

Vile 291

[Chapter 291 - Animated Spell](#)

Ronny became a blur to his audience soon after he executed his spell combo. A small crater was seen on the ground where he was standing just a few moments ago. It still had a few lightning sparks dancing over it as a mana residue.

Edward was seen retrieving a vial and throwing it on the ground. At first, Jules didn't understand why Ronny's opponent threw a vial of potion on the ground. But she soon got the answer.

The potion soon released a mana miasma after coming into contact with the surroundings. The miasma soon formed a mushroom-like cloud in the battle ring.

This was what Jules processed with her normal time perception. But her teammate perceived this event differently.

Ronny had already reached Dom's apparition. He threw a punch at the opponent's tummy which was just barely getting covered by the layer of wood in the form of uneven planks.

Ronny's hands had been turned into snakes' mouths by now. The punch landed on the guy's upper abdomen before he could realize that Ronny had approached him.

Although Ronny's time element spells were in the F-Rank, the synergy he had found while under the influence of the Potion of Serenity allowed him to use the spell combo almost like an E-Rank spell. As a result, he was faster than before, allowing him to land the punch without his opponent taking precautions against it.

The punch's effects hadn't even been processed by Dom's body yet. But Ronny decided to carry on with his momentum and grabbed his opponent's neck from behind. The grip that he had used to do that made it look like the fire snake had bitten at his back.

Ronny had done this to make his opponent stay beside him and not fly far away as a result of his merciless punch. He wanted to pin Dom down so that he could keep landing blows on him while keeping him in close range.

Ronny felt that his opponent's body was going to take off. So he pressed the neck downwards and used his right knee to perform a low blow on the same spot he had punched the guy before. After that, he went behind Dom, locked both his hands, and hammered Dom's back with that combined hand-lock.

Jules saw that as the cloud of the mana miasma was forming around the region, Dom was attacked by a blurred shadow. She could see the sparks of lightning and the light of the fire. She had realized that it was Ronny who had attacked the opponent with his extreme speed.

She saw that Dom slumped forward as something landed heavily on his stomach. Then she saw that he had been struck behind his back by a substantial force that only left residue mana in its wake in the form of lightning and fire.

Dom was pinned down on the ground with a loud thud. The ground beneath him cracked. But Ronny did not seem to slow down. As she could still see the sparks of lightning and fire wreaking havoc on various

parts of Dom's body. Ronny, like the battle-hardened ranker he was, had specifically targeted the guy's vital spots while landing blows after blows at him.

The battle had become completely one-sided between Dom and Ronny in the latter's favour. She saw that Dom's wood element armour had played a very small part in safeguarding him. This was because Ronny had been too fast for him to complete his spell execution soundly.

A screech was heard from Dom's apparition that didn't sound human. He was seen using a movement spell that covered his legs with a layer of malleable wood. He used those legs to kick against the ground he was lying down on and hurled his body in the air.

Ronny was still fast enough to see Dom trying in vain to leave the session of beating he had arranged for him. He formed the combined hand-lock again while he was processing the events in the almost-stagnant world and hammered down at the top of Dom's chest.

Because the latter's levitating body was attempting to leave the ground, he had easy access to the chest surface.

Dom's body had been covered by the half-finished wood armour that looked like it had been formed by mismatched wooden planks. There were sparks of turquoise lightning and light orange flames all over his body. The elemental residues of lightning and fire formed patches around his vital spots.

Dom's movement spell to escape Ronny's unceasing attacks turned out to be futile. His levitating body was again sent back to the ground it came from. Seemingly frustrated by the screeching noise, Dom clapped his hands and performed his AoE.

The flying wood spears came into existence out of the thin air around Dom and Ronny and they all targeted the latter. Then he used his movement spell again to get away from his lightning-element opponent while sending the wooden spears forward.

In an almost stagnant world, Ronny saw wooden spears coming towards him. His mind was still processing the insights he was gaining during the battle. Something was telling him to imbue his mana sense into the fire-snakes he had as his arms.

Ronny just followed the instructions he was given by the higher consciousness and raised his hands. The fire-snakes seemed to have come to life when he shared his mana sense with his spell-generated reptiles.

Ronny had just started to process the surroundings around him in multiple perspectives when he shared the mana sense in a way the higher consciousness had told him to. The first perspective was his own. These two perspectives belong to the now-lifelike fire snakes.

'Hissssss'

The fire snakes hissed when they saw that the wooden spears were approaching them from all around them. They raised their heads and shot towards the arrows. Their tails were still attached to Ronny's hands. But their fire-element torsos had been stretched tremendously.

Soon, multiple fire-snakes were originating from Ronny's palms. The number of perspectives he had to process also increased as a result. They each targeted the wooden spear coming their way.

Ronny was seen standing in the middle of a wooden spear storm that was closing in on him rapidly. The miasma layer was also present in the surrounding area. Things suddenly started going south for him.

That was until a hive of fire-snakes made their appearance.

[Chapter 292 - Cloak Of Lightning](#)

Ronny was seen standing in the middle of a wooden spear storm that was closing in on him rapidly. Miasma was also present in the surrounding area. Things suddenly started heading south for him.

That was until a hive of fire-snakes made their appearance.

The number of wooden spears was more than twice that of the fire snakes. But that didn't matter to the now-lifelike fire snakes. They all hissed and approached the spears closest to them.

Each of the fire snakes bit off the tips of the wooden spears as soon as contact was made. In some cases, snakes even wrapped their bites around wooden spears' hilts.

Spontaneous combustion!

Jules saw that as soon as the fire-snakes bit the wooden spears targeting their caster, they burst into flames before immediately disappearing into thin air. The fire snakes didn't rest and targeted other stray wooden spears that were heading towards Ronny.

The fire-snakes destroyed many wooden spears with their bites. Dom, however, had created more of them during that time. He sent the newly made ones towards his opponent. Edward stood next to him with his sword drawn.

The fire-snakes seemed to have realized that it wouldn't be possible for them to take care of all the flying wooden spears coming their way in due time. So all of them opened their mouths and hissed.

Something strange happened at the time for Ronny. The multiple perspectives he was processing in his head seemed to have a mind of their own even when they were connected to him. The perspectives asked him for his mana. They wanted to cast a spell of their own.

Jules saw that loads of fire-snakes Ronny had cast and positioned himself in their midst, opening their mouths towards the approaching wooden spears that had been newly formed. Then she saw the snakes creating a fireball each in front of their wide-open mouths.

She opened her eyes in utter surprise as she realized something. It seemed that a stacked spell was casting a stacked spell of its own.

Multiple small balls of fire were seen forming around the still-delirious Ronny. They were soon hurled towards the groups of wooden spears by their supposedly inanimate casters—the fire snakes.

'Burn everything!'

Ronny mumbled to himself as multiple rounds of detonation took place all around him in the surrounding area. The newly manifested wooden spears were caught in a series of detonations and were spontaneously combusted.

But some half-burnt wooden spears still made it past the fire explosion and started approaching Ronny. Jules thought that it was game over for her teammate as he still seemed to be in a daze.

Ronny didn't move even though he could sense that the mana-strengthened wooden spears were approaching him from multiple directions. He used his defensive spell this time.

