

Vile 261

[Chapter 261 - Price To Pay](#)

"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.

But Arthur needed to know if the lead was solid or not. After all, he was about to pay the geek a hefty amount of resources for it. He wanted to make sure that it was well spent. So he asked to confirm:

"How sure are you about the lead, Garvin? How can we trust the leads generated by this array?"

Garvin looked at Arthur with a tinge of anger in his eyes. But he didn't speak immediately. Cybill helped him get up and snapped her fingers. The earth-element mana and the earth beneath were combined to create a medium-sized table and three chairs.

Cybill helped her husband sit on one of the chairs while she took the chair next to him. Arthur didn't need an invitation. He took the remaining chair and waited for the array master to tell him what he needed to hear.

Garvin returned to his normal condition when he drank the tea made by his pioneer wife. Only then did he look at Arthur in the eyes before replying:

"That array was not my creation, Arthur. According to the royal library where I got it, it came from one of the ranker's utopias, which is still kept a secret from the public's eyes. However, it was recovered long ago, so you probably aren't aware of it.

What this array does is enable the ranker to enter the forced state of epiphany. But if it had done only that, it wouldn't be all that different from the arrays we know of, would it?"

Arthur nodded his head while tapping his fingers on the surface of the table. He stopped his actions suddenly and guessed what Garvin was trying to say to him:

"You mean you have to pay a price for using this array? It was obvious from your condition anyway. Tell me, what's the catch?"

Garvin massaged his stiff shoulders with both his hands and continued his speech:

"As you might have guessed, the array keeps the ranker's mind from falling into the subconscious state. This very state is needed for rankers to be immersed in their epiphanies, forced or not.

But thanks to the activation of this array, you can still access your memories and recall your experiences while you are in the ethereal state. You know what that means right? It means instead of the world's mana solving your random doubts, you get to ask a set of specific questions to it."

Arthur's eyes opened wide in surprise after he heard what the array master was trying to say. Garvin verbally marched forward before Arthur could interrupt him

I must say that the person who created this array must have been a genius lunatic.

Lunatic because the guy only cared about the output of the array and not its aftereffects. It was almost like he wanted the rankers who use it to suffer consequences after they were done with it. There's no countermeasure to prevent that. I guess he wanted to balance things out before they got out of hand.

That means the array forces you to pay a heavy tax for your transgression with the world's mana when it senses that you were conscious while being in the ethereal state.

Your mana core gets damaged right after you leave the state. There are other repercussions as well that I don't want to mention. Basically, the higher your ranking status is, the greater the repercussions."

Understanding dawned on Arthur. He recalled the former demanding extra compensation for his damaged mana core.

"I'll pay you extra, don't worry. But you are not the man to pay that heavy a price just to complete my request, Garvin. You must have figured something out, I'm sure."

Garvin looked at his wife and smiled at her, indicating he was thankful for her:

"I didn't. It was Cybill who mitigated the effects of using the array with her doses of exquisite potions. My mana core still got damaged after using the array. I have been able to reduce the damage a great deal after she administered me her remedies before and after the procedure. I should be able to recover from these repercussions in a few months.

The world's mana and its all-encompassing higher consciousness don't know how to lie. My point is, you can trust the intel I've gained after facing these repercussions, for asking the questions that you wanted to know the answers about."

Arthur had to believe in Garvin after closely examining his condition. Only after he was assured did he ask him about the lead:

Garvin was a geek array master. But he was no pushover. He demanded he is paid first before he gave the lead to Arthur. The latter had a couple of creases on his forehead but he agreed to the guy's demands. He retrieved all the resources that he had promised him from his storage.

"Alright. Listen to this, Arthur. The lead I got is..."

He told Arthur what he had gained from the higher consciousness he had just talked with. Then he nodded at his wife who supported him in getting up. The couple soon left, leaving Arthur alone in his seat.

He soon had another visitor in the form of a completely black-clothed man who seemed to have appeared from thin air. His face had also been masked by the black mask. He bent the knee in front of Arthur and placed his right hand on his heart as if performing a salute.

"What should we do with this information, my lord?"

Arthur looked at the man and said out loud in a voice that was laced with his suppressed anger:

"What should we do? Hehe. We don't want to scare the guy or create any ruckus. We grab him as soon as we confirm that it's him using this lead.

Anyway, what about my son? Is he progressing the way we wanted him to? I would still want to proceed with our earlier plan if it's salvageable after capturing that thief."

Arthur narrowed his eyes and asked his servant. It seemed he was still hoping to continue with his project.

[Chapter 262 - Jason's Background](#)

"What about my son? Is he progressing the way we wanted him to? I would still want to proceed with our earlier plan if it's salvageable after capturing that thief."

Arthur narrowed his eyes and asked his servant. It seemed he was still hoping to continue with his project. The black-clothed man cleared his throat and replied:

"Well, we wanted him to focus more on his ranking journey. But it seems he is enjoying the publicity he is getting. So he is a bit busy bullying kids his age. But I'm sure that's just a phase that will pass sooner rather than later.

Jason is a smart kid for his age, my Lord. He'll soon see that ranking wars are nothing but a distraction for him."

Arthur nodded before asking in a grim voice:

"Hmm. That's good. Don't give too much credit to his wit, Oliver. He is indeed smart but doesn't know when or where to use it.

*Sigh. All in due time I guess. The hormones raging in his veins need to settle down to make him truly focused on his path. What about Isen's grandson? I had heard from you that he was no less talented than my kid."

Oliver pondered for a while trying to come up with words. But he reported his observations just the way he felt about them:

"Ivor Osan is more of a dark horse than I thought. He is growing at a tremendous pace as a ranker. We should consider inviting him under our fold."

Arthur shook his head and replied immediately:

"I would want to do it. But the man behind Ivor is a wolf in sheep's clothing. If Ivor can be influenced by me at a young age, he can surely be influenced by his grandfather as well.

Don't underestimate their relationship despite what the lad feels about his household or his dead brother. Blood is thicker than water, you know."

