

Vile 251

Chapter 251 - [Bonus] The Legend Of The Boar Berserker 01

The boars in the lead were only a few steps away from their now-panting target when they lost their lives. Becky had overexerted herself while running stacked AoEs.

She could have used normal spells to take care of both the boars that were approaching her. That would have been a more mana-efficient choice.

But the mage wanted to show off a bit. She wanted Eren and everyone in the team to see her in a better light. Subconsciously, she hoped Steve, Renita, and the rest to pay her the same amount of respect they did to Eren.

'Haah! I hope that guy saw what I have done here and will let me cast my spells more from now on.'

Becky thought and sat down on the ground that had been covered with blue fire, which was diminishing with each passing moment. The boars' stiff bodies plopped one after the other.

'I wonder how Steve is doing'

Becky thought and looked in another direction which was assigned to the team's official berserker.

"Earth Armor!"

Steve yelled out the name of his spell as he saw a group of Earth Suidae approaching him. For some reason, he was excited. He felt like these boars and he were so much alike.

First, they had the same elemental affinity. Second, their spells also made them use their element to form armours around their bodies, just like him. Lastly, these beasts represented the path of a berserker at its core; controlled aggressiveness and undying tenacity to win over their opponents at any cost.

Steve had decided that he would work hard and take up any solo Besanc missions he could find and complete them in his free time. With enough Merps, he can buy the beast contract spell Eren was using and form a contract with one of these Earth Suidae one day.

Steve was left to man this alone by Eren. He had realized that the butcher showed confidence in his ability to handle the beast by doing this. So he didn't want things to end on a disappointing note.

Steve also realized that Eren had done this due to the similar elemental affinity and defensive spells he and the beasts shared. It would be easy for the berserker to stall for time with his defensive spell. Steve's teammates could then help him deal with the beasts assigned to him after they had handled their share of boars.

But the berserker in him knew this was his platform to truly test the mettle of his earth element spells. He rushed to the battlefield as soon as he saw his opponent.

"Earth Armor!"

Steve's limbs started getting covered in earth-element armour soon after he finished executing his defensive spell. Then he used his multi-use spell to launch himself in the air.

"Earth Spike"

As Steve was running towards his opponents, an earthen pillar-like spike of 12ft appeared immediately under his right foot. The speed of the earthen spike formation was so abrupt that it launched the berserker into the air.

Steve had adjusted the orientation of the spike's formation so that he would be launched forwards towards his approaching enemies. He flew in the air at an incredible speed— his black hair was blown back as it was pushed by the wind pressure.

Steve didn't mind his hair getting messed up. His heart was beating at a rapid pace when he saw the beast's hateful gazes following him as he flew towards them.

"Hahaha! Take this, Spike Armor!"

Steve combined his two spells and created a combo attack. His earthen-armoured limbs suddenly grew spikes over their outer surfaces. The berserker's flying trajectory began to descend in altitude as soon as he was ready with his combo.

"Bleeeeeergh!"

One of the boars cried in pain as soon as Steve's punch landed on its head, near its eyes. It had executed its defensive spell. But just like in Eren's case, it failed to protect the beast's eyes. And that became the spell's bane as one of Steve's earthen spikes lodged itself in the beast's eye socket.

The beast was still not dealt with, however. It tried to shake off its enemy by making exaggerated and wild moves. Steve felt like he was riding a wild bull in a drunken haze.

But the berserker knew what to do. His grip on the beast was soon about to be lost. And the beast still could see with its other eye, which remained fine even after his attack. Steve decided to change that.

He punched at the beast's remaining working eye with his spiked armour hand, while he was still on the beast's head. The beast cried in pain again and tried to shake Steve off its head with even more vigorous moves.

Steve decided to use the now-blind beast against its peers. He used his hands that had their spikes lodged in the beast's eyes and pulled them towards himself. It was the beast's subconscious way of diverting the pain it felt.

'Perfect. I can make use of this pork patty to take care of another of its kind.'

Steve thought and yanked his hands in another direction, towards a particular area. An area that was crowded with the other beasts in the group that were trying to observe the weird battle.

Earth Suidae would never harm another of their kind. And their enemy was currently riding one of their members. So they could only watch from the sidelines while making their dissatisfaction and anger towards their enemy known to him with their loud snorts.

But soon those snorting noises of anger turned into the snorts of panic and alarm. They saw Steve leading a blind member of their group toward them with threatening momentum.

"Blaaaaargh!"

"Bleurgh!"

"Bloooooor!"

The beasts tried to warn their blind members of their current position. But the beast was too much in pain and misery to listen to its peers' calls. So the boars that were waiting on the sidelines could only do one thing to get out of the situation.

Too bad for the beasts, Steve had predicted their retreat and prepared countermeasures.

Chapter 252 - The Legend Of The Boar Berserker 02

Too bad for the beasts, Steve had predicted their retreat and prepared countermeasures. He cast a stacked Earth Spike spell and made a series of spikes appear behind the beasts, blocking their retreat.

The beasts tried to run away by turning back. But they soon saw the crescent-shaped series of 12 feet earthen spikes blocking their escape from all directions. They were boxed in.

"Choo Choo, you sons of bitches. Haha!"

Steve said and directed the boar he was riding on onto the one that he guessed was the most dangerous among the beasts waiting on the sidelines. He stepped right foot onto the blind beast's head and pressed down hard while removing his spikes from its eye sockets. The berserker jumped in the air using the beast's head as a stepping platform.

The beast's head tilted downwards because of Steve's jump— its tusks were pointed right at the beast which was in front of it. The beast was busy trying to headbutt the spikes that had suddenly appeared and blocked its path. Using its tusk, it tried to destroy the obstacle.

But then it heard its peers' commotion and it turned back. The sight of the blind beast charging forth with its tusks pointed outwards was waiting for it. The beast tried to use its tusk as well to deflect the blow heading towards it. But alas, it was already too late.

The blind beast's tusks rammed right into the trapped beast's frontal torso after the two sets of tusks intermingled. The momentum of the blind beast was already too much for either of the beasts to come out unscathed.

But the blind beast's tusks made the situation even direr. The tusks first pushed the trapped beast backwards until it touched the spike that was located behind it.

