

Vile 311

Chapter 311 - The Great Escape P2

At first, Renar and Viper weren't sure of what they were looking at. They realized that there was more going on than meets the eye instead of assuming that Belar had screwed up.

They saw that the miasma had covered their previous battleground and then some more. They had known about the effects of the miasma cloud because of witnessing Ronny's fight in the dungeon. They also saw that the Adept ranker had been caught inside the cloud.

"What the fuck is happening here, Renar. Were you aware of this?"

Viper asked Renar as they both saw each other running and came close to each other. The latter shook his head and replied:

"I don't know jack shit, brat. That man is as cunning as a fox. Where the hell is Be..."

Renar was going to ask about Belar's whereabouts when he sensed the mana signature of a C-Rank beast going off behind him. His face turned pale as a result.

"Fuck! Let's just keep on running. I don't know what else to do anymore."

Renar came to a quick decision because of a lack of choices. Just when the pair had scaled a sufficient distance, they heard the acidic mass crashing down on the ground and losing form. The mana pulse that was spread in the surroundings, as a result, wasn't something that they could ignore either.

"Big bro Renar, I think... Huff... huff... huff"

Viper huffed as he kept on executing his movement spell along with Renar. The latter was trying to match his junior's speed.

The E-Ranker's right leg had been slightly injured anyway during his battle. He battled with two opponents after all. So one of the counters made by the duo had got him.

"I think... I think.. I'm going to die here. You remember me telling you about Nasuta, right? Give my love to her and tell her that I'll miss her. And... huff... huff... huff.. that she can move on with her life without me."

Renar had black lines on his forehead as he heard Viper's will-like speech. He grabbed the Novice ranker by his neck from behind, lifted him, and unleashed his true E-Rank speed at the cost of worsening his leg injury. He berated his junior while running away from all the mess that was going on behind him:

"Brat, I'm not your messenger. Do this yourself when you survive."

"If we die, we die. But until that happens, shut the fuck up and focus on escaping."

Viper shut his mouth when he heard Renar speak. He had a mirthless smile on his face as he felt the tough love. He then wondered what had happened to Belar who was already not doing great from the moment this sudden farce had started.

Right after the acidic bomb touched the ground.

Reen tugged her master towards her with all her might. She had tugged it in such a way that the latter's trajectory would first send him in the air before he would be brought down by the eventual pull.

As a result, the butcher didn't take long to get pulled to where Reen was. He was going to crash hard from above due to the speed at which he was pulled. But the demon beast had things under control.

Boing!

She opened both her hands and embraced her master as soon as he was within the range. The impact of the crash didn't make much sound. But her body was deformed as a result of the butcher's inertia. But it soon turned to normalcy after killing off the state of motion the butcher's body was subjected to.

"Erni, are you alright?"

Reen asked with concern on her face after she resumed her normal human form while hugging her master. The latter felt the emotions she was feeling and felt a warmth within his heart for the first time in a long time.

The butcher had just survived a huge life-threatening event. So it was natural that he would be on the edge. But the affection he felt coming from his demon beast soothed him a little, if only for a short time.

'I don't know about the rest, Reen. But I would at least try to be as human as I could be for you and Nina. Especially you who had always been with me ever since our first encounter.'

The butcher had this thought and smiled to himself. He kissed Reen's forehead gently to show her the affection she wasn't shown before and caressed her hair. But then his features turned grim as he observed the cloud of miasma still active at a distance from where they stood.

Then he saw the two of his teammates had been successful in running away from their respective battlefields. He had to applaud the luck that carried them to safety somehow.

The butcher wasn't sure Renar and Viper would survive the trap he had planned for Jerry. He didn't want an Adept ranker on his tail after all. He was okay with sacrificing Renar Viper along with Belar if the trap ended up killing them all.

The butcher knew how the rankers' organizational structure worked in general. The higher the status a ranker had, the more important their safety would be. That would mean their deaths would be taken more seriously than the lower-ranked members.

In short, killing an E-Ranker old man and killing an Adept who seemed to be in the prime of his life were two different things. Killing an Ace would irk the higher-ups of the Illuminati. Killing an Adept on the other hand would make them dig deep into the situation.

Killing Jerry wouldn't be easier either even with Reen on his side. It would take time for Reen to finish him. The time the latter could use to summon more Illuminati and other hired help, which would be active elsewhere in the Purgatory.

The butcher finally decided to preserve the pawns that had survived.

"Let's go, Reen. We don't have much time."

[Chapter 312 - Eulogy](#)

"Aaaaaaah!"

When Renar couldn't suppress the pain coming from his right leg, he yelled. He released his grip on Viper's neck and caught his knee with both his hands after assuming a crouched position.

Renar had beads of sweat on his forehead that soon started to run down his face. He pressed his lips against each other and closed his eyes to deal with the pain. Then he opened his eyes and looked at Viper before saying in a shaky voice:

"That's it. My right leg is killing me. Viper, you go ahead. I'll catch up with you soon."

Renar wiped beads of sweat on his forehead from his shirt's right sleeve as he spoke. The Novice junior shook his head before commenting:

"Remember what you said, Renar. If we die, we die. But until that happens, focus on surviving. Haha!"

Viper said and flashed a cunning yet genuine smile on his face.

Renar was stunned for a moment before feeling his junior's willingness to put his life on the line for him. But being served his own words in a metaphorical platter by the junior irked him a little:

"Now listen here, you little shit..."

But Renar felt a sudden mana signature coming from behind him. He thought their end had arrived. But then he realized it gave off a familiar feeling.

"You two sure have time to chat around when we are being mortally targeted. Let's keep moving, you idiots."

Ronny declared as soon as he closed his distance between him and the duo. He saw they both displayed a range of emotions on their faces. The most dominant among them was the sense of puzzlement—indicating they had a lot of questions on their minds.

The butcher shook his head before they could say a word:

"Not here. Not now.

Let's get to a safe place first. I'll answer your questions while catching our breaths. Then we'll part ways.

Remember, inside the towers, amidst the danger, we will find the haven we are looking for right now."

"What did you do with Belar?"

