

## Vile 561

### Chapter 561 A Small Price to Pay for Salvation

'The class change has been linked to your Life-Drain mode.

You can have your previous class back if and when you revert to your normal self.'

Eren nodded his head and spoke up.

'That's right. Now I'll have to...'

The butcher stopped smoking and paused his line of thoughts when he processed what Alephee was trying to say. Having a part doubtful and part hopeful look on his face, he asked Alephee.

'Are you sure?'

Alephee took some time before speaking up.

'I'm sure. Your enhancement-mode Life-Drain never really matched your normal state. Because it was based on an ability that shouldn't exist in this world.

When you were in a state of epiphany, the world's consciousness was not ready to initiate a conversation with you. So you subconsciously chose to make that mode a part of this world. In doing that, you reconfigured the mana circuits and mana points the mode had by default. And while doing it, you changed it based on the layout of the summoner class you had received from Tim.'

Alephee said and took a pause. She decided that she would ask Eren to do something for her when they get out of the subspace. She was feeling bored by only talking in the guy's head without being able to interact with the world normally, sans her soul sense.

She sighed and put that thought aside before continuing.

'But the higher consciousness can't think as clearly as an individual. It can only give attention to one person at a time. After all, it has the entire world and all its denizens to keep tabs on. So I didn't realize that you have, for the lack of a better term, what can be called malleable mana circuits and mana points.

Even though your Life-Drain mode now has summoner class, you can have multiple modes if and when you tap further into your bloodline powers. With multiple modes, you can have a variety of classes.

Whoever came up with the artificial slime project while being part of this world was a genius. If I had my previous powers...'

Alephee paused for a moment to consider a few things. The butcher was listening to her. But he let her have her time. He trusted her as much as he trusted Reen because they both were part of his existence. So he just kept his silence and smoked Sativa Stick, enabling her to gather her thoughts before speaking once again.

'My point is, your bloodline powers can give you more advantages than you ever thought were possible. The reason I approved of you choosing to practice your half-blood ranking technique was because of this. Finding something deep within you is always a better choice than looking outside for something that you may or may not find suitable for you.

You just need to revert to your normal self and your close combat class would be available to you. Though, I believe you'd have to go through some form of pain.

It won't be as unbearable as you felt for the first time. And reverting to your original state or accessing the Life-Drain mode won't be as easy as it was before. But it should be tolerable as you get used to the whole thing.

What's also good about the class change in your case is the fact that you don't have to regress your ranking status. Nor would you require any special preparations.

You should also thank your past self for sticking with the Rootless ranking technique despite all its drawbacks. Due to your choice to practice half-blood techniques, you were able to keep your consciousness and your body intact even after such an unexpected class change.

Otherwise, your body would have been forced to sleep before I could intervene. I'm not sure my intervention would have helped you much at that time anyway.'

The realization dawned upon Eren when he heard Alephee state things out clearly for him. The Life-Drain enhancement-mode was something he seldom used because of the repercussions it carried if someone got a clue about it.

The butcher's mana signature was completely otherworldly when he was in that mode. So doing anything with that mode active was akin to leaving traces of his abominable existence behind.

But now since his mana circuits had been altered, Eren could feel that his mana signature now belonged to this world despite it being different from his normal state. He didn't mind that. He welcomed the difference. By doing so, he was able to change his identity that was not based on anyone.

Eren looked at his hands after thinking about something. His skin during the Life-Drain mode had gained a bit of texture. It was still paler than usual. But now it looked bearable to look at. He stopped looking like a frozen corpse now.

Life-Drain!

He regretted activating his ability immediately after that.

"Aaaaaaaaah... fuck!"

Eren felt like his arm would be split vertically in two when he activated his ability. His skin covering both of his arms kept on wiggling as it reverted back to being as pale as it was before while using Life-Drain. It was as if countless worms had suddenly got under his skin and started moving on their own while creating that wiggling effect on his skin.

'As I said, malleable constitution. You made a deal with world consciousness while leaving a loophole like this behind.

Now you still have access to Life-Drain while your mana signature belongs to this world. A small bit of pain like that isn't such a terrible deal considering the advantage you have gained now.

Um... what do they say? A small price to pay for salvation.'

Alephee cleared the air behind why Eren felt pain activating the Life Drain before he asked about it. The latter smiled mirthlessly when Alephee told him to be masochistic while looking at the positive side.

But Eren had to agree that what Alephee said was the truth. Earlier, he had kept his Life-Drain mode hidden. Even if he could use the ability while he was in his normal state, the otherworldly mana signature would still leak out.

Plus, using the ability while not in Life-Drain enhancement-mode made the ability's gains less efficient than they were supposed to be. So he seldom made use of his ability to not draw any unwanted attention.

But now, he could use Life-Drain without having to worry about it. At least, he won't be branded as an abomination if and when he gets caught using it.

'Things would be interesting from now on. I gained another trump card I can use. I need to operate with the same prudence. But I'll be using it more often from now on.'

The butcher thought to himself and smiled while looking at his wraith-like hands and overgrown nails. Despite their hideous and spooky appearance, his hands started looking beautiful to him.

#### Chapter 562 Countdown

Eren looked at the pool of blood Tim had left behind. He then looked at his naked body and observed that some part of blood and meat that belonged to Langdon was still stuck to him when the water-element guy exploded in front of him like a water balloon.

Eren channeled his fire-element mana throughout his body and got rid of all the traces of blood and meat. He also felt that his understanding of the fire element had deepened quite significantly. He believed he had left Tuan behind both in terms of elemental attainment and ranking status despite starting practicing fire-element spells much later than him.

He took out another set of clothes from his storage and wore them. Since they were the same set of clothes Tuan had given him in different shades, he didn't look much different than before the start of the match. The real Tuan had kept things simple by opting for the same style. The butcher also didn't find anything wrong with the real Tuan's perspective on clothes.

Eren resumed his train of thoughts once again while looking at himself through countless reflections from the surrounding. He couldn't help but compare the wrath flame of Sid with the flame he had just consumed.

The state of epiphany I experienced was weird. After digesting Sid's wrath flame, I had an epiphany-like experience, which was related to his memories and life experiences. But this time, I was connected to higher consciousness. Was it due to—'

Eren half-finished his smoke while having a stray thought like this. Alephee wanted him to remember that there was a Titus competition currently on. And that he needed to hurry. But she kept that prompt on the backburner for now before confirming his suspicions.

'That's right. It has to do with your soul sense. Even an immature soul sense can help you reap more benefits than you could imagine. That's why having a soul sense at the beginning of one's ranking journey is so critical.

You can make soul sense and do your bidding while in a state of epiphany. You can also enter the state of epiphany willingly without any potion or array's help if you know how to use your soul sense.

Only people with soul senses are capable of negotiating with higher consciousness. The fact that you pulled it off while having a partially awakened soul sense is a tremendous feat.'

Eren nodded his head after Alephee confirmed his suspicions. He canceled his Life-Drain ability and felt the mana circuits of his arms changing again while gritting his teeth. But before resuming his normal state, he decided to check his status now that he had broken into the solid stage of the Ace rank.

