

Vile 201

Chapter 201: Alephee

“Beast contract spell!”

Ivor said out aloud before a strong pulse of mana was generated all around him. Eren halted in his steps and chose to watch the show, lest his movements get affected by the series of F-Rank mana pulses setting off around his opponent.

Ivor’s skin started forming scales. The now-hardened scale patterns had a slight purple tinge over them. Ivor was now looking more like a snake man with his vertical pupils and convoluted mana signature.

That’s right. Ivor had formed a beast contract with the Purple Lightning snake. It seemed like a huge coincidence but Eren knew it was not. Because every close combat expert in a lightning element would have made the same choice for their beast contracts if they were in the same location and position as the students of LA.

Forming a beast contract with Purple Lightning Snake just made sense for the guys like Eren and Ivor who had almost similar specializations and requirements. Therefore, Eren was a little surprised by the fact that Ivor had a beast contract spell that he hadn’t used before. But he wasn’t surprised by his choice to form a contract with.

Eren’s eyes shined with cunning. Ivor was a suitable test subject to know about how much power and manifestation he should show when he makes use of Reen. In addition, he executes a faux beast contract spell. Osan Jr. had become a parameter on which he was intending to base his dummy spell’s effects.

‘Reen, pay close attention to this guy. You have to manifest features on me that are the same as him when he uses his beast contract spell.’

‘Alright!’

Eren informed Reen, who confirmed Eren’s order. It was going to be Reen who would take care of the dummy transformation for him after all. He needed her to stay in the loop.

Unaware of what Eren was thinking, Ivor who was totally in the zone, completed his spell-induced transformation and charged at his opponent. This time he was much faster and looked stronger than before.

The sudden spell-induced transformation stopped Ivor’s bleeding. His wounds showed signs of healing. The invisible mana layer over his skin got thickened and became semi-transparent. It radiated a faint white light that seemed to bounce off of his skin.

Ivor had initiated his attack as soon as his transformation was stabilized yet he still couldn’t catch Eren off guard like he thought he would. He had thought that this would be Eren’s first experience seeing a transcendent grade spell being cast.

After all, the spell cost crazy money. He didn’t think a guy like Eren would have that kind of stash on him even with his C-Rank healer for a guardian.

Eren had kept a low profile despite being one of the top-performing students in the academy. He sort of just blended right in among the students. So nobody was aware of all his trump cards. Because nobody had kept track of him or his activities.

Unlike Ken, Jason, and Ivor, there were no fans of Eren in the audience. Well, there was one: Ramy Richards. But he didn't count because he belonged to his team.

Therefore, nobody was aware Eren would have the beast contract spell too. Because nobody expected him to. This was what solidified Ivor's belief that he was stronger than Eren. Because he had his beast contract spell to rely on in case things started heading south for him.

"Aaaaargh!"

This was Eren's turn to grunt with pain as he was kicked in the chest by Ivor savagely. Using the beast transformation spell would highlight the stats and characteristics of the beast related to the contract. So forming a forced contract with the Purple Lightning spell had given Eren's assaulter elevated levels of agility, even when the effects were deemed temporary.

This effect along with his overall increased body stats made it easy for Ivor to breach Eren's defences while staying nimble on his feet to avoid counterattack. It was now Eren's turn to get thrashed around. And that's what Ivor did with his opponent.

'Those who inflict pain must have the courage to bear it as well.'

Eren thought while he was being beaten black and blue by a close combat expert like him. He didn't flinch from the pain despite all those injuries. Although his mind was occupied with observing his opponent, he felt disconnected from everything else.

'Erni, I think I got it. No need to get beaten up anymore.

Use the faux beast contact spell. I'll raise your body stats to a sufficient degree so that you can beat this bitch up.'

Reen was worried about her master's safety so she made that announcement. But Eren knew she only wanted him to stop getting beaten up out of concern. She was also picking on his cuss words vocabulary it seemed.

But Eren didn't budge from his position. Ivor needed to show him all that he could do before Eren decided to change the game.

But simply getting beaten up wasn't enough to make Ivor reveal all his potential. And Eren didn't have anything else that could work on the guy apart from the faux beast contract spell. Except...

'Gem, are you awake?'

The question was asked in Eren's mind to no one in particular. He was hoping the gem would answer his call. Otherwise, he'd have to resort to using the faux beast contract spell to make a comeback.

Eren and Ivor both had retracted their weapons this time. They were both bleeding and had multiple cuts all over their bodies. By deploying a mana layer on the wounds, they were suppressing bleeding.

Eren was even more prone to severe blood loss than Ivor. This is because the latter had used the beast contract spell and turned his skin into the scale to mitigate the effects of the cuts.

That's why it was mutually decided by them to not use weapons anymore. As a result, both of them agreed to continue their weaponless duel. By contrast, if any of them crossed a certain threshold of danger, the referee would force them to forfeit.

Eren waited for the gem to answer while he entered the defensive stance. He abandoned the attack and focused only on the counter. Only this way could he deal with Ivor. By minimizing his damage.

'I always knew I couldn't count on you. Reen, let's do this.'

Said Eren to himself and was about to execute his faux beast contract spell with Reen when he suddenly heard a voice in his head.

'Eren, don't be hasty. You can count on me. I was only reluctant because I would be put back to sleep if I helped you again.'

And... you can call me Alephee.'

=====

AN: In the Kabbalah origin, the name Aleph is symbolic of the universe's origin.

Chapter 202: Beast Manifestation

Alephee spoke up. The gem's voice turned feminine as soon as it decided to come out with its identity.

'Alephee. Alright. So tell me Alephee, can you help me? I don't care if you are put to sleep if you can help me. It's not like you can be of much use to me when you are awake.'

Eren gave Alephee a clear cut answer that would sound rude but Alephee knew he was speaking the truth. She sighed to herself before replying:

'Alright. I can help you with casting the combo of Sedated Perception and Stunning Speed. I can augment the effect of the combo spell but it would be limited by what your body and mind can handle at the current level.'

'That is enough. I'll take care of the rest.'

Eren said to Alephee as he wiped the blood clean from the corner of his mouth with his palms. It was time for Eren to return the favour to Ivor for all the service he had done to him.