Viper asked Ronny in a grim voice as they were sitting around a small campfire inside a remote cave. The cave was relatively small, measuring only 12 feet in height, 7 feet wide, and about 9 meters in length.

Due to heavy snowfall outside, the mouth of the cave had been partially closed. It was thanks to Reen's mana sense that they could find such a place.

"Isn't it obvious? I used him as bait for our escape."

Ronny said plainly while looking at the campfire burning in front of him. He was making a meat stew inside a pan that was kept over the campfire to re-energize himself.

"I won't say you shouldn't have done that, Sir Ronny. Because that would be plain old hypocrisy. We wouldn't be here talking with each other if it wasn't for the fact that you used Belar as bait.

But the least you could have done is be honest with us two. I'm sure Belar wouldn't have minded either if he was let in on it— considering his situation at the time.

There were so many things that could have gone wrong with your plan. It's pure luck that we survived your trap."

As he saw the meat stew about to be made, Viper grabbed his empty cup. Although he wasn't that hungry, he knew that he had to keep his body in an ideal state in this place. Eating regularly and practising ranking techniques were core parts of that assignment.

"I agree that luck played a big part in your escape. But you don't tell someone they are going to die no matter how pragmatic they might be as rankers. That's not how it works.

I'm sure your bonds with Belar were strong. Maybe he would have agreed to be used as bait willingly to pave the path for both of you.

But in doing so, he would have shown the behaviours of a suicidal ranker in his actions during the battle. Do you think an Adept ranker, no matter how ignorant he might seem towards your battle, would have overlooked that detail? I don't think so."

Ronny sighed and looked at both of the anthropes who were sitting in front of him. He verbally marched on after seeing there was no response coming from both of them.

"Luck is not everything. Don't underestimate your survival instincts as well. The way you retired from the battlefield is also commendable.

Plus, it was you guys who played an important role in making that trap successful. I'm sorry for deceiving Belar when he was already doomed to die. But I'm not sorry for keeping you or myself alive."

Ronny said and immediately commented:

"Oh! Bring your cups here. Stew is done."

Ronny said and brought the hanging pan down from the campfire.

He divided it into three portions. Renar and Viper took two empty cups, while Eren took the pan for himself.

Since they arrived here, Renar had kept silent the whole time. Ronny could tell he wasn't okay with Belar's death. He could tell from the E-Ranker's face that there were so many questions he wanted to ask him.

Renar was angry at Ronny for using his junior as bait. And frustrated that he couldn't find a flaw in the latter's escape plan. He also felt irritated over the fact that he was helpless in all this due to his lack of personal power to change the outcome single-handedly.

But the butcher didn't interfere Renar's self-intervention. He left the guy to his own devices. Surely, the anthrope would soon find the answers to his questions on his own within his head. And would see that what he had done was entirely right.

After all, Renar knew that Belar's condition at the time wasn't optimistic for his escape even if he were to not be used as bait.

Renar looked at the stew inside his cup and saw his blurred face inside it that was illuminated by the ever-dancing flames of the campfire. He sighed and raised his cup before speaking up:

"To Belar! A young man who suffered a lot throughout his short, miserable life. But at least, in the end, he died without feeling any pain. May his afterlife be pleasant and peaceful for a change."

Renar offered a tribute to his fallen anthrope junior with moist eyes. Viper was also seen rubbing his eyes. But he snapped out of it after shaking his head and raised his cup as well:

"To Belar!"

Ronny looked at both of his teammates and then at the pan he was holding. He wasn't sure he should join this weird, non-alcoholic, stew-based toast cum eulogy.

One reason was that he was the direct reason behind the guy's death. Another difference was he began eating from the pan instead of the cup, unlike Renar and Viper. So raising the pan for a toast didn't really seem that appropriate to him.

But then he saw his two teammates waiting for him. He pressed his lips against each other and gave in in the end— raising his pan as well:

"To Belar!"

[Chapter 313 - Entering Solo Tower](#)

"Are they planning to keep on hunting us, Sir Ronny?"

Renar asked after finishing his stew. He wanted to know their next set of plans from Ronny. He had come to realize that the guy had a lot of trump cards. Plus, his planning was impeccable. He just hoped that he or Viper wouldn't be used as baits next.

'The devil you know is better than the devil you don't, huh!'

Ronny looked at Renar as he had that thought and smiled internally. He had to appreciate the guy for his mindset. As hopelessly straightforward he was as an ex-cultist, the guy could keep a straight head under extreme pressure.

"I don't think so. The clean up arranged by the Illuminati isn't meant to last long. They would only target weak teams like us and try to salvage any worthy rewards we may have obtained from the dungeon.

The teams that are strong enough to cause collateral damage would be left alone. With our team, they must not have expected such a brutal retaliation. We were the spoilers they couldn't see coming.

Of course, they would be pissed at us. But they won't employ all their clean-up crews to search for us over an old E-Ranker's and a bunch of Novices' deaths. That much damage to their force is taken into account in their calculation."

Renar heard this and thought about the bigger picture. He couldn't help asking:

"How would the Illuminati deal with the aftermath?"

Ronny didn't take long to respond:

"That's what they hired help for. It indicates that they wanted to deny the responsibility for their actions if and when confronted by the survivors and non-attacked anthropes. Remember, they still need the majority of the anthropes who are strong enough to win big rewards. It's just some small fishes like us that are seen as one-time gains.

I believe a few groups of powerful anthropes that were included in the exploration already knew how the Illuminati behaved. But they ignored it because they knew it wouldn't affect them.

Personal gains are more important than communal harmony for most rankers. And if you consider the rewards Purgatory churns out for every participant, the self-induced ignorance is worth it."

Viper got up from his seat and looked at the rays of fake moonlight coming from the cave's entrance. He put his hands into his pants' sleeves for some warmth and comfort before asking Ronny:

"So it's not hopeless out there as long as we get to our solo towers."

Ronny nodded at his statements before responding:

"That's right. So long as we wait for the closing of Purgatory and bide our time in solo towers, the situation is under control. We'll be out of harm's way when that happens.

Of course, we might have to deal with personal grudges from that Adept ranker. But the organization won't back him in this endeavour. Plus, he'd have to wait for the expedition to get cooled down. He can't just blatantly kill us in front of other high-ranked anthropes."