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Name- Eren Elijah Idril (Verified)

Organizations- Edinburgh Army (Nightshade duchy) Lionhearts Adventurers' Academy

Academic Status- Class 2/C

Ranked Status: Not applicable due to on-field assignment

Base Stats:

HP- 14.4 / 14.4

MP- 12.9 / 12.9

STR- 12.5

AGI- 14.9

INT- 10.5

BTP~ 65

BTP Visibility- Private

Ranking Status: E-Rank (Solid Core Ace Stage)

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Ranking Technique- Rootless (Custom Name)

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'Hmm. My intelligence score received the biggest boost this time. Probably because I was able to get a summoner class for myself. Malleable constitution, huh?

Maybe I can tweak my stats while keeping the BTP the same in the future. That's if I gain enough control over my bloodline powers and adjust my mana circuits as per my class.'

The butcher thought to himself as he checked his stats once again. The biggest boost he had gotten was in the INT stat, also known as the intelligence stat. Yet, he felt that he would be the most incompetent summoner with an intelligence stat value like that.

He needed more stat points in INT for him to truly tap into the true summoner's potential. But since he had arranged his mana circuits subconsciously and did not have any summoner-class specific ranking technique, he couldn't boost his intelligence stat the way he wanted to.

'Wait a damn minute.'

The butcher came to realize something. This epiphany was him getting approval from the world's mana for using the Life Drain mode. But Life Drain mode was not the only otherworldly mode he had.

Eren had Sin of Wrath mode in which his eyes would turn red. He reckoned that he also had Lust mode, which he hadn't entered yet for some reason even though he could use its ability just fine.

All of those modes, also known as bodily states, felt natural to him. But he also knew that they had an otherworldly source of origin. Thus, whenever he used them, he needed to make sure there were no witnesses or loose ends after using those abilities and modes.

But what if he gets all the Sin series abilities and unlocks every ability? With each ability and its mode, he would have a class to assign that mode to. He would then need to find a way to arrange his mana circuits according to the known class that was part of this world's rules. This would remove the otherworldly aura the modes possessed.

Then he would be able to use Sin series abilities openly without being hunted down by high-ranking entities. With each mode and each class, he would have a different mana signature. Each of those would not be similar to the normal signature he has, and yet they would all indicate that he was completely part of this world's system. So the normal-him wouldn't be linked with either of those identities. Neither would it attract anyone from the big leagues, even if he decides to 'make a splash'.

Eren could never imagine that he'd be able to make use of his Sine Series abilities like this. The prospect of using their modes to unlock new classes for himself. He had to admit that the value of having Sins series abilities had just doubled because of such possibilities.

'If only I could get the rest of the Sins Series marks...

No... No use thinking about the future when my present needs my attention.'

The butcher snapped out of his thoughts and checked the time on his wristband's spectral screen after accessing it. He had received a supplementary feature when he had exited the spatial distortion with Kat earlier in the day. It now sported a countdown timer that had been added at the upper right corner of the spectral screen.

Remaining time: 11 hours.

Thankfully, the countdown didn't stop even after Eren was in the spectral distortion. Otherwise, things would have gotten problematic for him by now.

Only 11 hours were remaining until the Titus tournament was over. The butcher needed to hurry. He grabbed hold of the two wristbands that his victims left behind and couldn't help but flash a cunning smile.

Since Tim and Langdon had died in the spatial distortion, their wristbands were technically his. He didn't shy away from getting them for his use.

#### Chapter 563 Array Setup for Spectral Renditions

"How should I exit from this place?"

The butcher asked Alephee while still in his Life Drain enhancement mode. He was going to revert to his close combat mode just before getting back to where the other competitors were.

Eren stayed in his summoner class mode because he wanted to create an intentional trail using that as his class. This way, the historians would only find out the trail of summoner class ranker still being present, making Tim a mysterious person that died and lived at the same time. He was also going to use Potion of Innocence to make the matters blurry enough so that his version of the story holds up and doesn't get questioned later.

'Hmm. You obviously can't enter the previous entrance using your current ranking status. There's a way... or two... that you can use. It's where the right-most corner of the library building was supposed to be. Not too far from the spot where you took those books out.'

Eren's fight with Tim had collateral effects on the surroundings. The library building that was somehow dragged into the spatial distortion wasn't an exception.

Eren nodded and decided to check the place. It wasn't long before he found a series of spatial tears that were present under the debris of the library's collapsed structure.

Eren now understood how he found those books in the library. The juxtaposition of spatial runs had created chaotic elements near the library building that made the space too delicate. It had various pockets of spatial tears that could be made visible if enough elemental chaos was unleashed near it. Something like fire-element spells setting off in the vicinity.

"There are so many spatial tears... which one should I take?"

Eren asked Alephee while trying to sense the spatial tears using his mana sense. He knew he wouldn't gain anything valuable. But he wanted to check anyway.

'Well... if I use my soul sense on all of the spatial tears, I may be forced to sleep once again. So we have to be prudent in our selection. You choose which one to check out first. I'll just confirm if it's safe to enter or not.'

Eren sighed when he heard Alephee.

'You are putting me in a tough spot here, Alephee. With my luck, we'd end up right in the middle of two competitors' spell collisions.'

He understood that Alephee was making it easy for him to accept his choice. If it was him who chose an exit, and it turned out to be disastrous, he could only blame himself.

'Fuck it. Let's check the very first spatial tear out from the right, 5 meters away from the ground.'

Eren decided to try out the very first prominent spatial tear he had laid his eyes on and decided to try it out. Alephee didn't mind and extended her soul sense to check for any possible mortal danger.

'Hm. I don't know what to tell you, Eren. Your choices have a way of surprising yourself as well as others around you.'

Alephee had a deadpan voice in Eren's head. But he had started to recognize the subtle moods behind her tones now. She sounded like she was amused by what she had found on the other side of the spatial tear.

Eren smirked when he understood the subtle meaning of Alephee's words. It at least meant that the space on the other side was safe for him to enter and check out.

That assurance was enough for the butcher. Before diving into the spatial tear, he checked everything around the distortion once more. He also sent his mana sense inside his ID stone's storage space, keeping it on standby to take out another vial of the all-stats recovery potion should he need it. Only after confirming everything was in order did he jump inside.

"Aaaaargh!"

The butcher screamed in pain once again when he made it to the other side of the spatial tear. He now understood that Alephee's definition and his definition of a safe route were different.

He had felt his skin tear and hurt all over his body as a result of the spatial storm and gravitational spike. These two were present inside the spatial tear he had entered to get outside of the anomaly.

The skin on the butcher's entire body was now torn in various places, in various forms. Still, it wasn't too serious for him because of the class change he had just gone through.

Eren grunted in pain while pursing his lips and stood up on his two legs somehow. He then looked around and found himself to be inside a cave-like structure. Its ceiling was studded with a bunch of yoperlite stones. There was no direct sunlight coming from any source.

The air was stale, stagnant, and damp. There was no sound or sign of any activity. Just a few faint flashes of rune luminescence flashing off at various places.

Eren looked at his surroundings and stopped cursing in pain. He wanted to know where he had landed. But before spreading his mana sense and getting the hang of things, he needed to fix himself once again.

The butcher regretted that his newly worn clothes had become bloodied after he jumped in the spatial tear. He then worried about the dwindling supply of an all-stats recovery potion he had in his possession.

Eren was about to take out another vial of recovery potion when Alephee stopped him.

'Save it for another time. Didn't you want to use Life Drain now that it has been altered? There are a few targets you can use that on.'