Oliver was silent after hearing his Lord's reply. The latter chuckled after understanding what his silence meant:

"Are you wondering why I sent my son to the city of Osan under Isen's care? One of the reasons was the project I ran in the Osan Woods. As soon as the project was finished, I wanted the kid on standby.

But it's also because I know Isen. Even if someone approached him from the shadows, he would never even think about harming my son.

Sometimes the devil you know is better than the devil you don't."

Oliver nodded at Arthur as he kept his head down. He gave a slight bowing gesture towards Arthur, got up, turned around, and was about to leave when he heard his lord's cold voice from behind him:

"Oliver, did any more petty attacks on Jason's life take place apart from the ones I know of?"

Oliver resumed his previous stance and replied slowly:

"No, my Lord. Um... the opposing force has stopped targeting Jason for quite a while now. Rest assured, we'll still be vigilant like always in protecting him to the full extent of our abilities."

Arthur laughed out loud when he heard Oliver's politically correct reply:

"Hahahaha! Opposing force you say, Oliver. That's my wife you are talking about. You know it. I know it. You can at least be honest with me when there's nobody around.

She thinks killing my talented bastard son would secure the future of the weak kids she has given me. Frankly, I want to punish her for the misadventures. But it can also serve as the reason Jason remains on his toes.

That pressure, that constant state of danger has contributed to his progress so far. I don't want him to get laid-back and lose focus anytime soon in his early years as a ranker."

As always, Oliver didn't reply to the comment. He waited patiently this time to get dismissed by Arthur. He didn't want to return to his kneeling position right after he got back on his feet again.

"Alright, alright. You can leave now. Make sure to tell Jason he'd need to prepare in case he needs to follow through with the project. Provide him with some resources so that he can go through another body cleansing.

And tell the Illuminati to speed up their operation too. That Ranker's Purgatory is a treasure trove. I still regret my choice to share its existence with them. Nevertheless, cultists are the best tools for this type of operation.

I've concluded that only a real demi-human can reap real rewards from that Purgatory. But I want to see how much the Anthropes can get from that place.

And keep an eye on the Illuminati too. Although we've worked with them before, cultists will always be cultists. They won't shy away from backstabbing us when the rewards from Purgatory are lucrative enough.

I don't want any mistakes this time. Clear-cut results, Oliver. Do you get it?"

"I understand my Lord. We'll make sure of that."

Arthur watched Oliver take his leave in silence. He remembered about Isen after his subject was inadvertently brought up. He had sheltered his son when Arthur asked if he was willing when they had met up at the royal court one day. That was the reason behind Jason staying in the city of Osan.

Later, Isen discovered what Arthur was doing in the in his backyard. Instead of directly demanding a bribe to keep his mouth shut, Isen just let him know the fact that he was aware. This was another political move he had played on him, letting him decide the bribe amount.

Arthur still didn't know if whatever he offered was enough for Isen. Or if he was angry at him for carrying out a dangerous experiment on his territory.

Arthur thought for a while and then shook his head. There was no point in dwelling on the past. In Purgatory, the real reward was waiting for him to grab it. He wouldn't let it go away, no matter what.

With a million thoughts running through his head, Arthur started to leave too. He had so many things to plan and do in the coming days.. What he didn't realize is that the OWB he was searching so desperately for was also going to be crazy-busy just like him.

[Chapter 263 - Renita's Progress](#)

Eren was shocked.

He was shocked by Renita's progress in such a short period. He was currently battling against her. It was a mock practice suggested by the ranger at their usual spot.

'Sedated Perception!'

Eren used his go-to time-element spell when he felt he was about to get boxed in. This time the bullets weren't his enemies.

The mana arrows made of the wind element had taken their place.

Renita had another style in her repertoire without discarding her original one. This was thanks to her mentor, Almera who used crossbows in her battle style.

Renita had been gifted an F-Rank 4-star crossbow artefact by Almera when she thought the young ranger could use the same efficiently in her battle style. Turns out the mentor's decision was right all along.

To a non-ranger ranker, mana bullets and crossbows wouldn't seem that different. But they were two different battle styles for rangers. The biggest difference was in the way they were used.

Most bullet-oriented battle styles required rangers to manifest mana guns with their mana before they could start aiming and shooting at their targets. But the use of crossbows and arrows in battle was almost always dependent on the artefact at hand.

The gun-and-bullet style was famous for barrage attacks. It also helped rangers with long-range attacks. Because they would travel faster than the arrows.

But the style also came with its own set of disadvantages. First, since it required rankers to manifest the mana guns first, it would cause delay and waste of mana. Second, it was not all that useful against close-combat experts if they came within striking distance.

The close-combat rankers' reflexes were effective enough to predict the bullets' trajectory, take detours, and launch countermeasures. That's why whenever Eren got close to Renita, it would be a game-over for her.

The crossbow style, by contrast, does not require mana manifested weapons. Rankers were able to shoot out arrows from them as soon as they manifested them. Those who adopted this style were able to remain highly reactive to any sudden ambush while consuming a minimal amount of mana.

But since crossbows were slow to travel in the long-range, not a lot of rangers used them. A ranger's path required them to have a bunch of long-range attacks in their arsenal. And not everybody was interested in working hard to include another battle style at the cost of extra effort and work.

Most rangers rely on guns and bullets. They would let their teammates take care of their vulnerability in mid and close range combat. And it worked out for them for the most part.

But Renita had decided to do more than most rangers. She had been working on the spell and the battle style ever since Almera decided to try it a few months back. She only asked Eren to battle with her using this style when she felt confident to do so.

The Renita of the previous timeline didn't use crossbows and arrows even after she had become famous as a ranger. That's why Eren was shocked when she first showed him her brand-new battle style.

Eren had forgotten that in her eyes there was a certain close-combat expert that influenced her choice of battle style. She wanted not to be helpless against him when he got closer to her.

That's why she worked extra hard to mitigate her vulnerability against close combat experts by adding a new battle style. She hadn't said this to anyone till now. She didn't even use it while completing the first Besanc mission. Because she wasn't sure how it would work in real missions.

But her first Besanc mission made her realize something. It was the fact that she could only see Eren's back and would not follow him as an equal if she didn't change. She had realized that he was that dominant with or without her help, both on and off the field.