"Ptui!"

Renar spat in discontent after hearing Ronny's speech and got up from his seat. He rubbed his hands together to fight off the cold before saying in an irritated voice:

"Baah! Politics. Us low-rankers are just tools in the eyes of those who sit at the so-called high table. So many of us can die from both sides and they wouldn't bat an eye."

Ronny laughed after hearing Renar's words. He tried to put some sense into the anthrope's one-dimensional brain:

"Hahaha! I used to think the same. That politics is harmful to low-ranking people like us. But I've come to realize now that the same politics can be used by low-ranked entities like us to survive and even thrive.

We can gain all the benefits while avoiding most dangers. That is if we understand the rules and use them to our advantage."

Ronny replied and started walking towards the cave's exit. Renar knew it was about time.

The E-Rank Anthrope dug a hole and buried some stuff that belonged to Belar he had in his position and closed it up with the soil. He also kept a big rock over it— serving as a nameless tombstone.

Renar felt comfortable and a little less agitated after he did that. Viper also bowed to the tombstone. They both waited in silence for some time before leaving the cave.

The rest was over and Ronny had already gone ahead. It was about time they all parted ways and entered solo towers of their respective ranks too.

A sky-high, ancient-looking building stood in front of the butcher. It made him appear incredibly small. There were various runs inscribed over its walls that would light up every so often and make their presence known.

This was the F-Rank solo tower the butcher had come to. By changing his appearance, he made himself look close to his true self, but not quite.

The entrance to the tower was massive. It was also surrounded by an air of mystery and hidden dangers that would give goosebumps to Novices that consider themselves its explorers.

"Reen, you are a C-Rank entity. So I don't know how the dungeon would react to your presence. Stay alert."

Eren said to his demon beast, who was currently hugging his chest in her slime form. She wanted to stay that way to handle any situation that is too difficult for her master to handle. She was worried about his safety after feeling the atmosphere surrounding the solo tower.

But then she thought about what Eren said and decided to merge with him and stay low while being fused to his body. It was better that the tower didn't treat her as a separate individual and kicked her out because of her C-Rank.

Eren stepped inside the tower's entrance and the arrays laid on the ground lit up in response. He soon vanished from his spot and was teleported to an unknown place that wasn't immediately made clear to him.

The butcher heard a familiar voice as soon as he stepped inside the solo tower's ground floor:

"Nice to meet you again, Eren Ilijah Idril. I hope you have settled your affairs outside.. Because it's going to be a long ride. Hehe!"

[Chapter 314 - Meeting Layla](#)

"Nice to meet you again, Eren Ilijah Idril. I hope you have settled your affairs outside. Because it's about to be a long ride. Hehe!"

Layla spoke in Eren's head. But he also heard the voice coming from behind him. He looked back to see a young woman waiting for him there with her hands behind her back, an innocent smile on her face.

Layla looked like a 13-year-old girl. She had dusky white hair that was borderline grey. Her skin was clear and supple with a light rosy tint on her cheeks.

Her eyes were a mix of blue and purple, like the colour of a periwinkle flower. Her slender build made her look even younger than her face suggested.

Most of Layla's hair was let loose. But she had a fishtail braid running through her volume of hair. The most eye-catching apparel she was wearing was her Kettle Brim style hat with an oversized, 360-degree visor. Furthermore, she was wearing a simple white shirt along with a minimal bowtie that matched the colour of her eyes.

The teenager-looking girl was also wearing a loose-fitting overcoat that became oversized towards the end of the sleeves. The peach-coloured skirt she was wearing boded well with the overall theme of her appearance.

Layla was sporting a pair of fancy shoes that were studded with a green gem at the top of their lace guards. She was also carrying a broomstick in her hand for some reason, which she made disappear as soon as Eren looked back.

"Out cleaning here?"

The butcher couldn't help passing comment as he caught a glimpse of Layla's broomstick. Layla puffed her cheeks after she heard the guy's remark and chided:

"This is how you greet me even though it's our first face to face meeting? Bad. I have a very bad impression of you now."

The butcher couldn't feel anything coming out of Layla's presence. If he didn't know any better, he would just assume that she was a rankless kid who had come here accidentally. He scratched his forehead and smiled awkwardly before replying in a consoling manner:

"I'm sorry, Layla. I didn't mean to offend you with my bad puns. Alright, what do I need to do? Let's get this thing started already."

The butcher was keen to begin the solo tower exploration. He was excited about the rewards he would get after clearing the floors. The dungeon rewards were already plenty lucrative. So he was hoping he would get ever better items and resources as rewards in the solo tower after each floor he cleared.

"What are you so eager for? People are hunting to kill you if you step outside now. Hehe! You sure like to make a mess wherever you go, don't you?"

Layla asked while flashing a cunning smile. The butcher wasn't surprised. He knew that she had referred to herself as the caretaker of this place. She must have had a mechanism set in place that would allow her to keep track of the Purgatory's participants.

"Whatever. They forced my hand so I just retaliated. Killing people isn't forbidden here, is it? Otherwise, those guys wouldn't have attacked me in the first place."

Layla laughed at the comment before replying amusingly:

"You are right, Eren. This is my master's place after all. It's only natural that blood gets spilt here whenever there are new potential candidates."

Eren raised his eyebrows when he heard Layla's response. He threw the most obvious question that popped into his head at her:

"Who is the master of this place and you, Layla? And why did you ask if I had settled my affairs outside or not?"

Layla started walking towards him after she heard Eren's question. She closed in on him until she was only a few centimetres away from him. She tilted her head forward and observed him closely as if he were some kind of specimen.

"I'll tell you all about it in a while. But let me see what I'm seeing here. This is also not your true form, I feel. Though it is difficult for me to say at this point because of my current condition.

Why are you acting like a chameleon when there's nobody around? Do you find fun in making other appearances that are not your own?"

The butcher had a blank face after hearing Layla. But she verbally marched on before he could defend his stance:

"Aah! I got it. You must feel like you are not that good-looking. So you change your appearance with your half-blood powers to cope with being ugly. Am I right?"

You have also increased your height with your transformation. Originally, you are tiny, aren't you?"