Sedated Perception + Stunning Speed

The same spell combo had been activated for Eren. but unlike before, this time it was handled by Alephee. That meant Eren could now cast up to three spells simultaneously without facing any repercussions.

Eren didn't tarry a moment longer and executed dual-stacked Blitz Steps. He felt as though he was moving faster than ever, even in a stagnated world.

Ivor had enjoyed beating a strong opponent like Eren. But he thought it was about the time he wrapped it up and helped Jason, lest he gets angry at him. But just when he decided to deal a final blow, he found out that he was underestimating his opponent all along.

Eren appeared right in front of the enemy close combat expert and decided to beat him up in his game. He first tried planting a punch under the guy's chin. And almost succeeded.

Eren's punch was blocked by Ivor's palm subconsciously. It was his experience as a close combat expert that served him well. Alas, experience alone couldn't help him bridge the distance between him and his opponent. This was because Alephee was on a different perception realm altogether, thanks to Alephee's elevation of combo spell effects.

Eren's punch was blocked by Ivor's palm so he used the elbow of the same hand to make a solid contact just below the guy's sternum. This counter couldn't be blocked by Ivor who was trying to deal with Eren's insane speed and reflexes with his sheer experience in close combat alone.

Before Ivor's body could react to the landed blow, Eren pulled the hand that had grabbed his first punch with his other hand. He yanked it hard enough, dislocating it from Ivor's shoulders.

"Aaaaaaargh!

Blitz Storm."

Ivor cried in pain. He then executed the lightning element AoE so Eren would be forced to retreat no matter what he did.

Two lightning element attacks from two rankers won't ever be the same just because they had the same elemental affinity. Every spell would carry its caster's mark. That was because every ranker had a different mana signature.

The elemental attacks that used ranker's mana carrying their mana signatures would bear the ranker's mark. So when the attacks would land on the opponent, the mark the spells carried would not match the one the recipient had. That conflict in mana signature would result in the elemental spells delivering their intended effect on their opponents even when they shared the same elemental affinity as the caster.

This was the reason Eren had decided to retreat even with his lightning element affinity. But thanks to his elevated perception, he was long outside the AoE's range just before it was finished getting cast.

Eren had also tried to interrupt Ivor's spell execution with his barrage of attacks from all directions. But Ivor had gritted his teeth and didn't stop his execution until it was done.

The butcher had to admit Ivor's drive to be the most successful in his generation wasn't to be scoffed at. The guy had talent, background, and determination to be the finest version of himself.

Ivor maintained his AoE spell and made a determined expression before saying out aloud:

"It seems I underestimated you, Eren Idril. Who would have thought the city of Osan would have not one but two talented individuals. But I learn from my mistakes, you know.

You want me to reveal all my cards it seems. So be it.

Beast manifestation!”

The tattoo on Ivor’s back of the palm shined with bright luminance before a huge semi-transparent cloud of mana was condensed in front of him. Ivor touched the cloud of mana with his tattooed palm. As soon he did that, the tattoo lines on his skin got dimmed and the cloud of mana started restructuring itself.

All this was happening when Ivor was standing in the middle of the Blitz Storm he was maintaining. Since the contracted beast’s mana body was formed under the influence of his spell, its body wouldn’t create a conflict with Ivor’s spells. This is because it had the same mana signature. That made the about-to-manifest beast immune to Ivor’s attacks and vice versa.

This was the reason Ivor could cast the beast manifestation while remaining inside the protection of his AoE spell. It didn’t take long for the beast’s mana body to get constructed. It was akin to the natural body of the purple lightning snake. Only that it was semi-transparent and looked a tiny bit taller than usual.

The crowd was awed by Ivor’s transcendent spell execution. It was the first time to hear about such a spell, much less see it being executed. Therefore, Ivor created new fans of his with that intimidating spell.

The newly manifested snake spiralled his body around his master’s in such a way that its body would be Ivor’s first line of defence from all angles. Only then did Ivor dispel his AoE to conserve his remaining mana.

Eren looked at Ivor and the snake who returned his cold gaze with hostile intention. Things were going to get messy again for Eren.

Chapter 203: Faux Beast Contract Spell

Eren looked at Ivor and the snake who returned his cold gaze with hostile intention. Things were going to get messy again for Eren.

But Eren wanted this. This was his prime chance to closely observe the effects of a genuine beast contract spell. He had told Reen to pay attention to his opponent’s every move and any minor details he leaked in front of them.

Reen obliged. Her C-Rank mana sense could be made discreet to lower-ranked entities if she wanted to be. She just needed to be wary of entities who were of the same ranker as her or higher.

Since no one of that rank was in the vicinity, she spread her mana sense across the entire battlefield, sharing its feedback with her owner.

Eren observed that Renita was huffing. She had tried her finest and had performed beyond what she could normally do in keeping Jason out of Eren’s way. But it was only a matter of time before she got either neutralized by her opponent or turned unconscious after overdrawing on mana.

Steve had joined Renita and was also trying his best to give Renita a breather every once in a while. She had already cast her AoE spell twice. She used her long-range mana bullets to keep the prodigy away from her and her teammate, if only barely.

Steve wasn't all that effective in dealing with Jason. He was helping Renita, yes. But he knew he would have been taken out by their opponent long ago had it not been Renita helping him with her cover fire.

But the duo was running on fumes while their opponent adopted mana conservation strategy. All Jason needed to do in dealing with those opponents was dodge and wait for them to run out of their mana.

It was not like Jason didn't try to leave the battle with Renita. The girl was very persistent with her attacks and thanks to her wind affinity, managed to keep up with his speed. Jason wasn't helpless against her. But he knew that a battle with her was going to waste his time.

So Jason tried to storm out of his duel with the ranger. But Renita wouldn't let him go. She had been instructed by Eren to keep the guy out. And she had decided to try her best to fulfil the expectation her crush had on her. So the battlemage was helpless. He could neither advance nor retreat.

Eren had made Alephee deactivate the spell combo after Ivor had executed his AoE. but he knew it was soon going to have to be activated again. That's because the ranker-beast duo was just about to attack him.

The purple snake attacked first. It slithered its way towards Eren in such a way that one could believe that it had flown towards its target. Eren made Alephee activate his time-element spell combo just when the snake was about to bite him with its long and sharp fangs.