Eren stopped himself from consuming the potion when he heard Alephee's words. He nodded internally before spreading his mana sense in all directions. Since she had put it this way, the butcher was sure he wasn't surrounded by his potential enemies.

"What the... where am I?"

A drop of sweat trickled down Eren's forehead when he spread his mana sense and found out what his surroundings were hiding under the cloak of poor light.

The first thing he noticed was the fact that the space was quite large and didn't seem to contain any exit. It meant the space was either isolated completely or the entrance and exit to this space were highly secured.

But the thing... or things that shocked him the most was the number and ranking status of many living entities in the isolated space beside him.

Chapter 564 Making Ideal Use of Life Drain

But the thing— or things that shocked Eren the most was the entities living here in this isolated space beside him.

Various mana beasts and monsters were present all around Eren. Several of them were only F ranks. But some were in the same rank as him. What generated the drops of sweat on the butcher's forehead was the presence of entities that had higher ranking status than him. And there was quite a lot.

Eren was going to make accusatory remarks about Alephee about her way of giving him a heads-up. But then he thought of checking the location again. This time more thoroughly than before.

Seeing this isolated space, Eren concluded that it wasn't normal. That's because even after he came here in this space all of a sudden without being invited in the middle of so many entities, he wasn't attacked or stared down. That was odd.

In the end, Eren discovered that these ranked monsters and mana beasts were slumbering inside an array dedicated to each of them. The runic chains were bound to each of their limbs, ensuring that they stayed in the array all the time.

Eren walked over to a wood-element E-Rank Red deer that was placed near him. He didn't enter the array. He did not touch any part of it. He just stood beside the array and watched what was going on.

Eren had started to form an idea as to what this place was after seeing the array setup up close. He also checked up on the mana beast that was trapped within it. Even though he was no good at the subject of array traps, the study of array traps was now making him understand the few basic array functions and ways to identify them.

Alephee decided to pitch in and fill in the blanks in Eren's predictions.

'You are on the right track, Eren. These are the same monsters and beasts that you had been fighting over since last week.'

'How?'



Eren asked with a light of curiosity in his eyes. Alephee didn't take long to answer.

'The array setup in which these creatures are locked creates real-life-like spectral copies. These spectral copies with mana bodies were what you and other competitors fought with.

The array is these creatures' prison and what keeps them alive. The array setup also puts the creatures to sleep.

But the array setup can not completely mimic the state of epiphany. Therefore, a makeshift system has been introduced in which food is supplied externally.

So those runic chains that you see seeped into the creatures' limbs also provide them with bio-energy to sustain them. In a way, those chains that are imprisoning them are also the ones that are keeping these prisoners alive.'

Understanding dawned on Eren as he processed Alephee's explanation. So this was how the enemies for the contestants were created. All those monsters and beasts he and the other guys killed were only copies of these animals with their mana bodies. They were acting and appearing just the way the organizers wanted them to.

'Does that mean Eliza also has a setup like this inside her Purgatory?'

The recurring spectral enemies and how they can become near invincible, so they can exhaust the champions. This was the same setup Purgatory had. Eren couldn't help linking what he had experienced in Purgatory with what he was seeing right now.

Of course, Purgatory didn't only contain spectral targets. The Draconic Lizards Layla talked about were real. Otherwise, the butcher's Life Drain wouldn't have worked on them. Plus, the wraiths that had been summoned weren't a spectral rendition of something alive.

'More or less, yes. But we can see that Eliza had been dabbling with the concepts of life and death. She is trying to revive herself from the grave that she has almost fallen into. So her experiments with wraiths and Draconic Lizards aren't part of the same setup.

So she also collects the souls of those who have died there and experiments on them when she feels like it. The wraiths she had made you fight with must be part of her experiments, failed or otherwise.

What you see here are only ranking entities that are bound to their mortal shells getting rendered in spectral forms. What Eliza has run in Purgatory can be called an advanced form of the same setup.'

Alephee explained to Eren and made him realize the difference between the two setups. Seeing that he seemed interested in learning more about the array set up, she explained it in detail as well.

Eren nodded his head when Alephee was done explaining. After understanding the nitty-gritty of the setup, the butcher couldn't help but smile wickedly at the potential opportunity that he can make use of when the time comes.

'Eren, your wounds are kind of serious if left untreated for long.'

Alephee's timely prompt made the obsessive-compulsive serial planner snap out of his chain of thoughts. He looked at his body by looking downwards before looking at his arms. Gritting his teeth, he decided to make use of his ability that he seldom used.

Life Drain!

The first victim of Eren's Life Drain was the E-Rank Red deer. Alephee navigated his way inside the array without triggering any of its defense mechanisms. Once in, all he needed to do was penetrate his fingers deep inside the beast's body on its exposed back.

The beast didn't wake up. It couldn't. The array's consistent operation ensured that the butcher could use his Life Drain on his first victim without experiencing any conflict.

Eren's injuries started healing at a rapid pace when the ability got activated. He then closed his eyes and channeled his ranking technique once again. When he received a unique supply of mana, his mana core spun rapidly. A unique atmosphere was created around the butcher as he felt every cell in his body was getting rejuvenated.

The mana purified by the Life Drain also entered other parts of his body, strengthening his muscles. The butcher felt like he had just had a satisfying meal when he was done with the Red deer. By now, the beast's corpse had been mummified.

'Heh. I feel like my ranking status is improving. It is a bit slow, but progress is progress. And this is as good a time as any to test the full extent of Life Drain.'

The opportunist in Eren couldn't let go of so many defenseless preys laid in front of him like a gourmet buffet. He was seen walking towards his next target with his claw-like fingers outstretched. Blood from its latest victim dripped from the tip of his sharp nails.

Chapter 565 Rigging the Field Boss

"This... this is the same Goblin Lord that I fought with, right?"

When Eren got to his next victim, the goblin lord that was slumbering inside the array looked familiar to him. Then he remembered that it was the same Goblin Lord that Kat and the rest had managed to lure out of his monster nest. He had then killed the mana body of this Goblin Lord, giving everybody a hefty amount of Titus points.

Eren didn't touch the F-Rank mana beast and monsters because they were no use to him. And he had killed and drained the life essence out of a bunch of mana beasts and monsters in the E-Rank.

He soon realized that he wasn't using Life Drain and his current situation efficiently. He was subconsciously avoiding the mana beasts in the D-Rank when they were all slumbering and of no danger to him.

Eren quickly stopped using Life Drain on E-Rank monsters and mana beasts and instead used his ability on D-Rank monsters. The Goblin Lord was going to be his first victim in that segment.

'That's right. This guy is the same Goblin Lord you fought with. But what are you doing with that... what is that?'

Alephee confirmed Eren's hunch. But she was puzzled when she saw him taking out an array disk that featured a glass-like platform in the middle. The center was also etched with runes, making it a ranked artifact.

Eren smirked when he found Alephee puzzled for the first time in a long while. He didn't reply with words though and activated his ability.

Life Drain: Devour

Eren's arms forgo their defined forms and change into slimy shapes. The two slime globs stretched towards the Goblin Lord's body before blanketing over it completely.

"Grrrrrrrrr!"

The Goblin Lord growled in his slumber when he unconsciously felt that something was wrong with his body. Eren was about to bolt out of his current position if he had shown any more signs of awakening. But fortunately for the butcher and unfortunately for the Goblin Lord, the monster couldn't wake up to defend himself.