The butcher's blank expression soon turned grim when Layla gave it back to him for his opening comment. However, he didn't like to act on his temper and upset Purgatory's caretaker more than he had to.

"Tch! You are no fun, are you? I was expecting a small reaction from you, but maybe I overestimated you. That brooding face is not good for your health and looks, you know.

Alright. You will learn about my place's master soon enough."

'You might meet her too. If you survive the first floor that is.'

Layla thought to herself before explaining further:

"Anyway. Knowing about my master's is not relevant right now. I'm sure you wouldn't have heard of her even if I told you her name. What you want to focus on is how you can clear the tower's first floor.

I had asked you if you settled your outside affairs or not before coming here because there's a chance you might die here. Plus, the first floor is equipped with a time dilation array.

That means a few days inside the tower is akin to only a few hours outside. So it might be a while for you before you step outside even if you do survive. At least you'd feel that you've spent quite some time before you get out of the solo tower."

Layla said and retracted her head to her previous position. She then smiled menacingly:

"IF you survive that is."

[Chapter 315 - Robbed Of Resources](#)

Layla gave Eren a customary warning. But the butcher was now far too invested in the tower exploration to back out now. His silence gave Layla the affirmation she needed.

"Alright. Let's get you started. Stand inside the array and keep an eye on it. You will be scanned for what you are carrying in person. You are only supposed to fight with the weapon or weapon set of your choice. Any kind of artefact is not allowed.

The artefacts, the potion, and, anything that can help you clear the dungeon in a fly will be taken away from you for the time being. It will be given back only when you step outside the tower. Only your first-aid potions would remain with you along with other basic necessities.

Upon your death, your items and resources would stay here, at which point the tower would kind of recycle them. But you'd have no use for them anyway after your death. So I doubt you'd have hard feelings. Hehe!"

The butcher was surprised that most of his gear and trump cards would be taken away from him before entering the first floor of the tower. But his doubts were soon cleared by Layla who seemed to have read the puzzling expressions on his face:

"This is not a group dungeon, Eren. Solo towers have their own set of rules. Here, your value as a ranker is tested. I know that it would be unfair to a few rankers who belong to non-combat professions. But this is how the place has been designed.

The dungeon exploration was merely meant to tempt rankers into exploring the solo towers. The rewards were used as bait so that the rankers would be willing to enter the solo tower even after knowing about the high mortality rate."

'The first floor seems to be a killing machine for rankers. Damn it. I should have asked for more details on the solo tower. But I doubt Zee would have told me about these things honestly.'

The butcher had a few creases on his forehead after he realized the danger he was going to be in on the first floor.

"Don't worry, Eren. Give all that you got. I'm sure things won't be that difficult for you. Hehe! Now, let's get started."

Layla said and raised her right hand towards her side. A small array lit up amid a pitch-black place that seemed to expand from all directions. The lights coming from that array breathed a breath of life into the dimly lit atmosphere while generating a synthetic yet synchronous mana pulse.

"Thanks for your explanation, Layla. I'll be going then."

Eren nodded at Layla before starting to walk towards the array. He heard Layla's young voice from behind:

"I can't help you with your test so I'll take my leave as well. Good luck, and do your best to survive on the first floor. Your life and my release depend on it."

Layla said before seemingly vanishing from her place. The butcher didn't look back and stepped into the array soon after.

The array lit up brighter after it detected that a ranker had stepped inside its eye. The system scanned him and began identifying the belongings he carried both on his person and inside the ID storage.

First, the butcher's artefacts disappeared. Since they were worn out and of not much use, he didn't care about their disappearance. But his heart whined in pain as he saw his resources as well as his Extols disappearing from his storage space.

'What the fuck? Why is it taking my Extols from me? Does this stupid tower think I'll somehow bribe my opponents with them? Or them at my obstacles and create some sort of miracle with a pay-to-win strategy.'

The butcher watched as the rewards that he had received from the dungeon disappeared from his storage. He realized that Purgatory was not as lucrative as he had thought it to be. Especially if the ranker decides to visit solo towers after their successful exploration of the group dungeon.

That's because the dungeon would get back all the rewards it had given out if the ranker decided to explore the solo tower and died inside it. Eren was pissed after seeing almost nothing left in his storage space except for his recently used Katars.

'Baah! The tower just fucking robbed me of my resources. This place has given me another reason to survive. I'd become a ghost if I had to and get my damn things back. You ain't getting any free stuff from me, you capitalist tower.'

Eren's line of thoughts was soon disturbed when he sensed a mana signature of a space element trying to pull Reen away from her fused condition inside his body. His expressions turned grim when that happened:

'Damn it. The tower is even more detailed with its array setup. Reen, don't act up and don't move. Stay where you are. Let's see what happens.'

The array's lights flickered as the synthetic mana signature washed over Eren. The process lasted for a few moments before the mana signature stopped scanning the butcher.

The butcher couldn't understand what was happening. Thankfully, Alephee spoke up to clear his doubts:

'The array can detect Reen's mana core. It's the only distinguishing feature she has that is different from you now. But it couldn't separate her from you because it detected that she was a part of yourself.'

Wait. That loophole is of no use to you. The array is taking countermeasures.'

The butcher heard Alphee's voice in his head. Before he could ask what she was talking about, he felt a distinct mana signature acting on him once more. This time, it was even more prominent and complex than before. And contained multi-element nuances within it.

'Erni, I think something is happening to my mana core.'

Reen spoke up after she couldn't prevent the changes from taking place with her mana core. She trembled in horror as her mana core was sealed by some unknown runic technique. It wasn't long before she was basically turned into a rankless demon beast.

The butcher was made aware of Reen's position and his expressions turned grim. But Alphee clarified what had happened to Reen right away:

'Don't worry. Reen's mana core would return to normal when she steps outside this dungeon. The runes are space-bound to this tower. They don't have any power outside.'

Eren and Reen both were calmed down after Alphee told them about the demon beast's temporary situation. The butcher sighed and took his katars out. He clutched them hard in either of his hands before the array started lighting up brightly.

The array lit up with blinding lights in the next moment, and Eren disappeared from his place. He had been teleported to the first floor of the solo tower.

