

## Vile 281

### [Chapter 281 - First Floor Rewards 01](#)

"Waves? Lady Zee, don't tell me, the beasts we see right now won't be..."

Jules asked with a dark expression on her face. Lady Zee smiled mirthlessly before confirming what she had come to assume:

"That's right. They won't be the last. A next wave of the beasts would be created as soon as we finish dealing with this one.

The number of waves would depend upon the average rating of the squad. With our luck as of now, we can expect at least five such beast hordes to attack us before this round is over with.

Don't lose your morals now. This is a purgatory after all. Not a utopia where the participants would be given room to breathe. Hehe.

You'll see the fruits of our efforts soon enough when this round is over. You will find that all was worth it when that happens."

Lady Zee tried to cheer her squad members with her words. Belar and Viper couldn't find any consolation in them because they were the ones who were most at risk in this battle.

The group soon engaged in a party-style battle with the beast horde. Lady Zee served as a stable foundation around which the party could build its defence.

Jules stayed with her and concentrated on creating more mirages of all of her squad members. It was going to be especially effective against the beast who couldn't differentiate between the real rankers and their mirages at all.

Renar supported his juniors by staying with them. Although the D-Ranker created a barrier between the squad and the horde with her black flames, they fought the beasts they encountered.

But the most menacing presence for the beast was Ronny who had entered the horde seemingly carelessly. He weirdly hacked through the beast horde. He would destroy the beasts' groins before killing them all.

At first, Ronny's squad members thought the guy was just being tactful by targeting the beasts' weak spots. But after a while, they came to realize that Ronny didn't care about his and the beasts' battle stances.

Julie had awkward expressions on her face as she battled with her portion of the horde while observing Ronny's brutal assault on the beast. She didn't know the guy she was intimately involved with had this kind of weird fetish.

Soon the first beast wave was over with. The squad members had minor to moderate injuries. But there was nothing serious that was done to any of them. Thanks to Lady Zee's adoptive squad-based battle strategy, even the novice rankers found it not too difficult to face their first beast wave.

The members who had not explored the purgatory came to understand why Lady Zee had said the exploration was going to be a marathon rather than a sprint. The subsequent sets of beast waves were going to test everyone's endurance.

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"Ronny, enough with that weird-ass way of dealing with the beasts. Even I feel sorry for the beasts now. Come and give me a hand here."

Jules flared her nose and demanded her guy help her. She also wanted him to stop abusing and molesting animals.

Ronny looked at Jules and found out that she was about to be in a pinch soon. He sighed and decided to listen to the woman.

'Breath of fire.

Fire snake.

Fireball.

Blitz Storm.'

Ronny used the spell combo to create a domain of lightning and fire around himself before plunging into the middle of the horde near Jules. That took some pressure off of the illusionist and she returned the favour by creating more mirages of her guy.

Ronny couldn't let the opportunity pass in vain. He attacked the beasts while they were busy concentrating on his mirages. His time-element spells paired up with his E-Rank movement spell gave him the speed he needed to pull this off.

"Aaaaaaaa!"

Ronny used the right dagger and pierced the eye of a beast. He used the now-no-more beast's head as a springboard to jump on another beast's head before piercing the beast's head in the same manner.

Then he looked around and found out that others were almost done with their beasts too. This was the last wave of beasts they had fought with, as per Lady Zee's calculation.

Purgatory never ceased to surprise them by throwing another beast wave at them. Belar and Viper had to drink a bunch of potions mid-battle to maintain their performance levels at that point.

This time, nobody wanted to jinx their situation by proclaiming that the beast wave they faced just now was the last. They waited for a while patiently.

Lady Zee finally breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the ground getting lit up with runes again. This was an indication of them clearing the first floor finally.

"At ease, guys. It's time for first-floor rewards."

A relatively small array was now visible in the middle of the first-floor space the squad was into. Lady Zee told the novice rankers to enter the array individually.

Belar entered the array first and walked toward its centre. The array lit up with brighter lights when it sensed that the novice ranker stood in the array eye.

Ronny was confused. He didn't see any reward being given to Belar even after the array was lit up. Lady Zee cleared his confusion soon after:

"Personal rewards will appear in the ranker's ID storage. There's no need for them to appear in front of other participants as well."

Ronny nodded at Lady Zee after he heard that. Only now could he understand why Belar was smiling meaninglessly while standing inside the array with his eyes closed.

Viper and Renar soon followed Belar's actions one by one. Ronny let Jules go next. All of them couldn't help but show the same types of smiles when they received their rewards and found them inside their storage.

It was Ronny's turn to receive his reward.

He stepped inside the array and waited patiently. Soon he realized that there was an artificial mana signature trying to override his signature over his ID stone. Soon, ether magic was used to bring a few things into his dimension.

Ronny sent his mana sense inside his storage to see what rewards he had received for all the efforts he had taken so far. He zeroed in on an ancient-looking book first because it exuded a soft light.

Then he wrapped his mana around the book and opened its first few pages. He caressed his chin metaphorically when he realized what he had received as one of his rewards:

'Hmm! An unknown ranking technique that I can't fully understand yet.'

#### [Chapter 282 - First Floor Rewards 02](#)

'Hmm! An unknown ranking technique that I can't fully understand yet.'

The book contained a ranking technique of the E-Rank. It also had a drawing of an array over its back cover.

The contents of the book were in an old language he knew because of his academic studies in this timeline as well as the previous one. But he would need to spend a few days deciphering the content completely.

'The book can wait. Let me check the other rewards.'

Ronny focused his mana sense on the scroll that had appeared in his storage as a reward. He opened it and had a pleasant surprise written all over his face when he understood what the scroll was for.

'This is awesome. Another time-element spell. Can't wait to try out this one.'

Ronny perked up as soon as he found out the scroll contained a time-element spell he hadn't seen before. Unlike the ranking technique, he wasn't sure would suit him perfectly, the time-element spell was something he could use to boost his prowess while staying in the current rank. Unlike the ranking technique, he didn't have to wait to reap the rewards of his efforts.

Plus, Ronny had a much-needed shortcut in the gem. With her help, he could make use of this spell in almost no time at all. He also needed to have a long talk with what he now considered as a spirit-like existence.

But Alphee was still slumbering. That talk and this spell needed to be put on hold for the time being.

Therefore, Ronny let go of the time element spell and picked up another scroll that he had received as his reward. This time it was a lightning-element spell. He checked another scroll and found a fire-element spell of unknown origin and a school of spells as well.

'No wonder the Illuminati are crazy about this purgatory. If every participant could receive rewards like these, then it is worth it to invest in a big project like this. However, it is imperative to ensure it stays a secret from prying eyes.