Eren thought the mock battle was over since he was within striking range. But he was taken aback when the ranger retrieved a crossbow from her storage and started shooting.

'Sedated Perception.'

Eren relied on his time element spell to effectively dodge the mana arrows targeting his stomach. But that didn't surprise the ranger. She only chuckled when she saw the surprised expressions on her crush's face. For once, she felt like bullying him the way he used to do to her.

Eren tried to keep a safe distance from Renita. But he soon found out that the mana arrows were of the homing type to his utter astonishment.

The five mana arrows followed his retreat. At least two of them would have hit him if he hadn't activated Sedated Perception.

'Wow. This girl is full of surprises.'

Eren thought as he retrieved his katars from his storage. He rarely used his katars anymore for mock battles. Only Ramy could get him to use his weapons these days. But Renita had been added to that list at this point.

Eren turned back and assumed a defensive stance. There was no use running from the arrows when they could just follow him around. Even if they didn't hit him because of his speed, they would just tire him out in the long run.

'Blitz Bolt'

Eren ran his lightning element spell through his weapons and made contact with the first arrow with it. The arrow and the weapon collided. Since the arrow was made from the wind element, it didn't take much on Eren's part to destroy it.

But the arrow's sudden destruction, which had compressed wind as its foundation, led to the sudden emergence of the gale. And that gale pushed Eren's hand back. The same hand which he had used to tackle the arrow with.

Eren's hand was now up to his head while his other hand was not ready to tackle another arrow that was coming for him. The second arrow made contact with his shoulder and destroyed his protective mana layer. Unfortunately, his chainmail armour hadn't covered that region of his body.

The tip of the arrow was lodged deep under his skin and drew blood. The arrow was soon destroyed because Eren's protective mana layer was actively working to do so. But the damage had been done.

'Damn it. This is more annoying than the bullets at close range.'

Eren thought as he resumed his defensive position. He knew by then that he had to use his hands instead.

But this wasn't all he was supposed to do if he wanted to win this mock battle. Otherwise, it would turn into a mockery battle for him.

Eren used his left hand to tackle the arrow, only barely. By that time his right hand had assumed the position he wanted.

'Fuck this shit. Let's get to her.'

Eren thought as he finished defending the last arrow from the barrage. He again tried closing in on the ranger despite knowing full well another barrage was going to get aimed at him.

[Chapter 264 - Don't Fear The Reaper](#)

'Fuck this shit. Let's get to her.'

Eren thought as he finished defending the last arrow from the barrage. He again tried closing in on the ranger despite knowing full well another barrage was going to get aimed at him.

'Blitz Steps!'

'Sedated Perception!'

Eren cancelled his Blitz Bolt and replaced it with his movement spell. He again used Sedated Perception, stacking its effect. This gave him the boost he needed to dodge all the projectiles Renita had been spraying all around her and at him.

Renita knew by now that she wouldn't always be able to keep track of Eren's movement when he uses his movement spell to its fullest. That's why she hadn't relaxed even when he retreated. Because she knew he could gain his ground just as quickly as he lost it.

So Renita had been firing all around her. She had a crossbow in one hand. While with the other, she had manifested her usual mana gun. She didn't care about her mana expenditure anymore. Because she had realized by now that stretching the battle was nigh impossible with Eren in her current state.

Eren had to pay the price for approaching Renita even with his astonishing reflexes and speed. Renita's anticipatory rounds weren't all random. She had studied the butcher's moves and targeted the spots that she knew he could approach from.

'Bzzeeet!'

A mana bullet grazed Eren's cheeks and sped past it, buzzing in his ears as it tore through the space. There were a few more bullets that had found their targets. Eren had concentrated on dodging all the arrows coming his way this time. So he couldn't dodge all the bullets.

He had decided to dodge the arrows despite knowing they would be following him. He had a plan to make them target their caster if and when he closed in on Renita. He would use Renita as his meat shield to defend against the homing arrows. That way she'll either have to discard those mana arrows or suffer the consequences.

Eren's plan worked this time. He successfully got close enough to strike and got behind Renita. He cancelled his stacked time element spell and his movement spell when he was a few inches away from her back.

The butcher had already stored his weapons away. He grabbed Renita's waist with one hand from behind while the other hand's index finger caressed her right cheek. The index finger had Blitz Bolt running through it, causing a tingling sensation.

Renita only saw Eren's afterimages dancing around her for a short time. And then her waist was grabbed from behind.

Before she could comprehend what had happened, her right cheek felt weird. There was something crawling on it that was extremely cold yet extremely hot. It was a familiar feeling she had felt so many times before. It was an indication for her that she had lost.

The tingling sensation had distracted her for a short moment. And that moment was enough for the homing arrows to get close to her. They would soon be targeting their caster if they weren't discarded.

Renita sighed and waved her hand. The arrows were dissolved in the same air they were birthed from when they were only a few centimetres away from her.

"I... I lost again."

Eren heard Renita's downcast voice while she was still in the position she was at. So he let go of her cheek and lifted his hand off of her waist before standing in front of her.

"You did lose, Renita. But that's also a good thing."

Renita had a blank face after she listened to Eren. The latter tried cheering her in his broken way. This was a genuine effort instead of his usual bullshittery. But for some reason, it came out wrong.

'Erni, that's not how you should encourage this girl. Tell her she is getting better than her previous self.'

Reen spoke in his mind after hearing her master bomb his interactions with the ranger. Eren had a hard time agreeing with Reen. Taking advice like this from someone who couldn't even speak the language a few months back didn't sit right with him. But eventually, he gave in to his pet.

"Err... I mean you are getting better than your previous self, Renita. Your progress is terrifying. That's what's most crucial right now."

Renita shook her head in denial before answering:

"You don't get it, Eren. I want you to see me as your equal. Not your follower."

The butcher was stumped. He didn't want to play dumb. But he also didn't want to reciprocate her feelings. Renita read those feelings in his eyes and continued herself:

"I know you don't see us together, Eren. Not anytime soon. Or maybe forever? I don't know how you feel about us. But I know what I feel about us."