The tusk's blunt force was enough for the trapped beast to feel pain despite its earthen armour spell. The force of the blunt impact penetrated the beast's armour and broke a few of its rib bones. The beast cried in agony.

But this resulted from the blunt force of the tusks. The blind beast's momentum hadn't been zeroed out yet. Its tusks pressed hard on the trapped beast's frontal torso and started cracking because it couldn't break the trapped beast's armour. The beast was already touching the spike from its rear end.

In response to the blunt force of equal magnitude, but of opposing vector, the tusks of the blind beast were cracked and were about to snap. But the first to show cracks and cracks were not the beast's white tusks.

It was the trapped beast's defensive spell that had broken first after its collision with the blind beast's tusks. The internal injury the former had suffered because of the latter's sudden collision was enough for the injured beast to dispel its armour.

The blind beast's tusks were digging into the flesh of the trapped beast now as a result of the armour spell getting dispersed. The latter's tusks which were pointed upwards now hit the former as well because of the sheer collision force. The two beasts crashed heavily onto the spike that was strategically placed behind them.

'Damn it. Their tusks are cracked on their surfaces. Hope Eren and Besanc don't mind them too much.'

Steve thought and cursed himself for pulling a stunt like this. It might look like the battle lasted quite a while. But in reality, only a few moments had passed. Steve watched the whole event from the air and regretted his reckless actions.

Every set of tusks provided a substantial amount of Merps for LA students. Steve was sure a miser like Eren would critique him and his actions. He thought this would end when he found out about what happened to not one but two of the boars' sets of tusks. Worst case, Eren would take a huge cut from his share of the mission as a form of compensation.

But the deed was already done. There was no benefit to be gained by crying over spilt milk. Steve could pull the same stunt again by targeting his next target the same way. But this time, he valued his potentially dwindling Merps' share more and decided to engage with the beasts in one of the most primal ways possible- punching.

The berserker retrieved his vial of berserker potion and drank it just before he landed on the ground. He threw the vial down and broke it before wiping the residual potion off of his lips.

Steve bolted towards the beast nearest to him as he felt the berserking potion's effects kicking in. His earth armour spell gained even more toughness and durability as a result.

Bam!

He avoided the beast's attack on time and punched it right in the torso from the side. The latter was pushed in the opposite direction because of that seemingly uncalled-for punch.

Steve had seen first-hand how the right amount of blunt force could allow it to breach the defensive spells. So he didn't hold back and started exerting more force in his technique-driven punches.

The other two boars wanted to intervene. But every time they tried, a bunch of spikes would get in between their charge.

Steve handled the multiple beasts excellently with his mid-range Earth Spikes spell backing his play. He used them to retreat in the air where the beasts couldn't touch him.

The White Raven's official berserker was on autopilot as he fought with the beasts. When he was done, the last of the three beasts had its defensive spell dispersed and its now-out-in-the-open body covered in blunt force injuries. This time Steve had made sure that the beasts' tusks were unharmed during his battle.

With the last potential threat dropping on the ground, the White Raven Crew's first mission was technically over. It only needed a clean-up now. And a post-mission pork feast to celebrate the team's feat was also due.

[Chapter 253 - Prattling & Pork Chops](#)

"Ewen, you wewe awesome as usual. You took cawe of that boaw, in what like a minute, right? *Sigh We wewen't so lucky. It's all Jake's fault..."

White Raven crew was having dinner in the Beast Sanctuary. There were huge chunks of pork roasting over a couple of campfires. The pieces roasted before the current ones were already served to the members.

The group was discussing its mission's highlights while enjoying a delicious meal and root beers. They drank root beer instead of potion-like ranked ales because they wanted to keep their heads straight in the middle of the forest.

"Listen here, you little sh*it. It was you who bolted towards the wild pork as soon as you got a glimpse of it. You'd be seriously injured if not dead if it wasn't for me or Ana.

Not only do you not thank us, but you also want to blame your mistakes on us? Steve, let's beat this guy's ass up."

Ramy tried to pin the blame on his team almost letting the F-Rank beast evolve into a full-blown menace on Jake. But Ramy's bullshit was too much for the tank. Thus, he proposed to Steve that he help him beat the team's sound knight.

"Oh, Jakey, you got that wong. I'm and will always be thankful to Ana. She has helped me a lot in this mission. It was a cewtain tank in ouw squad that didn't offew me suppowt when it was needed when I fiwst launched my attack.

We would have been done with ouw hunt sooner if it wasn't fow that small instance of uncoopewativeness."

Jake's face turned red in anger when he heard Ramy's blatant lies. He felt that the guy was becoming more and more like Eren in the art of bullshittery after following the latter's footsteps. However, unlike Eren's manipulative style, the sound knight's talk was aggravating to listen to.

Jake was going to get up from his seated position on the ground and grab Ramy up by the collar. But Eren spoke up before he had a chance to act on his intentions:

Jake, don't get your balls busted over Ramy's talks. I was looking at all your battles from my position. I must say, I'm impressed. The progress you have made over the past few months is exceptional.

Ramy, I hope you don't need me to tell you that you started with a reckless move and jeopardized the safety of your squad."

Eren said until here and then paused to observe Ramy's expression. The guy seemed guilty after being called out for his mistakes. His earlier instance of blaming Jake must have been his way to lighten the mood. The butcher thought to himself and continued:

"But give credits when credits are due. You bounced back from your mistake pretty well. And handled that about-to-evolve boar excellently.

Naturally, your element has a huge advantage over the boars. But the elemental spells the rankers use are a part of their individualities. So their strengths and weaknesses are carried by the rankers themselves. And so are the credits when they get efficiently used by them."

Eren looked over at Becky and spoke up:

"Becky, you did well."

The butcher concluded his comment on the team mage in just four words. Becky was infuriated in her mind after she heard Eren's concise response.

She knew he was doing this on purpose. Almost everyone in the team appreciated her AoE stacking, which she displayed splendidly in the mission. Except for the team's shadow leader himself.

"Steve, the stunt you pulled back then has cost us a sizable chunk of Merps. The appropriate amount of cut will have to be taken from your share of the mission rewards."