The shape of the snake's fanger was as real as real could get. It was just that Eren could partially see through them. Observing the beast closely in the stagnated world, he and Reen observed its mana body and the way it responded.

'What do you think, Reen?'

Eren asked while changing positions so the snake would miss its target. Reen observed some more for a while before saying:

'We can give you an appearance that would state that you are using the beast contract spell. But we cannot do anything about the beast manifestation.

Mana bodies are one thing. I'm sure we can find a way to manifest it the way we see in front of us if we look hard enough. But we can't do anything with the soul that resides in the tattoo.

I kinda have an idea about how we can deal with the soul part. But I'll tell you that after the battle gets over. Let's concentrate on the battle for now.'

Reen commented and Eren focused on what was in front of him. The latter nodded at her opinion and got out of the snake's attack zone.

Eren knew fighting the beast was useless. It had a mana body that could generate endlessly as long as the caster's mana could support the consumption.

Eren needed to target the caster himself. As long as he could take care of him, the snake's mana body would dissipate on its own. So he prepared to launch his assault on Osan Jr as soon as he got out of the snake's attacking zone.

Eren triple-stacked Blitz Steps and approached his opponent. He started with his kick-work this time. His legs were already wrapped in lightning. But with triple stacking of the movement spell, the lightning streams looked like they had come alive, flying in every direction they could think of.

Ivor smiled at the incoming kick. Because unlike before, he could see and pursue his opponent's attacks just fine. That was because his body stats had risen as a result of the Beat Contract spell.

Plus, Ivor's time-element artefact was still working for him. That gave him the confidence and skill to deal with Eren's insane speed. He had to admit that Eren was better than him in executing lightning element spells. The reason he thought Eren was fighting normally was that he was dependent on his artefact.

Ivor didn't like there was a better lightning element user than him. He subconsciously wanted to harm Eren because of jealousy and envy.

Ivor acted on those thoughts. He used his artefacts to their limits and made Eren get off balance with his own footwork. Then aimed a punch at Eren's neck, targeting Eren's Adam's apple.

Eren was again shocked by how deep Ivor had hidden his trump cards, not unlike him. The guy had shown only a portion of his artefacts' full potential. He saved that effect to be used with his beast contract spell, giving him the much-needed edge he was looking for.

'Ok. That's enough to get a sense of how things are. Reen, prepare yourself.

Faux beast contract spell.'

Eren shouted in his head as he saw the fist drawing close on him.

Chapter 204: Concede

'Ok. That's enough to get a sense of how things are. Reen, prepare yourself.

Faux beast contract spell.'

Eren shouted in his head as he saw Ivor's fist drawing close to him. Reen started the job she was assigned to do and Eren's transformation started taking place.

Eren didn't expect the beast contract spell would elevate one's body stats to this level. Otherwise, he would have executed the beast-contract spell long ago.

Eren's transformation followed the same route Ivor's had. His skin had manifested scales that were nearly identical to the one Ivor had.

Eren somehow got out of the opponent's attacking zone for the time being. Then he used his buffed movement speed to create a distance between the ranker, his beast, and himself to complete the transformation.

Eren transformed a touch quicker than Ivor, which could be attributed to the former's mastery and compatibility with the spell. He too started looking like a snake-man clad in lightning.

Then there were his elevated body stats. Reen had done a fine job mimicking the effects of the beast contract spell. Because he knew she could have jumped overboard and boosted his body stats more

than the spell allowed for. But she didn't do that. Instead, she had chosen to keep it as real as it was possible.

'Your pet is quite capable of listening to your orders.'

Eren suddenly heard Alephee's remark on Reen doing her job well. But he ignored it. Because the snake and its master were drawing close.

The purple lightning snake was first to arrive.

Eren again dodged the snake's biting attack and decided to counter it with his attack. Ivor was running in his direction too. So he was the one to execute the Blitz Storm this time just as Ivor got within the range.

The AoE kicked off with Eren as the centre. The beast with mana body got the most brunt of it. Ivor was relatively safe but this was still a significant blow to him.

Eren finally decided to end the task of testing the beast contract spell's effect by getting serious with Ivor. he knew Alphee's buffs wouldn't last long. So he needed to wrap this battle soon.

The next couple of moments were kind of a blur for Ivor. That was because Eren had suddenly burst with exceptional power and control over his beast contract spell. It almost felt like he could be close to being an E-Ranker.

Eren returned every punch and blow he was dealt with. He too beat Osan Jr. to a sorry state before launching the Blitz Bolt over his face to finally neutralize him.

Eren had to admit Osan Jr. had a monstrous talent. It looked like Eren had an upper hand in the battle. And he did. After considering his battle history from his previous timeline, he was projected to win by a wide margin against the guy.

Yet Ivor Osan had closed the gap pretty well using his time and resources. Plus he had Isen Osan behind him backing him up. Not to forget the fact that Ivor was extremely talented.

Eren knew that he would have been long beaten to a pulp even if he had the same elevated perception of time he was feeling when dealing with Ivor. if he didn't have his experience, Eren knew Ivor would have come out on top even with all his buffs remaining active.

Ivor collapsed on the ground not long after Eren decided to end his battle. One could say that Ivor's agony that came with the realization of not being the leading lightning-element close combat expert of his generation would keep his mood foul for days on end.

But Ivor was not the only one who was neutralized by his opponent. There were sounds of another two bodies dropping on the ground. Eren looked in the direction of the sound and found out that his team's berserker and ranger had been finally neutralized by Jason.

Jason too looked at Eren and then all the unconscious bodies laying around the battle ring. If this was a real fight, Eren would have the most number of kills by now.

But that didn't prevent Jason from approaching the guy.

“You were as good as I thought you would be, Eren. However, if you kept swimming in the small pond, you would always remain an average nobody. Before we resume our battle again, I was wondering if we could chat for a while when the match gets over?”

Jason asked Eren with stoic expressions. But alas, a certain someone was in the mood to talk:

“We might meet, Jason. But that won’t be today. Let’s just get this shit over with.”

Jason heard Eren’s reply and sighed. The guy was still as slippery as an eel even now. The least he could do was show him that there was a sky above the sky.