Blitz Shield!

A layer of lightning formed around Ronny. But this time instead of tongues of lightning dancing over his skin, the lightning had formed a densely knit net and covered his entire body.

The net of lightning soon transformed into something different, guided by Ronny's dazed mind. Now it looked like Ronny was wearing a cloak of lightning that covered every inch of his body from neck to toe. His head had also been covered in a lightning net.

The wooden spears that had made it past the series of fireball detonations soon landed on Ronny. They came in contact with his lightning cloak and their momentum was unrealistically killed off before they burst from within.

The wooden arrows were imploded as a very high voltage ran through them. The lightning's destructive voltage was so high that it had overcome the insulation properties of the manifested wooden spears.

All the arrows that came in contact with Ronny's lightning cloak faced the same fate as their earlier counterparts. Meanwhile, the target of that attack who was in a daze of his own soon seemed to have been snapped out.

The butcher woke up when he destroyed all the remaining wooden spears. He was woken out of his state because his body had subconsciously realized that it was running low on mana.

The casting of stacked fire-snake spell and stacked fireball spell had cost Ronny a lot in terms of his mana storage. When he was snapped out of his potion-induced daze, he wondered how he had so much mana after pulling off a stunt as he did.

Then the headache hit him. An excruciating form of headache he had never experienced before. He had started seeing things around him in a blur. He had to shake his head to regain normal vision. But the headache remained.

'It must be the side effects of the potion. That little ghost should have warned me, damn it. I hope this wretched headache is all there is to it for the side effects.

*Sigh. No point complaining now, anyway. I should focus on getting rid of Dom first now that I've also made him spend so much of his mana.

If the apparition follows real-life logic, he should be as spent as I am.

Ronny shook his head as he focused on his two opponents. If he was in full control of himself, he would have targeted Edward first because he seemed like the weaker ranker between the two opponents. Too bad, the subconscious-him wanted to dominate the biggest obstacle first. In doing so, he had left the potioneer unchecked for far too long.

'This miasma. My mana circuits and core have also been affected by this. The more I stay inside it, the more debuffs I'll have to face. I could target Edward. But Dom would use that time to initiate a counterattack on me.'

In the end, Ronny decided to continue targeting Dom. He retrieved Dicer's Right again and realized something. He could have targeted Dom using his weapons when he had first gotten close to him. But he dropped the thoughts of regrets and narrowed his eyes on Dom.

'Bud, you are not the only one who could use potions in battle, you know.'

Ronny addressed Edward's apparition in his head before retrieving a vial. It wasn't a potion bomb this time.

[Chapter 293 - Soul Sense](#)

Ronny addressed Edward's apparition in his head before retrieving a vial. It wasn't a potion bomb this time.

The vial contained an exclusive E-Rank potion meant to be taken by lightning users. It would help the rankers amplify the output of lightning spells almost twice their intended effects.

Ronny drank the contents of the vial without a moment's delay. Then he drank a couple of stamina potions of the same rank. The stamina potion would indeed make him recover the lost stamina from his over expenditure of it during the delirious state to a certain degree.

Ronny wanted to use the mana recovery potion on himself too. But sadly, his mana core wasn't exactly in that rank. He would have suffered the consequences of drinking the potion that wasn't meant for him had he done that.

Finally, he retrieved another vial of potion and emptied the contents of his two weapons. The potion contained a liquid that would destabilize the ranker's mana circuits for a while if it goes into their system due to direct ingestion or through open wounds.

It was a debuff potion meant for Ronny's opponents. He figured two can play the game of debuffing their opponents.

Edward's potion enabled him to cast an AoE that was supposed to work because of long exposure while enabling him to retract from the battle if he could find shelter in his teammate. Ronny's debuff potion on the other hand made him come in contact with the enemy. A contact he was more than willing to initiate.

Ronny also knew that the longer he stayed in the miasma, the more detrimental it would be for him. But just when he was about to bolt towards his enemies, a voice sounded in his head.

'Duck and move sideways.'

Ronny heard Alpee's voice and opened his eyes wide in surprise. His body responded to her instruction before he could process them and ducked on its own before using all the might of his movement spell to go sideways.

Another huge crater was formed where Ronny was standing a moment before. Part of it was due to Ronny using his lightning element movement spell in its full effect. But the biggest reason behind it was due to an explosion going off at the place.

Soon a barrage of wood spears zeroed in on the same area Ronny was standing at and attacked it with all that it got. Had Ronny been a second too late, he would have faced heavy repercussions.

'The miasma is not only debuffing your body. It is also affecting your mind and making you fall into an illusion.'

Alphee gave Ronny shocking news. He had thought that the miasma was working slowly on him due to the large area it had to cover. But turned out the effect and the whole charade was just to make him let his guard down.

Ronny came to realize that although Edward was a mere potioneer and his personal battle experience might not be much, he had made the best use of his field of expertise. The expertise he had almost been trapped in.

The butcher was glad that he had taken care of Edward through Reen without wasting efforts on himself. Otherwise, things would have gotten south if the potioneer was allowed to make use of the illusion-inducing potion.

'How strong is the illusion? Can the illusion expert Jules see what's going on here?'

Alphee seemed to have been checking something. She replied after a while:

'Your teammates also can't tell what's happening here for real anymore. They are seeing what they had been seeing all this while.'

Julia and Lady Zee would be able to tell the difference after a while. But it won't be anytime soon. The dungeon's mechanism has boosted the spell's effects.'

Alphee then told Ronny the real positions of his enemies that he couldn't see because of falling under the illusion. He immediately listened to her and started creating more distance between him and his enemies before asking Alphee again:

'There are so many things I want to ask you, Alphee. I understand now is not the time. But you always initiate contact when the situation is dire and go silent when I have time to talk to you.'

So I'll ask the most important questions for now. How can you detect the opponents?'

It's just like the last time when you could detect my enemy through the surroundings that interfere with the mana sense for when I was fighting the fog guy. I'm now guessing it's not mana sense you employ to detect these enemies. What is it?'

Alphee sighed before answering:

'It's soul sense. It works differently than mana sense. It's too early for you to use it, so I won't bother explaining it.'

Now, stop and run in the opposite direction.'

As always, Alphee kept her explanations short. But at least this time, the butcher got the answer to the previous question he was looking for ever since he had fought with the fog guy in a ranking battle.

'Alright. Here's another one: Why can't we have normal conversations? What's stopping you from opening a dialogue with me when there are no dangers around me?'

Ronny asked as he dodged another barrage of wooden spears following him like homing missiles. He had followed Alphee's advice and retreated to where he had come from. This enabled him to save himself from the sneak attack Dom had launched with his wooden spears.

'*Sigh. It's because we can't have a conversation for long with your weak mana core. In case you don't know, I'm bound with your mana core.

My existence is tied to you now. But the same goes for you as well. The more activity I take part in, the more your F-Rank mana core will be put under pressure.

Plus, I need some time to recover my powers. But your F-Rank ranking status is making it difficult for me to expedite my recovery process.

I still have to employ F-Rank mana from the surroundings to heal my injuries. That's like trying to extinguish a wildfire with a bucketful of water.'