'I fu*cking knew it. Eren would even ask hookers for their money for sleeping with them.'

Steve sighed and nodded at Eren's decision. It's not like he had much of a choice anyway. But he heard the guy talk more about him:

Regardless of what we do with the damaged tusks, you handled the task with the proper amount of bravery and intelligence. As I said before, a berserker needn't be mindless when entering the berserk state.

As for the question you asked me. If you want to form a beast contract with Earth Suidae, I'd say go ahead. The beast is a good match for someone like you who is a berserker and a user of the earth element.

And if you want to borrow Merps to get the beast contract spell, hehe! You know whom to ask?"

Eren said and wolfed down another piece of pork chop. The whole team was now accustomed to the butcher's appetite, so they only paid attention to his words and not his actions while he was speaking to them.

'I'd rather commit a robbery, get the thing I want, and get punished for it than to ask you for another loan.'

Steve snorted after thinking like that. At least the chances of him escaping the consequences of the robbery were slim, but not zero. But Eren's loans were a debt trap.

Eren understood what Steve was thinking and told him that the loan amount would incur zero interest. After all, the spell was meant to power both the team's berserker and the whole team by extension.

White Raven's team members were all shocked when Eren let go of his claims of interest. Since all these months they had known him, this was one of the rare few times the butcher had shown them a slight bit of leniency.

Steve was put in a daze by Eren's offer. He was shaken up hard by Becky who then whispered in his ears that this might probably be Eren's last form of monetary help towards his team. So he has to take the butcher up on his offer.

Steve agreed to Eren's help immediately. the latter verbally marched forward after concluding on the berserker's issue:

"Speaking of spells. Jakey, your Hydro Whips spell is working so much better for you than I had expected. You need to keep on practising the spell until you can get absolute control over the whips.

Bel and Ana are effective in terms of their non-combat roles. But you guys need to work on developing your combat potential.

Anywho! You need to take up more missions like these in the coming days. I'll be gone for a few days. So rake in as many Merps as you can. We are going to need them in the future."

Eren said that after having his last pork chop for the day. He was content with the amount of food he had and his team's battle results so far.

Now it was time to take care of some of his pending tasks.

[Chapter 254 - Blackmail](#)

Arizihana Agnoth could be seen in her study, looking through some administrative documents. She had worn a simple and elegant white dress that highlighted her moderate curves.

Her waist-length hair was not tied. So the morning breeze that would enter through the wide window would caress her hair lightly and make its presence known.

She was about to wrap up her paperwork and get ready to start her regular petrol duties for the day. But her usual routine was hit by a pause when she received a sealed scroll from one of the subordinates under her.

The scroll was sealed by a runic line so she had to imbue it with her magic to get it unsealed.

'Meet me at Galvan cliff, just before the day sets in.'

The scroll only had these eleven words written inside it. But just before she could throw the scroll down thinking that it was from one of her admirers trying to confess to her most mysteriously, the mana she had imbued in the scroll came together and formed another set of words:

'I know you work for the cultists.'

The words disappeared along with the dissipating mana and the scroll contained only those eleven words again. Arizihana had a mini heart attack after reading those words. She clutched the scroll in her hand tightly and started thinking about who the person that had sent the scroll could be.

'Damn it. I took every precaution I could, but it still leaked out. It might not have been my fault though. Those damn Beast Bloods lunatics can't keep their mouths shut. If the beans have been spilt, it must be from their end.'

Ari concluded and fumed inside her head. But there was another point to consider that she had forgotten to register before:

'This person didn't rat me out to the city administration. That means they are either playing a guessing game with no conclusive proof or whatever they have on me isn't solid.

No. Wait, Ari. there's a third possibility. They know that it's you for sure and want to use it as leverage. Blackmail!'

Ari's grim face turned grim after she thought about the third possibility. She immediately got up and walked to her castle's basement. There was an encrypted communication array placed there which she would use occasionally to communicate with someone close to her who also happened to be a cultist.

"*Sigh. Ma Cheri, I remember telling you not to contact me during these days. I have been a bit busy, you see. Anyway, miss me already? Hehe."

A life-sized, flickering spectral image could be seen getting projected over the eye of the array that was located in Ari's castle basement. The words were spoken by this very spectral shadow that initially expressed displeasure at being contacted by Ari.

But later on, the spectral shadow seemed to have been glad that the latter had contacted her. One could say that the person this spectral shadow belonged to was very moody and fickle.

"Haah! I'm not here to soothe your ego, May. This is serious.

Remember the talk we had a few weeks ago? It has come to pass. Someone is trying to blackmail me today. I hope you can guess what they are planning to use against me."

Ari said this with a stoic face while folding her hands. She wasn't interested in the usual romance that would take place every time she called the spectral shadow. The soup she had found herself in demanded serious attention not only from her but also from May after all.

"Say what now? And wait, do you think it was because of us?"

May asked after getting shocked by the news Ari provided her. The spectral shadow pondered for a while before coming up with words to respond:

"You are right. Maybe it was us. The lower ranks shouldn't know your involvement with us. And the higher-ranked entities just don't care about you or me.

Hmm? Does that mean it is someone from the Beast Bloods' middle order? Damn it, I can't be sure."

The spectral shadow agreed to Ari's indirect way of saying all of it was Beast Bloods' fault. But it couldn't just zero in on a single person from a large pool of suspects. So it asked Ari about the recent turn of eve

But surprisingly, it was Ari who gave the spectral shadow another reason to worry about:

"Have you considered another possibility? That it's neither a slip-up from my end or your end but a third party all along?"

May grew quiet after listening to another of Ari's concerns. The spectral image stopped flickering and revealed the person's real identity it belonged to. This person happened to be a beautiful half-elf woman in her late twenties.

May asked Ari all the details she could think of about today's events. The latter told her about how she received a sealed scroll. She also showed the scroll to her along with the content it had.

"The sentence that describes your association dissipated into mana after you read it. Someone is trying to keep your association with the cultists intact. That's a good and bad thing at the same time.

Good because your identity would stay a secret in their hands as long as you did what they asked because we're not dealing with an amateur ex-Beast Bloods member like I thought we were.