Eren couldn't keep quiet after hearing Renita's statement that bordered on a confession:

"Renita, why do you want to be with me? What do you see in me? I don't think I'll ever be a suitable partner to you or anyone else.

Why do you want to torture yourself by waiting for someone that'll never knock on your doors?"

Renita didn't answer immediately. She pondered every word Eren had said. She would be lying if she told him she wasn't hurt by his reply. But at the same time, she was expecting this. So the ranger looked in the butcher's eyes, placed her hand gently on his chest where his heart was before speaking up:

"Eren, remember when you had told us that the pursuit of power doesn't need a reason? It is indeed true. But the same can be said about love. The pursuit of love doesn't need a reason either.

What good is a long life obtained by higher-ranking status if we don't have the crayons of emotions to colour it up? Shouldn't we try to gain everything that this life has to offer?

You take pride in being selfish. How can you be selfish when you let go of one of the most significant aspects of life?

I don't want to have any regrets, Eren. If I can obtain everything this life has to offer, then when my time comes, I won't fear the Reaper."

'Shouldn't we try to gain everything that this life has to offer?

Not having to fear the reaper.'

Renita's words were repeated in Eren's mind as he remembered memories from his previous timeline.. He also remembered the cold and callous place he was sent to briefly after he had died. What would it be like to not be scared of that place?

[Chapter 265 - Talk With The Royal Bastard](#)

'Shouldn't we try to gain everything that this life has to offer?

Not having to fear the reaper.'

His mind replayed Renita's words and he recalled all his memories from the previous timeline. He also remembered the cold and callous place he was sent to briefly after he had died. What would it be like to not be scared of that place?

The butcher was agitated and irritated by Renita's reply. It was something that was shaking his whole being from within. Her words evoked those feelings and memories of his past life that he had been trying to bury deep in his soul.

Eren remembered how Sienna treated him in his past timeline. He recalled the pool of emotions he had swirling inside his head that washed away all his hopes for having real relationships.

Renita could see in Eren's eyes that he was struggling. She thought it was because of her or something she said that hurt him. So she lifted her hand from Eren's chest and took his hand in hers before trying to calm his mind:

"Eren, I don't know why, but it feels like you were hurt because of something I said. I... I'm sorry for that. Please know that it wasn't my intention. I didn't want to be pushy, trust me.

The reason I told you this was because I feel like you are always way ahead of all of us. I wasn't sure if I'd ever be able to say those words to you in the future. So I said this today when I found the right moment.

The shadow of death looms over every ranker's life no matter how cautious we want to be. And as I said, I don't have to have any regrets when my time comes."

The storm of emotions running amok in Eren's head finally quieted down when Renita talked some sense into him. He had subconsciously connected Renita's words with his previous memories. She meant to erase those memories from his mind and replace them with new ones that could take their place.

"I... Renita... I.."

"Eren Idril, there you are. Long time no see, man. Can we? Oh?"

Eren was about to say something to Renita that even he wasn't sure of. But fortunately or unfortunately, he was interrupted by a foreign yet not-so-foreign voice. He and Renita both looked in the direction of that voice to see Jason's team coming their way.

Jason was the one who had spoken those words. He stopped his sentence midway after seeing that this wasn't the right time for him to intrude on the guy's personal space. This was when he was having a moment with what seemed to be his girlfriend.

But it was already too late. Jason could see it on Renita's face that he had already ruined the moment. He might as well go ahead and talk business with Eren now that the guy was here. Otherwise, Eren had become kinda like a slippery eel every time Jason tried to get close to him.

Eren saw Jason heading his way. The latter was the last guy he wanted to see these days. But frankly, he had run out of excuses to ignore and get away from him. Especially now, when Eren wasn't in his finest mental state.

'Damn it. This guy, he is the flag bearer of bad news.'

Eren cursed himself for allowing himself to become vulnerable in his heart. The reason Eren didn't want to meet Jason or form a close connection with him was simple.

Dom Walker was the original owner of Reen in Eren's past timeline. He made his demon beast taming official and was subsequently invited to the kingdom's capital. His journey to stardom and becoming one of Edinburgh's most celebrated heroes was famous throughout the entire kingdom.

When Dom's name was widely known, another detail spread throughout the kingdom. Arthur Renar, the Duke of Edinburgh, had a bastard son named Jason. This bastard son had supported Dom under his banner and was later named as Arthur's successor.

Jason's past was revealed slowly to the masses. And his struggle from the bottom of the hierarchy to his entry into the kingdom's elite club had been an inspiration for many, especially all the royal and non-royal bastards who aspired to have their names etched in the annals of history like him.

Eren was also in the know regarding Jason's story. He had later found out that it was the same guy he had seen in the academy. At that time Eren was struggling to make ends meet. So he had even tried to use his association with the guy a few times to get out of some situation. But alas, nobody would believe him when he told them the duke-to-be was his batchmate from LA.

It was only in this life that Eren had found it odd for Jason to start his academic journey from the city of Osan. And only after he tamed Reen did he start to see why the royal bastard was doing at a backwater place.

Eren guessed that Jason had something to do with the experiments conducted on in the Osan woods. Even if he wasn't directly related, he must have known something about it. Jason taking Dom under his banner was a clear indication of the same.

So meeting a guy like Jason and having a conversation with him wasn't something Eren could take lightly. He had tried every possible way to ignore and get away from him. But alas, he couldn't ignore him forever.

"Eren, is this the wrong time?"

Jason asked while looking at his hand which was held by Renita at the time. The ranger became conscious after she followed Jason's gaze and released her grip.

'You stupid, stupid woman. Hold my hand damn it. Hold it now when I need it the most.'

Eren wanted to say that it was indeed a terrible time for Jason to interrupt. But Renita's sudden action finally sealed the deal.

Eren sighed, internally and out in the open as well.. It was time to talk with the royal bastard.

[Chapter 266 - Loose Cannon](#)

Eren sighed, internally and out in the open as well. It was time to talk with the bastard.

"We were just practising, Jason. What's up?"

Eren assumed his casual form soon after. If avoiding Jason was impossible, he might as well use this meeting to gain intel on him. He just needed to make sure that no detail regarding Reen or Osan Woods' Butcher got slipped by him.