Ronny listened to Alphee's explanation and found sense in them. If Alphee's existence was as grand as he thought it was, then his F-Rank mana usage would indeed make it difficult for her to recover from whatever she was recovering from. At her level, normal injuries or debuffs wouldn't stand a chance.

'Alright. Last question. You could have made your appearance earlier, you know. Although I don't mind you saving me in the nick of the time, I hate close calls, Alphee. I know you know that.

I would refer to it if you give me a preemptive warning. Like, you could have told me I was under the illusion right after I had fallen into it.'

Ronny asked while getting away from another potion trap Edward had set for him using Alphee's directions. The potioneer had started treating Ronny like some rodent that he could get to by laying various traps.

He had set up those all around the battle ring while Ronny was trying to run away from Dom's wooden spears. Ronny had to admit that the apparitions' timing was impeccable. They were teaming up like they had done this dance hundreds of times.

The potion trap would make use of array drawing to sense the opponent coming in the range. Then it would uncork the potion or make it explode depending upon the setup and potion's operability.

Ronny didn't know which debuff potions Edward had used in the potion traps. And he wanted to keep that way.

'Don't underestimate someone who has gone through Sage transformation. I don't want to reveal my existence here if I can help it.

The reason I started talking now was that I had made sure beforehand that the miasma was affecting the surroundings substantially.

The mana sense of rankers is getting hindered because of the illusory trap you have found yourself in. so my talk here should not create a problem. For now.

But that would all change when the miasma completely disappears. Just like you, I'm not fond of taking unnecessary risks either. So I'll keep my mouth shut, as I had been, so as not to attract the attention of something we want to avoid.'

Alephee concluded her explanation and went silent. Ronny didn't mind. He had gotten more information out of her than last time. It was enough for him for now.

'Soul sense, huh! This would come in handy when under the effects of illusion spells or potion-induced debuff. I'll have to search for this term in the academy's library. For now, to hell with Dom. I'll target this Edward fellow and stop him from any more potion traps.'

Ronny changed his battle strategy and shifted his focus to Edward due to his circumstances. He used Alephee's guidance to his advantage and made his way through the miasma effortlessly.

"Thanks for showing me that potion masters could fight their battles too. Rest now. Byebye."

Ronny said to Edward's apparition as his katar punched a hole through the latter's heart. He had killed one of his opponents using Alephee's help.

[Chapter 294 - Animated Spell Combo](#)

"Thanks for showing me that potion masters could fight their battles too. Rest now. Byebye."

"Ronny said as his katar tore a hole through Edward's heart. He had killed one of his opponents using Alephee's help.

Had it been other real rankers, they would have changed their strategies after seeing that their miasma had failed to affect Ronny mentally. But there was only so much intelligence the apparitions could exhibit mimicking the real rankers.

The butcher had never seen that unique way of implementing potions in the traps. He wanted to learn how to use them too.

In a way, Edward had opened his eyes to the new possibilities. A potion-induced miasma can affect rankers' senses and hinder their mana sense. A potion that can put a ranker under the illusion mid-battle.

Lastly, those potion traps. If he could pair the potion traps with his potion bombs, they would work as land mines.

But all that would have to wait since he had a bigger fish to fry at the time.

As soon as Edward's apparition vanished, the miasma started losing its potency. Ronny created a distance between him and Dom, buying time to wear out the residual miasma. He wanted to fight Dom with all his senses working after all.

Ronny was still juiced from the potions he had consumed earlier. But he was still wary of Dom. The apparition had a way to surprise him. He had thought that he had the guy, but apparently, he looked fine now. It was as if all that beating he had received from the butcher was just part of the hallucination.

'What the actual fuck? I remember beating the crap out of that guy. Why is he looking all dandy again?

No. Wait, a minute, that woodpecker is actually looking better than before he was beaten up by me. This dungeon is acting shamelessly now.'

Ronny thought to himself and felt wronged about his luck. Alpee was there to clear the air:

'I kept tabs on them using my Soul Sense while you were busy dodging their long-range attacks and potions traps. The apparitions played their part to keep it as real as it can get. I saw a potion guy passing vials of potions to the wood guy.

The last vial he was shown to be using must be some type of body-stat enhancing concoction. Hehe, just like you, he has also juiced up.'

Only then did Ronny understand that the dungeon wasn't playing pranks on him. But understanding didn't help him in his current citation. He sighed before gripping his weapons tight in both his hands:

'I've gained a lot of insights into my elements while I was under that state. I don't think I can use them all with the same proficiency. But I have a few options to try now.

Reen, strengthen my body and make it look like I've entered anthrope transformation.'

The butcher started changing right in front of his audience. He used his anthrope transformation mimicry as an excuse to make Reen boost his stats with their fusion. Then he bolted towards his opponent using the spell combo with different effects he wanted to try:

'Blitz Steps

Sedated Perception

Fire snake'

Ronny executed the spell combo while keeping the Breath of Fire spell on hold for now. He was planning to use it differently.

Unbeknownst to the butcher, Layla noticed something when Rony used Reen to strengthen himself. She smiled cunningly and seemed to have informed something or someone about it.

Dom was ready to face Ronny with his swords drawn. Swords. Dom was also suddenly blessed by the dungeon's mechanism to become a dual sword wielder.

Clank!

But his opponent was way past the stage of being surprised anymore. A distinct metallic clank was heard as Ronny's katars made contact with his weapons.

Dom had parried Ronny's attacks perfectly despite the latter using Sedated Perception to get a solid read on him. That meant Dom was supposed to benefit from enhanced perception as well.

A potion-induced enhanced perception would work in a different way than a time-element spell. By enhancing the body's natural image processing capabilities, the concoction would boost perception.

That meant if the ranker's eyes could only process 30 frames of images per second normally, then upon the consumption of the perception enhancing potion, that rate would increase as per the potency and rank.

The enhanced perception achieved the effects of a time element spell differently. This was the reason the butcher was interested in potioneering after hearing the field's vast applications from Nina.

Clank!

Ronny used his weapon skills to handle Dom's counters. And so began their dance of weapons squaring off against each other at close range. The butcher was getting injured by his opponent's attacks. But thanks to the strengthening done earlier, Dom's attacks only rarely managed to break past his defensive mana layer.

He wasn't the only one to get injured though. The butcher was using every trick in his sleeve-- from sneak attacks, low blows, to downright dirty plays. This was to get back at his opponent for every injury he had caused him-- with additional interest.

And yet, the butcher wasn't satisfied. He continued parrying Dom's attack. However, he made the fire snakes come back to life by sharing his mana sense in the same way he had done while in his delirious state.

'Spell animation.'

Ronny mumbled to himself as another two perspectives popped up in his head. He felt like he had six eyes now. The two belonged to him. The remaining four belonged to the two snakes that were looking at Dom with some hostility.

The fire snakes could now detach themselves from Ronny. They jumped from Ronny's hand and crawled towards Dom at breakneck speeds.

Dom tried getting away from the fire snakes. But Ronny didn't let him. He increased the pace of his attacks to keep his opponent busy while commanding his animated spells to attack.