Chapter 316 - [Bonus] Wraiths

"What is this place?"

Eren found himself in a place far different from what he expected to get teleported to. He looked up and saw the night sky that was studded with glittering stars. But the sky was devoid of the moon.

Then he looked around and found out that he was teleported to a barren land above a mountain. A large and expansive platform was created. It looked like the peak was chopped off by something very sharp in one go, allowing for the creation of such an unnaturally flat platform above a mountain.

The wind felt cold. But it didn't feel like it was being influenced by the snow. Plus, it was too stable to be called a natural wind— considering the height Eren sensed he was supposed to be at.

Eren used his movement spell and moved over to the edge of the platform. He saw that the mountain he was on was one of many in the range of mountains surrounded by a dense forest. The platform was created when the mountain's peak was chopped. And yet, it stood taller than the other mountains in the mountain range.

"Wondering where you are? Let me tell you that this place exists for real. What you see in front of you is a look-alike of the actual place.

But it's not in what you call the Edinburgh kingdom though."

Layla's voice was heard in Eren's mind. He thought to himself and concluded. The solo towers send their participants to field dungeons that are based on real places.

"What do I need to do?"

Eren asked while maintaining his vigilance. He couldn't see any opponents in front of him. But he felt that the wind was getting chilly by the second.

"Survive, Eren. Survive in this place for seven days and seven nights. We'll talk about the next step afterwards."

Layla said and stopped talking. Eren also sensed a fluctuation of mana right at the centre of the platform. He got tense and tried executing his spell combo in anticipation.

Sedated Perception

Stunning Speed

Blitz Bolt

....

...

'Hmm? There's something wrong with the time-element spells.'

Eren felt his time-element spells not getting activated when he was about to launch his combo. Alephee's voice was heard in his mind before he could try to cast the time-element spells one more time.

'Time-element spells won't work here, Eren. At least not in the usual way. That's because the entire place is rendered on a time-element array. Remember what the caretaker told you. A few days could pass in here while in the real world it would only mean you have spent a few hours inside.'

Eren furrowed his eyebrows after he heard Alephee's statement. He kept his eyes at the centre of the platform. A medium-sized, complex array was lit up on the ground— indicating something was going to appear from it.

'Can't you do something about it, Alephee? I mean you created a miracle once when you sent me to my past. Allowing me to use my time-element spells shouldn't be impossible to you.'

Alephee replied soon after:

'It's not that I can't do it. It's the tower's mechanism. It will sense that an anomaly has been created inside the time chamber. We don't know how it will react to that anomaly.'

So my suggestion would be that you drop the idea of using your time-element spells here. The risks might not be worth the advantage you seek in your battle.'

Eren heard Alephee say inside his head. He could choose to override the dungeon's time-element spell restriction with Alephee's help. Or he could drop the time-element spells from his spell combo.

Eren thought of something else as he was watching the array at the platform's centre getting brighter by the moment. He couldn't help asking Alephee about it:

'Alephee, your existence wasn't detected by the tower. So you are beyond the tower's fail-safe mechanism. Is there any way you can help me besides enabling me to use time-element spells?'

Eren asked with hopes in his eyes. He needed all the help he could get from the looks of things. That's because the chilliness in the air has grown since the array appeared. He felt a strange mana signature in the surroundings that he hadn't felt in either of his lifetimes.

The butcher had come to realize that he was going to fight off an unknown kind of creature. Not knowing about your enemies raised the difficulty of the battle.

'Sorry to burst your bubble, Eren. I won't be able to do much if you want to avoid the repercussions from the tower. Plus, I'd like my existence to stay hidden from the tower's mechanism. For some reason, I feel that Layla isn't the only one keeping an eye on you.

But I can give you heads-up for your upcoming battle by making use of my soul sense. I'd have to compromise on being put to sleep if I tried to exert my consciousness like this. But your survival is more critical here at this point.'

'Do it.'

Eren didn't take long to reply. He had already been exposed to the potential of a soul sense application in battle. Alephee's tips were also welcoming. The butcher could trust her because their existences were interconnected.

Alephee spread her mana sense after she got Eren's confirmation and used it to scan the incoming enemies. Only a few moments had passed since the array appeared.

'Eren, I have bad news. Against your upcoming enemies, your lightning element offensive spells will almost be of no use at first. Use all your fire-element spells. Those would help you the most in dealing with their rotten bodies.'

Alephee informed Eren, who immediately cast his spell combo. He didn't have the luxury of taking his time and considering her suggestion.

Blitz Steps

Fire snake

Fireball

Breath of Fire.

Eren executed his spell combo that focused on his fire-element spells. Immediately, his feet were surrounded by tongues of lightning. His katars' edges caught fire as he tweaked the fireball spell to do so. And there appeared a bunch of fire snakes around him that all focused their gazes on their new enemies that had started appearing from the arrays.

"What the fuck are those?"

Eren couldn't help his shock when he saw his enemies. He soon heard two voices in his head, coming from Alephee and Layla at the same time, saying the same word in unison.

"Wraiths."

[Chapter 317 - Surrounded By The Undead](#)

"Wraiths."

What Eren saw gave him shivers. These were not ordinary monsters he had battled in his past life. He doubted they could even be called monsters at this point because of their appearances.

The wraiths looked like humanoid rankers of mixed races. But the flesh on their bodies was mangled and rotten. Many wraiths were missing the flesh on their face and limbs, making the skeletal structure that is found within them visible to the naked eyes.

Many wraiths were missing eyes in their eye sockets. Some had yellowish-white crowns in place of the scalp. Some had missing teeth. Others had their limbs fractured and twisted in an abnormal direction.

The wraiths were wearing tattered clothes that looked like they would turn to dust anytime now. Some of these monsters also carried in their hands old, worn-out weapons that didn't look threatening at first glance.

But Eren could feel with his mana sense that the wraiths had their own brand of magic working for them. The mana signatures they gave off were similar. And they had coated their worn-out weapons in the same mana signature— making it difficult for the butcher to feel the potency of the weapons and the magic the wraiths were using.

'Eren, the wraiths are the product of forbidden magic used on the dead bodies of the rankers. Beware, these guys are not apparitions like what you battled in the underground dungeon.