Now I know why the cultist organizations fought over this place in my past timeline. Their anti-establishment purpose of existence can only make sense if they have something like that to rely on.'

Ronny thought and put the scrolls of spells away. He had received a spell for every element he could use. And all the three spells were something he hadn't seen or heard of. This was a massive haul for him just by considering the rewards he has received so far.

But those were not the only things he had received.

'Fuck. An E-Rank katar set.

And I had used daggers the whole time. This is a breach of privacy I approve of. Hehe!'

Ronny carefully examined the new set of weapons he had been rewarded with. These were two E-Rank weapons that were made for dual-wielding. Plus, they were of E-Rank, a rank higher than what his current default weapons were made of.

Ronny wasn't sure what star status the set held. But he was hoping and expecting it to be at least three-star or above. That would save him the trouble of finding a suitable default weapon set when he breaks into the next rank, which wasn't too far away in the future.

It was difficult to come across high-ranked weapons the further you travel into your ranking journey. Thus, he could be satisfied with a three-star weapon of E-Rank. Especially when he didn't have to pay huge Extols for it.

'What do we have here? Hmm? Isn't this... a wearable artefact set with a spell inscription?

Oh, my fucking devil! The boots are E-Rank too. This is too much.

How is this Sage so wealthy?

Ronny rolled his eyes even when they were closed after he realized the rewards he had received just for clearing the first floor were too tempting.

They were so numerous that instead of evoking the greed for more rewards, he felt like he should act like a turtle after receiving the rewards he had received so far and not proceed any further. The previous life's pessimistic loser in him was a staunch believer of the saying 'quit while you're ahead.'

'What can this dungeon offer as rewards for clearing further floors? It is low-key scares me to think about the possibilities.

The Illuminati can't let go of the meat pie this easily. I should expect a betrayal.'

The cynic in him saw a warning in his mind-boggling fortune so far. But then the practical part tried to find the reason for his massive haul in the performance he had displayed so far:

'I'm thinking about this too negatively. Maybe I'm the only one who will receive such rewards. My rating could be one reason. Another reason might be because I took care of two E-Rank monsters.

Although I can't take complete credit for killing the second monster, I was the one who had landed the finishing blow. Plus, what I consider treasures for my rank aren't worth much to the Sage ranker. The difference of perspective should be at play here as well.

I need to control my emotions from being all over the place just by checking the rewards I received.

If the underground dungeon can offer me this much, I'll have to try the F-Rank tower using my strength as well. Soon or later, this identity is going to get burnt. I don't think I'll have another chance to explore this purgatory again.

I'll have to make the most of my first and possibly last time here.'

Ronny soon regained his composure and opened his eyes. Only a few moments had passed in the real world. He looked at his squad members to see they were also looking at him.

Soon, Ronny's position was replaced by Lady Zee. She was also put in a cheerful mood after receiving her rewards. And yet, this was not all.

The array summoned a huge pile of Extols that would act as the group rewards.. The purgatory had made its participants rich in both financial and ranking terms.

### [Chapter 283 - Ronny Vs. Apparition P1](#)

"What will it be this time?"

Renar asked after observing the surroundings around him. The squad was on the second floor of the underground dungeon.

It wasn't much different from the first one in appearance. The members were situated in the middle of an underground space that was hundreds of meters long and wide. The roof was so high that one could barely see a series of big and small stalactites hanging over them.

"This time we are preparing to fight humans. Well, I call them humans, but they are just apparitions based on some previous rankers, I guess. You'll soon see what I'm talking about."

She explained to the group and looked a few meters away from where they stood. As soon as she had finished explaining, a mana fluctuation was felt in the surrounding.

Using the array and the dungeon's mechanism, a battle ring-like structure was formed. Soon everyone came to know what Lady Zee was talking about.

Six faceless apparitions had appeared on the other side of the battle ring. They looked human apart from the almost non-existent facial features. Instead of eyes, nose, and mouth, it was just plain-looking skin. Additionally, they wore generic adventurer's gear.

"Damn, these guys are spooky. What are we supposed to do now? Fight straightaway?"

Jules asked while looking at the opponents that had appeared. Lady Zee shook her head in denial before responding:

"This time, it won't be a total team effort. The rules should be listed right about now."

Lady Zee finished speaking. And as soon as she did, a spectral list of rules appeared right over the battle ring, allowing the squad members to understand how the second-floor test was going to unfold.

As per the rules, each team would send one member to battle as an individual. The loser would be eliminated while the winner had two options. They could choose to battle another opponent or could quit after their battle was over. Either way, they can't enter the battle ring again.

A team that can exhaust other teams' members first wins the round. The rewards will multiply by twice if the victorious team completes the round with two of its members remaining. The reward would be tripled if the winning team had three members remaining in their team.

"Hold on a minute, if we lose this round, do we take a rematch or start from the beginning?"

Renar asked after reading the rules. Lady Zee laughed aloud at Renar's doubt:

"If we lose the round, we are kicked out of the dungeon then and there. There are no do-overs in this place. Not until we wait for another year. In case you don't know, purgatory can't be accessed all year round.

It only opens for a month every year, around this time of the year. For the rest of the time, it remains sealed. And no matter what we do, we can't get inside. Plus, we can't stay in purgatory forever. If we are alive by the time the purgatory is going to be closed, then we'll be thrown out of the place using space magic, no matter how much we try to oppose it."

Lady Zee said this and looked at her squad members. Her gaze made everyone realize how serious the whole situation was. The members waited quietly for Lady Zee to give her instructions:

"Alright. Now that you understand the rule, we'll decide the order in which we can send our members for the fight.

We can keep things simple to gain maximum benefits. We'll send the one with the highest rating first. That would be you, Ronny. And the member with the lowest rating would go last. That way, the member with the highest ratings would have the chance to fight multiple opponents should they choose to do so.

Ronny, try to clear at least two opponents. Jules will do the same. It would be enough for Renar to just win his battle. I'm expecting the novices to lose. So your and Jules' extra opponents should balance things out.

This way, I'll come to know how much I would have to invest to make our squad win this round. There are a few spells I'd rather not use if I can help it, you see.

Ronny, enter the battle ring. Your opponent will soon follow suit."

Lady Zee laid the order in which her squad would send its members for their battle. As per instructions, Ronny would be first, Jules would be second, and Renar would enter the third. The fourth and fifth places were reserved for Viper and Belar respectively. Lady Zee would enter the battle ring last.