Dom then tried to slash at the snake using one of the swords while he used the other to parry Ronny's attacks. The snakes remained unaffected when the sword made its way through their ethereal bodies.

But they did indeed freeze in their tracks for a while. That's because Ronny felt his headache worsening as soon as the snakes faced the attacks.

Ronny shook his head again and ignored the headache while carrying on with his assault. As a result of which, the snakes resumed their strides and reached Dom.

Each of the snakes climbed on Dom using one of his legs. At first, they wrapped themselves around the legs of their target and tried to burn away its defensive mana layer.

Some of the mana layers did get burned away, allowing the snakes to physically harm the wood user. But that was not why they were there. They climbed further on Dom's body.

Dom must have realized with his limited intelligence that something sinister was heading his way. Hence, he executed his defensive spell again and made the weird formation of wooden planks grow around his body to keep his vital organs safe.

They climbed to Dom's waist and wrapped their torsos around it. Both snakes raised their heads and looked at Dom's face. He was busy fighting Ronny, so he couldn't keep an eye on the stacked animated spell. But he must have felt their lifelike gazes on him.

Dom immediately tried to cover his face with his defensive spell. Alas, it was a bit too late. The snakes had already opened their mouths while tightening their grips on Ronny's waist.

"Breath of fire!"

Ronny said and smiled. Dom's vision changed as soon as he heard his opponent speak. A cloud of orange filled his vision.

As the Breath of Fire was cast by both the snakes at the same time, their damage output was doubled.

Dom gave out a sharp, inhuman shriek as his face was getting burnt away by the fire. But that's not all the damage he was going to suffer now.

Ronny used the fact that his opponent was practically blindsided to launch another set of attacks. He went close to the guy and started hacking through his body without any hesitation.

First to get chopped away were Dom's arms. His mana layer was in disarray trying to focus on the immediate threat his face was facing. So the mana layer around the other parts of the body got weakened.

That was all Ronny needed to show why he should be called the butcher. Arms were only the beginning. He hacked through Dom's guts next.

Ronny had to admit that the dungeon's mechanism was as real as it could get. Because he saw Dom's intestines out in the open when he operated on his stomach.

Picheeeek!

Dom's Adam's Apple was finally pierced by Dicer's Right as he faced the cloud of fire generated around it. Only after Ronny punched a hole through Dom's neck did the snakes stop their execution of Breath of Fire before vanishing into thin air.

The snakes vanished quickly because Ronny couldn't keep the spell and shared mana sense active for any longer. His headache had gotten unbearable after he overexerted himself like that.

"My job is done here. I'm out."

Ronny said this loudly to nobody in particular.. But his teammates who had watched the last part of the battle got his message loud and clear.

[Chapter 295 - Interrogation & Introspection](#)

"My job is done here. I'm out."

Ronny said this loudly to nobody in particular. But his teammates who had watched the last part of the battle got his message loud and clear.

Ronny found a corner outside the battle ring to sit and start his recovery by practising his ranking technique. His teammates had a lot of questions but he made them realize with his actions that those could wait.

Lady Zee shrugged her shoulders after she saw that Jules and others were staring at her for her decision. She cleared her throat before saying:

"*Cough. Alright. We'll talk later when everyone has finished.

Now that Ronny has beaten multiple opponents in one go, the trend should continue with you, Jules. Go ahead and take on as many opponents as you can. Our order of combat hasn't changed."

Jules nodded at Lady Zee's instructions and stepped into the battle ring. She was on edge after thinking that she would have to fight battles with the same levels as Ronny's.

But to her surprise and ease, the opponents she was given weren't that difficult to deal with when they were compared with what Ronny had. She took care of the first opponent she had easily.

The next opponent she had gave her some trouble. But Jules used her illusion spells to successfully trick her opponent. Her winning strike ended with that as she retreated.

Renar went next. He battled his first opponent and won. He used his anthrope transformation in the second battle and barely managed to keep his victory streak. He too quit after two battles.

Eren's last two opponents were counted as one entity by the dungeon's mechanism because of his special status as a demi-human. So his teammates still had four members to defeat. And since Julie and Renar scored two wins each, their team won by keeping three participants in the reserve.

"Care to explain what happened back there?"

Lady Zee asked in an inquisitive tone to Ronny when she saw him opening his eyes. The latter's squad members for the dungeon were now sitting around him. The dungeon had given them time to rest and catch their breaths before proceeding further.

It's been a few hours since Ronny's battles with Dom and Edward took place. He had stabilized his condition since then and was now in his normal state.

"Hm? What do you want to know?"

Ronny asked to buy time. The wheels inside his head had already started churning to mix truth with lies and create a wonderful mix of bullshitery.

"Don't play innocent. Why did the dungeon treat you differently?"

Lady Zee wasn't stupid. She had realized that the level of difficulty Rony had faced was poles apart from what Jules and Renar were given to battle with.

This wasn't her first time exploring this dungeon. If it treats people differently, it would probably have a reason for it. She wanted to know why.

"Hmm. I would have chosen the "how should I know?" route, Lady Zee, but I've come with a prediction of my own. Because that's what I had observed too. The dungeon indeed gave me special treatment, even when I didn't ask for it.

I guess that the level of difficulty rises with how in sync you are with your anthropomorphic transformation. It won't make sense to you. But I'm sure Renar and the rest would agree with me."

Lady Zee looked at Renar and the latter didn't know what to say. In the end, he just nodded at the squad's de-facto leader, backing Ronny's prediction. But Lady Zee wasn't done with her line of questioning yet:

"Alright. What did you drink before the start of your battle with the two-opponent tag-team?"

Ronny smiled at Lady Zee when he heard her question. He caressed her chin before answering:

"Lady Zee, you must have read my profile report given to you by Jules, right? I was handling the stuff inside the Beast Bloods' treasury before I joined your guys here.

Hehe. Let's just say there were some things I liked. And I decided to funnel them into my storage."

Ronny didn't want his team to know about Layla because he didn't want them to ask him why she approached him. He was sure that she had not done this with any participants that had come here over the years.

That's why he changed the origin of the Potion Of Serenity he consumed to Beast Bloods' treasury. As a result of which, Lady Zee sighed because she found no reason to doubt his words.

"*Sigh. You are lucky you found that in the Beast Bloods' treasury. The Illuminati has a record of that potion. Apparently, it is very difficult to concoct. The ingredients it needs are extremely rare and almost extinct.

Plus, it can only be concocted by high-ranked potioners. That's why one would require a huge amount of contribution to get that potion for themselves inside the organization."

Ronny furrowed his eyebrows after hearing the potion's description from Lady Zee. He had thought that the potion would not be recognized by any of his mates. But he had apparently underestimated the lady with the scar on her face.

He didn't speak even though there were so many thoughts running inside his head. He wanted lady Zee to continue which she did after a short pause:

"The Potion of Serenity, as it is called, helps you connect with higher consciousness and get insights into the way of the elements. I've been trying to get my hands on that potion ever since I heard about it in the Illuminati.

Too bad, it can't be accessed even by me without having something substantial to show for it. You didn't need the potion at your level, Ronny. It is still too early for you to wield your elements.