Jason soon geared up another intensive battle. He prepared his mana circuits to cast his go-to spells. Eren made a statement just as he was about to attack. Not to him. But to the referee of the match.

“I wish to forfeit White Raven Crew’s win after my team’s active participation. The reason being is that I’m bloody, beaten, and exhausted.”

Eren said nonchalantly and then looked at Jason who was too stunned to reply anything. Almost half the people in the audience wanted to fight with him because of his exceptional performance and some guiding words he would offer sporadically to his opponents.

What Eren had said was an only half-truth. He was indeed bloody and beaten. But he could have still carried on with the match. Or at least tried to play another round with him.

‘I should just stay as far away as I can from this guy.’

Thought Eren as he started to walk towards unconscious Renita to check up on her. This was after the referee approved his request. This was the first time White Raven Crew had conceded a match of its initiative. And it would be it’s last as well.

Chapter 205: Masochist?

“Did I see that right? Did this Eren guy also have the Beast Contract Spell from the beginning?”

The match was over. But the audience’s discussion about what they had seen was not. One stunned guy asked his buddy standing nearby. The other guy was equally shocked by what he had just seen.

“I didn’t even know such a spell existed before. Why would that black hair guy take the beating from Ivor if he was so OP?”

The other guy couldn’t help asking. A third guy pitched in to comment.

“That Eren guy’s ranking matches always turn out to be like the one we just saw. He gets his ass handed to him by his opponents before he barely manages to score a win.”

This guy had seen more of Eren’s experiments-centric matches. The first guy who had heard this had a face that said he had some sort of realization:

“Oh! So he is a masochist.”

“Hey watch your tongue, big guy! Who gave you calling a masochist? Eren just likes to try new spell combos in his matches. He’ll beat everyone’s asses with everyone’s sweat if he decides to play seriously. You understand that?”

A certain auxiliary member of White Raven Crew decided to put his shadow leader’s case forward. The three guys looked at each other confusingly. Then they tried to recall what the guy had just said to them. They could barely decode what he had just said to them in their minds.

“My man, don’t eat your meals when it is piping hot. Look what it has done to you.”

The second guy said this to Ramy with a straight face. It seemed he really believed Ramy’s lisp was due to him eating his food eagerly while it was hot.

“Fu*ck you! This is how I’ve always talked. You are here to pick a bone with White Raven Crew, aren’t you? So be it. Let’s have a wanking match tomorrow. I’ll be sure to bust your balls at that time.”

Ramy felt angry. Not because he was called out for his lisp, not really. But he had to punish them for their comment on his idol anyway. Thankfully, Ana and Bel come to do the damage control:

“*Sigh. Ramy, how many times have we told you not to argue with random people? How will you silence the entire audience who has watched Eren’s matches till now? Let things slide sometimes.

Hi there, fellow students. Forgive our teammate’s rude remark. But yes, if you want to fight with us, it can be arranged. What will it be?”

Ana was smiling. And she looked cheerful while she highlighted Ramy’s challenge too. But the trio could not find that smile to be comforting. Then it realized White Raven Crew’s performance in the ranking match that took place just now.

Nobody sane would want to invest their Merps on a losing bet. So one of the guys quickly came forward to deny the challenge. And the matter was sorted there.

Ana was right, though. The entire crowd was abuzz with the performance that Ivor and Eren had shown just now while using the Beast Contract Spell. But then Eren had to just go ahead and call it quits right when things were beginning to get interesting.

That had turned the audience’s mood sour. And they vented their anger by trashing Eren for his weird fighting choices and cowardice. So Ana had to watch over Ramy, lest he runs his mouth off to every random student who makes any uncalled-for comment on Eren.

“Renita... Renita... wake up!”

Eren was feeling tired as well when he was trying to wake his team’s ranger up. Jason had made her overdraw on her mana, making her extremely exhausted. It resulted in her fainting as soon as her body couldn’t take it anymore.

“Ummmmmm! Eren, is that... you? You can’t stay a moment away from me... can you? Hehe!”

After drinking some recovery potions and Eren's multiple attempts to try to wake her up, Renita finally showed signs of gaining consciousness. But apparently, it was a slow process.

Eren smiled mirthlessly after he heard Renita's remark. He didn't try to correct her or get along with her dream-driven assumption. He just tried to wake her up for good.

"Why don't you stand up before I answer that. Renita, in case you've forgotten, we are still in the middle of the battle ring."

Eren had Renita's head on his lap. The caretaker had just handed him the vial of recovery potion and began to treat the other students who needed care. So the butcher had to take Renita's head rested on his lap before he administered the potion.

Renita processed what was being said to her slowly. Then she looked around. Then she realized she was resting on Eren's lap. Her cheeks turned red and her face showed unmasked awkwardness along with a slight bit of panic.

Renita tried to get up from her position so fast that her forehead was hit hard against Eren's chin. The guy who wanted to simply wake his team member up had come very close to losing the tip of his tongue with that act.

"Aaaaah! Sor... sorry Eren. My bad. And the... thanks for treating me. I... I am good now."

Eren caressed his chin that had just been assaulted by Renita's forehead. He looked at Renita and casually replied after he sighed a bit:

"All is fine if you are fine. Never mind that. Did you think about what I had said earlier regarding your spell?"

I prioritized waking you up because I'll soon meet with Adept Marla and Ace Almera after this. If you agree to my suggestion, we must inform your trainer by today so that she can get her schedule sorted."

Eren said while looking at Renita with an expectant gaze. He had decided to invest his newfound wealth into his teammates so that they can give him better returns in the long run. The suggestion that he had given to Renita was only a part of it.

Chapter 206: Ellora Ruins & Ranker's Utopia

"How are you, Erni? Do you miss me?"

Eren heard a familiar voice on his holo-call. He could see that the person was as cheerful and energetic as he remembered them to be.

The holo-call opened a spectral screen in front of Eren which showed a real-time image of Nina. it made the butcher flash a radiant smile as he replied casually in response:

"Of course, aunt Nina. Not a day passes by without me major-missing you. And I don't even have to ask you this question. Your call now and then tells me all that I need to know. Hehe!"