Ronny nodded at Lady Zee and walked towards the battle ring. As soon as he entered the ring, an apparition followed his lead and did the same. Only after entering the ring could Ronny sense the ranking status of the opponent he was going to battle with.

His opponent, like him, was in the E-Rank. Although unlike Ronny, who was at the liquid core stage of E-Rank, the apparition was at a solid stage.

"\*Sigh. There are no easy pies here."

Ronny shook his hands and took out his daggers. Too bad he couldn't use any of the awesome rewards he had received for clearing the first floor.

'If clearing the first floor gives you this much wealth, I wonder what else can be obtained after someone clears the second floor.

I would want to defeat at least three opponents and increase the multiplier behind the rewards on my own as well. But let's not get ahead of ourselves and jinx this thing.'

Ronny gripped his weapon hard as he observed the spectral counter that had appeared over the battle ring counting down the start of his first battle:

3...

2...

1...

0...

Ronny and his opponent bolted towards each other as soon as the counter hit zero. Ronny executed his first combo to welcome the apparition with a bang:

'Blitz Bolt

Blitz Steps

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Fire Snakes.'

This was the maximum number of spells Ronny could support by sending his mana circuits into hyperdrive.. He wanted to save his stamina in the long run as he wanted to take care of three opponents.

[Chapter 284 - Ronny Vs. Apparition P2](#)

'Blitz Bolt

Blitz Steps

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Fire Snakes.'

Ronny executed his spell combo. This time, instead of the fire snakes attacking the enemy, he had cast the spell in such a way that two fire snakes tied themselves around his arms. The snakes' heads were right above the daggers' tips he was holding with both his hands.

Ronny's Blitz Bolt was also maintained in a way that it would wrap both his arms with tongues of lightning. The false E-Ranker was maintaining two offensive spells on himself rather than releasing them.

Only Eren could do something like this with the control he had because of his past timeline's experiences. Julie couldn't help but get shocked by the amount of control the guy had shown by executing his offensive spells in this way.

"Hmm. No wonder the guy received such a high score in his rating. Ronny is trying to take things up a notch by starting like this. Maybe he is aiming to defeat more than two opponents.

Julie, you need to step up your game as well. Hehe. Of course, not in battle. I meant in bed. The guy is ambitious. He won't stay under the same skirt for too long."

Lady Zee warned her junior when she saw how Ronny wanted to pull the stopper on what cards he could play. Jules nodded her head at the former when she heard her speak and clenched her fist.

In the battle ring, a substantial amount of mana fluctuation took place when the two opponents collided with each other. Ronny had used the daggers to meet the opponent's sword. His arms were covered in lightning and fire.

Clank!

In a defensive move, Ronny's daggers blocked the sword. When that happened, Ronny was pushed back a few steps. He was only stabilized when he altered the Blitz Steps and strengthened it by pumping up its mana consumption.

Ronny was shocked by the apparition's prowess and his speed. His weapon agility wasn't something to be scoffed at either. His opponent's sword would have grazed his torso if he hadn't activated his time-element spells beforehand.

He soon recovered from his initial shock. He couldn't break the X formation that he had made with his dagger to block the sword and trap the opponent's weapon with it. So he used the spells he had maintained over his arms to do their work.

Ronny willed his spells and guided them with the help of his mana sense. The fire snakes that were on Ronny's arms started crawling forward. Similar to how they were placed on Ronny's arms, they covered the opponent.



But this time, instead of just resting, the fire-snakes started burning the mana layer Ronny's opponent was coated in with the help of their high temperature. Steam of mana and water started coming from the opponent's arms as a result of the fire-snakes doing what they had been sent out for.

But the misery didn't stop there for Ronny's opponent. The latter also sent out the lightning-element offensive spell he had been using to bolster his defensive stance.

The damage done by lightning and fire element spells at the same time wasn't something Ronny's opponent could brush off with ease. This was even when he was programmed to be higher in rank than Ronny.

The cloth of the opponent's sleeves was the first to be destroyed by the lightning spell. It was torn in multiple places all at once when Ronny's Blitz Bolt ran through his opponent's arms. The torn pieces of the sleeves then caught fire by the heat and fire generated by the fire-snake wrapped around the opponent's arms.

That left Ronny's opponent with only two choices. Maintain the stalemate with Ronny as he slowly destroys his mana layer and affects him with his spells. Or break the stalemate by risking a counterattack from the false E-Ranker.

Ronny would have liked it if their stalemate continued. His mana consumption would have been higher, but he would have gotten rid of his opponent with his two offensive exerting maximum impact on his opponent.

The apparition finally chose to face the counterattack by pulling his sword back. But it had underestimated Ronny. Because the latter was expecting this turn of events as well.

'Blitz Bolt

Blitz Steps

Fire snake

Breath of Fire

Sedated Perception'

Ronny changed his spell combo as soon as he sensed the block he had maintained with his daggers feeling less pressure than previously. He understood the apparition was pulling back to restart the play. Therefore, this was a good time to counterattack.

Eren released a stream of flames from his mouth towards his retreating opponent. This spell not only inflicted more damage but also blindsided his opponent. Ronny was not sure if the apparition without eyes could be blindsided.

But he guessed that since the purgatory had placed the same number of restrictions on the apparitions as if they were real-life rankers, they would mimic the effect of being blindsided if the dungeon participant executed their spells with that aim in mind.

He was right.

Despite his blindsided vision, the apparition swung his sword in front of him as he moved backwards to counter the enemy that was approaching him. But it wasn't enough to stop Ronny who had enhanced perception by his side.

"Where are you running off to?"

Ronny demonstrated the dagger arts taught by Marla. He cut through the opponent's natural mana defence using one of his daggers and cut the opponent's left hand from its wrist.

He caught the hand that was cut by his weapon with his right hand before throwing it at his opponent:

"Here, you dropped this."

The hand still maintained its original state and didn't disintegrate into light particles. It followed the logic of a real hand getting cut by Ronny and landing on the opponent's face.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaa!"

Ronny shouted as he used the small opportunity he had created for himself. He charged forward and attacked the opponents' heart by plunging one of the daggers into it.

The daggers had been coated with lightning and fire that destroyed the already unstable mana defence the opponent had and allowed the dagger to get lodged into the opponent's heart.

The opponent stopped moving when that happened. He looked down to see the damage done to him. But his body had already started disintegrating into light particles when he was in the process of looking up.

Like this, Ronny had taken care of his opponent in the first few moments of the fight. It surprised not only Jules and Renar, but Lady Zee was also quite impressed by the guy's presence of mind.. In addition, she observed that he had a fierce will to dominate his opponent in such a manner.