Sigh. We won't gain anything from the scroll. It's an expensive E-Rank scroll so we know the person who used it is at least an E-Ranker. But that's all there is to it. The scroll itself is easy to get. We can't find shit through tracking the source of this document."

Ari stopped tapping her fingers on her folded arms as an act of impatience and voiced her displeasure:

"Duh! I know that already, May. I'm asking you what I should do now?"

Ari asked and started tapping her fingers again. She was trying to act impatient and angry. But May could understand that was just a defence mechanism to hide her fears.

The establishments were never known for their forgiveness towards cultists or someone who was proven to be linked to them. This held especially true for someone like Ari who was leading a battalion of city guards for the city of Silvermoon.

It could be said that Ari had not lost her head in a panic if she was still acting this normal. May thought that and sighed before answering Ari's question.

"What can we do anyway? Let's see who this fella is first. We'll think of something after your meeting with this blackmailer takes place.

And Ari, if you find that they are alone and the information they have on you is doubtful at best, then you know what to do."

Ari placed her right hand on the hilt of her sword hanging by the waist after hearing May's response. A killer intent suddenly emanated from her serious stance. She concluded May's line of thoughts in her head.

'Kill them!'

[Chapter 255 - Sticking To The Script](#)

"Nice to meet you, miss Arizihana Agnoth. How was your day?"

Ari was greeted by a deep and raspy voice when she reached the destination mentioned by the scroll. She maintained her silence and focused on the two people that were present in her vision.

A tall, dark, and broad-shouldered man could be seen standing at the precipice of the Galvan cliff. He was looking at the setting sun and moving clouds with a look of keen interest. He had spoken to her without looking at her as if the mundane part of nature was more significant in his eyes than her.

A petite young lady could also be seen standing near him with her head looking downwards, giving off the impression that she was his attendant. Standing near the tall man with his heavy presence, her appearance seemed unimportant.

Both the man and the young lady had worn masks with weird and eye-catching embroidery imprinted on them. It was the same kind of mask a well-known rogue named Tumko Darata from different parts of Edinburgh was known to be wearing.

People could tell from one look that the petite lady was the broad-shouldered man's subordinate. But that would be the case if they only consider what was visually unfolded in front of them.

Scanning their presences with mana sense would tell a different story though. Surprisingly, the man was an F-Ranker despite his heavy presence. And the young lady who looked to be inconsequential was a C-Rank entity. Arizihana was quite surprised by the contradiction.

But what surprised her, even more, was the fact that both the lady and the man had convoluted mana senses. Arizihana thought the duo was using an artefact. She tried to probe further with her mana sense but she was literally and metaphorically stopped in her tracks. The young lady lifted her face and looked the Agnoth scion in the eyes.

The young lady had elegant facial features. Her eyes were deep blue and had a certain charm in them. But when she looked at the approaching Arizihana, the latter got a different message in her psyche.

'This is a warning.'

Ari thought and retracted her mana sense. She was only in the vapour phase of D-Rank after all. That too with a potion-induced breakthrough. She will have to wait a while for her rank to stabilize and for her to advance. So a warning from a C-Rank entity wasn't something she could take lightly.

Ari was thinking of silencing her blackmailer forever if she could confirm that the leak wasn't spread further. But the presence of the C-Rank entity made her abandon that plan.

The scion of Agnoth stood a few meters away from the group. The man had already made an opening statement. He didn't seem interested in speaking again.

Arizihana played the mind game by refusing to answer his question. But her indirect methods seemed to have been in vain. Because the man didn't speak after that.

Ari's silly stunt came back to bite her in the ass. The silence was now putting pressure on her, the reason for that silence. She got frustrated and sighed in her head before speaking out loud:

"Err... Let's cut the casual talk, shall we? Who are you?"

Ari answered the man's question with a question of her own. The man didn't take long to turn around and finally face the elf, his target for blackmail. He nonchalantly stepped towards Ari and replied casually:

"You have never been blackmailed, have you, miss Arizihana. Allow me to give you a small introduction to the roles assigned to each of us in this small play we've got going here.

You as the one who is about to get blackmailed will answer all our questions to the extent of your ability and knowledge. That's the role assigned to you. You need to stick to your script.

We as blackmailers will keep our identities under wraps. That's because there's nothing wrong with our heads. We will not answer anything that can be traced back to our identities. Why do you think we wore these masks? Just because they look cute?"

'Hmph! Could have fooled me. And only you think that those hideous masks look cute.'

Ari thought in her head. She also thought that if she were to ever become a blackmailer or a cultist on the run, she wouldn't choose such eye-stinging masks for herself even if someone puts a mana gun on her head.

The broad-shouldered man came closer to her, looked at moderately curvaceous Arizihana with a sly glint in his eyes, and replied with a now-playful voice:

"Haha. You understood your role. That's good. Now let's restart our conversation, alright?"

Miss Arizihana, how was your day?"

Ari helplessly shook her head before speaking up:

"What do you think? Not pleasant, ever since I received your blackmail scroll."

The man chuckled and started walking to his subordinate. He folded his right arm, placed the elbow on her shoulders, and rested his head on his palm before replying:

"Yes! Blackmail. It indeed is blackmail.

But if you were to ask me personally, I wouldn't want our interaction to be labelled with that word. It has a negative connotation to it. And I don't like that. What we are about to have here is a simple form of exchange. Nothing too serious really.

You have three people under your care that we want to retrieve and liberate. Give us those three people and we will be out of your hair. Simple, right?"

'This is simple indeed.'

Ari had that thought. But what she said was completely different to what she was thinking:

"That depends. Don't play mysterious and give me clear-cut answers if they are not related to your identities. Who are these people and what are you planning to do with them?"

The man nodded in understanding and laid down what he wanted in front of the renowned elf hero of her city:

"Renar and his colleagues. The former Beast Bloods. We want to retrieve them. Give us those slaves and your secret stays a secret forever.

As for what will we do with them? Miss city protector, it's just as I said.. Stick to your script."

[Chapter 256 - Die Is Cast](#)

"As for what we will do with them? It's just as I said, Miss city protector. Stick to your script."

The broad-shouldered man instructed Ari in a cold, commanding tone while flashing a gracious smile. When he said this, a part of his mana signature fluctuated and his aura briefly erupted. Ari felt the chills in her bones when she sensed his signature that wasn't quite human.

