacted.

As long as we know that our hard work can get us the fruit we need, we are ready to bear the hard work.

If the establishments want us to stop pursuing the lost path, let them try!

**Chapter 190: Demi-Human?**

“If the establishments want us to stop from pursuing the lost path, let them try!

-JJ Edgar.”

Eren read till this entry and then closed the book to process what he had understood from it. Now he was sure that he was completely ignorant in his previous timeline.

Because he didn't know about the continent shaking events JJ Edgar person talked about in his journal. Neither was he aware of therianthropy and mutagen.

And he was certainly not aware that demi-humans existed for real once. He wanted to take whatever that was written in this journal with a pinch of salt, but the various explanations the journal gave to defend the writer's conjectures made sense to him.

‘Wait a minute. Fuuuuuuck! Am I a demi-human now?’

Eren had a sudden thought after reading Edgar's journal and couldn't help opening his eyes wide in surprise. He felt joy at first in succeeding in something that many high-ranked entities had failed in. But that joy was soon replaced with worry and concern for his well-being after he registered the possible repercussions.

As per the journal's explanations, all the big-league establishments spanning across the continent seemed to abhor demi-humans. Eren already had an active bounty placed on him as the Osan Woods Butcher. He didn't need to be a genius to know how the Edinburgh kingdom would react if it came to find out that Eren had succeeded in becoming a demi-human.

The most strange part about this whole scene was the fact that Eren wasn't aiming for anything even remotely related to becoming a demi-human.

“Breathe, Eren. breathe. Take deep breaths and calm the fu\*ck down. This is all just a conjecture. I need to look through the study materials carefully before making a well-educated guess.

For all I know, I might just be something else entirely. Something in between an anthrope and a demi-human.

Or maybe I'm still a human with abilities that are like the anthropes. I don't understand what took place that day. I never thought about the transformation I had after that uncalled-for fusion with Reen. But it looks like I need to look into it for real.”

Thought Eren to console himself. He denied being a demi-human, in the end, to assure himself that there wouldn't be another fresh manhunt launched on him.

Because if that manhunt takes place, it'd involve all the big players from the kingdom and possibilities outside it. He'd have to leave the academy, say goodbye to his future endeavours, and live under a rock all his life to keep his hide.

But then Eren had a melancholic thought that maybe he had used two lifetime's luck on that gem. With the way things seemed to go haywire for him despite his meticulous planning, he couldn't be sure that the same wouldn't happen in this case as well.

Eren smiled mirthlessly after he came to realize something. Things started to spiral out of control when Eren obtained Reen as his demon beast. It pointed to another possibility that he voiced to himself:

“Maybe Reen was the key someone big in the Edinburgh kingdom had made for themselves to turn into a demi-human behind everyone’s backs. If that is the case, then it would explain why they are looking high and low for my traces.

Reen was an investment they never wanted to come out in the public. It’d be a huge conspiracy if some big-shot fella in the royal court is found to be dabbling in taboo experiments that were deemed forbidden by all the known establishments on this continent.”

Another conjecture bomb went off in Eren’s head. He wasn’t sure on his hunch, but all the events and the information he had collected so far pointed to the same possibility. JJ Edgar’s journal had opened his eyes to various things that were hiding in plain sight for him.

But all his conjectures need to stay as conjectures. That’s because he didn’t have much information on a lot of things that were linked to these possibilities.

Therefore, Eren added another task to his to-do list: to know about the missing pieces of history of the entire continent that was dated back to 700 years or before. If what Edgar’s journal had written was considered to be true, then he knew that he wouldn’t find much in the academy’s library. But he wanted to try nonetheless.

Of course, Eren knew that he needed to act with even more prudence now. If he is a demi-human or the closest sample to being one, then death won’t be the worst thing his fate would have in store for him. He’d be kept like a guinea pig in some lab all his life with no way to escape or commit suicide at sight.

“\*Sigh. As if being the Osan Woods’ Butcher was not enough. Now I need to worry about even this shit.

I swear to the devil, if I find that buffoon who chose a low-level place like Osan Woods to perform their cultist-like experiments, I’ll fry their balls in boiling oil and make that person eat them with ketchup on top. Fuck!

Um... that is if they have balls and I have the power to pull this off.”

Eren was having a range of emotions in his head at the time. The demon beast connected mentally with him couldn’t help asking with a downcast voice after she saw what her master was going through:

“Erni, do you regret involving yourself with me?”

Eren had already gotten up from his bed by now. He was pacing around in his room, with hands behind his back while the storm of thoughts raged in his head. Reen was sitting by his bed in a young girl’s form when she asked that:

“Hmm? Where did that come from?”

Said Eren with puzzling expressions and paused his stride-in-loop. Reen had to clarify what she said:

“All your big problems and your pressing worries are related to me. Isn’t that a big enough reason for me to ask you that question?”

Said Reen with serious expressions on her face. But one could see a hint of worry and guilt hidden behind that seriousness.