### [Chapter 285 - Dom's Apparition](#)

"Ronny, be careful of your next opponents from now on. Don't get spooked or hesitate. Battle with them like usual.

Remember, the opponents are apparitions generated by the dungeon. Not real rankers."

Lady Zee warned Ronny with a strange message. The latter raised his eyebrows when he heard that. But he nodded at the D-Ranker anyway.

Ronny had taken care of his first apparition before it could even showcase the kind of spells it had. And he was planning to do the same with his next opponent as well. And start conserving his mana from the third battle onwards.

Ronny's mana expenditure had almost doubled because of his fast-paced play. But he had saved on the stamina he was going to need if he wanted to fight four fights.

But the apparition that was supposed to be Ronny's next opponent started to transform as soon as it stepped into the battle ring. Everything from the apparition's facial features, stature, build, to its generic

clothes changed. They all changed to make Ronny remember the first E-Rank hunter he had fought after finding a new lease on life.

'This is... Dom Walker!'

Ronny recognized the changed silhouette immediately after the changes were finished. He now understood why Lady Zee said what she said. He needed to defeat someone he knew from the past.

'Wait a minute. This means the dungeon can read my memories. The fuck. How?'

Ronny understood another thing from the detail that had unfolded in front of him. The dungeon couldn't arrange something like this without scanning the participants' mana signature alone.

Ronny hoped the dungeons or S-Rank entities couldn't do that just by sensing the ranker's mana sense. Otherwise, there was no point in trying to hide anything from the Sages.

Most likely, Ronny figured, it was the array mechanism of the dungeon scanning the participants' memories. But that didn't make things any less spooky for him than they already were.

Ronny had too many things to hide. He didn't want someone unexpected to show up. Dom was still okay because nobody in his squad had recognized him. But he would be in trouble if someone they all knew showed up like an apparition.

He then shook his hand before consoling himself:

There should be a variety of ways rankers can pull off the same miracle at S rank. I was only a D-Ranker in my past timeline. That restricted view is limiting my imagination, enabling me to label things around me as possible or impossible.'

Ronny reexamined his knowledge of high-ranking entities from his previous timeline and he found it to be lacking. But there was nothing he could do now.

Plus, there was no time to worry about who the next opponent would be. Ronny needed to take care of his current opponent first.

That being said, Ronny felt that the dungeon had messed up creating an opponent like Dom that was referenced from his memories. Because he didn't have any attachment with the guy. If he could take care of him that day while he was rankless, he could certainly do the same now that he was a ranker as well.

'Blitz Bolt

Blitz Steps

Stunning Speed

Sedated Perception'

This time, Ronny decided to get up close and personal and bring out his true potential as a close combat expert. The simple combo would cut down his mana consumption while enabling him to maintain his fast-paced battle style.

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Dom Walker's apparition looked just like him. But instead of the eyes, there were hollow sockets that were filled by the void. The lack of eyes in the eye sockets made Dom look a bit different from his previous self.

Eren's memory of Dom was not complete. It meant that he hadn't seen him use his spells or element when he had killed him. The guy had been drugged by the butcher, due to which he couldn't exert his mana for spell casting.

Ronny understood that the details missing in his memory would be filled randomly by the dungeon. Dom hoped the dungeon didn't possess omnipotent powers to figure out what Dom's real element was, even though he had died without leaving behind a body.

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Dom responded to Ronny's incoming assault by drawing out an Odachi from its sheath. He swung his weapon at his opponent and cut him in half.

Or so it looked like.

But what Dom had cut just a moment before turned out to be Ronny's afterimage. Thanks to the Sedated Perception and Stunning Speed, the guy could manoeuvre easily despite having a small room to do so.

Eren was seen standing behind Dom the next instant with his back to him. His two daggers were found behind him, in a position to pierce his opponent's back.

Just like Ronny's fast movement left a series of afterimages in its wake, it seemed that Dom's weapon mastery enabled him to pull off the same phenomenon. Because as the Odachi was seen taking care of Ronny's afterimage, it also appeared behind its wielder in a defensive position. It had successfully blocked Ronny's attack.

Ronny could imagine Adept Marla flaring her nose at him for trying to sneak up behind his enemy and still failing the task. A close combat expert would rarely use sneak attacks like rogues and assassins. That being said, when they did use them, it was akin to an assassin's sure shot kill. Or at least that's how it was supposed to play out.

Dom's ranking status made him technically more powerful than Ronny because he was on the verge of breaking into the D-Rank when he was killed. The apparition stayed true to Ronny's image of Dom and granted him the prowess of someone who was just a few steps away from breaking into the D-Rank.

Ronny didn't lose hope just because his weapon was blocked though. He decided to continue with his current spell combo.

Ronny removed his weapon from the stalemate and quickly created a distance between him and Dom. The latter was still slow to launch a successful counterattack this time.

A chirping sound was heard as Ronny executed his Bitz Bolt to full potential. He approached his opponent again, intending to make his attack count this time.

## [Chapter 286 - Elemental Fusion](#)

A chirping sound was heard as Ronny executed his Bitz Bolt to full potential. He approached his opponent again, intending to make his attack count this time.

Ronny was seen creating afterimages in his path again as he collided with Dom one more time. This time he didn't try to evade the long reach of the Odachi. Instead of stepping aside, Ronny was seen ducking under the swing that was aimed at him.

Dom was supposed to be a lot taller than Eren when he was alive. The apparition-Dom was no different either. But since Eren was in his Ronny avatar, the difference wasn't much.

That's why when Ronny ducked under the weapon's swing and got back into position, his weapon had almost found its spot inside his opponent's heart.

But this was the time when Ronny came to know about apparition-Dom's elemental status. A thick layer of wood covered the region on Dom's body that was going to get pierced by Ronny's lightning coated dagger.

The lightning lost its destructive power as soon as it came in contact with the mana-generated wood's surface. This spell-manifested wood was tougher than what wood is normally known for.

Soon, the growth of wood started covering Dom's entire body, creating an armour of wood in the process. Dom started looking weird as a result of the same.

But Ronny understood that the visual appeal of a ranker's spell wasn't everything. If the spell looked uncool but did its' job well, then Ronny wouldn't hesitate to use the spell either.

Ronny twitched his eye as he realized that the dungeon was again trying to test his limits. He was half sure by now that the real Dom wouldn't have wood element affinity. It was given to apparition-Dom by the dungeon to become his good counter.

'Thank the devil I took care of the previous guy as soon as I could.'

With his lightning element spells reducing in their effectiveness after Dom's elemental reveal, Ronny understood that a fast-paced battle style won't give him maximum benefits. With wood armour covering his opponent from all angles, he couldn't land a finishing blow in a short period.