Had you given it to me, I would have paid you handsomely for the Potion of Serenity. I still can, if you have more than one."

Lady Zee asked with hope in her eyes. She felt that the potion was a waste on Ronny who hadn't even stepped into the D-Rank. Had she used it, she would have been able to reap greater benefits than him. At least that's what she was thinking.

Lady Zee's assumptions were based on what she had heard about the potion so far from her seniors and records found in the organization. But contrary to her belief, the butcher had suffered from drinking the Potion of Serenity.

Even the one who had given him the potion— Layla also found it surprising that the butcher had progressed so much into the way of the elements in a single go. It was as if he had greater experience for his age as a ranker than she had thought.

The butcher's life experiences from the past and present timelines had come together. They had come together to make his consumption of the wondrous potion a greater success story than he or any of his team members had realized.

Ronny shook his head and sighed before answering Lady Zee's query.

"I had another vial of the same potion. But I sold that at Nilami, for which I became famous. Had I known back then that the potion was so rare, I would have sold it for a higher price.

I just knew that the potion was meant to be consumed mid-battle to have maximum benefits. And that's what I did without knowing what it could actually do.

I'm as surprised as you guys are after experiencing the effects of the potion myself."

Lady Zee nodded at Ronny before continuing her round:

"How did you manage to keep yourself safe in the miasma, Ronny? It would have been difficult for me to deal with the situation had I been in your shoes.

But you used the same miasma as an advantage to turn things around. How did you navigate successfully in that debuff-inducing environment?"

'She's asking about Soul Sense.'

Ronny scratched his chin before responding:

"Who says I navigated successfully? I was just running wild and hoping for the best, using my anthropic senses as a base. More like an educated instinct, if you will. Thank the fuck, that played out well in my favour. Things could have gone either way if you ask me."

'This guy says all the right things but why do I find them to be so irritating?'

Lady Zee said that to herself before sighing. Without any follow-up question to grind him, she thought she should just drop the subject of interrogation.

"Let me give you some advice, Ronny. The spell animation you used after gaining insights. I don't know if you know this, but it is not something that can be used casually.

You share your Mana Sense to breathe life into a compatible spell, enabling it to exert all its power to its fullest potential. But by sharing your Mana Sense this way, you are also making it prone to the opponent's attacks.

If your Mana Sense gets hurt during the battle by your opponent's retaliation, it would affect your mental state adversely. That can't be good news when you are battling with an opponent who CAN hurt your Mana Sense. They can use your disturbed psyche as an opening to launch an attack on you."

'Oh. So that's where those bouts of headaches came from. When Dom slashed at the fire snakes.'

Ronny had one of the questions he had about his previous state answered after listening to Lady Zee's suggestion. But before he could thank her for the same, a small, familiar array appeared and lit up in front of him. The spot was in the middle of the battle ring that had already vanished.

It was time for the second floor's rewards!

[Chapter 296 - Second Floor Rewards](#)

It was time for the second floor's rewards!

"Didn't the rewards come too early? We had to fight two rounds of battle to clear the first floor. And the second floor is cleared with only one round?"

Renar asked in confusion. Lady Zee cleared his doubts with her response:

"It's not the number of rounds the dungeon considers but the level of difficulty you have to face as a team to clear the floors. Maybe you didn't have to exert as much effort when compared to the first floor, Renar.

But Ronny and Jules had to bring out their absolute best. That contributed to the team's credibility to clear the second floor. Plus, the dungeon would do what it does best- surprise you when you least expect it. It follows the known pattern only half the time."

Renar looked at Ronny and Jules after he heard the explanation and remembered the fights that they had to suffer through to secure their victories. As Lady Zee had said, he didn't face the burn of the second floor much. Since there were people who had outperformed themselves, the dungeon's mechanism balanced their hardships by putting less burden on him.

"Let's not waste any more time. With our current performance, the third floor of the dungeon is the maximum we can go. I'd like to wrap things up after that. There are also solo towers that you can take part in.

Jules and I would part from you guys after the third floor of the dungeon gets cleared and we get out of it. You can explore the dimension for some days and take part in solo challenges if you are okay with the risks. We'll meet when Purgatory is going to close for this year."

Lady Zee said and gestured to Belar to step into the array. The usual followed and everyone had their turns. Ronny was the last to go since he had decided to practise his ranking technique some more to stabilize his condition.

Contrary to Lady Zee's grim prediction about the third floor, he was looking forward to it. He had so many insights to digest after all. Battles would be a convenient method of achieving that objective in the shortest amount of time.

Ronny stepped into the array and closed his eyes. Next, he sent his mana sense into his storage and waited for things to appear like they did last time.

It didn't take long for Ronny's rewards to arrive in his storage. Just like the first floor, there were multiple items this time as well. But his attention was drawn to one particular item as soon as he laid his eyes on it.

'Hm? An egg with runes on it?'

Ronny wrapped his mana sense around his unexpected reward and inspected it. The egg was twice the size of his palm.

The runes on it lit up when he tried inspecting it with his mana sense. But apart from sensing that the runes were there to keep the contents of the eggs safe, he couldn't find anything about it.

'Reen, can you sense what it is?'

The butcher asked his demon beast companion. The latter just seemed to have shaken her head in denial before responding:

'No, Erni. The runes on the eggs are not letting me get a read on it.'

Ronny seemed to have thought of something before directing his question next to another of his partners that liked to keep her mouth shut for most of the time:

'Alephee, what about you? If Mana Sense can't work, I bet your Soul Sense can. Would you like to help your host and friend here?'

'At least pay the rent for living inside my mana core.'

The butcher asked playfully while displaying his frugal attitude. Alephee seemed to have rolled her eyes before making a few things clear for him.

'Haah! Pay the rent you say. If I wasn't there, you would have died by that wolf chewing on your dick. And no I can't help you.'

Not because I don't want to. But doing so might affect the reward you have.

Soul Sense isn't as simple as Mana Sense, you know.'

Ronny didn't budge from that half-assed explanation. He wanted Alephee to clarify a few things for him right now. So he pressed on:

'What do you mean? Does Soul Sense damage things every time it gets used? Why didn't that happen when you used it in the battle?'

Alephee pondered for a bit before replying:

'The Mana Sense employs your mana to do things. It becomes an additional sense that goes beyond the limits of the traditional senses. It lets you analyze things more deeply. But what if you could employ your soul to do the same and then some more?'

In Soul Sense, you have to spread your soul around you. That means your soul stretches beyond the confines of your body and treats the area around you as an extension of your body.

If I do that with this egg and the eggs turn out to be alive inside the protection of those tunes, then my Soul Sense would negatively affect the fetus. A soul's interference should not be taken lightly. Especially when it is being used on someone who hasn't even been born yet.

Now you tell me. Do you want to take the risk of running your reward just to satisfy your curiosity?'

'Um, no. Let's... wait.'

Ronny told Alephee and decided not to ruin his reward. He then focused his mana sense on his next reward-- an old tome that had a locking mechanism.

The locking mechanism opened on its own when the book came in contact with the butcher's Mana Sense. He opened the book and scanned the content written over it.