Only a few tricks can work to counter them. Fire-based spells are one of them. The physical damage you can inflict on them will have almost no immediate effect on wraiths. It is only when your fire-element mana invades their bodies that you will see satisfactory results.

Wraiths use only one form of magic irrespective of the element the dead bodies of the rankers were previously associated with— the netherworld ice element.

The wraiths you see still have their physical bodies. But they can also exist for some time in their mana-body form before getting dispersed into nothingness.

Do you understand what that means?'

Eren made a suppressed gulping sound as he heard Alephee's description of wraiths. Forget about the lightning spells. If even his physical attacks fail to yield results, then he was screwed by the tests on the first floor.

'It means I'll have to be wary of them even when I destroy their corpses. They are almost like ghosts that reside in the bodies of the deceased.

Wait. Dead rankers! Are these the bodies of the rankers who had come here and died in this place? This fucking Purgatory is giving a new meaning to the word recycle. Fuck!'

Eren cursed the way this place handled the dead bodies of the rankers. Not because he was empathetic to them. However, these guys died and made his job more difficult.

"Skrreeeeeeee!"

The silent wraiths that were walking aimlessly in silence produced a sharp sound in unison when they saw a live ranker looking at them from a distance. At least 25 of them appeared all at once. And they all started running towards Eren without a moment's delay.

'What rank do these guys have? I can't sense shit.'

Eren gripped his weapons hard as he saw the horde of wraiths approaching him frantically. Some of them were threateningly agile even with their twisted limbs and corpse-like bodies. They looked at Eren like he was their mortal enemy and produced the same sharp sound in unison as if to challenge him.

'The Wraiths don't have ranks like the normal rankers. But what I can feel from my soul sense, they are as powerful as an F-Ranker in the solid stage.'

Eren listened to Alphee as he started running towards his enemies. There was nothing he could do or use to defend himself in this open terrain. He might as well take the initiative and attack them instead of running around and wasting his stamina and mana.

'Fuck! This dungeon is trying to kill me. I'd have to fight this undead horde for seven days and seven nights? What the fuck!'

The gap between the difficulty levels of the underground dungeon and solo towers was huge. But it was too late for regrets. Eren used his movement spell and got close to the horde of wraiths that were eyeing him. He was followed by his fire snakes.

The first thing that hit Eren was the rotten smell coming from the bodies of the wraiths. The second was the abnormal mana signature the monsters were giving off. The third was the soul-freezing cold he felt coming from their bodies.

'I'll kill you again to give you the rest you fuckers deserve. Sleep motherfuckers, sleep for fuck's sake.'

Eren was especially agitated compared to the usual battle stress he was able to cope with. Hence his cursing had increased. The same cursing speech he used to have when he was a nobody in his previous life. The upcoming battle with the wraiths had made him revert to his previous foul-mouthed self.

"Breath of fire."

Eren released his fire-element spell from his mouth as soon as he appeared in the middle of the monster horde. The fire snakes that were following him entered the battle as well and executed the same spell at different places.

The pitch-black night lit by the starry skies soon found a set of new light sources in the form of streams of fire generated by the fire snakes and their caster at the same time.

"Skreeeeeeeeee."

The flesh burning stench started exuding from the wraiths' bodies as they were subjected to the fire. But that didn't prevent them from confronting their attackers fearlessly. It was as if they didn't care what would happen to their bodies.

Eren wasn't done yet. He stacked his movement spell as soon as he saw the wraiths coming to get him. By now they had surrounded him from all sides and there was no way to run. Therefore, he charged up his legs and jumped high-- the only place he could retract to for the time being.

Eren first tossed his katars in the air. Then he executed his fire-element spell as soon as he found himself stabilized in the air a few feet above the ground. The target of his attack was right below him-- concentrating on his previous position.

"Just fucking die already.

Fireballs."

[Chapter 318 - Life Drain P1](#)

"Fireballs!"

Eren stacked his fire-element spell and directed them towards the bunch of wraiths that were eyeing and screeching at him. Eren had jumped about 20 feet in the air. As he was getting pulled down by gravity, he executed two more fireballs to ease the fall and damage the monsters simultaneously.

"Screeee!"

A sharp, deafening noise reached Eren's ears and almost made him lose his balance as he landed on the ground. Alphee came to his rescue at the time. She covered his body with her soul sense.

'Don't attack the wraiths carelessly. Use your powers well. First, seal off your ears with your defensive mana layer. And use the fire snakes to your advantage.'

Eren showed that he agreed with Alphee by blocking off his ears using his defensive mana layer. Then he caught the weapons that were about to hit the ground near him.

Swoosh!

Eren lit his katars on fire and swung them towards the nearest wraith that had come to confront him. Since the wraith was near him, it had already caught fire.

The wraith was an elven sword warrior. He was much taller than Eren. He ignored the slash Eren's weapon caused on his torso. Then he swung his sword at Eren. But the latter dodged it by tucking under the swing and getting near him.

By now, Eren's animated fire snakes had formed a perimeter around him. The surrounding fire snakes fought and prevented the wraiths from breaching the perimeter. The snakes that were inside the perimeter fought with the remaining wraiths that were near Eren.

Eren couldn't hear the sound of the battle anymore. His skin was tingling from the vibration of sound that bombarded him. Plus, the chill he felt before was intensifying at the moment.

The elf warrior wraith laughed hideously after Eren's precise attack landed on his back from below. He punched towards the latter with his empty hand while holding his sword above his head.

'Watch out. The wraith is looking for collateral damage. He is planning to attack your body at the cost of chopping off his hand.'

Alephee's voice was heard in Eren's mind as he was about to engage with the elf warrior again. He retracted his hand just when it was about to hit the guy's lower rib cage. Eren retreated immediately and tried to distance himself from him.

But soon, he saw through one of his fire snakes' vision that another wraith was about to attack him from behind him. While retreating, he kept an eye on the elf warrior wraith.

'Damn it. There are just too many.'

Eren cursed and stopped retreating before employing his movement spell to its fullest potential. He dodged to his left just when the dwarf elf was about to attack him from behind using his axe.