When Ronny failed to land a blow at close range, he would be vulnerable to counterattacks half the time. Plus, Odachi's long reach made it risky for him to retreat safely.

Ronny needed to change his spell combo. Which he did:

'Fire snake

Fireball

Breath of Fire

Blitz Steps'

Ronny decided to work with the fire-element spells at his disposal because it was effective against the wood element. He cancelled his time element spells to conserve his already rapidly depleting mana storage.

'Sururururu'

As soon as the two rankers collided, Ronny's fire element snakes bit into his opponent's armour. Fire snakes' bites coated the wood armour in flames that produced a distinct sound when they started burning it up.

But it turned out Dom also had a second set of spells just like Ronny did. He swung his Odachi first before retreating backwards and snapping his fingers as he did so.

Dom used the mana within the environment and moisture to create floating masses of water. He raised his empty hand and guided some of the masses of water to land on him, bathing in the process.

Dom had taken care of Ronny's fire element spell. The latter had dark lines on his forehead after learning of the recent turn of events. The dungeon was hell-bent on testing his mettle as a ranker it seemed.

'My high rating is to be blamed for this.'

Ronny quickly concluded after he saw his opponent was slowly turning out to be a very effective counter to him. Plus, fighting with Dom and not gaining an advantage was irritating for him. To Ronny, it felt like he had made no progress at all during the months in LA.

But Dom wasn't done there. Ronny could swear that the apparition-Dom was beaming with pleasure on his face as he lodged his Odachi in the ground in front of him before raising his hands to call all the masses of water towards him.

Something weird happened at that time.

Something Ronny AKA hadn't seen in both his lives. He saw that Dom was making the element of wood and water merge as the masses of water collided against his wood armour. The wood started looking like it had turned into a dense plasma as a result of fusion with the water element.

The plasma of wood replaced Dom's wood armour and became more refined than before. If the wood armour looked like a weird juxtaposition of planks, the plasma wood armour took into account the contours of Dom's body, providing him with a customized fit.

Dom's plasma wood armour also made him more difficult to approach. First, it was not just planks of wood covering his body anymore. The contoured armour allowed him to fill the chinks in the armour he had before the fusion took place.

Second, the plasma wood was lighter and more durable than before.

Instead of breaking right on the spot under the influence of force overload, the plasma wood would get stretched and use that force as a source of energy to get displaced. It would resume its previous shape and position after the force inflicted on it by the external source is extinguished.

"What the fuck is this I'm seeing? Lady Zee, do you have any idea what just happened?"

Instead of approaching the opponent directly, Ronny thought to gather some information about the phenomenon he had just witnessed with his eyes. That's why he asked the Adept ranker to shed some light on the event.

Ronny was wary of the opponent as he asked that question. But thankfully, Dom just stood there and allowed him to finish his conversation.

"Boy Ronny, you are one unlucky fellow, aren't you? This has never happened to any of us so far. Because none of us is qualified to face something like this."

Lady Zee's face was also painted with shock when she saw Ronny's opponent.. Then she looked at Ronny in pity, as if he was a lost cause.

### [Chapter 287 - Layla](#)

Lady Zee's face was also painted with shock when she saw Ronny's opponent performing elemental fusion in front of her. Then she looked at Ronny in pity, as if he was a lost cause.

"Um... Lady Zee, nothing about your statement makes me understand what I'm supposed to do? Some elaboration would be helpful here. What is this elemental fusion?"

Lady Zee shook her head in denial before replying to Ronny's question:

"Elemental fusion is something you can do when you have progressed further into the way of the elements. It is supposed to happen when you reach B-Rank or higher.

I don't know much about elemental fusion either. What I do know is the fact that elemental fusion is supposed to be synergistic in nature.

Don't underestimate your opponent even if my explanation sounds simple and rudimentary. Anything that has to do with the way of the elements has the potential to enable the ranker to exert more power than his rank could normally entail."

Ronny rolled his eyes after he heard Lady Zee's response. He couldn't believe the dungeon was making him fight against something that belonged to the B-Rank. This was more than playing while the odds were against you. This was playing a game when the entire match was rigged.

'Elemental fusion is supposed to be synergetic? What does that mean?'

Ronny couldn't help but ask the question to himself when he started processing Lady Zee's words while his guards were up against his standing-still opponent. Reen was there to answer the question.

'Erni, I think I sense the elemental natures of wood and water have retained their properties after being mixed.

From what I can tell, the armour the guy is wearing should have the electrical resistance of wood. And at the same time, it would be more difficult to burn because of the presence of water elemental nature mixed within it.'

'Fuck my life!'

Ronny had to admit he had underestimated the difficulty of the dungeon. When he had taken care of his first opponent in the first match of this round, he had thought that things would be a little hectic. But he'd pull through because of all his advantages.

Something like this though was beyond his scope of understanding or capability. He didn't think he would be able to deal with an opponent of similar rank even when he was a D-Ranker from his past timeline if he started using the powers that belonged to the realm of B-Rank.

'What should I do now?'

He thought to himself as he gripped his daggers tightly. He was just about to give it his all by bolting towards his opponent when an unknown female voice was heard in his mind:

'Hello, Eren Elijah Idril. My name is Layla. You can call me the caretaker of this separate dimension.

First of all, let me tell you that it's not what you think. The dungeon is trying to help you.'

A voice identifying herself as Layla spoke in Ronny's mind. It sounded ancient and young at the same time to him.

Ronny had first thought that it was Alpee speaking in a changed voice to him. But Layla's name told him otherwise. He knew full well the former would hear him, so he posed the question to himself.

'There's no privacy policy left in this place, is it? I'll just skip the intro now that you know about me. Please tell me, Layla, what is not what I think it is?'

There was a short pause before Layla answered Ronny's question the same way she had contacted him the first time:

'Hehehe! You are one paranoid ranker, aren't you? Of course, I can't hear your thoughts. Not really.

It is the dungeon's mechanism aiding me to understand the ballpark thought of what you are thinking, based on your fluctuating mana signature right now.'

Ronny didn't believe Layla's words. He made her suspicions known to her:

'Don't bullshit me. You peeked into my memories to render this fellow right in front of me. How can you make this apparition if you haven't looked through my memories?'

Layla giggled like a small girl once again before replying to Ronny:

Hehehe! I sense a strong sense of you not believing in my words. I'll tell you this. The rendition of someone you know from the past is not done by me. Master had automated that process from the get-go. I don't have access to those memories either.

My master was very particular about who he was going to choose as his successor. He didn't want my point of view to get influenced because of my knowledge about the participants' memories.