"Grrrrrrrrrrrr!"

"Grrrrr!"

"Gr"

"..."

It took a while but Eren finally managed to breach the monster's natural mana defense before digesting his entire body with his half-blood ability.

This time, he had chosen to use his ability this way instead of just puncturing his victim's body and drawing the Life essence out. This time, he wanted to create a Blood Seed out of the Goblin Lord.

Eren closed his eyes and processed the monster's life essence as well as his memories. This time, it didn't take long for him to make a Blood Seed out of the monster because of his earlier experience.

Eren drew the mana-coated drop of blood out of the tip of his fingertip and let it levitate over it. He then took hold of the array disk and slowly placed the Blood Seed over the glass surface of the disk.

A blood slide!

Eren imbued his mana inside the array disk and it activated the array and runes were etched over it. The blood slide vanished from the array disk's platform after the array was activated. The slide was secured inside the array disk while ensuring that the essence of the Blood Seed remained intact and unharmed.

'Oh!'

Eren knew Alephee would understand what he was doing once she saw it. He was creating blood slides for various monster forms. He already had Orc form's Blood Seed stored within him. As a result, he couldn't save another Blood Seed.

So he had come up with a way around ever since he got out of the Oni dungeon. It was the first time he used his preparations.

Eren then looked around him. There were a lot of monsters around him, most of them of Ace-rank caliber. But there were some monsters with D-Rank caliber as well.

'I... damn it... I don't have time to process all this free stuff.'

The butcher felt frustrated that he couldn't reap more benefits out of the opportunity that was in front of him than he already was doing. He needed to prioritize his potential gains now.

The mana sense Eren used to scan the area revealed a dreaded presence right in the center of the isolated area. This was an Adept-level monster that was so close to breaking into the next rank.

An Ogre Lord.

'This... this is the last Field Monster they have kept as a group challenge for us.'

Eren quickly recognized the monster when he first saw his gigantic body. The Ogre Lord was a 12-foot mini giant with an overwhelming physique. He had bulging, muscular limbs and a terrifying face. He still wore his arm guard, loincloth, and footwear-looking artifact made out of beast skin.

The Ogre Lord's consciousness inhabited the array-made mana body that he used to protect a large area on his own. As if he was still unaware that it was not his real body. Every contestant had learned about this monster because of his terrifying mana signature that he would release. It was to let everyone know that the area he was protecting was his territory.

No contestant dared to approach the Ogre Lord. This was because they knew only collective efforts by all Top 13 contestants would allow them to think about challenging the ultimate field boss. And yet, nobody was sure they could beat him. The Ogre Lord's Labrys alone would be able to pulverize all the defense they might put against him.

'Eren I don't think you should waste time making Blood Seed out of the guy. You wouldn't be able to get through his mana defense quickly.'

Alephee commented in Eren's head after seeing that Eren had stopped at the array setup imprisoning an Ogre Lord. This monster was only a step away from becoming an Ogre Overlord. Thus, the faint pressure he was released was still intense.

'You think too highly of me, Alephee. I'm not bold or stupid enough to mess with this monstrosity. Who said anything about making a Blood Seed out of this monster? I can't even extract life essence out of him using the normal method because I know I won't be able to breach his mana defense on time.'

Eren looked at his pale arms and said that. His overgrown nails looked deathly and piercing. But he knew his limitations. Forget about piercing the Ogre Lord's skin, the butcher won't be able to scratch him anytime soon even with his body only passively defending him.

'Then...'

Alephee paused as if she understood Eren's intentions halfway.

'Let's create a malfunction in the array.'

Eren smiled and told Alephee what he wanted from her. The latter chuckled lightly in his head and told him what he needed to do.

He was going to rig the Field Boss battle from here.

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Time Remaining: 25 Minutes

The final day of the Titus tournament was about to wrap up. In the last two hours, each competitor's location was getting revealed on the wristband's spectral map.

It was clear that the organizers wanted chaos to unfold in the last two hours of the competition. Not just first place, all the places within the top 10 were significant because they all carried rewards. The lucrateness of rewards was in descending order starting from the first place. That meant the better the ranker's rank, the better rewards they would get.

"Raaaaaawr!"

In pain and agony, Cyclops Lord screamed.

But his cries didn't last long. That's because he was soon decapitated by a ranker who seemed to have done it without much effort on his end. However, only he knew that the monster had been a difficult challenge for him.

He had beads of sweat rolling down his forehead as he looked at his monster kill. This was yet another Adept-level field monster that he had solo-killed.

Drin Dawn and William Shank were in an entirely different league than the rest of the competitors. They didn't form any raid teams and solo-raided the monster nests using their individual battle powers.

They also didn't target other rankers. Because at their level, they would earn more Titus points killing monsters and beasts than targeting rankers.

Drin wiped the sweat forming on his forehead with his arm's sleeve before accessing the wristband's spectral screen. Even he knew there was only one person who could keep up or exceed his Titus point earning rate.

That was William Shanks.

But for the last two days, Drin had been on a grind. He had cleared a lot of monster nests and tough field monsters all by himself. With this monster kill, he hoped to rise to the position of first place holder.

With the bubbles of expectations forming in his heart even when he didn't want to, Drin looked at the updated ranking. But what he saw left him in a state of shock.

Chapter 566 Reaching Climax

With the bubbles of expectations forming in his heart even when he didn't want to, Drin looked at the updated ranking. But what he saw left him in a state of shock.

1st Place- Drin Dawn- 829,7935 Titus Points

2nd Place- Tuan Aag- 798,8241 Titus Points

3rd Place- William Shanks- Chapter 609,6969 Titus Points

Drin only paid attention to the first three rankings. That's because he had always been in the top three since he entered the tournament.

He had decided to play it slow and steady for a few days to gauge the situation. But then William started to gain on him by clearing monster nests after monster nests. Drin began doing the same after a few days.

The last couple of days had seen Drin and Willaim competing fiercely for Titus point earnings. Both of their fan booths were the most excited crowds among a sea of people attending the live telecast from the Colosseum.

Neither of them thought to attack the other. Because their Titus points spoke volumes about their battle potential. Drin and William both knew that taking care of each other was more difficult than handling Adept-ranked monsters. They both would end up injured in the best-case scenario, which would prevent them both from competing for the first spot.

Furthermore, they both knew that other contestants wouldn't shy away from playing spoilers in their duel if and when they battled. In that case, both of them would be eliminated by weaker contestants. This was something they both didn't want.

So it was a tacit understanding among the Top Three that they would never chase after one another.

Drin was glad that he was finally ranked first after all his effort and work. But he was surprised by the way Tuan had surpassed William and gained the second rank. That too, on the last day of the tournament. Just when only a few minutes were remaining.

This was the fastest growth Drin had seen a ranker record in a day. And that too, when William was still working hard to compete with Drin.

'How... How did he manage to do that? The last time I checked he was nowhere near us.'

Drin felt confused and shocked after seeing Tuan in second place. He then looked at the screen and found out that a bunch of names was missing from the list of contestants remaining on the last day.

'It doesn't make sense that Tuan gained so many Titus points in a day. Unless....'