'This guy is F-Rank? Some of these Anthrope cultists are a crazy bunch of degenerates with equally crazy techniques, I must say. Their heretic paths take them further away from who they once were. Sad and scary at the same time.'

Ari cleared her throat and spoke up:

"Al... alright. I understand. But I can't just hand them over right away. They are the city administration's property after all. I'll need to buy them from the administration and then I can..."

The broad-shouldered man shook his head in denial and said out loud:

"No, miss Arizihana. That'll take a long time and raise suspicion. Instead, you can make up a false Beast Bloods case related to their hideout and ask the city administration to lend Renar and his teammates to you.

Then your official report will say that you were attacked by Beast Bloods while investigating the case and Renar and his colleagues were killed in the ambush. This way, the city administration won't have to look for their human resource and the case will be closed then and there.

This is the way you'll do it. There will be no getting around it. Do we understand each other?"

'Damn it. There goes my plan to buy time.'

Ari cursed the broad-shouldered mind in her head but nodded at his instructions outwardly.

"Oh yes, we had four Beast Bloods with us as prisoners. But only three of them are serving the city as slaves. Do you want me to fetch that remaining member as well?"

Ari asked innocently. She sounded helpful, but the man laughed mockingly before answering:

"Miss Arizihana, you underestimate us. Do you think we didn't do our background check before contacting you? She's been taken as a legal slave. Bringing her into our fold will only raise our risks of being apprehended by the kingdom."

Ari had to try sabotaging the man's plans. But she sighed after seeing her silly trick getting caught by the man before nodding at him.

"Good. Rest assured, I'm not trying to stir up trouble, Arizihana. You'll find that I'm as easy-going as an innocent newborn lamb if things work out my way."

'Comparing yourself to a newborn lamb? You sure can lie as easily as you breathe, Mr Mask. Hehe!'

The broad-shouldered man could hear the petite lady's laughter and mockery in the back of his head. He just outwardly shrugged his shoulders before replying in the same telepathic manner he had heard the lady's voice:

'What? I said, "if things work out my way". Which is true if you think about it.'

"Um... Mister?"

The broad-shouldered man's telepathic conversation with the petite young lady was cut short by Ari's words:

"Oh, you can call me Mr Mask."

"Alright. Mr Mask, you are from the Beast Bloods, aren't you? It's fine if it's just these slaves that you want. But if you have any other schemes you are hatching right now, I'll remind you that my connections with the Beast Bloods aren't completely severed. Even if they've turned sour because of the recent events.

May... Errr... XXX will have to intervene in our exchange if you try to pull something I wasn't expecting in this deal. This is my warning to you. As you said, let's just stick to our scripts."

The broad-shouldered man's narrowed eyes suddenly exuded a cunning light when he heard Marie's name. This time, he didn't threaten back but just replied with a nod of his own.

"Alright. Let's finalize our plan then."

Ari said and started discussing the finer details about the plan. There were so many questions she wanted to ask the duo. For example: what was so special about Renar and his colleagues? And what use could they be to the man?

But she had come to realize that this man in front of her was not willing to share any information. So she thought of doing a thorough check on Renar and his colleagues herself before turning them over to the man. They might be able to help her approach the man from behind without him being aware of it.

Ari started to plot as she discussed a few things with the duo.

Ari wanted to include May in her mess from the get-go. But the latter was nowhere near her when this blackmail incident took place. So she decided to use her name as a deterrent.

Ari discussed and finalized the plan's details with the man. Any attempt at buying time or introducing loopholes was foiled by the man's wits. So she just gave up trying to outsmart him in the end.

A long time after Arizihana had left.

"Reen, the coast is clear, right?"

Eren asked Reen while he was in the form of the broad-shouldered man. He had shapeshifted into Ron Damien for a meeting with Arizihana. Reen had been there in the form of Elena.

"Yes. There's nobody following or tracking us as far as I can tell. This woman has kept the secret about her involvement with the cultists deep in her heart it seems. She doesn't trust anybody to have her back during this situation."

Eren agreed to Reen's line of thoughts and replied:

"It has turned into our advantage. Damn, I love messing with criminals. They just can't ask for help openly. Suits me just fine. Haha!

But hold on a moment. Who is this May? Or "err Marie" this woman was talking about? And why do I feel that I've heard that name before?"

Eren stroked his chin as he was walking away from his blackmail site. His colt was located at a distance from this place.

"Marie is the name your teacher Levine spoke about when she was telling you about her previous apprentice."

As she walked beside her master, Reen casually reminded him of this. The latter froze in his tracks and slapped his forehead after he remembered Levine's talk with him.

"Haah! If I am lucky again, then this would be Marla's sister. *Sigh. Let's hope she doesn't get involved in this mess."

Eren thought this out loud and followed after Reen who had gone ahead. The die had already been cast.. He might as well play the game to the best of his abilities to come on top in the end.

[Chapter 257 - Arthur's "Pet" Project](#)

There was a drawing of a huge array about a hundred meters across on barren open ground. There were plenty of stars shining in the sky above. But the array itself didn't need any starlight to make its presence known. That's because the runic inscriptions it was made of were exuding a distinct milky white light.

A middle-aged man was sitting atop a platform made of the inscribed stone, which was placed over the array eye. He had his eyes closed and was seen regulating his breathing in a particular pattern.

The man wasn't alone in his surroundings though. An older man in his 50s and a young woman waited outside the array for the ranker sitting atop the runic stone platform to finish his work.

"How long is this going to take, Sybill? We've been here for a few days now."

Cybill seemed to have been irked by the man-in-his-50s' comment. She looked at him annoyingly before replying:

"It was you that came to us asking for help, Arthur. A bit of patience can take you a long way. It's not easy for Garvin either, you know. What you are seeing right now is him working his ass off for the rewards you promised us.

I understand that you want to keep your mouth shut about it. But since you started asking questions, I might as well return the favour. What is your obsession with Osan Woods' Butcher anyway? Why are you going to such extensive lengths to find him?"

Garvin chuckled. But Cybill could tell the range of emotions Arthur was feeling right now wasn't anywhere near to joy. It was also his leaked out mana signature that attested to her womanly instincts.