He just let me use the dungeon's mechanism to understand the participants' real-time thoughts. This was done so that I could get a glimpse of how the potential successor to the master's heritage is as a ranker.'



Ronny heard Layla's answer and relaxed a bit. He didn't want his memories scanned by someone powerful. His identity as an Osan Woods' Butcher was one reason. The other, most crucial reason was the fact that he didn't want anyone to know that he was carrying a logic-defying artefact in him in the form of Alephee.

'Alright, I believe you can't read my memories. Simply because you don't have the reason to lie about that part. But why should I believe you when you say that the dungeon is trying to help me when I see the dude pulling a move that doesn't even belong in the E-Rank?'

Ronny asked Layla in annoyance. He was looking forward to his rewards for his extra work in this round. But he didn't think he could win this match anymore. Not when the guy had become immune to both sets of spells at the same time.

'Look, Eren. The whole reason I contacted you now is that I don't want you to rush into your battle thinking that the match is rigged. I said the dungeon is trying to help you and I mean it.

Like that lady said there, it is not something that happens to everyone who comes to this separate dimension trying to test their luck at becoming my master's successor. The dungeon's mechanism has judged your rating and performance so far and found that you are worthy to be tested like this.

You need to understand that at your rank, there are not a lot of things you can know or understand. The elemental fusion is indeed related to the way of the elements. But that lady is just ignorant if she thinks these concepts only apply in the B-Rank.'

Ronny heard Layla's explanation and pondered for a bit. The squad members saw him putting one of his daggers in his right hand. He used the now-free hand to caress his chin.

They didn't know that he was talking with Layla at the time. They just thought that he was making use of the dungeon's exploit to take a breather before resuming his lost-cause battle again.

Layla observed that Ronny wasn't replying so she took the initiative again and explained to him what she was getting at:

'Your foundation as a ranker gets set in your early ranks. You need to start working on these concepts early in your journey as a ranker if you want to make use of powers like these.

Having the ability to wield the elements like they are supposed to be wielded. A ranker should start working on these things from your current rank, especially if they don't want to experience any tiring bottlenecks in the future.

This dungeon is not trying to get you. It is in fact trying to help you by showing you the thing you need to start working on sooner. But I'd be lying if I said the dungeon doesn't have any other reason behind this.

It is indeed trying to test you as well. But there's a subtle difference this time if you compare this with your earlier fights in the dungeon so far.

This time, the dungeon is not trying to test your current ranking power. It is trying to test your potential as a ranker in the future.'

Layla paused after saying till here. She let Ronny understand what she was trying to say to him. The latter thought to himself before some understanding dawned on him. He needed to confirm his doubts:

'You mean to say I can win this match if I just try hard enough? How? I can't do what this guy has done.

The synergy of the elements even when they have been fused! I don't completely understand these concepts. But I've come to realize that the guy's armour has made him immune to my lightning and fire element spells. And those are the only attacking sets of spells I have at my disposal.

So you tell me, how am I able to win against this?'

Layla giggled like a little girl once again before replying:

'Hehehehe! I'm not one of those rankers whom you can fool easily. I know what you are. You need to use that power within you to fight this opponent.'

Ronny had a stoic expression on his face when he heard Layla this time. He had understood that she was talking about his status as a demi-human. But he asked to confirm:

'What am I?'

'A half-blood, of course.'

Layla replied immediately.

#### [Chapter 288 - Half-Blood](#)

'Half-blood? What does that mean?'

Ronny raised his eyebrows. He wasn't sure if he had heard this term in either timeline.

'That's right. A half-blood. What do guys call it these days? Oh yes! A demi-human.'

Ronny narrowed his eyes when he heard Layla say that. She, as the caretaker of this place that has existed for who knows how long, must know some crucial information. the kind of information the current population was denied access to.

Layla had approached him first. He might as well try and get some intel on missing pieces of continental history JJ Edgar was talking about in his personal diary:

'What can you tell me about this so-called half-blood existence?'

Layla became quiet after Ronny asked the question. Just when the latter thought he wouldn't gain any information from her, she replied in a melancholic tone:

"Half-blood clans were once thriving on this continent. There was no ranker in existence that didn't know about their rise to prominence when it was their era. Too bad none of them are in this world anymore. Except you, of course.'

Ronny raised his eyebrows again. But before he could ask Layla any more questions regarding the missing history, she spoke in a soft childish voice again:

'Enough talk about the past we can't change. Chop chop, Eren Idril. You have a test to finish here.

What I wanted to say was you can use inherent spells if you're half-blood, right? Use them. You can rely on them to get you through the current challenge.

Ronny had a blank face when he heard Layla's suggestion. He tried to explain to the former why he couldn't do what she had expected from him:

'Layla, as easy as it might sound coming from you, let me come clean in saying that I only have one inherent spell I know of currently. And that is not something I can use against this guy.

And how can inherent spells help in fighting something like elemental fusion? They don't seem much different to me if you ignore their obvious peculiarity.'

Ronny heard a female voice when he finished asking the question. But it wasn't from Layla. Lady Zee had been tired of waiting. And she let her displeasure known:

"Ronny, what's the hold-up? Finish your battle, will you? It's fine if you only have one win. I'll take care of the rest and make sure we pass this round. So don't worry."

Lady Zee thought that Ronny had gotten cold after he realized that his opponent could perform the elemental fusion. He couldn't blame the guy. She would probably hesitate to fight too if she were in his shoes.

Then she calmed down and analyzed the situation. Her prior experience told her that the dungeon would never rig a match so much that the participants would have almost zero chance of success. She knew there had to be some catch involved.

She wanted to figure that out by battling with her opponent that could use elemental fusion as well. Maybe she could gain some insights after fighting with them.

"Oh! It's nothing, Lady Zee. I was just trying to catch my breath. I'll start my test in a few moments. Just hold on."

Ronny bought a few minutes for himself before using the same to continue his discussion with Layla.

'Layla, please answer my question.'

Ronny pleaded with Layla to hurry up and finish up whatever she had approached him for. The latter had regained her nonchalance by now. She replied to him casually:

'Look Eren, anything that has to do with the way of the elements can only be dealt with the way of the elements. A half-blood is blessed with a shortcut when it comes to wielding its elements. They just need to utilize the power of their blood to cast inherent spells.

The inherent spells are based on the way of the elements from their get-go whether you completely understand it or not. Therefore, you can say that a half-blood starts wielding their elements as soon as they break into the F-Rank.

When my master had created this separate dimension, the half-blood rankers were a normal thing. And he would have preferred one of them to become his successor as well.