Eren's skin tingled again. He knew that both the elf and dwarf wraiths were mad at him for not being an obedient victim. They both were screeching at him at the same time.

His natural defence layer felt the tremors produced by the mana-infused screech. But before he could stabilize from just changing his position and attacking one of the two wraiths, another monster attacked him from the front. It had the body of a human female.

Eren couldn't change the direction of his movement in time. He was missing his time-element spells more and more in this battle. Those spells were a boon for quick and calculated movements that he could plan after seeing the attack coming. The time-element spells had allowed him to dominate most of his opponents while avoiding any fatal injuries.

The female wraith didn't carry any weapon. But the nails on her hands were longer than normal. Her fingers also had been elongated. The flesh on her body had dried and shrivelled— forming wrinkles all over. But her eyes carried a hint of water in them.

The old-hag-looking female wraith was fast with her hands as she didn't carry any weapons. She smiled hideously at the butcher as she grabbed his right hand. The one he was using to stabilize his position by placing it on the ground and using it as something to kill his momentum with.

Eren felt as if all his energy in his right hand was being sucked dry as soon as the female wraith grabbed his hand. He watched to his horror as his fleshly hand was starting to turn wrinkly and losing its original colour.

"Get the fuck off of me, you fucking old hag."

Eren shouted loud and swung his katar at the hand the female wraith had used to touch him. He saw that the female wraith was still flashing an unsightly smile as she swiftly evaded the attack aimed at her.

Eren felt the chills invading his body even after the female wraith left his hand. The netherworld-ice element pervaded inside him and started to freeze his flesh and bones. Even a portion of his blood in the nearby veins had turned into tiny blocks of bloody ice.

'Quick. Run your fire-element mana through the right hand and expel the foreign mana currently trying to shut the organs down. I've stopped it from spreading further in your body with my mana sense. But it would take efforts from your end to get rid of it for good.'

Eren retreated as he heard Alephee's suggestion. He gathered three of his nearest fire snakes and assigned them to the three directions around him. He stopped amid his fire snakes and observed what was happening around him with vigilance.

Thankfully, the elf warrior wasn't that fast because his right foot was twisted in a weird direction. The femur bone of the right leg seems broken as well, preventing him from following Eren at a steady pace.

Eren guessed that the elf warrior must have overexerted himself to close his distance from Eren and attack him first. As a result, his right femur bone was broken and his right foot was twisted.

The dwarf warrior had just taken his axe out of the ground where Eren stood a few moments ago. The female warrior smiled coquettishly at him again. She seemed to be high on something.

The female wraith's eyes that were just moist a moment before had produced two distinct lines of tears on her cheeks now.. But contrary to the usual emotion associated with tears, the monster seemed ecstatic.

[Chapter 319 - Life Drain P2](#)

The female wraith's eyes that were just moist a moment before had produced two distinct lines of tears on her cheeks now. But contrary to the belief associated with the tears, the monster seemed ecstatic.

The female wraith stretched her tongue and reached towards the tears running down her shrivelled cheeks. She used the tip of her tongue to lift the drop of the clear liquid that had a dash of purple-blue hue mixed in it.

She sent those drops down her throat using her excessively long tongue as a slide. Then she traced the moist path of the tears they left behind with her tongue. The female wraith looked like she had the biggest orgasm of her afterlife when she drank those tears.

Eren felt a chill run down his spine as he witnessed that. Things were not looking rosy for him from the very first night of the trial. He looked down at his caught-on-fire shrivelled hand that was slowly gaining colour and returning to its previous state as he kept on running his fire-element mana through it.

'What the fuck was that, Alephee?'

Eren asked while looking at the three immediate opponents that were closing in on him. Alephee didn't take long to reply:

'Life Drain!'

Alephee said. But before she could provide Eren with an explanation, Layla's voice sounded in his head:

"That was the Life Drain ability of the Wraiths. A few deviant wraiths can suck the vitality of their opponents. Be careful and don't let them touch you again."

'Hey! I was about to say that. This mischievous rascal beat me to it.'

Alephee's unpleasant voice echoed in Eren's head as he had dark lines on his forehead. He asked Alephee in a grim voice:

'You knew about this?'

'Well, yeah.'

'Don't give me your casual 'yeah'. Say stuff like this before they fatally injure me, damn it.'

Eren replied with a burst of anger. He soon heard Alephee's sulky response:

'But I was only reminded of it when the female wraith's ability worked on you.'

Eren sighed internally before asking the gem's spirit in a comforting tone:

'Alright, alright. What else can you tell me about it? Is there anything I can do? Is there any way I can prevent the old hag from getting high on my life force?'

There was no point in wallowing in the things that had already happened. The pragmatist in Eren showed himself at the time of his crisis and enabled him to ask the right questions:

'No, Eren. You can't block the ability with your mana defence layer as you did with the wraiths' screech. Technically, the mana layer and your mana itself would be a part of your life force.

The vitality-sucking wraith would be able to suck your vitality as soon as she touched you. You can only try to avoid contact. That's the right way. The second best is that you cut her arms first before destroying her body.

Still, the discovery of a deviant wraith isn't all terrible. Hehe! I'll tell you of another measure you can use against these wraiths which the cheeky rascal conveniently avoided sharing with you.

Deviant's wraith's eyes turn the ethereal energy found in the life force into a liquid form-- those tears. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?'

Eren processed what Alephee told him as he watched as the mini battles between his fire snakes and the wraiths intensified. He immediately felt as if he had a salty taste in his mouth. He confirmed to be sure:

'You mean, I have to...'

'Yepp! You can drink the tears to gain your lost vitality back and then some more. It won't taste salty or anything unpalatable despite how it looks.

You can also store it away for later use. Even a single drop will do the trick. If you process it using your ranking technique properly, it can be beneficial for you and help you get over the bottleneck in your ranking.

I'd suggest you take out the eyeballs of that wraith and store them inside your ID storage. They would be able to produce a drop or two within a week or two on their own even after they are taken out.

The removed eyes can keep on producing those tears for a few months...'

'Keep it concise, Alephee. We don't have much time here.'

Eren stopped Alephee from rambling about the health benefits of having a deviant wraith's eyes in his possession. That's because soon his three attackers and he would be within striking distance of each other.