The butcher was mesmerized by what he found inside the tome. He kept on turning pages after pages, giving them a quick read. He only stopped after he finished checking up the last page and registered his surprise to himself:

'Holy moly, it's a jackpot. There are so many potion recipes I haven't even heard exist. Most of them belong to F and E Ranks.

Fuck! Some of them are also in D-Rank. This tome alone is worth all the effort I took to win my round on the second floor.'

Ronny was extremely pleased with getting his hands on the tome as a reward. He had also found the things he was looking for in it. He had found the recipe for the miasma potion that he had found intriguing. Plus, the tome explained in detail how the potion traps worked.

Plus, the tome also gave him the ability to permanently strengthen his weapons using potions. In addition, a few recipes were given as examples of how the way of the elements could be used in the concoction of potions.

Ronny had high hopes for the egg after he realized the value of rewards the dungeon had granted him for clearing the second floor. He turned his attention to other rewards after he begrudgingly kept the tome away.

The butcher found a stock of various vials next. He immediately recognized a bunch of the vials. Because the content inside them had the same tint as Edward's miasma potion when he had used it against him.

The potions seemed to be 5-stars in quality too. This type of reward also put a smile on Ronny's face because it gave him the immediate trump cards he needed to turn things around. Especially in the separate dimension.

The butcher was never fond of making his safety dependent on the actions and reactions around him. Especially in Purgatory where he couldn't count on anybody. These miasma vials would serve as get-away passes if things started turning grim for him.

Other vials contained potions of the E-rank. They ranged from stamina potions to mysterious concoctions, carrying some known as well as unknown buffs and debuffs.

The butcher then shifted his attention to a bunch of scrolls he had received as his reward. He opened them up and saw that they were all 5-star, E-Rank variants of his time and lightning element spells.

'Damn. This dungeon needs to be farmed for rewards. I'll have to find a way to enter the dungeon and sneak Jake and the rest in here.'

The butcher thought to himself and read through the scrolls. The first floor had given him new spells while the second floor had raised the ranks of all his existing spells. The dungeon sure knew how to keep its participants interested.

Lastly, he discovered a non-elemental F-Rank spell to make his weapons levitate and attack as per his commands using the mana sense as their driver. He remembered Dom's way of handling the wooden spears and realized that the spell's potential was already laid out in front of him in the previous battle.

'This non-elemental spell isn't that special. But it can give me the variation I need to tackle my opponents in mid-range. Not bad.'

The butcher thought to himself and smiled. He retracted his mana sense after confirming all the rewards.. He couldn't help flash a grin to his teammates when he stepped out of the array.

[Chapter 297 - Third Floor](#)

Ronny and his teammates went to the third floor after collecting their individual as well as team based rewards. It didn't take long for the third floor's entrance to appear before them.

The third floor pitted the team against packs of Crimson Fire Foxes. The packs would come at the group in a set pattern.

The evolution of Crimson Fire Foxes was easy to distinguish. The number of tails they had were indicative of their ranks.

The F-Rank Crimson Fire Fox would have one tail. The E-Rank fox would have two and so on.

The packs Ronny's team had to battle with would usually have one D-Rank fox or multiple E-Rank ones to make up for the rank. Rest of the foxes in the pack were usually F-Rank ones.

Lady Zee had to exert more effort on the third floor than anyone else. That's because the greatest threats in the pack would usually be handled by her.

Crimson Fire Foxes would release fireballs from their mouths. The number of fireballs that could be executed as well as their damage output would increase with the mana beasts' rank-ups.

The group also had to fight mutated Crimson Fire Foxes that would be blessed with odd types of fire-element spells. So Ronny and his teammates were on their toes till they defeated the pack.

But their misery would begin afresh with the arrival of a new pack. They were given only a few minutes of breather in between.

The constant battles had eventually tired the group out. Belar and Viper had it worse. Both of them had been severely injured by the time the group took care of the 6th pack.

Viper's left-half face has been burnt by the residual fire of the D-Rank mana beast's spell because he couldn't get away from the same in time. The burnt part of his skin looked as if it had melted and in the process of leaving its initial position it was hanging on to.

Jules gave Viper an ointment that finally stopped Viper's condition from turning into anything worse. But by that time the damage had already been done.

The residual fire was from a deviant D-Rank monster that had already started welding elements. The injury left by a mana beast like this wasn't easy to heal.

A ranker had to be wielding his elements themselves to get rid of the foreign influence that had invaded their bodies. Plus, they needed near perfect control to battle that influence without damaging your body.

The second method would be to find a healer who could wield their elements with excellent control. The third and final method to cure injuries like this was using potions and other such alchemy-based products that had been concocted by someone who could wield their elements.

Plus, such potions couldn't be mass produced. They had to be custom-concocted depending on the situation and condition of the ranker who was facing such an injury.

Viper's teammates obviously didn't have any of the means available to them to completely cure Novice ranker. Therefore, the best they could do was primary healing that stopped the burnt skin from turning any worse.

And yet, Viper's condition was still light compared to what Belar had been inflicted with. The guy's right leg had been torn off from the knee by one of the Crimson Fire Foxes he was battling with.

This was the second time Belar was suffering from such an injury. But the experience in the field didn't help him have an easier time.

He was finally rescued by Jules who stepped in as soon as her battle with the E-Rank fox had ended. But by that time, Belar had already suffered from the maws of the mana beast. All she could do this time was offer him a potion to stop the bleeding.

Since Belar had faced the injury before, he had prosthetics in spare for his limbs. He begrudgingly took the F-Rank artifact prosthetic that fitted him perfectly after he imbued his mana in it. As a result, he started cursing Eren again in his mind, believing that the guy had cast some kind of curse on him.

Since almost everyone performed mediocre at best and just barely survived the third floor, the rewards for the same weren't that great. But this wasn't the case for the butcher. Because he had performed exceptionally well for his rank, using all the cards he had— from strengthening provided by Reen dubbed as his anthrope transformation to his newfound insights into spells and way of the elements.

As a result, the butcher received another tome of potion recipes that contained newer recipes and covered some D-Rank recipes as well. He also received an encyclopedia on herbs and their effects. Although he couldn't get the names of most of them, he knew he had hit the jackpot again. Because he could always find the relevant names by referring to history books.

But that was not all. He had also received a bunch of life-saving potions and a few defensive artifacts. The first artifact he had received was an E-Rank watch that showed time but also contained a function of serving as a shield when he needed it to. He just had to run his mana through it and an almond-shaped bronze shield would appear in front of him. The shield had lightning-element runes, amplifying its performance when used by a lightning-element ranker.

The other defensive artifact he had received was an E-Rank space-element artifact in the form of a pendent. It could create a spatial hole in front of him once every three days that would have the ability to send away the incoming weaponry or spell thrown at him, only to make the same appear a few meters away from him.

The spell-element defensive artifact could only be used once per three days because it wasn't used by a space-element ranker. So it would take longer to get charged through the runes inscribed on it, which interacted with surrounding mana.