So he had programmed the dungeon mechanism in such a way that the half-bloods would only receive the tests that were meant to be taken by them. And something like dealing with elemental fusion was a no biggie for half-blood rankers.'

Ronny pondered for a while before replying:

'So that means I received this test because the dungeon thinks that I'm qualified to follow through with it because of my status as a half-blood. But I keep on telling you, this whole thing about being a demi-human or whatever you call it is fairly new to me.

I wouldn't be able to use my inherent spell against this kind of opponent. The most I can do is copy the physical traits of an anthrope on a superficial level when I cast my spell and make physical contact with them. I don't think the way of the elements is something I can copy and reproduce.

I'm guessing you are aware of how sensitive my status as a demi-human is these days. So you would understand when I say that I wouldn't use my inherent spell in front of the audience. Even when I knew I could use it to defeat this guy.

I don't have the habit of creating more mess in the future just to take care of the current situation.'

Ronny made her position known to Layla. Shortly thereafter, the latter responded in a disappointing tone.

'Haash! The half-bloods would weep if they came to know the current standards and paranoid nature of the last kin they have left on this continent.

Alright, I can make your squad members disappear from their current positions and keep them away from you till you finish your test.'

#### [Chapter 289 - Optimized Compromise](#)

'Alright, I can make your squad members disappear from their current positions and keep them away from you till you finish your test.'

Ronny shook his head before replying to Layla:

'That would just raise more suspicions in Lady Zee's mind. I would rather quit this test than risk something like getting an entire cultist organization breathing down my neck.'

Layla sounded angry when she replied to him next:

'You gutless man. My bold and manly master shouldn't have a scaredy-cat successor like you.

But I cannot ignore you either. Because it seems that you are the only half-blood left here.

I'm only allowed to assist in my limited capacity. Keep that in mind and tell me, what do you want me to do? I can't help you win the match with my participation if that's what you are asking.'

Ronny rolled his eyes when he heard Layla's childish standards in men that were not mindful about their own safety. He then tried to clear the air with his next words:

'No, you didn't get it, Layla. I'm not telling you to rig the test from your end. I am not seeking participation from you or my team members. There's a simpler way. Just change the opponent. And this time, if you can help it, make them not wield their elements. You can do this, right?'

Ronny asked with a hopeful voice. He didn't want to give up on clearing the round with maximum participation. Especially when he knew there weren't many floors he could clear with his current team because it was simply not possible.

The average rating of the group would make it easy to clear the initial floors. But the group's weak links would start to create problems when individual participation is considered on the tests as well.

To clear the dungeon, the butcher would need a group of professionals who had the maximum potential to grow as the rankers. Something like his White Raven crew. But that was a possibility that belonged in the future.

Ronny had to think about making the most of his current visit. So he asked Layla if the thing he proposed could be done:

'\*Sigh. I can stop your opponent from using the way of the elements. But the dungeon's mechanism will make it so that the difficulty level of your current battle stays more or less the same.

And I don't know what it will do with yours to compensate for the lack of an opponent who is not wielding their elements.

Plus, your default rewards will also be affected by this change. In case you are still having doubts, let me go ahead and confirm that you have been given better rewards than your peers.

It's because you performed better than your peers, which in turn was made possible by the dungeon putting you through harsher tests. With me interfering in the test manually, your rewards won't be as grand as they ought to be. So tell me, do you still want to proceed?'

'This childlike existence is surprisingly obedient. I wonder what makes her listen to my requests.

Two plus two equals four. Ramy shouldn't be allowed to speak the word ranker in the presence of girls. Lalalalalalalala....

Alright, Layla. I'm okay with anything as long as it doesn't get in the way of the elements involved.'

Ronny thought to himself. Then he mixed those with random words and another set of thoughts. So that they wouldn't be read that well by Layla. Then, in his head, he agreed to her question.

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The butcher was a blank slate when it came to predicting thoughts through the real-time analysis of the mana signatures. That power belonged to the Sages.

Sages were impossible for the butcher to deceive. But he knew how arrays could be used to analyze rankers in general. Since the arrays don't have the mental capacity of a human, they will only behave the way they are programmed with runes.

And the runes would not be able to differentiate between his real thoughts with fake ones he had introduced to fool the same arrays.

Due to the cocktail of thoughts he had bombarded his mind with recently, Layla couldn't figure out what he had been thinking about. But she ignored that when she received his affirmation and got to work.

\*\*\*\*\*

Lady Zee was confused.

This year's dungeon exploration left her confused. First, she hadn't expected to see that the opponent generated by the dungeon would employ elemental fusion in a battle against one of her teammates.

Then another weird thing happened. Ronny's opponent started changing into another faceless ranker. But the weirdness didn't end there. The opponent apparition had also been joined by another faceless ranker.

It seemed that her team member was preparing to battle two opponents simultaneously. Exceptions like these never happened in previous explorations. Not with her. Not with any of the other Illuminati members as far as she could tell.

Ronny was part confused and partly relieved that Layla had pulled through. Then it dawned on him that the dungeon mechanism had optimized the difficulty level of his current battle. He needed to battle two opponents of higher-ranking status than him because he had avoided someone who could wield their elements.

"What is happening, Ronny?"

Jules asked in impatience. Ronny shrugged his shoulders before responding:

"Beats me. Maybe there's a glitch in the dungeon mechanism."

Ronny blamed his special treatment on the glitch in the dungeon mechanism which was almost non-existent. Lady Zee couldn't refute him either because she had been surprised by the way the dungeon behaved sometimes. So she let the matter rest.

Soon, the first apparition turned into Dom Walker. The second apparition turned into Edward Jenner, the LA lab-in-charge he had killed before starting his revenge plan on Sienna. He smiled mirthlessly to himself when he thought of how he had taken care of Dom and Edward:

'I had killed both of these guys using Reen, thinking I had skipped battling with them. But who knew they would have their revenge like this by teaming up with each other to take me down one day?'

### [Chapter 290 - Potion Of Serenity](#)

'I had killed both of these guys using Reen, thinking I had skipped battling with them. But who knew they would have their revenge like this by teaming up with each other to take me down?'

Just when Ronny was done pondering to himself the shitty luck he had faced so far and preparing to launch a frontal attack on his two opponents, he heard Layla's voice that had returned to her childish tone:

'Hold it, hold it, Eren Idril. It'll be too difficult for you to win like this. Wait a moment, I'll give you something from my personal collection.'

Layla said and fell silent again. The next thing Ronny knew, there was an invisible array getting drawn over the ground he was standing on. An array that only he could see. This was the same array the dungeon had used to make the participants' rewards appear in their personal storage.