Drin thought of a possibility and looked in a particular direction. The contestants all knew there was a Boss Monster in the subspace posing an almost impossible challenge for them to take on should they all decide to take on.

The Ogre Lord was only a step away from becoming an Ogre Overlord. As confident in their battle potential as both Drin and William were, they didn't dare step anywhere near that monster. Because they, along with all the other contestants, knew he wasn't mean to them. At least not by forming small raid teams.

They all needed to work together to take down the Ogre Lord. But who would do something like that and risk getting backstabbed by others?

'That Tuan is an interesting fellow.'

Drin thought and shook his head while laughing mildly. He thought that Eren had killed the ultimate field boss they had by forming an equally ultimate raid team before reaping the most benefits for himself.

Only a few minutes were remaining until the end of the Titus tournament. So Drin stopped worrying about his ranking position being taken by William. The guy was going to be a third-place holder in the tournament unless he found someone or something to give him a large chunk of points.

'Or... William could just target Tuan to make up for the difference in Titus Points.'

Drin thought as he stepped down from the Cyclop's chest he was standing on. The monster's spectral body started disintegrating soon afterward.

But just as Drin was about to sheathe his sword, he saw someone approaching him using their movement spell.

"Yo... Drin. Help a friend out here."

The approaching ranker had a male voice. Drin adjusted his eyes and kept his mana sense on the alert. Even though he didn't sense any threat from this approaching ranker, the one chasing the guy was an entirely different story.

"Tuan..."

Drin identified the face behind the voice when it came into his vicinity. He wondered whether Tuan wanted to fight him for the first position. But the latter clarified his intentions even before he asked about them.

"Help me... defend me from William. For your own sake."

Tuan circled Drin without approaching him any further than the latter felt threatened with as he said that. He was also sweating a lot, enabling Drin to know that he had been running away from William with all that he had.

Drin was about to respond when he saw another ranker approaching him with even greater intensity than Tuan. He was none other than William.

William wanted to deal with Tuan as soon as possible to at least gain second place. He knew that first place wasn't possible because he couldn't defeat Drin in these last minutes. But with Tuan, he could at least try.

So all he could do was eliminate Tuan and take what he felt was rightfully his.

A stalemate had been reached at this point.

With Drin standing right between William and Tuan. This Top Three Showdown was shown live on almost all of the Arangar Collesseum's spectral screens. This was the climax scene viewers outside the subspace had been waiting for.

Almost every spectator was watching even the smallest of movements performed by Drin, Tuan, and Willaim with absolute interest. The betting houses were getting overcrowded with all sorts of betting scenarios.

This was the peak event of this year's Titus tournament.

"Drin... I hope you don't interfere between me and Tuan. I just want to deal with this fire bastard. I have no intentions of fighting with you or winning the first position any longer."

William offered a truce to Drin while narrowing his eyes on Tuan who was looking at him with a pleasant smile on his face. For some reason, that smile irked him the most. It was as if Tuan was mocking him for being able to snatch his place at the very last stage of the tournament.

His smile also seemed uncomfortable to Drin. It was as if he was okay with whatever result the final day of the tournament wraps up with.

Either that. Or Tuan knew what the result of the tournament was going to be with absolute assurance.

#### Chapter 567 The Finale P1

"Drin boy... I hope you don't interfere between me and Tuan. I just want to deal with this fire bastard. I have no intention of fighting with you or winning first place any longer."

Drin remained quiet for a while. But before he could even think about replying, he heard Tuan chuckle from behind him.

"Hahaha! Will you think you can make a fool out of Drin? Defeating me means winning this competition for you. That's because I have enough Titus points to help you surpass Drin's Titus points easily.

Let me tell you one thing, Drin. I'm very weak and tired right now. I'll lose to this guy within seconds if you DON'T interfere in our matter."

A blue vein on Drin's forehead popped when he heard Tuan's unabashed response. This was blatant blackmail. Tuan was saying that should Drin choose to act as a spectator, he would lose his position as the first place holder.

William had had it with all the mocking he had suffered from Tuan while he was chasing him down. The guy not only mocked him but his mother as well, making him want to beat the close combat expert all the more.

Of course, William was aware that Tuan was doing all that to distract him while he was chasing the guy. But what infuriated him more was the fact Tuan's strategy worked and he had managed to run away towards Drin with him on the toe.

Upon hearing Tuan's blackmail, Drin turned to face him without worrying about William. He looked the guy in the eye before speaking up in a cold voice.

"Tuan, I suggest that you don't try to use blackmail on me. If you are that weak, maybe I'll eliminate you on my own. Let my first place become even more prominent."



William got stressed when he heard Tuan speak. But he wanted to see the frightful reactions of Tuan at that point even more than getting his second place back.

But William saw Tuan speak with the same nonchalance and carefree attitude as before. He heard him speak to Drin next.

"What would you gain by attacking me anyway, Drin? Your ranking in the tournament is already set. Adding a few more points or an entire bulk of them by defeating one of the top three rankers shouldn't change anything for you, right?"

Besides, if I stay in second place, I'll give you all of the Extols I would win."

Tuan looked at Drin and flashed a businessman-like smile. Then he looked at William and smirked.

William concluded that Tuan was determined to take second place in the tournament even if it meant losing prizes. The event was broadcast live. They were not required to sign binding contracts to make such claims.

Even if Drin ends up not taking up the offer, Tuan was fine with it. After all, he only needed to delay his showdown with William long enough till the tournament got over.

William decided to act. He used his movement spell and disappeared from his spot. But just when he was about to make his move on Tuan, he received Drin's interference.

Drin effortlessly blocked William's broadsword with his relatively feeble-looking Katana before speaking up.

"You'd have to forgive me, William. The offer's too tempting. Besides, Tuan is right. I can't let you get his points and gain the first place over me."

William started laughing maniacally when he heard Drin's words. He responded in kind.

"Hahahaha! Drin boy, don't think I'm scared of you just because I asked you nicely. Think this through. Is that your final answer?"

Drin didn't reply with words. He just grabbed his Katana firmly and stared at William. He was also paying attention to Tuan, in case the guy who had set the two up against each other wanted to take advantage of their situation.

Drin had not thought of Tuan as a schemer when he had first seen his battle. But he had to give it to the guy for coming up with such a simple yet effective plan.

'The betrayal changes a person.'

Drin thought to himself while he saw William continue his laugh.

"Hahahaha! If that's what you want, Drin, then so be it.

You and me. Let's dance."

William and Drin then started fighting officially when only a few minutes were remaining. Both of their fan booths grew wild as they saw the fight they had been waiting for unfolding in front of their eyes. The

organizers of the tournament were also pleased after predicting that the sales of their array disk recordings would be record-breaking.

Meanwhile, the cause of this fight had created a sufficient distance from the battlefield. Now Tuan was looking at the fight from a safe distance while he waited for the final moments of the tournament.

'Haaash!'

Tuan breathed a sigh of relief when he made Drin fight his battle for him. He knew that he couldn't break his Tuan character anymore even with his newfound ranking status and fire element attainment. Besides, William and Drin weren't opponents he could take on effortlessly.

Using Layla's potion again, he reduced his rank to that of his previous self. Because he was now only a step away from reaching the Adept rank. He had kept himself away from checking his status to not feel emotional about his own progress. The butcher decided to check his stats only after the event was over.