"Hahaha! Let's just say he has stolen something that I worked on for years on end. I spent so many resources on that project of mine that half of my wealth has vanished. But I never tried to cut costs on it even once. It was meant to be inherited by my son, after all.

The guy turned all my efforts and plans to create something magnificent into shit. Why shouldn't I hunt him? I will take away from him what is rightfully mine.

If that is not possible, then I'll imprison his ass and make him my slave for the rest of his sorry life. I'll then kill him in the most painful way possible after taking away everything he snatched from me."

Arthur flashed a maniacal grin after he concluded what he was saying. This was the first time in a long time that he had expressed what he truly felt. He had been quiet about the whole thing for months now. Fuming from the insides.

Cybill's questions finally allowed Arthur to express what he truly felt about the Osan Woods' Butcher. And he felt rather satisfied after doing it. Like a huge boulder had been lifted off of his shoulders.

Arthur also knew that Garvin and Cybil were a trusted pair. They were the rankers who had dedicated their lives to the study of magic. In a way, he could relate to them. And trust them to keep this affair limited to them.

He had also been planning something monumental ever since he explored a certain Ranker's Purgatory. And this ambitious project of his had dragged him into the most fundamental studies of magic that no ordinary rankers had access to.

The years passed by. The more Arthur learned, the more he realized how little he knew about mana, magic, and the mysteries of the world he was living in. His exploration into that Ranker's Purgatory and the studies that followed had allowed him to see ranker's journey in a different light.

But that study also made Arthur realize that it was too late for him to change his path. For him to pursue the long-lost path of magic, he had to regress in his ranks and turn all his life's work to zero before he could go on.

It wasn't something Arthur was willing to do. He thought hard but finally decided against it. And yet he couldn't let what he had studied and found so far go to waste. So he came up with the plan to let his son take his place.

But all his plans were foiled by the wretched OWB. He had gathered into one single project all of Arthur's wishes, resources, and hard work. And the result of that project was obtained by a man who came out of nowhere.

And the most infuriating thing about the incident was that Arthur couldn't find the guy even after employing all his covert and overt tactics. He had used the kingdom's channels at his disposal to hunt the OWB officially, placing a hefty bounty on him.

Arthur's anti-OWB campaign had been working great. The latter had been linked with a lot of falsified crimes by now. Arthur labelled him a cultist without knowing anything about it to turn the public sentiments against the butcher.

Arthur had also put Jaime's panel on the task of finding Osan Woods's Butcher under the guise of the panel caring about their students' welfare. Plus, he had hired a lot of external help anonymously to get even a shred of a clue regarding the butcher's identity.

But all his efforts had yielded no results. The exceptional third-party rangers he had hired would go round and round in the Osan Woods following the butcher's trails and end up at the same place they started from.

The various leading historians he had hired only gave him vague descriptions about Osan Woods' butcher being a rankless entity and other minute details that didn't make sense.

Arthur spent restless days and sleepless nights trying to track and know about the butcher in any way he could. But the usual methods didn't seem to work.

Thus, Arthur had to seek the couple's help despite his initial reluctance. This was because Garvin and Cybill Karr were well-known figures in Edinburgh. And he wanted to keep his project away from the limelight if he could help it.

But Arthur was forced to realize something by the illusive butcher. The latter had a powerful backer. So his ruse to downplay his cards would be futile, no matter if he decides to use them or not.

So Arthur had to knock on Garvin's door and ask for help. The nerd was happy to do so under the condition of promising rewards, of course.

Arthur was furious and about to lose his shit after Garvin listed the things he wanted from him. But Garvin Karr, the genius array master, was his best bet to find or get a clue about the butcher's identity.

So he had to give in to Garvin's wishes in the end. This was what dragged him to the barren place. Now he was waiting patiently, or at least trying to wait patiently for the array master to fulfil his end of the promise.

[Chapter 258 - Preordained](#)

Arthur had to give in to Garvin's wishes in the end. This was what dragged him to the barren place. Now he was waiting patiently, or at least trying to wait patiently for the array master to fulfil his end of the promise.

Some more days passed by. Arthur came back to visit the couple again. Garvin was still at it again, meditating on the stone platform. Cybill came to greet him with two wine glasses. She offered him one while taking a sip from the other.

"I was wondering when you'll be back. Don't worry. Garvin shouldn't take long now."

Arthur nodded at Cybill and took the wine glass before asking:

"What is the true purpose of this array, Cybill? From its runic inscriptions, I can guess that it is related to guiding rankers to a state of epiphany. But I can't understand anything beyond that."

Cybill stirred the glass gently and took a whiff of the wine she was savouring before answering:

"To be honest, Arthur, I don't know much about arrays either apart from the basic stuff despite all these years living with the array maniac. But I'll tell you what I heard from my husband.

It is indeed an array that increases the chances of ranking entities entering the state of epiphany. Since it was initiated by us, it'll have most of the limitations and disadvantages of the forced state of epiphany.

Plus, the array also extends the amount of time one can stay in a state of epiphany without getting kicked out of it. Right now, that array has created an invisible cocoon of mana around my husband while forcing him to respond to his will.

Furthermore, I've also made Garvin consume a couple of potions I created myself to help him in this task. It should give us better results overall."

Arthur heard that and nodded before taking his first sip of the wine. He was pleasantly surprised by its taste. He chuckled before replying:

"Hahaha! Enough about the arrays. Let's talk about this wine.

This is indeed a high-quality counterfeit, Cybill. I feel like my almost stagnant understanding of the path has been galvanized again.

Even one of the most prominent potioners of Edinburgh, Cybill Karr, can't resist the temptation of trying to counterfeit elven ales. I don't know what the elves will say about it, but human rankers of our ranks will surely be happy and come out of their caves to celebrate.

I'm sorry for getting off-topic, Cybill. And you'd also have to forgive my lack of knowledge about anything related to potions. But why is it so hard for humans to concoct a potion that has the same effect as the elven ales?"

Cybill didn't like that Arthur called her wine brewing a counterfeit of elven ales. But she had to admit that it was true. She sighed deeply before replying:

"The study of mana is endless for researchers like us, Arthur. We are always curious and on our toes regarding the wonders that are yet to be discovered.