"Um... it's about our talk the other day. I wonder if you have time now that you are over with your practice for the day?"

Jason asked again as a formality. But it was clear from his stance that he wasn't willing to take no for an answer.

Jason was accompanied by Ivor and Veronica who stood behind either side. If stares could stab, Ivor's gaze would have poked holes all over Eren's body many times over. The butcher guessed that the guy hadn't forgotten about his epic defeat by his hands even now.

Veronica was eyeing him too. But Eren could tell her gaze was different from Ivor. She was embarrassed to make eye contact with him because of how the fight between them had ended.

"Yeah. Let's go grab our supper while we are at it."

Eren agreed and shifted the venue of their talk to one of the LA's canteens. He told his team to continue practicing. But for some reason, Renita decided to follow him.

"Eren, you are from the city of Osan. Tell me what you think about Osan Woods' Butcher?"

Jason began shooting rapid-fire right off the bat. Eren was expecting a question like this. So he didn't panic. He took his time before replying:

"Frankly, I had forgotten about the wanted criminal until you mentioned him. I am too distant from the whole affair to offer an opinion.

Um... I suppose he should be apprehended for the crimes he has committed. Other than that, I don't have any strong points to make."

Eren said this and took another bite of his bread dipped in Pork Sorpotel.

There had been a lot of Earth Suidae subjugation missions in the Besanc. LA would take all the necessary ingredients from the beasts' bodies and supply the rest to its canteens. That's why the canteens had a lot of pork-centric dishes these days.

"That's fair. But what do you think about the whole case retrospectively? Is it a cultist activity like everybody thinks it is? Or are they using the cultists as an excuse to wash their hands off the case?"

I'm asking this because I know that your aunt Nina was part of the investigation that was conducted by the city administration. You must have picked up a pointer or two from that investigation."

Jason was having a hard time watching Eren eat like he was starving for days. But that didn't deter him from asking his questions. The questions that he had been meaning to ask from the first time they had met.

"In case you weren't aware, Jason, I didn't assist aunt Nina much in her investigation. And her involvement in the case was pretty brief too if you ask me.

However I feel about Osan Woods' Butcher, it will not affect what he did or will do. So why should I make an opinion in the first place?"

Eren took a short pause after he finished the loaf of bread he was eating. He quickly grabbed one from Renita's plate and looked at Jason before continuing:

But it seems that you want me to go the extra mile to entertain you, hehe. Fine then.

Here's what I think. Osan Woods' Butcher was a smart ranker. He or she got into the woods, did what they had been intending to do with surgical precision, and got away from the crime scene just as cleanly.

We can debate the identity of the butcher all we want. But that won't erase what he had done. Neither will it affect him. Do you know what I think? The butcher will be more harmful to society when their identity is revealed."

'Tooting your own horn, I see.'

Reen spoke in Eren's mind and laughed when she heard Eren speak about himself in the third person.

Jason listened to Eren talk and he had to admit he was right on point. He had thought that Eren knew something about the case because of the way he had provoked Ivor into spilling beans. But the royal bastard thought maybe he had judged the guy too soon.

One had to admit that Eren's poker face was impeccable. It did not betray the facade he was trying to maintain. Therefore, nobody could see through him. But it seemed that it still wasn't enough for a certain someone:

"Why do you think OWB was a smart ranker, you punk? If he had been smarter, he wouldn't have killed so many LA students in the woods.

This paints a bull's eye on his back that he can't get rid of. You remember who was among the people he killed, right? My stupid brother. If they were half as smart as you claim the butcher to be, they would have let those students go instead of leaving the trail of death behind them."

'Blame it on your brother, dude. He left me no choice.'

Ivor was trying to pick an argument with Eren, thinking he was opposing his opinion. But this time, Eren completely agreed with him.

"Look, Ivor, if you want a rematch, just say that out loud. We don't need to have a personal reason to fight. I'm ready anytime as long as the amount of Merps you place as a wager is tempting enough.

Brrrrrrrrgh!"

Eren finished his speech and his meal at the same time and burped carelessly. His plate was the only one that had gotten empty before everyone else, whereas others had only just started eating.

Eren narrowed his eyes on Jason as he asked in a patient tone that was laced with seriousness:

"It's my turn to ask questions now, Jason. You are so fixated on Osan Woods' Butcher. Even more so than Ivor who had gotten his brother killed by him no less. How are you related to the case?

And what's that got to do with why are you trying to talk to me today?"

[Chapter 267 - Retainers](#)

"The way you are so focused on the butcher in Osan Woods. Even more so than Ivor who had gotten his brother killed by him no less. How are you related to the case?

And what's that got to do with why are you trying to talk to me today?"

Jason realized that Eren wasn't being cordial anymore with him after Ivor's tantrum. He looked at Ivor admonishingly before replying:

"Don't pay attention to Ivor's rude behaviour, Eren. He has lost his elder brother in the incident. So he can't help getting edgy whenever that topic is brought up. I hope you can understand his situation."

Eren stared back at Ivor this time while replying to Jason:

"Heh! I do understand. Boss your way around students who don't have a prominent background and stay low-key around someone who has a more powerful backer than yours. That's not considered edgy, Jason. That's the way of life for scavenger hyenas."

"That's it. You punk, let's have a one-on-one right now..."

The way Eren compared him to a hyena angered Ivor even further than he already was. He got up from his seat and pointed his finger at Eren in a provoking way.

He wanted to duel with Eren right away in the ranking war. But he was soon restrained by Jason's words:

"Ivor, you might want to sit down and let others speak. Everything is not always about you.

Eren, I'll also ask you not to provoke this loose cannon.

It's not what you think. This jerk has picked a fight with a lot of people regardless of their backgrounds. Roody Orton, Sienna Slughorn, and even Ken Riverine, who is known for being one of the friendliest people have made that cut.

In some way or another, Ivor has attempted to make trouble for everyone who has brought up the topic of Osan Woods' Butcher. And frankly, I'm done covering his ass."

Eren was shocked at how Ivor had behaved with the big names. He now had to admit that the guy was truly an edgelord.