Eren's previous life ended when he was a D-Rank adventurer in the solid stage. He had entered that rank when he was well past his prime in that life.

Compared to his previous self, his ranking advancement in this timeline was astronomical.

'Focus, Eren. Now's not the time to think about the past.'

Eren criticized himself as he watched Drin and William fight.

Contrary to what both Drin and William had been thinking, Eren had no plans to play spoiler in their battle that was only meant to give the tournament's audience its needed pay-per-view.

Eren didn't have to take risks because the competition wasn't about the last person standing. It also wasn't about knowing who is the strongest ranker among all the contestants.

This tournament was about gaining maximum numbers of Titus points. So that's what Eren had focused on from the very beginning ever since he had planned to switch places with real Tuan.

By this time, the rest of the contestants present in the subspace started gathering around the battleground of Drin and William. Katalina, Ketsu, Lily, and Wilder were among them.

Those who had stayed till the last day of the contest were allowed to stay in the subspace even when their wristband got snatched or destroyed. It indicated that they would win consolation prizes according to their rankings in the Top 10.

Suddenly, for the first time, a giant spectral screen appeared right above Drin and William's battlefield. It displayed a countdown timer that was slowly reaching zero.

"10..."

Each of the contestants mumbled the displayed digit in their head or out loud. By this point, they had given up on improving their ranks and came to accept the current rankings. Hence they all relaxed a bit and waited for the thing to get over.

"9..."

'This is it.'

Butcher thought to himself before contacting Katalina who was standing not too far away from him.

'Kat... It's time.'

Chapter 568 The Finale P2

"8..."

'Kat it's time.'

Just as Katalina watched the countdown hit 8, she heard Eren's voice on her voice communication channel. She executed her movement spell and appeared right next to him in the next moment.

At the scene, Katalina's sudden use of a movement spell didn't pass unnoticed by the rankers. They saw her approach Tuan without fear of an offensive strike from him. Some of them thought that something was up and started paying attention to them.

"7..."

Tuan took out a bunch of items from his storage space and threw them on the ground.

"6..."

Katalina also took out a bunch of items from her storage space and added them to the pile already present in front of Tuan on the ground.

"5..."

"What are they doing?"

Bianka couldn't help but say out loud after she observed Katalina's actions. She wanted to get Katalina's Titus points for herself. But the surprise organizers had in store threw all her pre-planning down the drain.

Even chasing Lily to draw Katalina out only bit her in the ass. This time, it looked like Katalina was more ready than she was to take her on. Equipped with her flying artifact, potion bombs, and runic scrolls that contained array traps, Katalina became a major headache for Bianka.

The close combat expert became even more difficult to deal with after teaming up with Lily, Ketsu, and Wilder. The teamwork they displayed was not flawless. But they made up for it with their cunning and usage of array traps.

In the end, Bianka gave up on getting Katalina's points. She gave up on her entire raid team and focused on Reva Sunstar. She wanted to isolate Langdon and get him next. But he was nowhere to be found. So Reva was her only choice.

Bianka's team play with Ray and Silvera panned out and they were able to get Reva's wristband for themselves. They immediately crushed it and shared the Titus points equally among themselves.

Katalina and Lily's team decided to listen to Tuan's suggestions after he contacted them. He told them to focus on clearing the monster nest he had given them directions for. His suggestion also gave them lucrative results. That too with hardly any effort.

It was as if the monster nest had been drugged by someone beforehand. All the monsters that were present inside the monster nest were extremely slow and their reaction times were highly compromised. Plus, there was no boss monster to be found. As a result, Katalina and Lily's team only took less than half the time to clear out the nest.

Lily had thought that clearing a monster nest at this crucial time was a terrible idea. But after finding out that Tuan's suggestion was right on the money, she began to see him in a different light.

She had learned from Katalina that he was being targeted by Tim and Langdon before she was forced to leave his side. The close combat expert started looking more worried about him than she was about herself. This sudden change of behavior in Katalina's personality caught Lily off guard. She wondered what kind of magic Tuan had done on her.

Ray became curious about Bianka's words. He followed her gaze and looked at Tuan and Katalina that had just appeared beside him. He then saw them making a pile of some items and decided to cast a long-distance vision spell. They were standing in the opposite direction from Tuan and Kat after all.

"4..."

"They... holy fuck... they are wristbands!"

Ray Rhinehart finally got to know what the pile in front of Tuan was made of. He screamed in shock that bordered on horror.

At first, Bianka and the rest of the rankers didn't get what Ray meant when he was looking at Tuan with wide-open eyes. As if those eyes would come out of the sockets anytime.

It didn't take long for the rest of the rankers to catch up with what Tuan was about to do.

"3..."

Katalina's wristbands had come from the contestants she had beaten in the past. The butcher had given her the idea to collect wristbands and crush them at crucial times. So she had kept some of the wristbands while crushing the rest to keep her ranking competitive.

Eren had then demanded her share of wristbands from her after he branded her with his Sins series ability. The latter was happy to oblige.

She was even ready to give Eren her wristband herself. And the butcher had planned to use it if the situation arose. After all, Katalina was now his people. And the butcher won't shy away from using that to his advantage.

But the moment the butcher's rendezvous point with Team Lily was compromised and they couldn't form a team as he had wanted them to, all his earlier plans were thrown for a toss.

The butcher was going to target Bianka's team first, and then Drin or William depending upon the situation at the time. He planned to take their wristbands while letting Team Lily get eliminated in the

process. As per his deal, they still would have been within the top 10 even with their wristbands getting owned by him.

But fortunately for both Tuan and Team Lily, things didn't come to that. After the butcher realized that he was trapped in the isolated space containing the array set up for monsters and mana beasts' bodies, he changed his plan. As a result of the cheat that he was able to introduce into the array set up, he cleared the Field Boss solo.

Tuan first weakened the Ogre Lord by introducing a malfunction in the array setup that was maintaining his live body. After discussing the timing of his appearance with Alephee, the two waited in the isolated space.

He also collected a few more blood slides while waiting inside the isolated space. Then used the same way to exit the space and get back to the ruined library building.

Using Alephee's advice carefully, he chose another spatial tear and exited the distortion. By the time he had come out, only a few hours were remaining.

Tuan then contacted Katalina and told her to focus on clearing the monster nest that he had rigged the monsters off. Meanwhile, he rushed towards the Field Monster that only he knew had been weakened so much that a few hits from him were enough to destroy it.

Tuan's position skyrocketed and he was recorded as 2nd place holder after he solo-killed the Field Monster. The result of his battle with the Field Boss was that Ogre Lord couldn't be rendered into a mana body anymore. That was because he died soon after his mana body was destroyed by Eren, thanks to the array's gradual malfunction.

"2..."

"Fuck. Stop him."

Bianka was driven nuts when she saw what Tuan was about to do. She didn't know why she was so mad at him when he had hoodwinked all the contestants at the same time.

Somehow, due to her prior meeting with Eren, she took Tuan's deceptive actions quite personally.

Bianka cast her movement spell and approached Tuan. Her raid partners didn't follow her. The team was broken after they had defeated Reva Sunstar.

It was a miracle that they didn't fight among themselves. So following Bianka in her assault didn't make sense to them.

"Ugh! Get the fuck off!"

With no interest in his voice, Tuan pulled out the labrys he had collected from the Field Boss. Maybe his luck was exceptionally favorable today. Because the artifact was compatible with fire-element mana.