But the more we learn about it, the more we understand that mana is not curious about most of us or our existence at all. It just sees us as parasites that are trying to leech the mana off and make it our own for our benefit and longer lifespan.

Something that wasn't preordained by nature to us."

Arthur shrugged his shoulders before stating what he felt:

"Isn't that a normal thing for rankers though? It should apply to all the rankers out there. Not just human rankers. If mana sees all living beings who absorb and make use of mana as parasites, then that evens out the field for all of us.

If everybody is special, then nobody is."

Cybill had her eyes fixated on her husband. She observed his condition with all her senses while having a conversation with Arthur.

She replied to Arthur after checking everything was still alright about Garvin and he was fine:

"What I have learned after dedicating my entire life to the art of potioning is that the world's mana loves entities that are in sync with their base nature.

We humans like to think a lot. I mean a lot. The wheels inside our heads are always churning. Some of us might even take pride in that. We define our behaviours by social norms. And in doing that, we prevent ourselves from understanding our true nature.

Hehe! Maybe humans' base nature is that they'll always try to run away from their real selves."

Arthur had a blank face after hearing Cybill's roundabout reply. The former understood that her philosophies had slipped over the guy's head so she chuckled again and summed it up for him:

"What I'm trying to say here Arthur is that we humans add too much of our consciousness in everything we do. Whether it's array inscription, potioning, artefact crafting, or any other mana-related field, the jobs related to those fields require us to hone our consciousness.

Conscious efforts like those help turn more of our kind into experts in our fields. But those same conscious efforts prevent us from becoming true maestros.

*Gulp

Do you understand what I'm trying to say here?"

After she finished her explanation and the drink, Cybill asked Arthur. The latter nodded before adding on:

"I do indeed. There are more human experts in every known field than the other races if the sample size is restricted to let's say 100 random rankers. But the number drops down drastically if we were to only consider the geniuses of any given field.

I still don't get one thing though. Even if we do have a low number of geniuses in our fields, at least a few of them should be able to pull off the feats geniuses from other races have. We can even use those other-racial-geniuses and THEIR works as references. So what's stopping us human rankers from doing something as easy as making a damn ale?"

Cybill looked at Arthur with a hint of anger in her eyes. She wanted to rebuke him because he had just insulted her, her husband, and every other human genius with his speech.

But she later pitied his lack of knowledge despite being a successful ranker himself. Her anger vanished after that.

'Cybill, you don't get angry with men who know nothing.'

Cybill self-restrained herself before trying to reason with Arthur.

[Chapter 259 - Halflings](#)

'Cybill, you don't get angry at men who know nothing.'

Cybill self-restrained herself before trying to reason with Arthur:

"Arthur, you need to understand this. Our extreme sense of existence taints our mana sense and mana signature. Because we employ our mana in our fields, the results we obtain are also tainted by that. The more we have that taint, the more inferior the quality of every ranking item we craft for ourselves.

And it applies to lower-ranked humans as well as those who have progressed much further in their ranking journey. I would even go so far as to say that human rankers become more arrogant of themselves as they progress further in their ranks."

After she said that, Cybill glanced at Arthur to see if he got her meaning. The latter simply maintained a poker face, giving her no clue that he got it. So she verbally marched on before Arthur could ask:

"The world's mana doesn't like a part of itself to be forcefully snatched by the masses of giant egos. It wants the mana to be as pure as before we intercepted it.

There is a direct correlation between the way of the elements and the state of epiphany. You can only start walking on the path of your element once the world's mana gives you the rights and direction to do so.

In contrast, when a human subconsciously interacts with the world's mana during their epiphanies, their egos prevent them from believing everything the mana has to say to them. We just can't help it even if we decide to not do so before the state of epiphany hits us."

Arthur wasn't a genius researcher like Garvin and Cybill Karr. And he wasn't that knowledgeable about the in and out of their respective fields either. But he finally gained something from the potioneer's explanation:

"You mean you need to enter the state of epiphany to make something like the elven ale? That would make elves monsters, wouldn't it? I mean look at the amount of ale getting sold throughout the kingdom.

I know it's still rare and limited in quantity, but the amount is still large enough to scare most humans who know what that condition implies about ale brewing. If the elves can enter the state of epiphany that easily and that often, they can use that state to progress further in their ranking journey as well.

And yet, we don't see that many high-ranked entities in the elven race if we consider how easy it is for them to enter the state of epiphany. At least not on the surface. Why is that?"

Cybill shook her head after hearing Arthur's discussion and replied patiently:

"I can't answer that on behalf of all the Faeruns, Arthur. And I can't say how their ale brewing or their practice of honing their elements work either.

The fact is, though, that their way of life, their freedom to do whatever they wish and seeking out various experiences are crucial in their ranking journey.

Those experiences and expressions of freedom become their mediators and help them in communicating with the world's mana when the state of epiphany finally hits them. That is something we can only emulate on a cosmetic level.

Most of us humans will have strong beliefs and opinions about everything we find worthy of our time and resources. This is how we've been designed.

While most elves can see something miraculous in the most mundane of things. They'll wear their hearts on their sleeves around you if they trust you.

So if and when the state of epiphany hits them, the elves can get the most out of it. Their hearts are open to the path suggested by the world's mana, regardless of how contrasting it sounds.

This all happens subconsciously of course. Neither the elves nor we humans can consciously make our decisions while our psyches are suspended in that ethereal state.

And neither of us can influence the mana to tell us exactly what we want to know. That's why I said it all comes down to the most fundamental nature of all living things."

It seemed that Arthur had gained some insight, as he agreed with the potioneer's patient explanations. And that understanding made him a bit reluctant to come to terms with it:

"That would mean humans will always stay one step behind elves and other races that excel in their fields of expertise? Is there no way around it?"

Cybill checked out her husband's condition and replied to Arthur without looking at him:

"I'm not aware of any such thing officially existing. Early researchers thought halflings would be the key to understanding and maximizing the benefits of the state of epiphany by developing ranking techniques based on their constitutions. But they dropped the idea as soon as it came out.