Of course, he didn't say it out loud. Eren wanted to wrap up the conversation as soon as possible. So he gestured to Jason with his eyes and allowed him to continue:

"Anyway. You are right. I am involved with the case of Osan Woods' Butcher. Or to be more precise, it is related to my father and I was dragged into it as his son.

The main purpose of OWB wasn't to kill LA students and commit other heinous crimes in the Osan Woods. It was to steal something that belonged to me and my father. The killings were only there as collateral.

Why am I discussing this right now with you? I just wanted to know a little more about you before giving you a chance to be one of my retainers.

You see, Eren, my background is a bit special. And that requires me to gather some allies who are talented but are not that privileged yet. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?"

Eren pretended to be shocked after hearing Jason's speech. He raised his eyebrows before asking to confirm:

"Retainers you say! Are you related to the..."

Jason nodded at Eren before interrupting him:

"That's right. But I'm not allowed to make it official yet. I don't have the "legitimacy" backing me yet, you see. So sharing this secret with you and your friend here can also act as a form of trust between us.

What I want from you is pretty simple, Eren. Would you like to serve under my banner when I obtain that legitimacy? By you, I mean you and miss Renita here as well. She is no less talented than any of us after all.

I'll make sure you are taken care of in terms of ranking resources."

Eren looked at Jason carefully before finally asking:

"Okay, let's say that what you say is true. Why do you need to gather allies right now? We are on the LA grounds, Jason. You need your teammates to survive here. Not retainers. Then why are you headhunting for lackeys this early in the *cough* royal *cough* game?"

Jason smiled amusingly after hearing Eren's question. He took his time before responding:

"Eren, have you heard of Royal Ren?"

Jason said this and let his targeted audience figure out the meaning behind it. He knew his statement would detonate like a time bomb in Eren and Renita's heads. At least for Renita, he got it right. She was shocked when she understood why Jason was looking for retainers.

Eren looked shocked too but he was expecting this. This was because, although Jason had started his academic journey in LA, he didn't conclude it at the same academy. He had been transferred to Royal Renar sometime after Dom made his demon beast taming public.

As a result, Jason of the previous timeline was also waiting for his father's project to be completed in Osan when Dom's presence ruined their plans. At that point, Dom might have formed some kind of understanding with Jason's father, as he was made to cooperate.

Jason stayed in LA for the first year. He left soon and joined Royal Ren after Arthur made sure there were no loose ends with his project and regarding Dom. Jason's legitimacy was confirmed shortly after he entered Royal Ren.

Eren knew this beforehand. Therefore, he wanted to avoid talking with Jason. His identity as the Osan Woods' Butcher was one thing. Not agreeing with Jason to follow him in Royal Ren would certainly create a rift between them that might have repercussions for him in the future.

Maybe Eren could play it cool and ride the wave, gaining an easy entry into Royal Ren. it was a holy place for all young rankers after all. The place was less like an academy and more of a fast-track guide for rankers to advance rapidly in their rankings.

But leaving LA was not something Eren was willing to do.. He did not want to lose the advantage of the past timeline he could use for a future event.

[Chapter 268 - Helping Hands](#)

Leaving LA was not something Eren was willing to do. Not before that event took place. That's why he didn't take much time before politely refusing Jason's offer:

"The offer is indeed tempting, Jason. I can't speak for Renita, but I'll have to decline. We all know Royal Ren is not a nice place for commoners like me.

Maybe things would work out for you and our friend Ivor here. I can now see why he sticks close to you. You are his ticket to enter the place he couldn't go because of his brother's death."

Eren looked at Ivor and said this in a plain voice. He remembered Ivor's long-winded speech about how he was unable to go to Royal Ren because of Isaac's death. With Jason's support, Eren didn't think the guy would have to worry about excessive non-disclosure contracts. His succession to Isen's position also won't be hampered.

Ivor wanted to rebuke Eren but he couldn't. This was exactly why he was mindful around Jason.

"I'll always... *cough... I mean I'll also stay with Eren."

Renita declined Jason's offer as well. Jason raised his eyebrows after hearing Renita's reply and asked them both one last time:

"Do you guys know what you are denying? Eren, LA is indeed good for close combat experts. But Royal Ren has top-of-the-line close combat experts serving as assistant professors and professors.

Renita, you'll be losing the most out of denying this offer. LA is just not suitable for a capable ranger like you. No matter how much you strive for greatness, your growth will always be stunted here. Are you sure you don't want to change your opinion?"

Eren and Renita looked at each other after Jason finished. Eren could see in Renita's eyes that she wanted to take Jason up on his offer. But not at the cost of getting separated from him. He nodded at her and then looked at the royal bastard before replying:

"We are positive, Jason. Thanks for asking though."

Jason had a stoic expression after he heard Eren's reply. He wanted to get the close combat expert under his banner who was calm and collected, unlike a certain someone from his team. But since he had received a clear-cut no, it was about time he moved to recruit a few more trusted retainers of his age before his time in LA was up.

"You'll regret this, punk."

Ivor couldn't help giving Eren a threat before leaving. Only time could tell if it was empty or not. But for now, Eren didn't feel like engaging with him or Jason.

Veronica was silent the whole time. She was trying to steal a glance at Eren during the whole time of conversation. But Renita would catch her doing so and narrow her eyes looking at her. The ranger's vigilance made the young lady self-conscious, preventing her from observing Eren up close.

There were two groups of rankers meeting inside an abandoned castle ruin. One group was made of two people who had worn eye-catching masks to cover their identities. The other was made of a young elf and three captives.

"These are the people you want. Do what you want with them. I believe the deal we had with each other is concluded with this delivery, right?"

Arizihana asked the man in the mask while folding her arms under her bosoms. Renar and the two young anthropes that were caught and enslaved with him were standing behind her. Their mouths and eyes were sealed with runic inscriptions. Plus, their hands and legs had been chained.

"Hm. You did a good job, miss Arizihana. Nobody is looking for them right?"

The broad-shouldered man asked to confirm. Ari nodded before responding:

"That's right. I did what you asked me to do. Lent them from the city administration under a made-up Beast Bloods case and declared them dead on paper soon after. There's no heat in taking them."