Ronny understood that Layla had sent something to his personal storage. As he hurriedly sent his mana sense into his storage. He expected to find an artefact or weapon that would help him deal with two E-Rank apparitions that had been blessed with higher ranking status than him.

'That's it? A potion?'

Ronny thought and felt disappointed. Layla sensed his emotions and responded irritably:

'You dare treat this as some stamina potion? Hmph! Thank you lucky stars I gave you this concoction.

From what I've observed about the rankers' standards of the present times, you guys don't have anything like these. At least, the concoction won't be available for guys like you, who were used as guinea pigs to farm this dungeon.

This is called the Potion of Serenity. Even during my master's time, it was extremely rare.

It should only be used sparingly, otherwise, your mana core won't be able to handle the disturbance in the mana circuits it creates.

The potion will aid you in gaining insights into your element, enabling you to wield your element eventually. It'll also help you bring out the true potential of your rank by sending your mana core into an agitated state.'

Layla sounded as if someone had belittled her toys in front of her. Ronny couldn't help but continue his ridicule some more after hearing about the former's explanation:

'It's not like I can start meditation hereafter gulping the potion down my throat while my opponents are waiting for me to finish processing whatever insights I gain. There are other, better ways to help me, you know.

Just give me an OP weapon or something already. Why should Ken Riverine have all the luck? Let me feel like I'm the protagonist of my own story at least once.'

Ronny replied in equal annoyance. Layla's irritation grew as the former reciprocated her feelings.

'Listen to me, you shameless, gutless man. I don't know what problems you have with this Ken guy, but don't take that out on me. I've already done enough by offering you something like the Potion of Serenity.

The Potion of Serenity will help you capture the true essence of all your life experiences as a ranker. It works the most effective when it is taken for the first time. The beneficial effects decrease and the \*cough\* side effects increase \*cough\* with repeated use, especially if the potion is taken again in a short timespan.

You don't need to meditate after taking the potion. It is supposed to be consumed while you are in the middle of a serious battle. That is the most preferred way to get the maximum benefits out of this potioneering wonder.'

Ronny scratched his chin when he heard Layla expounding on the potion and started processing it slowly in his head. He zeroed in on one fleeting warning made by the latter:

'Hmm? What side effects? And why are you helping me so much? What's your cut in all this?'

The butcher would always suspect something was fishy when someone was being overly helpful towards him. He had completely stopped believing that people could help him out of the nicety of their hearts.

'There are no side effects you should be worried about right now. Just take the damn potion already. And I'm always helpful, Eren Idril. I always have been. Not everyone is like you, you know.'

Ronny spat on the ground when he heard that. He responded right afterwards:

'I can recognize a fellow bullshitter when I see one. Out with it, Layla. Why are you helping me? Otherwise, I'll quit this battle. I don't care about the repercussions or rewards. My life is more meaningful to me.'

Layla seemed to have panicked when she heard the word 'quit' from Ronny's mouth. She sighed deeply before confiding in him:

'Alright, alright. The thing is, I'm bored and want to get out of this place. Explore the outside world. Have you ever wondered how long I've been trapped in this dimension? Too long, too much, I tell you.

And you are my key to getting out of here. I'm raising your chances to win something substantial here that can help you in your solo battles in the tower.

The tower battles would be too difficult for you to handle otherwise in your current situation. Don't think tower battles will be as easy as what you are facing here. You could even die inside the tower if you aren't prepared.

I need you to perform well in your tower battles and get the mark as a reward, Eren Idril. Due to your half-blood status, you are my only hope of getting the true inheritance of this place. Why do you think I contacted you first?

With that mark, I'll be able to leave the place with you. It's my get-out-of-jail card.

Of course, I cannot directly help you in battles because of the restrictions placed on me by my master. So the Potion of Serenity is the compromise I've come up with without making my involvement overtly obvious to the dungeon mechanism.'

...

'Oh! So this little ghost wants to leave the place with me.'

Ronny thought and pondered over all the other details Layla had shared with him.

Layla expected Ronny to pull out of the battle when she told him he could die exploring the separate dimension. But contrary to her explanation, the latter flashed a content smile before retrieving the Potion of Serenity from his storage.

He uncorked the vial and addressed Layla before consuming the potion in one go:



'I'm relieved now that I heard your ulterior motive, Layla. My faith in you has been restored. I will never put my faith in others' goodness. But with your self-interests linked to my winning, I can finally get on with the program.

You called me gutless, right? I think you've misunderstood my stance. My life is not so cheap as to expose myself to unnecessary dangers I can avoid.

But for the right price and right rewards, I, Eren Idril, will not hesitate to shed my blood and put my life on the line.'

Ronny said and gulped down the Potion of Serenity. It tasted like water to him, leaving the minty flavour and effect behind as an aftertaste. The next thing Ronny knew, his mana circuits and his mana core had started becoming restless.

His vision was also getting hazy as if he was drunk on the most potent booze of his rank. He felt that his mind was vaguely connected to something greater than his existence.

The butcher was no stranger to the feeling. He had already experienced the state of epiphany. He was experiencing exactly that feeling right now. But the effects were diluted and different.

Suddenly scenes from his past appeared in his mind as though some sort of image-viewer had malfunctioned and displayed loads of images all at once.

Ronny felt delirious and in control simultaneously. He then looked at his two opponents that had been inactive so far, as if waiting for him to make a move.

Ronny started having weird ideas in his head. The concepts of lightning, fire, and time were creating a cocktail of comprehension for him that he had started digesting slowly but surely.

'The lightning tells me to be fast.'

Ronny executed Blitz Steps while under the effects of the potion. But there was something different in this execution. The tongues of lightning that had coated his lower legs seemed tamer than before. They also changed their hue from dark blue to light blue before turning it into turquoise.

But that was not all. This time, unbeknownst to Ronny and most of his audience, the tip of his toes had changed into lightning sparks. As the claws extended out of the shoe, they looked like claws of some beast peeking through the toe-cap.

'The fire tells me to burn everything.'

Ronny cast the fire-snake spell on both his hands. This time, instead of wrapping around the butcher's arms, the snakes manifested themselves over his hand in such a way that it appeared as if the snakes had replaced his arms.

'The time tells me everything converges and diverges at some point.'

Sedated Perception and Stunning Speed had been executed simultaneously. It seemed this time that the effects of both spells were synergistic. The almost-stagnant world around him looked clearer and more vivid to him.

It seemed to him that quite a while had passed. But in reality, only a few seconds had passed since Ronny's first spell execution. He became a blur to his audience soon after.