Lastly, the dungeon had rewarded the butcher with another defensive artifact in the form of a simple-looking shirt in the E-Rank. It was a non-elementalized alchemy item meant to be worn by everybody. Instead of using the runs to grant it its defensive properties, the item had been immersed in the concoction once, granting it enhanced resilience against blunt impacts in the E-Rank.

'Boy, I can not wait to officially enter the E-Rank now.'

The butcher had this thought as he and his teammates got out of the dungeon.. They had decided to quit their journey while they still had the ability to do so.

[Chapter 298 - Something's Up](#)

"As I said Ronny, I and Julie would take our leaves now. You guys can decide to explore the Purgatory or choose to stay put until our departure arrives.

Either way, I wish you good luck. Julie, we'll have to leave soon."

Lady Zee declared her next set of plans sometime after the team got out of the dungeon. Since they were now out in the open where the cold had made its dominance known, everybody had worn their winter clothes back. The campfire was burning and the fragrance of grilled meat was in the air.

'Good luck, huh? Something's fucking up.'

The butcher had a sudden thought when he heard Lady Zee's statement and looked at her plain face. She was staring at the fire burning in front of her as if lost in some thought.

But the butcher could tell, this was just a ruse to prevent him from picking anything that would give away her real intentions. He had his fair share of betrayals while he was still being accepted as a party member in the previous timeline after all. He knew those pre-betrayal faces and statements all too well to mistake them for something else.

Despite all those thoughts running through his head, the butcher didn't let the recognition of the betrayal show on his face either. He nodded his head at Lady Zee before responding:

"Alright. We'll meet at the time of our departure from the Purgatory. Take care, Lady Zee. Jules..."

Jules hugged him before Ronny could say any further. He smiled and caressed her back. He knew at that time that she wasn't let in on Lady Zee's plans.

"We'll surely meet at the end of this wretched exploration, Ronny. Just don't take any unnecessary risks if you are unsure about something. Sometimes quitting the game ahead gives you more benefits than keeping on playing.

Promise me you'll take care of yourself, okay?"

Jules said while burying her face in Ronny's chest. Others were looking at the couple in a wide range of emotions. The butcher nodded his head while looking down at the illusionist, releasing her from her worries.

Jules couldn't believe what she had just said. Since when did she become this caring towards someone she had only seen as a sugar daddy at first? The progression of her emotions in these weeks had baffled her more than anyone who saw the couple hugging each other.

But she didn't care. Jules could subconsciously connect more with Ronny because, like her, he too was used to having a mask they would have to wear for an audience.

Her audience was the academy and other normal rankers she would interact with as an assistant professor of LA. Ronny's audience on the other hand were all those with who he had come in contact.

Jules had come to realize that whatever wrongdoings she had done, Ronny should have done something much worse for him to always wear that mask and make it a part of himself. At least he had the potential to cause a great disruption to the order around him. And yet, the guy didn't look like he was burdened by keeping his emotions bottled up.

To Jules, Ronny looked content in himself. Something she wasn't able to do by living two separate lives at once. So in him, her mind had found the road to salvation. She had subconsciously thought that only he could understand him and the choice she made to survive.

Unbeknownst to her or Ronny, the gold digger Jules had turned into someone she looked down upon the most— a woman blindsided by the first sprout of love.

But the surprise at her behaviour didn't prevent her from embracing the warmth she was feeling right now. The surprise soon turned into recognition as she hugged Ronny even tighter for a few more seconds before finally letting him go.

"Alright. It's time to leave. Julie, follow me."

Lady Zee finally got up from her seat and started walking. Jules followed her orders and started walking in the same direction, right behind the D-Ranker.

She then stopped and looked back. For some reason, she didn't feel comfortable leaving Ronny behind despite the latter assuring her of his prioritization on his safety. She finally shook her head as if rebooting her thought process. Then waved at Ronny smilingly before following Lady Zee's lead.

"What should we do now? My missing feet are going to be a handicap that my prosthetic won't be able to overcome. Not the way you'd expect it to. Therefore, I suggest we stay put."

Belar said sometime after Jules left. He made his unwillingness to carry on further known to his teammates who were sitting around by the campfire just like him. Only Ronny was seen eating the grilled meat now. The other had already had their fill.

"Hehehe! Boy, do you think staying put would assure your safety here? What do you think this place is?"

Ronny asked amusingly while taking another bite from his piece of grilled meat. Belar raised his eyebrows but didn't question the guy. He was just trying his luck with his earlier statement anyway.

Belar had come to realize that the guy whole had rescued them from being enslaved by Silvermoon city administration was not someone who he could fuck with. Therefore, he just wanted to serve his time under Ronny and get a chance to get back Eren when he could do so.

Belar thought that if he served Ronny well, maybe he could help him get his revenge on Eren who had cut all his limbs and humiliated him. So he kept his mouth shut when he heard the guy's rebuttal.

But his teammates didn't have the same inhibitions. Renar was the first to raise his query.

"Sir Ronny..."

[Chapter 299 - Surrounded](#)

Renar couldn't keep his mind at ease when he heard Ronny's hint. He asked warily in a low voice as if his voice had the possibility of getting heard by some unknown stalker:

"Sir Ronny, what do you mean by that? Could you please clarify?"

Are we going to get attacked by the Illuminati? But..."

Ronny interrupted Renar before he could complete his statements:

"But we signed a binding contract with them that ensured our safety, right? Yeah, I hate to break it to you, but that won't save us from our upcoming battles."

It was Viper that raised his query this time:

"So are you saying they'd take so much effort to breach contracts with us just to get our goods when the contract itself offers them a cut while avoiding complications?"

Sir Ronny, I think the bigger the organization, the more bound by the rules it seems to be. I don't think high-ranked entities would take part in breaching contracts with nobody like us.

What would they gain anyway? The goods that are treasures in our eyes but a pile of waste for them."

Viper seemed to talk less, but when he did, he tried to be on point. Ronny shook his head after hearing his assumption:

"I don't know why you became a cultist if you were all this gullible from the beginning. I'm saying that they don't have to breach the binding contracts with us. That's because they won't target us directly.

The binding contracts only assure us that the Illuminati members won't attack us. But it doesn't cover the involvement of third parties and other squads they have hired to explore the dungeon.

Try to remember. How many people did we see gathered on the first day?"

Renar had dark expressions on his face as he blurted out:

"You mean..."

Ronny nodded and finished up the last piece of grilled meat before confirming Renar's doubts:

"That's right. At least half of them are our enemies now."

Renar looked at Ronny and remembered what the latter had said about them in passing. Gullible cultists! They were indeed gullible cultists to place their bets on a binding contract that had a huge loophole like this.

Only now did he understand why Lady Zee and their group parted ways when they could have just stuck together. Higher-ups at Illuminati have already agreed to exploit the loophole.

Why should they take a cut of rewards when they can just employ rogue rankers to take care of the squads that have won big?"

"That bitch Zee, if I find her..."

Renar spoke softly but the hint of anger he felt for his de-facto team leader of some time ago was unmistakable:

"Haah! What can you do to her even if you find her? She'll squash us like the bug we are if we try to take it out on her.

I'm not trying to take her side, but all of this must have been preordained by the true higher-ups of the Purgatory exploration. Most likely, she doesn't have any say in it."