Let's take a child between a human and an elf for example. That child, whether it be called half-human or half-elf depending upon its appearance, will carry the shortcomings of both its parents in most cases. First of all, it will never be able to talk with the mana the way elves do because it is half-human.

In addition, it won't get better in its field even if it studies it diligently as it's not completely human either."

Arthur knew halflings were considered worthless by pure-blooded rankers of all the races. But he didn't seem to understand the reason behind it. So Cybill took a long sigh and elaborated further:

"The reason I say this is because a human way of crafting ranking items depends on our ability to either consciously or subconsciously blend our consciousness into our mana signature. All our recipes and crafting techniques take our mana signature into account.

Of course, it taints the final products. But that is something we can manage and make peace with.

But a halfling's mana signature drastically differs from that of a human. This anomaly is serious enough to make all of our recipes and techniques virtually useless to the half-elf ranker.

And since the halflings cannot hone their elements the same way elves can, the elven recipes and techniques also become equally useless to them. So a halfling suffers from both sides and has no real advantage over the races it was born from.

Halflings are not respected by either race because they are considered useless. Plus, they are rare to be born in the first place because the chances of their natural progeny are ridiculously low. So it seems nature and the world's mana also don't like their existence either."

From her storage, Cybill retrieved a vial of potion.. It seemed she was preparing for something after looking at her husband's condition.

[Chapter 260 - \[Bonus \] The Manhunt Resumes](#)

"So a halfling suffers from both sides and has no real advantage over the races it was born from."

From her storage, Cybill retrieved a vial of potion. It seemed she was preparing for something after looking at her husband's condition.

Arthur ignored Cybill's actions and asked her in a serious voice:

"Cybill, you started that whole explanation by saying you don't know any official way that exists to remedy our lack of natural talent in the way of the elements. So how much do you know about the "unofficial" way?

And how successful will it be based on your calculations?"

Cybil stopped looking at her husband and turned around. She narrowed her eyes on Arthur as if to discern something. Then she sighed before replying:

"You of all people shouldn't bring this subject up, Arthur. Do I need to remind you who you are?"

But as a researcher, I don't like to cover the truth with a cocoon of lies. Since it's you who asked me to talk about the forgotten history, I am bold enough to tell you what I know.

Yes. The very existence of demi-humans in the past was the answer researchers were looking for. They were said to have all the advantages of both races.

We both know from redacted documents about the history of this continent that the demi-humans were able to interact with the elements like the mana beasts. They did this by simply existing and developing the inherent spells related to their bloodlines. And they could also produce ranking items like humans, estimated to be better in quality than us.

Plus, they could practise their ranking techniques like humans to speed up their ranking journey even further. They broke through their ranks at terrifying speeds that would unbalance the natural order.

They were the real monsters that walked this earth once.

As for your last question. I believe turning into demi-humans would have mitigated humans' lack of expertise in the way of the elements.

I had heard the rumours that you were trying to learn more about demi-humans. Seems like those rumours were true.

I don't mind the curiosity, Arthur. Being a researcher in my field, I can even relate to it. But you need to understand this. The world works on an unseen equation that balances things out.

If there are so many benefits of turning into a demi-human, you can bet your ass that it would have equally terrifying repercussions.

The demi-humans are the abominations of this world.

So I hope you don't go beyond satiating your curiosity and bring trouble to all of us."

Arthur hmped at Cybill's warning before replying in a plain tone:

"I know what I'm doing, Cybill. I was just trying to get your opinion on these things. Besides, you might want to turn back and see how your husband is doing. It seems something's happening to him."

Arthur pointed at where Garvin was sitting while he said that. Cybill dropped the whole subject right away and turned around.

She saw that Garvin's body spasmed and knew it was time. Her husband had warned this would happen so she was ready to remedy the situation with her potion as soon as things settled down.

The array's lights had started dimming before getting brighter than before. They followed Garvin's breathing pattern. And they immediately began exuding an erratic range of luminance once Garvin started spasming.

Garvin opened his eyes and mouth abruptly. His eyes and the insides of his mouth had also been lit up in the same light the array was exuding. But slowly things seemed to be settling down as the lights grew dimmer by the moment.

Arthur could now see that Garvin's eyes didn't have their iris at their usual places. They had been rolled backwards, making his eyes devoid of the usual features they had as only the white sclera was made visible.

Arthur's spasms stopped. But his skin started drying up at a rapid pace. He quickly turned into a living mummy before his eyes could get back to normal.

As soon as he was conscious of his surroundings and his conditions, he looked around and found his wife looking at him with concern while clutching the vial tightly. He nodded at her, telling her he was done and it was safe to approach him now.

The ground on which the array was drawn started turning into a mini drought land. It started cracking, resulting in the formation of numerous drought lines. But Cybill didn't care about what she was stepping upon. She quickly appeared in front of her husband, uncorked the vial, and helped him gulp down the content within it slowly.

Cybill's mastery of potion-making wasn't just for the show. The potion's effects kicked in and Garvin's mummified state started reversing back to normal. His body let out an unelementalized wave of mana as it started to regain its appearance before this phenomenon took place.

Garvin took a while to come to his senses. He assured her with his eyes and a pat on her hand that he was okay. Or as okay as he can be at the moment. The repercussions of using this array weren't over. But the real danger was past him. And his wife's concoction had helped him a lot.

Arthur didn't care about the couple's bonding time. He approached the duo and raised his eyebrow at Garvin. He was asking the array master subtly about what he had gained from the stunt he pulled just now in front of him.

Garvin didn't mind Arthur's rude behaviour. He knew he was going to get paid handsomely for all the work he had done for him. Especially when he had learned one of the most crucial clues about the Osan Woods' Butcher.

"*Cough cough. Honey, I'm fine. No need to worry. Arthur... *cough cough.

I hope you remember your promise and bring me all the things I've listed to you. *cough

Plus, I'm obligated to charge you extra for the damage to my mana core in the process. I'm sure a person of your calibre wouldn't mind.

But rejoice! Hahaha... *cough cough. I have found something crucial you can use in your manhunt."

Garvin coughed the whole way in his speech. But Arthur got his message loud and clear. He couldn't help flashing a cunning smile after he realized that the OWB manhunt can be resumed with a fresh lead.