This was a weapon carried by a 12-foot muscular monster. So obviously, it was larger than normal weapons. The two ax blades the artifact featured were broad and gave off a threatening vibe with the runes inscribed on them. It was as tall as the butcher, and its weight made him wield it with both hands while channeling his Ace rank mana into his arms.

The weapon was clearly oversized for Tuan's stature and build. But that made him wield it with even more passion.

This was the first transcendent-grade weapon artifact the butcher had his hands on in both his timelines. Even when he wasn't compatible with the weapon's art, its rarity alone compelled him to try it when he got a chance.

Tuan didn't do anything fancy even though the weapon had an inscribed spell etched onto it. He simply channeled his fire-element mana into it before releasing it all at once into a compressed flying slash.

Whoom!

A blazing trail was created on the ground as it split apart, creating a 6feet deep trench. The butcher was almost liable to lose his balance and fall off on his butt after swinging the oversized artifact. More than half of his remaining mana from his mana storage was zapped away in that single flying slash.

The butcher felt like his Ace rank mana was not enough to bring out the weapon's true power. He could feel that only Adept-rank mana could somehow scratch the surface of the weapon's potential.

The butcher only had to scare Bianka away with his new weapon. And that goal was achieved without a hitch. Bianka remained frozen in place when the trench dug out by the weapon was only a few meters away. If Tuan was a bit more off-balance, Bianka did not dare to imagine how her condition was going to be at this time.

Tuan had already understood the weapon's potential after using it for the first time. His forehead was dripping with sweat as his mana circuits were made to work overtime by the weapon's ever-so-hungry mana consumption. His breaths were uneven, more so now that he finds wielding this badass weapon to be exciting.

The other rankers were also shocked by Tuan's display of might. They also recognized that the weapon belonged to the Field Boss. This realization hit everyone like a wrecking ball.

'Was that Field Boss only meant for a show?'

Bianka and almost everyone had the same thought after they saw Tuan possessing the transcendent-grade weapon. They regretted the fact that they didn't try their luck with the Field Boss and simply chose to ignore him, enabling a chance-grabber like Tuan to get his hands on such a sought-after artifact.

Even Drin and Willaim paused their fight when they saw the commotion. They both looked in Tuan's direction only to find out that he too was looking at them with the same smile he had first greeted them with.

"Thanks, Drin. I'll treat you to a drink someday."

As the butcher said out loud to Drin, he channeled fire-element mana through his right leg.

"That fucking fire bastard. Drin... you fucking moron. He... that... oh fuck..."

William Shanks saw what Tuan was about to do and what the outcome of his actions might turn out to be. He became mad after approaching Eren with uncontrollable anger in his eyes, using his movement spell to its fullest potential.

He wouldn't have minded if Drin won the first position because he knew the guy had more potential than him. But for some reason, the crafty 'fire bastard' as he liked to call Tuan, winning the tournament didn't sit right with him.

'Too late.'

Said Drin to himself before smiling mirthlessly. He dropped his shoulders and watched the spectral screen above him show an updated digit. Meanwhile, upon Tuan's orders, Katalina had already distanced herself from him.

"1..."

With his blazing right leg, Tuan crushed the pile of wristbands that had laid in front of him in one move. His wristband was getting updated with Titus point so fast that it projected a spectral screen that kept on adding Titus points to his default score.

"O...."

Just when Tuan's wristband was done updating, the countdown timer of the Titus tournament hit zero. And with that countdown, the Titus tournament was officially over.

The winner of the tournament along with all the other placeholders was decided at that point.

Chapter 569 Champion

"You fucking fire bastard. You took us all for a ride. You son of a..."

William yelled in anger when he saw what Eren did. The latter maintained his smile while pointing upwards with his finger.

"Zero!"

All the contestants and dear viewers, please note that the Titus tournament concludes at this point. The contestants are prohibited from performing any offensive activities. Any prohibitory action will result in contestants losing their place in the top 10 list."

William stopped in his tracks when the announcement was made by a rigid, feminine voice. His facial expressions changed from anger to frustration to disappointment to acceptance in a matter of moments.

The rest of the rankers were too stunned to speak or act at this point. Rankers like Silvera and Wilder weren't even aware what had happened because they were only paying attention to the battle between two Top Three contestants.

Soon after, another announcement was made by the same feminine voice as the spectral display got updated.

"The top 10 placeholders of this year's Titus tournament, starting from place 10, are as follows.

10th Place- Silvera Rehrook

9th Place- Ray Rinehart

8th Place- Bianka Bluedust

7th Place- Ketsu Hasu

6th Place- Wayne Wilder

5th Place- Lily Geist

4th Place- Katalina Reich

Congratulations!"

The spectator displayed the place holders from 10th to 4th positions and stopped. It then changed colors and layout and displayed the next set of names with bolder and bigger fonts.

"Following contestants have made it to the Top 3 segment of the tournament.

3rd Place- William Shanks- Chapter 609,6969 Titus Points

2nd Place- Drin Dawn- 829,7935 Titus Points

Congratulations!"

Displaying till here, the spectral screen got completely blank before bursting with any eye-catching theme of orange fire and Fire Wings. This was a personal touch the organizers had provided to him for his position.

The alchemy products embedded inside the arrays went off and soared the skies, both inside the subspace and at Arangar colosseum. They splashed a beautiful vista of colors by using the evening sky as their canvas.

A visual rendition of Fire Wings was displayed over all the screens that were available for all the viewers to see. The most epic moments in Tuan's battle scenes also started replaying in reels in the background.

This visual rendition of Fire Wings could be seen getting reflected in every viewer's eyes as they stared at the live telecast with fervent gazes. Soon those eyes saw the name they knew was going to get displayed.

"1st Place- Tuan Aag- 831,Chapter 5789 Titus Points

Tuan Aag wins this year's Titus Tournament. Congratulations!

Contestants will be summoned back to the Arangar Colosseum in: 3... 2... 1... 0."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Sorry to keep you away from your limelight, Tuan. Please bear with us. Can you tell me what happened with Tim Westmoor and Langdon Lark?"



While the rest of the contestants were teleported to the Arangar Colosseum to receive applause from their fans, Tuan was summoned to a different place away from the cacophony of stadium's noises.

The question about Tim and Langdon's whereabouts was asked to Tuan by Gladius Red. he was the same guy who had acted as the host of this year's Titus tournament. The same guy who had introduced the contestants to the audience one by one.

This was a spacious room with runic luminescence creating a pleasing ambiance. Uan was sitting beside a large work desk in a comfortable sofa chair. Gladius was sitting on the opposite side of the table with his locked hands placed over the table.

Tuan was ready for such questions from the moment he had decided to digest Tim and Langdon as his gains. He sighed in a melancholic tone before speaking out.

"Sir Gladius, I don't know what happened to them. But I can tell you events that took place after they started chasing me."

Tuan knew that the organizers couldn't see how they entered the distorted space or the activities inside it. So he started telling Gladius the chronological order of events by mixing facts with his blend of bullshittery.

Tuan told Gladius that he and his pursuers had entered a weird space when they continued their chase. He also made some bold claims.

"Sir Gladius, I can say for a fact that Tim and Langdon were cultists. As soon as they found out they couldn't be monitored by you guys because of the distorted space's peculiarity, they started casting weird spells that didn't seem to belong to our usual kind.