The masked man seemed pleased:

"Haha. Good. Then I believe our business is done here, miss Arizihana."

Ari felt a little relieved when she heard the reply from the masked man. She was also smiling internally thinking she had played him.

'You'll soon regret blackmailing me, you masked bastard.'

Ari had just thought this when she heard the masked man's deep voice:

"I hope you don't try to pull a fast one on me with this deal, miss Arizihana. Otherwise, I won't be responsible for the fallout."

'Did this guy just read my mind?'

Ari thought and labelled it as a coincidence before replying coldly:

"I hope you also don't try to do anything 'mischievous' for your own sake. I'll be going if there's nothing else."

Arizihana soon left the ruined castle building. Ronny AKA Eren waited for some more time before asking his pet about something:

"Reen, are they clean?"

Reen spread her mana sense and covered Renar and the other two young anthropes, affecting their psyches. The three captives were scared shitless when they felt the mana sense that was scanning them. But they couldn't run nor call for help. All they could do was to stay still and wait for the nightmare to get over.

"Apart from the weird smell they now carry, nothing else that sticks out like a sore thumb."

Reen shared her findings with her master. Eren scratched his chin when he realized what was done to the captives:

'Weird smell, huh? Since Marie was a former apprentice of Levine, I can imagine her concocting a potion that can help Arizihana track Renar and the rest when she wants to.

And this after I had told that cute elf to not try anything funny with me. I was half-expecting this anyway.'

Eren thought and shook his head. He was going to let Arizihana go without making her connections to the cultists known to anyone. There was no benefit to be had making her a wanted criminal in Edinburgh after all.

'How should we get rid of the smell, Erni? Should we consult Levine discreetly?'

Reen asked in the butcher's head. She had fused with Eren once again after Ari had left. To which he smiled cunningly before making his intentions known to her:

'Why should we? Let her track us. Hehe.. We were short on the number of helping hands anyway.'

[Chapter 269 - I Desire This Power](#)

Eren released Renar and the rest. Then introduced him to them as Ronny; a fellow anthrope who wanted their participation in exploring a place meant for rankers like them. Renar could feel it in the butcher's address that the possibility of their participation wasn't up for the debate.

The guy whose three limbs Eren had chopped off in his fight with him now had three different limbs attached in their place. They were limbs taken from other dead rankers of the same rank. The surgeon had done a good job patching the guy up. But he couldn't do anything about the different skin tones and textures he now carried on his doctored body.

"Introduce yourself."

Ronny asked Renar and the rest in a commanding voice. The captives couldn't see the C-Rank entity that had scanned them but they were wary of its existence. They couldn't underestimate Ronny either because of the fierce aura surrounding him.

"Name's Renar, sir Ronny. I'm glad someone from the Beast Bloods came to save us. Our surrender to the city of Silvermoon..."

Ronny raised his hand and told the guy to stop with the act.

"I'm indeed an anthrope like you. And I was once part of Beast Bloods too. But not anymore. So you don't need to explain yourself about how and why you were caught."

Renar realized then realized that there were no Beast Bloods higher behind this guy. And the exploration he was going to be part of wasn't planned by his previous organization.

"Al.. alright. I'll keep things concise then. I'm Renar. Boys, out with your names too."

The young anthrope who had previously gotten beaten up by Ken introduced himself as Viper. And the guy whose limbs Eren had hacked introduced himself as Belar.

"Renar, Viper, and Belar. Good to meet you. Before I let you understand your assignments, I want to see how well you can fight and use your anthrope powers.

Renar, you are up first. We'll fight without using any spells."

Eren wanted to see how effective his new pawns were going to be. He wanted to gauge their strengths so he could make effective use of them. Plus, he had never fought using his E-Rank strengthening before.

Anthropes had access to the same type of spells other rankers had. But they were blessed with relatively higher body stats. The anthropes who could implement the high body stat values into their battle styles and turn that into their strengths would have the edge over normal rankers.

Eren asked Renar to fight without using any spell because he couldn't use any E-Rank spell. Only his body was strengthened to the E-Rank by Reen's fusion after all. He couldn't use the E-Rank spells on the borrowed body boosts.

Renar nodded his head and manifested his anthrope transformation. His transformation was based on a crocodile-type mana beast. As a result of which the transformation turned his skin dark green before loads of scuts were formed on its surface.

These scuts enforced the skin and made it more resilient. These scuts were the reason Almera's wind arrows couldn't take care of Renar previously.

Eren used therianthropic transformation mimicry as well while Reen had strengthened his body into E-Rank. Since they were going to fight without any spells, Eren could focus on testing his and the genuine anthrope body's limits.

"Don't hold back."

Eren shouted before bolting towards Renar. The latter had also understood that Eren meant business and no half-assed performance was going to impress him.

Eren AKA Ronny and Renar got within striking range of each other. The former made a chopping action aiming for the target's neck, which was blocked by the latter just as swiftly. Renar launched his counter by trying to land a blow to Eren's stomach with his right knee.

Even without the time-element spell, Eren's perception in close combat range had gotten pretty sharp. He saw Renar's right knee heading for his stomach. Instead of blocking it or stepping aside, he used his left foot to step on it, using it as a springboard to jump over his target.

Zwhoom!

Eren became airborne when he successfully pulled that move. But the fight had just started. He united his right hand's fingers into a fist and swung it forward as he was being dragged down by gravity. His fist was aiming at the guy's cranium.

Renar saw that Eren had almost disappeared on him when he tried low-blowing him with his knee. Before he could register what had happened, his mana sense told him the attack was going to come from above.

Renar braced his arms in X formation up above his head without looking up. The timing was impeccable as the punch landed right in the middle of the X formation as soon as it was made.

Eren's E-Rank strengthening wasn't all for the show. It packed a punch as it cracked the ground on which Renar was standing. Five feet wide and two feet deep crater was formed with Renar standing in the middle of it.

But Renar himself was not injured at all. The crocodile scuts had absorbed most of the impact, enabling the genuine anthrope to carry on fighting.

'That's impressive.'