Eren replied to Nina with teasing expressions on his face. The latter puffed her cheeks while she made her dissatisfaction known:

“You seldom call me on your own. So I have to. And why does it sound like you take pride in the fact that I miss you more than you miss me? If anything, you should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Hahaha! I was merely pulling your leg, aunt Nina. Of course, you can call me anytime you want. My schedule won’t allow me to always pick them when you do. But I’ll be sure to call you back when I miss them.

I’m doing well. And I have even greater news to share with you.”

Eren expressed another reason for his happiness. Nina was excited for Eren too. She couldn’t help asking as soon as Eren finished delivering the news:

“Oh! A recluse like you can find joy in doing something. That’s news. Tell me what it is?”

“I wouldn’t call myself a recluse now. Hehe! I’m part of the team known as White Raven Crew, did you forget? The news I have is related to my plans related to potioneering.”

Eren flashed a knowing smile towards Nina. the latter could see in his eyes that it was something substantial. The C-Rank potioneer asked eagerly:

“Enough beating around the bushes, Erni. Tell me what it is?”

“Hehehe! You’d be surprised. I have become a disciple of a Master ranked potioneer Master Levine de Montmorency. She’ll soon start personally teaching me.”

Eren looked at Nina with an expression that screamed, “How cool am I?”. The healer was stunned for real before flashing a genuine smile of pride and happiness:

“That’s awesome news, Erni. I bet you’ll be even more successful than me in potioneering in the future as long as you don’t slack off.

So you were really interested in potioneering, huh? I thought your crush on me had more hand to play in you taking up optioneering than anything else. Hehe!”

Nina teased Eren a bit. But the guy didn’t shy away from admitting that fact either.

“You are right, aunt Nina. It started that way, yes. But now I’m genuinely looking to make a career in it.

I’ve never shied away from admitting that I like you and what you do in the first place. After all, you are a very special existence in my life.”

Eren fawned over Nina with his glib tongue. The latter was pleased and felt more secure than ever before. But her teasing didn’t end there just because Eren’s words worked on her:

“Little rat, you say that now. But tell me honestly, how many hookups have you had in the academy so far?”

Eren paused for a while and pondered over it. Then he started counting with his finger. That got Nina riled up:

“Are you a rat in heat? Girls in the academy have become too easy. Hmph! You’ll die of exhaustion, Erni.”

Eren burst into laughter after he heard that. He tried to make the misunderstanding go away that he had created himself:

“Relax, aunt Nina. I was just kidding with you. Moreover, what’s up with you? Where are you? I can see that you are not in the city of Osan, that’s for sure.”

Eren asked while looking behind aunt Nina. The holographic screen of the holo-call appeared very lifelike due to its clarity, which allowed the butcher to observe the ruins of some old buildings he could see behind Nina.

“Oh yes, Erni. I forgot to tell you. I decided to follow your advice and not stay in the city of Osan anymore. This is the final stage of the C-Rank, and my ranking technique has practically stopped working. I’ve decided to take the route of forced breakthrough.

Currently, I’m at the Ellora ruins just outside the Edinburgh kingdom. There’s been a rumour that some spatial distortions have been observed in the ruins.

As a result of everyone thinking the same thing, Ellora ruins have become active again with adventurer parties.

Rankers’ Utopia!

An explored ranker’s utopia gives rise to so many possibilities. Everyone is here to try their luck. And I’m one of them.

I’ve teamed up with some old associates of mine. Ellora ruins attract a lot of beast hordes from time to time. So many parties need to cooperate while also competing with each other.

It’s chaos out here. But I’m enjoying this thrill I’ve been missing for a long time. Hehe!”

Eren was shocked when Nina shared her latest update. From his past timeline, he had heard about Ellora ruins and the ranker’s utopia found there.

A ranker’s utopia was a separate personal dimension created by a Sage ranker from the past. This was just before they attempted to achieve a forced breakthrough at the end of their lifespan.

A Ranker’s Utopia, or just utopia, existed for the Sage rankers to choose their successors and carry on their mantle. It was designed for low-ranked entities that hadn’t progressed further in their ranking journeys.

A ranker’s utopia will test the brave adventurers who take up the challenge to explore it and everything that it has to offer. The separate dimension would spell doom and despair to the unlucky candidates. But it could turn out to be the one-way ticket to success for a few special or lucky rankers.

There had been a lot of cases of rankers getting lost and never being seen after they entered ranker’s utopia. In addition, there were a few incidents in which rankers who inherited the legacy of the utopia achieved unbridled success.

Chapter 207: Shamrock

Nina was trying to try her luck in the Ellora ruins. Utopias held many secrets within them. In the separate dimensions setup by Sage rankers, there were several ways for rankers to resume their ranking journey, bypassing their bottleneck. If they were lucky or talented enough to acquire them.

Nina wasn't behind her ranking journey in any way. It was just that progressing in the B-Rank was an extremely challenging and time-consuming process. It would make the ranker feel that they were not progressing in their ranks at all.

Forced breakthroughs were spontaneous. They didn't have normal limitations that would be placed on the ranker if they only limited themselves to practising ranking techniques. She believed that she should try her luck at forced breakthroughs instead of just following the standard routine.

"Aunt Nina, you don't need me to tell you that you should be careful in exploring ruins and any potential ranker's utopia if there is indeed one at that place. I'm sure you would take excellent care of yourself. Plus, your job as a healer is always at a relatively safer spot than the rest of your team.

Ranker's Utopia is suitable for those who are prudent enough to look for opportunities. So I won't try to dissuade you from what you are planning to do either.

But will you do something for me if I tell you? Without asking questions, that is?"

Eren suddenly asked with a face that said he was serious. Nina didn't know where the stoic shift came from. But she didn't mind giving in to Eren's simple demands anyway:

"What is it, Erni? Anything serious?"

Eren shook his head before answering:

"First you have to promise that you won't ask questions. Only then will I be able to tell you."

Nina heard this and felt a bit dubious about what Eren was trying to pull here. Yet her affection didn't allow her to say no to the guy:

"*Sigh. Alright, Erni. What is it? I might be needed somewhere else soon. So you need to wrap things up."

Eren nodded before saying what he had intended to say:

"I have a solid lead that says that one will find the entrance to the ranker's utopia right in the middle of a worn-out, dome-shaped construction at the northeastern side of the ruins known as Ajanta's Temple.

I don't have exact information about how to activate the mechanism to make the entrance appear. But this should be enough of a lead for you and your team to find out on your own.

Grab whatever you can from the ranker's utopia and get out of it as soon as you hear temple bells ringing in your ears. You don't wait for a second longer after you hear the bells. Be quick on your feet.

Can you do this for me?"

Nina was about to ask her question right after Eren finished. But by pressing his index finger against his lips, Eren reminded her of the promise she had made.

“I know you have a lot of questions. But let’s just say that I have found a reliable backer to help me with a few things. And he doesn’t want to make his association known.”

Eren used bullshittery to explain what he knew from the past timeline. That’s right. He had already known about there being a ranker’s utopia being discovered in the Ellora ruins. But that event was bound to happen some years from now on.

The news had spread through the kingdom and beyond. And a lot of high-level rankers had participated in exploring the separate dimension. Some died, while others who survived had brief bursts of fame and success.

Eren had heard that high-levelled rankers who had explored the utopia at that time had come up with an unwritten rule. It was to run for the exit as soon as they heard the bells getting rung throughout the dimension to avoid calamity on themselves.

Apart from this small bit of detail, the only other information that was leaked to the masses was the utopia’s entrance. All the other details had been kept away from the low-level rankers of that time. So Eren of that time had limited information.

Ranker’s utopia wasn’t an ordinary place to wander about. It was mainly explored by rankers of D-Rank prowess and above. Low-levelled rankers could also explore the utopia if it was made by the Sage creator taking them into account. But even in that event, the risks to low-level rankers were just higher.

That was the reason exploration of the ruins and utopias was limited to high-ranked entities. There were always low-ranker daredevils who would gamble on their luck. But most of them would end up missing, dead, or worse—traumatized for life.

“Erni, sometimes the mystique you maintain makes me worry about you. But it also has its charm, I won’t lie. Hehe!

It’s not that I don’t trust your wits. I do. Still, I also hope your backer isn’t leading you by the nose.

It seems you want me to explore the utopia in a hush-hush manner. But what should I say to my party?”

Nina didn’t take much time to agree with Eren. She only asked how he wanted her to deal with the whole thing:

“Simple. Tell them that someone who has explored the utopia before your visit has tipped you.

Also, don’t keep the information to yourself after you are done exploring. Sell it anonymously to multiple parties and earn profits from it. It should also help you cover your tracks after others get involved.

You’ll have a week to explore the utopia before the mystical sound of bells spreads across the entire dimension. That should be enough time for you to wrap things up for good.”

Eren said while scratching his chin. He also gave Nina a few more details that he could remember about Ellora’s utopia. With utmost focus, the healer listened to the butcher’s suggestions and was determined to follow them.

“You say you have limited information, Eren. But the kind of information you have, if it’s true, is the most crucial one that I and my party could use to our advantage. Although I don’t trust your backer, I trust you. So don’t worry. I’ll follow all your suggestions the way you want me to.

If there’s nothing else, I’ll be hanging up.”

Nina seemed to be in a hurry. Eren guessed her party was about to move from their resting place. He just flashed a sly smile after he heard Nina’s reply and asked with lewdness laced in his voice:

“Oh, there’s one more thing. What’s the colour today?”

It took a while for Nina to understand what Eren was asking her. She blushed a bit before speaking with confidence and tease:

“It’s a Shamrock coloured one with white stripes. Imagine that, little rat. I’ll cut the call now. Leave you alone for some self-help may be. Hehe!”

Nina cut the call giggling. It was about time she and her party made a move on Ellora’s Utopia.

Chapter 208: Eren vs. Ramy

“Are you ready, Ramy?”

Eren asked his auxiliary team member. The warm and breezy evening was as uneventful as usual. The team members had found some time from their busy schedule to practise their skills.

Eren was going to work on Ramy today. It’s been a few weeks since the White Raven Crew’s match with the Stormborns. Jason had tried to contact Eren again. But Eren delayed the talk for now saying he had too many things to take care of, which was a genuine reason all along.

Ramy had an untapped potential that Eren had seen when he fought the guy in this timeline. That’s why he decided to put his Merps to work on the guy.

Eren spent his Merps to get the guy some spells and resources that suited him. He also trained him by tweaking his close combat style a tiny bit. Now it was time for the butcher to test the returns on his investment.

“I am weady when you awe, Ewen!”

Ramy was excited. Or maybe the word excitement was an understatement. The guy had started worshipping Eren instead of fanboying him ever since Eren had put his time and resources to help him.

Of course, scrooge would never give things for free. He had told Ramy he needed to return the Merps he had invested in instalments. But the sound-element ranker didn’t see it as something unjustified. He had also decided in his mind that he would follow his idol’s rules about money and everything else and make them his own.

“Good. Now show me what you got.”

The other members of the White Raven Crew stopped their practices after hearing Eren’s command to start the battle. They too had seen their shadow leader training Ramy for all these days now. They wanted to know how much the auxiliary member of their team had improved.

Ramy nodded at Eren and turned serious. He knew the guy in front of him wouldn't forgive him if he showed him some half-assed performance. Eren might just stop all his efforts to train him altogether if his performance in this practice match wasn't satisfactory.

The Surreal Sound Sword spell was activated by Ramy. But the execution was a bit different than Ramy's last time. Instead of manifesting swords made of tangible sound waves, he was using the real sword. The sword just had the spell-induced sound waves running through it, making it vibrate a small amount and producing a distinct sharp-pitched sound. It was as if Ramy's sword was trying to sing in its language.

And instead of using the spell as a mid-range attack like the last time, Ramy was planning to use it as a close combat aid. These were suggestions given to him by Eren, enabling him to explore the potential of being a knight while keeping the core of his spells mostly unchanged.

Since it was only running sound waves through a real sword, the silent incantation didn't take long and was almost instantaneous. Ramy's mastery over his previous spells had improved too, making him able to cut the execution time while ensuring better output.

Eren drew his katars. The two ran at each other before their weapons finally clashed. And Eren immediately felt Ramy's drastic improvements.

Ramy's overall expertise hadn't changed much. But his opponents would dread entering a close combat battle with him. That was because his sword that had sound waves running through it would pass those waves through his opponent's weapon, making it vibrate uncontrollably.

But that was not all. Up close, the sound vibrations would also affect the opponent's reflexes as the sound waves would travel through the air and affect their auditory senses.

Ramy's opponent would get disorganized and their weapon control would go into disarray every time they made contact with Ramy and his sword. And this was just because of the change in the execution of one simple spell.

Eren wasn't immune to the silent debuffs applied by Ramy's spell either. In fact, he was still better off since his body and bones had been flexible because of his transformation. Had it been a normal ranker, they would have been debuffed even more.

The vibration caused him to lose his grip on his katars for a short moment. And that short moment was all it took for Ramy to parry and attack Eren. Now that he had the chance, he took advantage of his attack against the butcher.

One of Eren's Katars, Dicer's Left, was dropped by him. And his defence cracked. Ramy exploited it by holding Eren's left hand and running another series of sound waves through it.

Eren felt like his brain got fuzzy. His ears started ringing and his eyes could only see the world as some blurred holo-call displayed over a shaky spectral screen.

Ramy pressed on and followed his attack with another swing of his sword now that he had caught his opponent and idol in a groggy state. The sword was about to make contact with Eren's left side, which was defenceless because of the dropped weapon.

Alas, Ramy didn't know about Eren's transformation and his body's adaptability under external influences like this. The sound waves should have made it more difficult for Eren's muscles to function normally. His bones should have resonated with the sound waves, making his skeletal structure vibrate. As a result, the joints would be affected.

But Eren's body mitigated these effects because of its flexibility. It allowed the sound waves to pass through it without the muscles being adversely affected as a result.

Thanks to his transformation, Eren was able to wake up sooner than Ramy had anticipated. As soon as he regained his senses, he cast Seated Perception and Stunning Speed at the same time.

'It seems I underestimated the guy. He has potential.'

Eren thought as he saw Ramy moving in slow motion to attack him while he was in the stagnated world. The butcher knew he would have suffered a bit if he hadn't cast his time-element spells at this time.

Eren moved out of Ramy's range of attacks a little. He adjusted his stance in a way that he would be able to attack his opponent from the waist down, by crouching under the incoming sword.

Eren balled his fist and ran Blitz Bolt through it before making it land on Ramy's almost defenceless stomach. The butcher had shown a modicum of mercy on his teammate and controlled the lightning element spell's effect as well as the force behind his punch to make it easier for him to recover from the attack.

'Ramy Richards, you are doing well. But I'm too selfish, you know. I won't allow you to come out in a better light when you are fighting against me.'

Eren thought to himself as his punch hit the intended spot.

Chapter 209: OP Ramy?

'Ramy Richards, you are doing well. But I'm too selfish, you know. I won't allow you to come out in a better light when you are fighting against me.'

Eren thought to himself as his punch hit the intended spot.

But it seemed that Ramy was expecting this. Because he had already executed another sound-element spell on his body that would allow him to send invisible sound waves through his attacker's body at the point of contact.

The sound waves flowed through Eren's arms that he had used to punch Ramy. In the stagnated world, he could sense the sound waves vibrating his skin as they passed through his body. This caused his muscles to be unable to maintain the force they were backing the punch with.

'With such debuffs put in place, even hitting this guy is a sin now. Why do I suddenly feel like I've created a monster with an always-smiling face?'

Eren did not regret improving Ramy up for real. But he regretted the fact that he wasn't completely immune to the guy's effect despite having a transformed body. That would only mean Ramy's attacks would be even more effective on normal rankers. Which in turn could mean the sound-element knight getting more zealous towards him.

The punch finally showed its effect on Ramy who was now curling forward to deal with the blunt force's impact. But even with that natural reaction taking place, Ramy didn't forget to use his sword to swing at Eren.

Eren parried the sword with his katars easily. Due to his time element spell combo, he did not need to worry about the guy just experimenting with his newfound tuning.

Or so Eren thought!

Ramy's silent incantation was taking place right behind him. Eren could see the runic patterns getting printed in the air Ramy. The guy had been using silent casting ever since his match started with the butcher.

Eren didn't panic. Ramy's punch would cause him to be interrupted, and consequently, fail to cast his spell. Or at least that's what the butcher was hoping for.

But he had underestimated Ramy's resolution. The guy bit his lips and endured the pain caused by Eren's punch. Then the Blitz Bolt affected him. In addition, the opponent's lightning spell also helped him feel less pain at the point of contact due to its inherent stun effect. This resulted in him being able to endure the pain without breaking his spell execution.

Eren's onslaught continued in the stagnated world. Ramy endured all the punches and slashes, coordinating his counter and strengthening his defence over time.

It would have been easy for Eren if he had targeted Ram's vital spots. But he didn't do that. The butcher was trying to test his knight's potential in close range battle after all. It would defeat the purpose if the fight ended too quickly.

Ramy shouted to his heart's content after sustaining a barrage of attacks from Eren. His silence casting had been completed. He now had multiple sound swords levitating around him, ready for his beck and call.

The sound-element ranker didn't wait for the blurred opponent that was Eren to hit him some more. He willed some of the sound swords in front of him to attack the butcher while he kept some around himself to act as the first line of defence.

'Impressive. This guy can become more overpowered than me when fighting with multiple opponents.'

Eren cancelled his time-element spell combo and thought to himself. He realized that Ramy could tackle multiple opponents of the same rank simultaneously without losing his ground thanks to his unique battle style.

The surreal sound sword spell allowed him to manifest multiple swords made of compressed sound waves that would hum with a distinct sharp noise around him. These swords could be used for an attack as well as defence, making it easy for him to handle multiple enemies while ensuring his safety.

The line of swords Ramy used as a defence made it difficult for Eren to approach the guy. Plus, the swords he had used for the offence were easy to break. But there was a catch.

The swords were meant to be destroyed by Ramy's enemies. Once the sword is destroyed, there would be shockwaves of compressed sound waves getting spread in all directions. It was enough for the

opponent's auditory and other senses to be affected by the sound waves being emitted so close to oneself.

That's what happened with Eren. A sound sword would come his way, and he would try to parry it. But even with his most efficient parry move, the said sound sword would then just detonate right after the point of contact with Eren's katars.

The sound waves would travel through Eren's weapons and wreak havoc inside his body starting from the hands he was using to hold his weapons. It would also affect his senses, making it easy for other sound swords to approach and surround him.

The biggest advantage of silent incantation was the fact that it wasn't entirely dependent on the caster's mana. While maintaining the caster's mana consumption under control, it could tap into the surroundings' mana and enable them to get more out of their spells.

The disadvantage of silent incantations having longer casting time was already taken care of by Ramy's fine-tuned battle style. And he didn't forget to maximise his advantages as well. Whenever a sound sword would get destroyed, he would just manifest two more to take its place.

As a result, Eren was soon surrounded by an array of sound swords aiming at him. The butcher didn't panic. He straightened up his back and looked at Ramy with a smile:

"You have improved quite well, Ramy. I must give you that. But there are a few things you need to learn as well."

Ramy felt like he had achieved something monumental after hearing praises from Eren. he knew Eren was kinda going easy on him. But he also knew the guy wasn't a type to praise someone just like that.

"What is it, Ewen? What do I need to do to improve?"

"Well for starters, don't give your enemy a chance to talk mid-battle."

Ramy heard a voice behind his ears and then his legs became limp. He fell to his knees while still looking at Eren in front of him, which soon turned out to be his afterimage.

Chapter 210: Healing Magic 01

"Well for starters, don't give your enemy a chance to talk mid-battle."

Ramy heard a voice behind his ears and then his legs became limp. He fell to his knees while still looking at Eren in front of him, which soon turned out to be his afterimage.

Eren could have knocked Ramy out. But he settled for breaking the guy's stance with his lightning-powered punch. This time, Eren also sent Blitz Bolt through Ramy's body the way he sent his sound way through his.

Due to this, both were about to fail their spells. But Ramy had to give in first because Eren's transformation allowed him to sustain Ramy's debuff on him for longer.

Plus, Eren's BTP value was higher than his teammate. In the brief stalemate they experienced, Ramy broke first, causing him to suffer the fate of being defeated.

“That wasn’t cool, Ewen. You say not let youw enemy talk, and yet you talked with me youwself.”

Ramy said while grabbing Eren’s hand that the latter had offered to make him get up from the ground. The butcher shrugged his shoulders before saying:

“I meant not to let your opponent talk when you have all the advantages or have them cornered. I didn’t say don’t engage with your enemies yourself. You should, when you want to buy time.”

Eren said and started walking towards his other teammates who were standing at a distance from them. Ramy followed him behind while asking him for some more tips:

“Ewen, is thewe anything else I need to impwove on?”

Eren didn’t look back after hearing Ramy’s question. He scratched his chin and pondered a bit before saying:

“Your silent incantation takes time. Instead of suffering in silence, it would do you better if you followed your earlier strategy of buying time with, let’s say, your intriguing usage of words.

Your swordplay needs a lot of work too. But even with your shoddy skill, it has allowed you to defend yourself while the silent incantation takes effect. With enough mastery and efficient spell use, it could turn out to be your biggest advantage in future.”

Eren said and beckoned at Ana to come forward with his index finger. The healer did as she was asked, a bit tensed by the test she was soon going to undertake.

Eren had gathered his team to test the skills of his other team members that hadn’t participated in the team’s matches much. Among the trio, Ramy was the first to be tested. Ana was the next.

“Ana, are you ready? Don’t worry. For today, just your healing skills will be tested. You haven’t even practised combat arts. So there’s no use testing that. Because you would suck at it.”

Eren gave it to Ana straight without mincing his words. Eren’s first half of his speech made her feel happy. As long as she could put her healing skills to the test and nothing else, she was pretty confident. But it was the latter part of his speech that made her upset a bit.

But the butcher didn’t pay attention to Ana’s puffed cheeks and carried on:

“Ramy, come forward. Ana, heal this guy. I’ve given him a few blunt injuries as well as some katar wounds just for this test. Treat them all.”

Ana looked at Ramy as if he was some poor beggar. Eren had used him as a guinea pig to test Ana’s skill. But the guy himself wasn’t bothered by Eren’s treatment of him at all. It only made sense in Ramy’s head that Eren would be this efficient with all that he does.

Ana was a wood element user. Her healing spells augmented the effectiveness of her elemental affinity. As a result, she was able to heal most normal injuries in a jiffy without expending much mana.

Ana walked up to Ramy and looked at his injuries at close range. Then she retrieved a seed from her storage space and dropped it on the ground.

Ana then executed her spell, Beanstalk Betterment, which made the seed she had just dropped take roots in the ground and sprout with super accelerated speed. The seed soon turned into a healthy-looking, lush green plant, which was twice Ramy's height. It exuded freshness and vitality. It also dispersed a mild pleasant aroma in the air, calming the spectators' senses.

Under the guidance of Ana's mana sense, the tree had its vines wrapped around Ramy's limbs. The vines found their mark which was all the injuries on Ram's body and started working on them by dispersing healing magic.

Ramy felt like all his injuries were getting anaesthetized because of the cooling effect the vines had on his skin upon the point of contact. The cooling effect soon seeped deeper into Ramy's body, reaching into his internal organs and healing his blunt force injuries.

Once the internal injuries had been taken care of, Ana focused on treating the katar wound on Ramy's body. The cuts weren't deep enough. So it became easier for her to close them quickly.

Ramy was fine a few moments after Ana's spell was executed. Ramy was satisfied with what he had experienced so far. But Eren wasn't. He needed more.

"Ana, please recover his mana as well."

Eren requested Ana as if it were a command. This was Ana's real test. Recovering your mana passively or with your ranking technique was one thing. But recovering it for someone else was something else. It required the expertise of a healer.

Ana recovered another of her plant seeds from her storage and followed the same procedure. The plant that popped up this time had the same height as the previous one. But instead of being pure green, the leaves of the tree were azure in colour.

The azure tree didn't have any vines. Instead, it had flowers with buds of pollen packed in their centre. Under Ana's mana sense guidance, the pollens were dispersed all around Ramy. they were dissolved into his skin right after they came in contact.

The mana core in Ramy's body was revolving rapidly as it was refilled with its depleted mana. This time, the process lasted even shorter, allowing the knight to reach the peak of his status in no time.