They also wanted to silence me for good after I recognized that they were cultists. And they would have succeeded in doing so had I not found a spatial tear that led me to the Field Boss's territory."

Tuan conveniently made up Tim and Langdon's cultist identities on the fly. He knew that the distorted space and the now-ruined library was eventually going to get found out after the two rankers' deaths. So he told them the location of the distorted space himself while blaming the potential existence of his spells' unusual mana residue on Tim and Langdon.

He also told Gladius that Tim was a weird summoner class user and that he claimed that he could kill the monsters and use them as his summons using a special procedure.

Gladius raised his eyebrows when he heard Tuan speak. Frankly, he felt that a normal cultist wouldn't talk so much about themselves to the guy they were going to silence. But then he reasoned it out himself while saying 'you never know with those cultist punks' in his head.

Tuan then blamed most of the happenings inside the distorted space on Tim, knowing full well that his actions as the summoner class individual were also going to get pinned on him.

Gladius didn't say anything for a while after he heard Tuan speak. He waited for the incident report by his men that had gone on preliminary investigation. It was soon delivered to him on his ID stone's spectral screen.

Almost everything about what Tuan had claimed was reflected in the preliminary incident report. He furrowed his brows when he saw the mention of one potion in the report.

Gladius stomped his open palms on the desk hard before commenting.

"Damn it. My personal historian is in critical care. Who the fuck made this wretched Format History potion? And some evil, greedy bastard has started selling it in the black market, making it difficult for anybody to track them down."

Gladius lost his cool in front of the same evil, greedy bastard he was talking about.

#### Chapter 570 Meeting Gladius

Gladius lost his cool in front of the same evil, greedy bastard he was talking about. He then controlled his frustration seeing that Tuan was observing him with keen eyes.

Gladius cleared his throat before adding up.

"In any case, thanks for sharing your plight with us. You have pointed our investigation in the right direction. Is there anything you want to ask?"

Tuan nodded his head before asking Gladius with genuine curiosity.

"Sir, what is Format History?"

Gladius expected this question from Tuan. Tuan's inquisitive look prompted him to answer clearly.

"It is a name given to a particular kind of potion by Historians in recent days. Um.... Let us say that the potion was first seen to be associated with a very sensitive case going on in Edinburgh.

So almost all of those who are well known in royal affairs know about this potion. I wouldn't have known about it myself had it not been for the fact that one of our Historians was externally contracted by the army to investigate the recent disappearance of army personnel."

Gladius closed the spectral screen that was in front of him and got up from his seat. He got up from his seat and added some more facts about the potion he knew of.

"This potion is very insidious. It mentally affects every historian who tries to investigate the area affected by the potion's effects. New cases of usage of this potion have popped up in various places within the kingdom.

I'm already inclined to believe that Tim and Langdon are cultists because this potion is involved in the incident. They also managed to sneak into our isolated space. Maybe that was their goal all along. And you were just caught in their plan accidentally."

Gladius' assessment left the butcher with a blank look on his face because he was genuinely surprised. It seemed that he didn't need to come up with any more bullshit. Its production would be taken care of by Gladius himself.

It was him that had started selling limited quantities of the potion on the black market to cover his tracks. Otherwise, every incident related to the usage of the Potion of Innocence would get linked with Osan Woods Butcher. That was something he didn't want.

The butcher had set things in motion before he made his move on Sid to cover the traces of his involvement. But he could have never imagined that the same move would save him in an unforeseen case he was made part of.

The butcher also found it amusing that the historians had come up with their own name for the potion. To be honest, Format History sounded more logical and mass appealing to him than his version which reeked of personal touch.

"By the way, Tuan. How did you manage to kill the Ogre Lord?"

Gladius asked, narrowing his eyes on Tuan. The latter didn't flinch and told him the truth.

"When I got out of that weird space with a shattered mirror-like sky, I was very close to the Field Boss's territory. I had just evaded a life-threatening attack from Tim and was looking for a place to hide.

At that time, the rankers' live locations were yet to be displayed on the contestants' wristbands. So I thought of using Field Boss's territory as a deterrent and hiding just outside it. I had a basic recovery potion in stock. So I just needed to wait for a while till I could resume my participation in the competition."

Tuan flashed a heartfelt grin after he said that. He continued with a tinge of enthusiasm on his face.

"But who would have imagined that the Field Boss's mana signature would feel so weak after I reached the place? I decided to check the boss out in case someone was battling it to reap the benefits by being... you know... a kind helper."

Gladius smirked at Tuan when he heard Tuan speak about wanting to play spoilsport in someone else's kill. However, this level of cunning was expected from the contestants who had reached this far. So he didn't mind and let the butcher continue.

"When I got near the Field Boss, his reaction times seemed way off. As if he was struggling to even move his neck or walk properly. So I started to test the waters. I started with my flying slashes that worked way too well on the Ogre Lord. Then I got closer to him a bit and executed some more of my mid-range spells.

And the next thing I know, I had already slain the Field Boss.

This was an unexpected gain I hadn't seen coming my way. Hehehehe! Maybe it was a rare occurrence of good fortune I was blessed with. Something that came after I suffered at the hands of my wife first and then by Tim and his other cultist buddy."

Gladius chuckled when he heard Tuan's point of view. He had also figured out why Field Boss was so weak after reading through the report.

Gladius nodded his head at Tuan before responding.

"The reason behind this is also mentioned in the report. I have no problem with telling you. But you'd have to promise that you won't talk about this event to anyone.

We don't want any bad press attached to the Titus tournament, you see. And Tim and Langdon potentially being cultists kind of complicates things for us. If you know what I mean."

Gladius was ordered by his higher-ups in the report to buy Tuan's silence. Titus tournaments getting linked with cultists and cultist activities was something the organizers wanted to avoid at any cost.

Eren had already understood how things would play out when he mentioned cultist activities. His change into the summoner class, usage of Potion of Innocence, and the localization of his ability Life Drain had given him the confidence to set things this way.

Therefore, the butcher nodded before speaking up.

"By all means, sir. Honestly, even I would like to avoid being targeted by Tim's and Langdon's fans. You know how it is. Conspiracies spill out like wildfire. Maybe some ardent fans of Tim and Langdon would come up with a wild theory that I was in fact the cultist. And somehow I set those guys up, painting them as the bad guys.

Therefore, if you could keep my name out of this, it would be much appreciated. This would be mutually beneficial for both of us. So I don't think you'd mind."

Tuan said while bowing to a higher-ranked entity like Gladius. The latter was very pleased with Tuan's reasoning. He was going to ask about him signing the confidentiality contract. But now it seemed unnecessary.

"Alright, Tuan. Things get a bit easier if all are in the same boat of avoiding rumors.

It was a summoner class Tim who was performing some kind of experiments on monsters and beasts slumbering inside the isolated space. For some reason, he also died from the experiments he had performed on those monsters.

In any case, you benefited from Tim's misdeeds. We don't hold it against you though. That first place is yours to hold onto. As long as you keep quiet about the whole incident. We'll take care of announcing Tim and Langdon's disappearance our way."

Gladius smiled and nodded at Tuan, unaware of the fact that he was sabotaging his own investigation. In front of the same man who was the reason behind Tim and Langdon's deaths in the first place.