The fire-element mana did affect the wraiths, causing them to slow down considerably. But it couldn't finish them off. The fire snakes were also going to disappear because Eren felt like his headache would soon make him dispel the animated spell.

Furthermore, taking care of the many fire snakes around him was also taxing on his mana expenditure. It meant that the longer he fought the horde of the wraiths, the grimmer his prospect was going to be in the end. What if he had to be in the fight with them for seven days straight?

Eren had a depressing look on his face when he realized the kind of soup he had found himself in. As if to take pity on him, Layla spoke in his mind and tried to give him some hope:

'Don't worry, Eren. This place follows the rules of real life for the most part. The wraiths can't exist in daylight. You only need to fight them till dawn arrives, which is ten hours from now as per your perception of time.

Their bodies would burn, and their spectral forms would be destroyed. They'll be taken care of on their own when that happens.

You don't necessarily have to win against all of the wraiths. As I said earlier, you just need to survive the seven days on the first floor. Hehe! Isn't it easy? Do your best.'

[Chapter 320 - Dealing With The Dwarf Wraith](#)

"You don't necessarily have to win against all of the wraiths. As I said earlier, you just need to survive the seven days on the first floor. Hehe! Isn't it easy? Do your best.'

Layla finished her speech on a cheering note. That certainly relieved some pressure off of the butcher's psyche. But the black lines on his forehead didn't disappear as he realized the much-needed respite was still ten hours away from him.

'Easy? Easy? This fucking brat...'

Eren wanted to curse Layla for her easy remarks. But he stopped himself and tried to self motivate himself instead:

'Heh! It'll become impossible to clear the floor at this rate if I just get scared at the beginning. Snap out of it, Eren fucking Idril. You are better than this.

Just 10 hours, right? I can do this.'

Eren said to himself something he didn't truly believe. The odds were still stacked against him. He needed a trick that could work against the wraiths while enabling him to face the least amount of repercussions.

But first, he needed to take care of the three immediate opponents he was about to face all at once. He thought about it and activated another spell:

Blitz Shield!

A layer of lightning appeared around Eren's body and was converted into a lightning overcoat. It had fewer runic patterns than he previously had when he was in the ethereal state while in the underground dungeon. Still, it was a huge improvement over the normal defensive spell he was used to.

Eren had not yet gotten attuned to all the insights he gained after consuming the Potion of Serenity. However, he was able to accomplish this in an expedited manner due to the constant battles he was having.

Eren used his movement spell to his fullest and approached the dwarf first who looked the weakest among the trio. He employed the fire snakes that protected him to attack the other two. He sent one snake towards the old hag. The other two were assigned to deal with the elf sword warrior.

"Breath of fire."

Eren used the fire-element spell through his mouth as soon as he got close to the dwarf wraith. The dwarf wraith screeched when he was subjected to the fire. He repelled it by condensing a layer of dark blue ice on his body.

'This is the netherworld ice element Alephee talked about.'

Eren thought to himself before he stopped executing the spell. He used his weapons arts on the dwarf just as he was repositioning himself after being subjected to the fire.

'Swoosh.'

Eren chopped off the wraith's axe-holding hand before aiming his next attack on his eyes. But the wraith was unfazed even after the separation of his limb. He spun around quickly and ducked. Then he picked up the dropped axe using his other hand and spun it towards Eren's legs while still maintaining his close-to-the-ground position.

'These fucking dwarfs are nimble with their weapons even after they die it seems.'

Eren cursed and hastily jumped using his quick movements. This time, the jump wasn't as high. But it gave him the altitude he needed to cast another fireball spell on the dwarf.

'Screeeeeeeee!'

The dwarf screeched as he was subjected to an even more fire-element attack.

'Destroy their hearts and brains. They are anchored to their mortal bodies because of those two organs. As long as those organs are intact, you won't be able to destroy them in one go.'

Eren heard Alephee's suggestion as he was about to fall to the ground. He had a light of hope in his eyes when he heard the information.

'Information like this..'

Eren redirected his stance and headed towards the dwarf wraith. He tightened the grip around his weapon and spun in the air. By now, the monster had stood on its own. But before it could look up, it felt something landing on either side of his shoulders with a significant force.

Eren had placed his feet right over the dwarf's shoulders. The momentum of his fall hadn't slowed down. It passed through his body and was exerted on the dwarf, causing him to be on his knees as a result.

The butcher didn't waste time. He squatted and ran one of his katars directly through the monster's cranium from above. Then he grabbed the monster's shoulder with his hands and stood on it, allowing his legs to swing vertically and generate momentum behind the monster's back.

Eren ran his lightning element movement spell to its fullest to increase the right leg's speed and penetrating power. Then he used the same leg to puncture-kick the dwarf from behind— just where his heart was supposed to be.

Picheeui!

The right leg was through the monster's body as soon as the attack landed. It also damaged the heart in the process. From the dwarf's front, the rotten black blood was dripping with dark blue mana residue. And when Eren took his right leg back with equal speed, the same blood was spurted on the ground behind the monster as well.

'(Information like this) ... should have been given as soon as the fight had started.'

Eren finished his sentence only after he had defeated the monster. He had destroyed its brain and heart simultaneously with one attack. He had come to realize that attacking the wraiths this way, using fire-element spells first and then following them with attacks on their hearts and brains, would give him the maximum battle efficiency.

Eren jumped and landed on all fours to see that the dwarf wraith's body had started crumbling— turning into dust before disappearing into thin air. He was just about to get up from his position when he sensed a threat coming from where the dwarf's body was.

The dwarf's apparition appears from the crumbling dust that was once his body. It screeched even louder than it could while it had a mortal body and flew towards its enemy at an alarming rate.

Eren was about to execute his breath of fire again when he heard Alephee's voice in his head:

'Eren, remember when I told you the lightning-element spells wouldn't be useful? That was before you destroyed their bodies. You have to use them on the wraith's spectral form to deal with them.'

It was Alephee's warning that made Eren smile in mirthless amusement. His companion had a serious problem streamlining the information she was supposed to provide him. But he didn't let it get to him and changed his spell:

"Blitz Bolt!"