Viper understood why Ronny was against setting up a camp now. If they stayed at one place for longer than they needed to be, then they would be targeted by the rogue rankers that had been hired to hunt the explorers.

"We better get moving..."

Viper wanted his team to move away from their current position after realizing the dangers they were surrounded by. But Ronny got up, dusted off the snow stuck to his butt, and replied while looking blankly ahead of him:

"Too late. Prepare for battle."

Ronny said and drew out his daggers from his storage. Renar and the rest quickly followed his lead after seeing the seriousness plastered over the former's face.

Ronny wasn't optimistic about running away unscathed from the danger he was soon going to face. He had always known he couldn't count on the Illuminati to have his back. But the kind of pickle he had found himself in was unavoidable. Because he wanted to explore Purgatory at the cost of being backstabbed.

And finally, he received what he was expecting. Sometimes he wondered if merely thinking about the most undesirable outcomes empowers them to be manifested in his life.

"Look what we have here, Jer. Four lost little lambs are begging for their release from this hellish Purgatory. Hahaha! Don't you think we should oblige to their requests?"

A raspy voice rang in the surroundings. It came from the same direction Ronny was looking at— their front. Soon, Renar and the rest could see a lone figure leading a group of three rankers closing in on them.

Ronny held his ground and didn't reply. He maintained his position and deadpan expressions while gripping his hands on the daggers he was holding. That's because the guy who spoke was an E-Rank existence that was just a step away from being called an Adept. He was leading three rankers that were in the solid stage of the F-Rank.

Ronny wasn't acting cautiously because of the team in front of him though. There was one more team of rankers who had blocked their path of retreat.

"Gerish, don't play with our targets. The job is supposed to be nice and clean. Finish what you see in front of you and move on.

These nuisances aren't the only ones we need to take care of, you know."

The voice that came from behind didn't sound as old as the man's voice who was coming from the front. But it contained a certain authority in it that couldn't be questioned by the likes of anyone present there.

'An Adept. Possibly in the liquid stage by the kind of mana signature he is emitting. Fuck. That Zee is indeed a bitch. I'll fucking whoop her ass if I see her again here.'

Ronny gulped and thought to himself as he realized he and his team were being targeted by an Adept.. He had to pay the price for ignoring the tell-tale signs of being backstabbed to gain the rewards.

[Chapter 300 - Showdown](#)

"Bah! You are no fun at all, Jer. Look what being an Adept has done to you. You lost your playful side. Even though you left me behind and steered ahead of me, I'm not envious.

I don't want to become a hardass like you when I break into the D-Rank.

cough cough cough Ptui!"

Gerish huffed and coughed and spat on the ground. Rankers would usually not get colds or flu-- like that of unranked mortals. The fact that Gerish had a cough conveyed his condition as a ranker. If he wanted to survive, he had to break into D-Rank. Otherwise, he would die of old age.

Jerry or Jer as Gerish liked to call him was leading the group of two E-Rankers and one F-Ranker. One of the E-Rankers was in the initial stage while the other was in the middle stage.

'Two more E-Rankers. Fuck.'

Ronny cursed and gestured to Renar and the rest to come closer to him. They needed to open a united front if they wanted to have even the slightest chance of getting out of this trap alive. Gerish and Jerry saw that their preys were forming a formation. But both didn't mind.

"Haah! Unlike you, I try not to delve into the past, Gerish. Besides, we have been summoned to take care of this task fast and get on with Sir Arthur's task. We don't have much time."

Ronny's ears perked up when he heard the name Arthur. But now was not the time to think about anything complicated. What they needed to do now was get their sorry asses away from this mess. IF they could get away alive, that is.

'Time to sacrifice a pawn or two.'

Ronny thought about this as he looked at his teammates one more time. He had brought Renar and the rest because he knew he couldn't count on the personnel the Illuminati would arrange for him as his team.

He also brought them so that he could use them as sacrifices. He focused on a particular figure among his group as he made his plans:

"You two, battle with that E-Ranker and finish him off quickly. The novices should take care of the novices. Gerish and I will block the group's retreat. We will step in if you fail to do your job. But remember, you'll have to pay the price if that happens."

Jerry ordered his two E-Ranker subordinates and stopped walking. Gerish's team looked at their leader, who nodded his head at Jerry's commands. Gerish also stopped walking ahead and folded his hands, looking at Ronny with a hint of amusement in his eyes.

With the Adept's commands, Ronny's immediate opponents were now known to him. He was set up against the two E-Rankers while Renar, Viper, and handicapped Belar had to fight against four F-Rankers.

The two E-Rankers encircled Ronny's group and stood in front. The F-Rankers were gathered in the opposite direction.

"Renar, listen to me. We can still do this, thanks to the rewards we have received in the dungeon.

Fall back to this place when you see me doing the same. We'll provide cover fire for each other and who knows, we might be able to take care of all of them, hehe!"

Ronny said this with false bravado and a mirthless smile on his face. But there was something in the way he said it that irked the Adept present there. But he decided to follow through with the plan he had laid out.

'Haah! Kid, you want to put pressure on me and Gerish by deterring us from the trump cards you received from the dungeon. If you think that would be enough to scare us into leaving you alone, then you are still too green.

And if you truly believe that those trump cards can save you from an Adept ranker, then I shall be the reason for your rude awakening.'

Jerry thought to himself as he saw his subordinates about to engage with someone who seemed to be the leader of the opponent team. He looked at Gerish next and gestured to him to hold his ground.

"Just drop dead peacefully, man. No hard feelings."

One of the E-Rankers was a male in his early 30s. He said this while he ran towards Ronny.

The other E-Ranker looked like a male dressed in a woman's clothes because the person had a girlish face. But his body was ripped like a dude on roid potions. He followed his teammate's lead and bolted towards Ronny as well.

'Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Blitz Steps

Blitz Bolt

Blitz Shield

Fire snakes

Breath of Fire.'

Ronny sent his mana circuits into hyperdrive and pulled off a sic-spell combo right off the bat. His body grew hot, turning red in the process. It was obvious that he was exerting himself with the kind of spell combo he had executed.

But he had no other choice. Battling with real human rankers was different than battling with the apparitions in the dungeon after all. The apparitions in the dungeon become predictable if you keep fighting with them. That is if you drive long enough to do so.

But the real rankers were the real deal. That's because one could never accurately guess how battling with them would turn out without knowing anything about them.

'Erni, you are hurting yourself. Let me out. I'll take care of them.'

Reen pleaded to her master after she observed his condition. The latter denied her proposal and said in his mind:

'I'll take care of these guys, Ren. Don't worry. I'll ask for your help when I need it. Maybe you can use your inherent healing spell to cure me post-battle.'

Plus, I want to see how many E-Rankers I can kill today by being all in. Hehe!'

The butcher said this while looking at his two opponents who were now just a few meters away from him. Three distinct mana pulses had made their presence known, indicative of three E-Rankers executing the spells in their arsenals.

What his opponents didn't know was the fact that Ronny was aiming to slay not only them but Gerish as well, who was standing behind them. He had to paint the path of his escape with the guy's blood if he wanted to survive out of this ordeal.