Eren thought as he praised the resilience of the anthrope's body. For some reason, it excited him too. If a copy can produce such promising results, how effective should a genuine demi-human transformation be?

'I desire this power!'

Eren thought and subconsciously grabbed Renar's wrist. An unfelt-before pulse of mana was generated at that time. Eren's skin melted and spread across the guy's hand. It created a sizzling noise as the anthrope's skin melted. Eren's liquified skin absorbed all that plus Renar's blood, producing a steam-like mana residue in the process.

"Aaaarrrrrgh!"

Renar yelled in agony. He couldn't understand what was happening to his arm. The guy told him there wouldn't be any spell usage. But now he felt stupid believing in some random man.

Eren was bewildered too. He couldn't make heads or tails of what was happening to him or his unintended victim.. But in the next second, the hand that had grabbed Renar's almost melted wrist also turned dark green and had crocodile-like scuts over it.

[Chapter 270 - First Innate Spell](#)

Eren was bewildered too. He couldn't make heads or tails of what was happening to him or his unintended victim. But in the next second, the hand that had grabbed Renar's almost melted wrist also turned dark green and had crocodile-like scuts over it.

Eren couldn't think of what to do or react next. So he activated his F-Rank Sedated Perception to buy himself some time.

'What is this? Reen, you have any idea?'

Reen pondered for a moment before replying:

This seems to be the innate spell that I use to digest my food. How did you learn it?'

Eren smiled mirthlessly in his head before responding:

'Hehe. Beats me. I didn't feel like I was casting a spell either. It was as natural and effortless as breathing.'

Reen thought of something and asked her master to confirm:

'Erni, do you think demi-humans have inherent spells of the beasts they have absorbed the bloodlines of?'

Some sort of understanding dawned on Eren after Reen made her line of thoughts known to him.

'Quite possible. So inherent spell is what you get when a spell stops being a spell. I will have to experiment with this power later on. This is not the time to make the pawns wary of me. Reen, how can I bring things back to normal?'

Reen shared her experiences of using her inherent spell with her master. Eren used those experiences to control the spell that had just awakened.

For some reason, Eren could taste some blood in his mouth which he knew wasn't his. His head also felt heavy and the arm that had displayed the properties of crocodile skin felt sore after it returned to normal. Evidently, the inherent spell had a few side effects.

Eren's arm returned to normal. But the same could not be said about Renar's hand. Thankfully, only a small section of the epidermis of the hand had been melted and the rest of the skin underneath it was still intact. So it wasn't a serious injury. At most, it would look like the epidermis had been burnt off by a fire spell.

Eren cast an F-Rank fireball spell before quickly discarding it. This was to cover the traces of an inherent spell he had just executed.

The butcher hadn't figured out the whole thing yet. There was no reason for him to inform his pawns of the phenomenon that had just occurred. He then cancelled Sedated Perception to process the time normally.

"You... you... lied to me. Why are you using the spell when you told me not to?"

Renar complained and shouted as he looked up. He looked up just when Eren had discarded the fireball spell after activating it.

Eren was still in midair. He pushed against Renar's defensive X guard and used the recoil to jump back in the air. He did this before straightening himself and landing safely on his feet a few meters away from the anthrope.

He retrieved an F-Rank healing potion from his storage and threw it to Renar before replying:

"Err... my bad, Renar. I accidentally activated my spell without intending to. You can use this potion to heal your wounds."

Eren said and then looked at Belar and Viper who were standing at a distance from the mock battleground. He was sure he had been quick enough in covering up the incident, preventing two novices from noticing the unusual nature of the incident. In contrast, Renar was too overwhelmed by pain to notice that a strange pulse of mana originated above his head.

Renar did feel weird about an E-Ranker using the F-Rank spell in a fight where he had proposed not to use any spell. He also wondered how an F-Rank spell could hurt his E-Rank body. But rankers had many ways to pull something off like this.

Eren felt like he should try the same thing with Viper and Belar too. But he needed them as pawns for his exploration of ranker's purgatory. Therefore, he didn't want them to be scared by him. So he dropped the plan.

Eren no longer fought with Renar. Viper and Belar were only asked to show him their fighting prowess by battling each other. The two obliged.

"Alright, this is enough. You guys will have to sign a binding contract with me before I make some arrangements for you. It'll take some time before we start our exploration. So rest well while honing your battle skills in the meantime. Are there any questions?"

Belar raised his hands and asked without any fear:

"You are from the Beast Bloods? How come we never heard anything about you while we were in the organization? Were you active in another region? And why us?"

Eren in Ronny's avatar just shrugged his shoulders before saying:

"I was indeed active in a different part of Edinburgh and didn't hear about you guys either until only recently. It is bothersome to locate the disbanded Beast Bloods members so I just freed you guys whose location was now public knowledge."

Belar tried asking some more questions. But Eren just released his mana sense and spread it across the region after getting irritated by the young anthrope's persistent attitude. Renar, Viper, and Belar at the

time subconsciously felt like they were being suppressed by a higher form of existence than them. They stopped asking questions as a result.

Eren had already arranged an anonymous place for the three anthropes to spend a few days at. He was going to call them to action only at the time of purgatory exploration. He gave some more instructions to the anthrope before allowing them to depart from the place.

"Erni, what are you planning to do with them exactly?"

Reen assumed the form of Selena sometime after she and his master were alone at the ruined castle and asked. The latter looked at the orange-red sky coloured by the setting sun and replied slowly:

"I am not sure. At first, I wanted to use them as disposable pawns in purgatory. But now I feel like I should use them to carry out some experiments. Let's see what happens in purgatory. I'll try to keep them alive if I can help it.

We are running short on time because of the multitude of pies I've dipped my fingers in. *Sigh. We'll have to focus on my shop and get it running before I enter ranker's purgatory."

Eren concluded and started to walk away from his previous position. Reen followed after him. He needed to get his affairs in order before he could experiment with his newly obtained inherent spell.

The inherent spell wasn't the only thing he had gained today. He looked at his normal body stats on the spectral screen after he had returned to normal.

The butcher had a smile on his face when he saw the progress that had happened over just a few minutes: