

Vile 601

Chapter 601 Minerva's Utopia Appears

"You did it, Eren."

Agatha's voice came from behind Eren as he gazed at his barren guild land from the rooftop of the guild building with blank expressions. The latter didn't turn around when he noticed Agatha had followed him up there after settling some matters with other guild members and the construction guild. He chuckled before responding.

"Well, it's a start, Agatha. We have a lot to do. Did you coordinate with Renar and Viper?"

Eren asked while smoking another of his Sativa sticks. He had been trying to keep his Sativa consumption in check for a better impact on his budding soul sense. But this day was an exception.

Agatha was still busy thinking about something when she heard the butcher's question. She replied after a while.

"We have talked about some basic stuff. But from the looks of it, the distribution channels for our products should give us enough exposure in the market.

The problem is our current potioner staff. It is not enough by a long shot if and when all the channels start working at their full capacity."

Eren chuckled before replying.

"Use the channels as per our production. The distributors and the shopkeepers haven't signed any exclusive contracts with us anyway. That way, we'll earn less profit margin. But we also don't have to worry about being on a tight schedule.

And don't worry about hiring new staff. This place will become the potioners' sacred ground once Minerva's Utopia opens up. You'd be more worried about how to reject potioners when that happens."

Agatha nodded and sighed a bit. But before she could respond, Tuan spoke next and let her know that he had also come looking for Eren.

"I kind of figured out you wouldn't make such a big investment on an infertile land that was so close to the city of New Beginnings for nothing. There is a Utopia factor added to the equation. When can we see it?"

Eren turned around when he heard Tuan speak and replied promptly.

"Well, I don't know the exact date. But it won't be long now. I just hope we get enough time to finalize our deals before the news breaks out.

More importantly, Tuan. Why are you still wearing your mask? Didn't I tell you that you could stop wearing it two days after the Titus tournament gets over?"

Tuan snorts after hearing Eren's query. He replied after removing the mask he had been wearing and pointing at his face with both his hands.

"THIS face is giving me a lot of trouble now. I can't even walk on the streets in peace, thanks to the stunt you pulled off in the tournament. I have become a celebrity overnight."

Tuan laughed depressingly and continued.

"What's more? You even let everyone know that my wife left me. Now all the ladies I meet think my heart is broken. They are now trying to cheer me up by asking me out. Pity dates I call them. I don't know if they are genuine or not."

Eren started laughing when he heard Tuan speak about a unique problem he had. He became popular among ranker ladies after Eren won the Titus tournament under his name. The performance that the butcher had put up along with his exceptional acting had started paying dividends to Tuan. Regardless of whether he wanted it or not.

Eren tapped Tuan's shoulders before speaking up.

"So what if they are pity dates? Do you know what you do with them? You make use of them, Tuan. Go out. Try your luck with the ladies, my man. This glimmer you have right now will fade away eventually.

Instead of trying to run away from the limelight by using the mask, you might as well make use of it. You need to understand that there is no surefire way to get over someone. But a better company always helps.

It's fine to seek comfort in a beauty's embrace. It is fine to seek another embrace too. I'm not telling you to go on a rampage. But be out there, man.

The wound on your heart won't heal overnight. But the healing has to start someday, right?"

Eren strode past Tuan, leaving the latter alone with his thoughts. The butcher was tired of overthinking for now. He needed to vent and celebrate. Therefore, he placed his arm across Agatha's shoulders and led her downstairs toward her private chamber. Miss Manager was also looking forward to positive returns from her guild master.

Tuan smiled mirthlessly when he heard Eren's speech and processed it. It wasn't that deep or philosophical, to be honest. And yet he couldn't deny the butcher's logic. Therefore, he had decided that he would make use of the fame that did not belong to him. All so that he could forget the betrayal that had been consuming his mind even now.

Eren's prediction came to pass in a week. A spatial tear was seen not too far from their guild's building and the Kukenan plateau.

Minerva's Utopia had been opened up.

Eren had first thought of placing his guild's building near the spatial tear where he knew it would appear. After all, the entrance to Utopia was going to be a guild asset. And he wanted to keep it close to himself.

But Agatha wanted to make use of the plateau as a symbol of the guild's elevated status by placing the guild building on it. In the end, the butcher chose to follow Agatha's suggestion.

Nobody was present at the site other than Eren and his mates when the entrance opened. He told the rest that they'd keep the news regarding Minerva's Utopia secret for as long as they can.

Eren warned Agatha and the rest not to follow him and entered the Utopia on his own. His guild members didn't know what he was up to. But they saw him come out of the separate dimension with haggard outfit and a wide smile on his face.

The next day.

"Master Levine, your student Eren greets you."

Eren was seen talking with someone on a spectral screen. The long-distance communication array had been pre-arranged by him in the guild building. It was located inside a separate hall dedicated to such communication.

He had also placed security measures and isolation arrays in the hall, making his spectral call more secure than ever. The butcher had to pay a significant amount for creating a secure line like this as well. But he had done it without a second thought.

The person that he had called was Levine de Montmorency. The potioner that had taken him as her official student.

Chapter 602 Contacting Levine

"Eren, I'm sorry we couldn't meet last time due to my circumstances. But I'm glad that you called me. Where are you these days?"

A beautiful woman was seen smiling at Eren when she first saw him. She seemed to be busy in her potion lab. And yet, the Master ranker had kept all her tasks on hold when she heard the Ace ranker call her.

"Master Levine, I know that you are in the Nightshade duchy. Will you please consider coming to the city of Arangar to discuss a business proposition?"

Eren bowed in front of his potioning master as he requested her to meet him at the city of Arangar. He was asking a B-Rank entity to do something for him. Even if she was his master, he needed to be humble about it as well as rational.

"Hehe! As sly as ever, Eren Idril."

Levine said and chuckled when she saw her student's demeanor. She finished jotting down a few things in her journal at the desk before responding to him.

"It was as if you knew where I'd be before deciding to contact me using the contact array mark I had given you. That's right. I'm at Montmorency estate.

I would have summoned you here instead of coming to you. We have a lot to catch up on. And I want to see your progress as well. Plus, there's so much I have to teach you now that you've broken..."

Levine narrowed her eyes when she saw Eren smiling at her when she said something about his rank. She had a suspicion in her mind so she asked.

"You... you haven't broken into Adept rank, have you? How much time did I spend in isolation?"

Eren chuckled when he saw Levine looking for her journal entries. He coughed and cleared her doubts.

"Ahem! Master Levine, I have not yet attained Adept rank. But I'm close. I didn't want to arrange a meeting with you to learn from you. At least not this time.

There's something big heading my way. And I wanted you to be a part of it."

Eren hesitated to continue speaking. Then he clenched his hands and looked at Levine cunningly before adding up.

"I know that you need a big win too."

The butcher looked down and perked up his ears, waiting for Levine to give him a positive reply. He knew a bit about her past from the very beginning. It was for that reason that he was so eager to learn from her and become her official student.

Levine de Montmorency belonged to the House Montmorency. It was a renowned house in the kingdom of Edinburgh for the processing of raw ingredients and other potion-related activities. It didn't excel in potion manufacturing per se.

The Montmorency House was home to many exclusive potion-making recipes. Several of the clan's members were pioneer potioners who explored various branches of the profession. They would invest all of their efforts in coming up with novel, better ways to concoct potions, known products, or otherwise.

The clan members of the Montmorency clan, therefore, preferred dealing with raw products. As a result, they opened up dedicated channels for dealing with potion ingredients.

If House Slughorn was famous for its all-encompassing potion manufacturing line, House Montmorency was known for its greenhouse-manufactured products. They had exclusive control over the time-element arrays and spells that could be used to process the products in a certain way, in a controlled environment.

Eren had gotten his time-element spells for the processing of ingredients courtesy of Levine. He had used them thoroughly in all his potioning sessions. Thanks to these spells, he had managed to concoct better potions in a relatively short time.

House Montmorency was going to be an ideal partner for Eren in his endeavor to manage the produce coming out of Minerva's Utopia. In his previous timeline, House Remus had contacted House Montmorency for the same reason.

At that time, however, the handler provided by the House Montmorency to manage the raw materials coming out of Minerva's Utopia was different. It was someone named Ottoman Montmorency.

In Eren's previous timeline, Levine was injured in an ambush. That injury caused her to regress to her previous ranking status.

Levine sought shelter in LA due to this ambush. She was in a vulnerable position and being backed by a powerful force was the most effective protection for her. That's why she had taken up the job as LA's professor.

It was rumored that the ambush had been organized by someone in her family because of the power struggle the clan was facing. Levine's faction was pitted against another faction. And her injury had put her faction at a disadvantage.

But now that Levine was a Master ranker once again, she had decided to indulge in her clan's power struggle once again. But since she was absent for quite some time, her position had gotten a bit weaker.

Levine needed a win for herself. A win that would make her faction within the clan stronger than the opposing faction. What better way for her to score big than gaining exclusive rights for produce brought out from Minerva's Utopia?

Eren also guessed that since Levine wasn't back in the power struggle by this time, Ottoman Montmorency should be the leader of the opposition faction to Levine's. Being allowed to process an entire Utopia's raw products must have strengthened his position in the clan by a lot. That's why Levine of the past stayed in LA for a long time instead of returning to the clan's estate.

But this timeline was different. Eren wanted Levine's faction to win and get the faction's support for himself. For that, he needed Levine's full cooperation.

"What proposal do you have in mind, Eren?"

Levine had stopped underestimating her student when he had done what he had claimed to do and brought her the ingredient she needed to heal her. It seemed that he had a plan to make this proposal beneficial for both of them. So she looked at Eren with keen interest and waited for him to make her a deal she couldn't refuse.

Eren nodded with a stoic expression and started retrieving a bunch of items from his storage in front of Levine. These were the products he had gotten his hands on from Minerva's Utopia.

Instead of words, Eren believed the raw products he had displayed in front of Levine would help his cause more.

Chapter 603 Market Presence

The city of New Beginnings. Just before the sun is about to make its presence known in the sky.

Commoner district. Rankers market.

Every corner of every street is bustling with activities. Shouts of merchants trying to bring customers to their local shops or joints. A group of adventurers haggling with a merchant who seems unwilling to lower his prices.

Noises of known and unknown origins. Mana signatures of various items and mana senses of various rankers clashing with each other.

Chaos is considered normal. One's wealth is their only identity.

An old potion-selling shop on the corner of some seemingly forgotten alley. A bit away from most of the crowds and activities.

An adventurer party had taken up a mission in Monster Canyon.

The usual.

Almost every ranker party here was planning to visit Monster Canyon after all.

"Look at this potion, Zeref. An E-ranked all-stats recovery potion for just 2 Extols. And just one Extol for three vials of the same potion in the F-Rank.

This... looks like a good deal for our party. Don't you think so?"

With a voice coated in excitement, someone said.

"Hmm? An all-stats recovery one? And for that cheap a prize too!"

Zeref pondered a bit. But then some memory of a previous incident struck him and he shook his head before laughing loudly.

"Hahaha! That's a dead giveaway.

Lien, listen to me. Don't get sucked into those vague concoctions. Those are likely unsuccessful attempts by some newbie potion maker who is trying to get their money's worth.

It won't have the efficacy we need even if it does what it advertises. Better go with Slughorn potions. They are reliable and safe. Although their price is a bit steep and the potions won't have an all-around effect, they are trustworthy.

You need potions you can count on in Monster Canyon after all. Otherwise, you'd end up as a monster or beast poop one day. Hahaha!"

Zeref, an Ace-ranked adventurer patted his party mate and cackled. As Zeref he had seen the world and Lien was just a newborn who wasn't aware of how the world worked.

Lien wasn't convinced by Zeref's pessimism. He didn't outright reject his friend's point of view. But instead, I tried to get more information about the product.

The vial of the potion had a faint runic engraving. Upon channeling mana through it, the vial's cap projected the manufacturing detail of the potion along with the manufacturer's name.

"Hmmm? White Raven. Zeref, Tisha, have you guys heard this name before?"

Zeref only chuckled in response before shaking his head in denial. Tisha's response remained the same. One part of Lien wanted to put the potion's purchase on hold. But the other part thought the deal was too compelling to let slip even without trying.

Zeref asked the shopkeeper who was busy handling another pair of rankers.

"Sir, could you please tell us anything about this manufacturer named White Raven?"

Lien jumped into the conversation the shopkeeper was having with his two new customers. Additionally, he pushed the customers the shopkeeper was talking to, making him even angrier.

Lien had just broken into Ace rank while the shopkeeper was in the solid stage of Ace rank. Even if ranking statuses were to be put aside, the fact that Lien had offended his higher-paying customers got on his nerves.

To say the least, he was a bit irritated. Thus, the shopkeeper smiled at Lien before answering the impatient ranker.

"Heh! Young man, you seemed to be in a bit of a hurry. Take this as a warning from me. At the place where you are heading, your nature may end up becoming your fatal flaw.

Monster Canyon is not as easy as people make it out to be. Only the most vigilant survive there. Impatience like yours might hurt you in that monster-filled environment."

Lien had a blank face after hearing the shopkeeper's retort. He was about to snap but his friend Zeref put his hand on his right shoulder and slightly pressed it. Then he took over the conversation.

"I'm sorry for my teammate's behavior, uncle Alto. He just recently joined our guild and was assigned to my party. This will be his first visit to Monster Canyon. He'll surely remember your valuable advice."

Zeref said and looked at Lien with eyes that made his intentions known. Lien clenched his fist before deciding to follow his vice-captain's lead.

"I'm sorry for being out of line earlier, sir Alto."

Alto had seen his fair share of young rankers in his career. He was a successful merchant. Even though his shop looked old and he didn't have much staff, that was only a ruse. He had multiple shops that would cater to customers of various economic brackets.

Even though it looked like Alto had given this advice to Lien out of spite, it wasn't entirely true. He had said what he said to make the young man aware of the dangers of Monster Canyon as well. That's because he had seen too many inexperienced rankers and interacted with them just a few days before their eventual deaths.

In Alto's memory, they all acted like Lien. always in a hurry to make quick bucks. These young guns would get inspired by various stories of rankers striking metaphorical gold in Monster Canyon. And then they would rush to that place only to get killed in the most brutal way possible.

There was a reason Monster Canyon was a newbie killer.

Alto looked at Zeref and realized that Lien would be led by an experienced ranker. So he let go of Lien's behavior, apologized to the customers he was tending to previously, and told them to wait a bit. Then he cleared his throat before answering Lien's original query.

"Zeref, look after this Lien in Monster Canyon, will you? Haha!

Anyway, I shall answer your very first question, boy. I don't know much about White Raven. So I can't say anything for sure regarding the authenticity of the brand's manufactured potion.

To be precise, I know they work well on paper and the lab results are also promising. But I don't know much about their effectiveness in the middle of a battle."

Lien sighed when he heard Alto's statement. Maybe Zeref was right. Perhaps he was being too optimistic regarding his first trip to Monster Canyon. Maybe the fact that he felt like the king of his small hill when he broke into the Ace rank was just his imagination.

Lien was about to put the vial of White Raven potion on the counter to return it to Alto. But the shopkeeper's next words made him reconsider his actions.

"Although I don't know much about the product or its manufacturer, I can tell you something else about it."

Alto narrowed his eyes before looking at all sides. Then he lowered his voice to its bare minimum before responding.

"You didn't hear it from me, but I was told that White Raven has some connections with the Montmorency family. I also heard that the manufacturing guild behind these potions has that famous Tuan Aag as its guild member."

This time Zeref and Lien both were shocked. The Montmorency name was enough to make White Raven's market presence appear solid in customers' eyes. Plus, Tuan was in the news all around because of the Titus tournament happening not too long ago.

These things were enough to influence customers to at least try White Raven to try once. Therefore, both Zeref and Lien looked at each other before voicing their demands out loud in unison.

"We want to buy these White Raven potions."

Chapter 604 Getting Levine Onboard

"That Alto guy is your paid actor, isn't he?"

A woman ranker with a blood-red hood pulled over her head seemed to be conversing with a black-haired young man. The woman's face was covered and her rank was not distinguishable.

Unbeknownst to Lien, Zeref, Tisha, and the shopkeeper, they were both being observed by this duo who stood not too far away from the outside of the shop.

One could feel subconsciously that messing with the red-hooded woman was a terrible idea. An idea that would make them realize their doom. Yet they also couldn't look away from her or her seductive curves.

The black-haired young man who was with her looked average. But if one looked deep into his green eyes, they'd see tinges of blue that had gravitational powers of their own.

"Hehehe! No, master. I mean not really. He is one of the shopkeepers in my distribution chain. I was ready to pay him to advertise my products for a bit.

But he told me he couldn't put his shop's reputation on the line for something that may or may not do well in the market. Especially in the long run."

Eren said and watched as Lien's group left the shop with a bunch of White Raven potions. Even with the shopkeeper's flawless response, the most he could do was convince the trio to buy a small portion of vials with White Raven brandings.

Still, Eren couldn't complain much. This was the very first time his products were getting sold in the city of New Beginnings. He had to stay patient with the first line of buyers to come up with better reviews for his products.

Eren was sure his sales would skyrocket as a result of word-of-mouth publicity. Patience was the key.

"White Raven is rumored to have an association with House Montmorency, huh? That was all your doing, wasn't it, you sly devil?"

Levine seemed to have smiled when she said that. Eren scratched the back of his head before coming clean.

"Well, he told me he wouldn't put his name on the line. So I just told him to spread the news. One was about Tuan joining the White Raven guild. And the other is me being under your tutelage.

Both are true news. But they don't directly assure the buyers of my product's quality. So I told Alto to add a bit of mystery by saying that they were rumors.

The real sale of White Raven products will begin when the first line of customers come back with their reviews."

Eren knew the markets in the city of New Beginnings were going to be the biggest litmus test for his projects. That's why he made use of every advantage he could count on to maximize his profits.

"Alright. You are supposed to be a potioner first and a businessman later, Eren. I'm glad that my student plans to sell potions on such a grand scale. But you need to remember the basics before trying to make money out of your skills."

Levine felt that Eren should remain on the ground while he is starting up a new business. So she held onto her praises and gave him a few uncalled-for pointers while chuckling a bit.

Levine stopped leaning against the alley wall and straightened her posture. Then she started walking in a particular direction. Eren followed her and started speaking.

"We'll leave for the city of Arangar in a while, Master. Meanwhile, I want you to check this one out."

Eren said and threw a heavy chunk of metal in Levine's direction. The latter caught that chunk effortlessly and looked it up.

"Andrium!"

Levine's eyes weren't visible through her hood. But if one could see them right now, they would observe that they were exuding a faint light of their own. Eren chuckled before continuing.

"My market presence is just the beginning. What you see in your hand is why I called you to meet with me. Of course, I'll seek help from my most talented and charming master when my stakes are this high."

Eren smiled lightly and bowed a bit again in front of Levine. The latter also made sure to register the ninja compliments he had thrown her way. She couldn't say she disliked it.

Levine was a foot taller than Eren when she had last seen him in LA. Now their roles had been reserved. And yet, Levine could tell that it was the same guy who had come to find her.

Levine smiled and received Eren's compliments by pushing him a bit away from her as they were walking side by side. She pondered for a moment, and then she gave the piece of Andrium back to her student.

Levine would be lying if she said she wasn't impressed by her student's resourcefulness. Levine was skeptical when Eren invited her over to witness his growth. But she had come to realize that everything this guy had been doing from LA was to prepare for a monumental move like this.

Levine was tempted to join him. But she couldn't find it in her to put her student at risk because of her selfishness. So she stated what she had in mind.

"You know about the power struggle between me and Ottoman within my clan, right? Pairing with me would mean the Ottoman faction will oppose you in the future.

If this thing is as big as you are making it out to be, then once Ottoman knows about it, he'll be coming for you and your guild. Of course, I and my faction will do our part to keep you and your interests unharmed. But there's only so much we can do when Ottoman starts getting serious.

Remember, Eren. The one who defends has to be right all the time. But the one who strikes only needs to be right once."

Eren chuckled when he heard Levine's warnings. Frankly, he knew about these risks even before he approached Levine to be his backer and handler. But there were risks everywhere when the stage and stakes were this high. He might as well take calculated risks and try to strive for better growth than stay at the bottom of the barrel all the time.

"Hehe! Master Levine, thanks for thinking about me. But I know what I'm getting into. To be honest, it won't just be Ottoman.

There would be other players that would come out of their woodwork when they understand how valuable Minerva's Utopia is. Adding your enemy to that list won't make that much difference.

I'd rather have you on board with my plans than trust some stranger I don't know. If Ottoman is an unwanted byproduct of that decision, so be it.

You and your expertise are worth the risks White Raven may have coming its way."

Eren said and sighed. Then he looked up at the sky that was slowly starting to get brighter before commenting.

"I don't want to create a ruckus if I can avoid it. But I'd rather strike first than be on the defensive all the time."

With a tinge of cruelty in his expression, Eren looked at Levine and spoke further.

"After all, I'll only have to be right once."

Chapter 605 The City of New Beginnings

"Why did you summon me to the city of New Beginnings instead of the city of Arangar? Don't tell me it was just to show me your products' market presence?"

Levine asked while sounding suspicious. The duo had moved to a quiet restaurant in the noble district of the city. Eren had ordered ranker-specific food for himself and Levine.

Eren stopped eating his steak and looked at Levine before responding.

"Master Levine, as your student, do you trust me?"

Levine didn't even take a moment to answer. And she did it with a very serious face.

"Not even a bit."

Eren had blank expressions on his face when he heard Levine's answer. But before he could object he heard Levine's laughter.

"Hehehe! I was just kidding, Eren. I trust you. Tell me what else you are planning?"

Eren smiled mirthlessly before resuming his serious stance.

"Master Levine, I want you to invest in me. I want a suitable plot in the city of New Beginnings that would serve as my guild's branch. It would also be used as a destination and a storage facility for all my potions.

I know what I'm asking is a lot. But getting a place in the city of New Beginnings is not only not cheap but also a near-impossible task for low-level rankers like me."

"And that's where I come in," Levine replied promptly, smiling at Eren.

Levine didn't have an appetite so she only ate a bit. She swirled her ranked wine inside the wine glass she was holding as she kept on pondering over Eren's proposal. She took a while to reply.

"You are right, Eren. The city of New Beginnings is used as a chess board by one of the biggest players this kingdom has. A guy like you owning a property here would only invite more trouble for you.

But..."

Levine sighed and took a sip from her wine glass before speaking up.

"I'm not as rich as you think I am. At least not anymore. I don't completely control my clan's finances. I can only influence it to a certain extent because of a few people backing me.

If only Ottoman wasn't in the picture..."

A faint killing intent emanated from Levine, which made Eren's forehead wet with beads of sweat. He was glad there wasn't anyone on the rooftop of the restaurant where they were sitting. Otherwise, people would have known that there was a Master ranker in their midst.

Levine was trying to hide her whereabouts from Ottoman, lest he ambush her again. The potion makers were never so easy to kill. Especially a high-ranked potioner like Levine.

Eren was confident that Levine would at least be able to get away if and when that happens. But he could not say the same thing about himself.

Eren heard Levine's explanation and sighed. He then took out a book from his storage space before presenting it to Levine.

The B-Rank potioner took the book from Eren's hand and started reading from it. The more she read, the more curious she got. That's because she found the contents of the book fascinating.

This was a copy of the book Eren had received from Purgatory. It contained a few lost recipes as well as techniques that were termed extinct. Of course, Eren hadn't completely copied the book down. Just some essentials that would get Levine interested.

The book didn't contain anything related to B-Rank. But that's beside the point. Levine was intrigued by the methods that had been used in the recipes.

These methods were completely different from what the current potioners used to do. Levine was already planning to introduce a few changes in some of her concoction processes after getting inspired by her fast reading when she heard her student's words.

"This is a portion of the book I've copied. Let's just say I discovered it while searching for something else.

I can share all the contents of the original book with you. That's all I can offer for now anyway. Won't you tap into your winter fund for me? I know what I'm offering won't be worth the efforts you'd have to put in. But that's a start, right?"

Eren used some more sophistry to convince Levine to use her investment to buy a piece of land for him in New Beginnings. They both knew that sooner or later, Ottoman would find out about such a big purchase. But they both didn't care.

Levine assured Eren that she would get the piece of land in the city of New Beginnings as expected. Of course, the butcher would have to compensate her for her investment, which he agreed to instantly.

Only then did Eren breathe a sigh of relief. For his plans, he needed a place in the city of New Beginnings. But there was only so much he could do when the problem wasn't limited by his financial situation alone.

The city of New Beginnings was one of the biggest cities in the kingdom of Edinburg. It was up to 30 times larger than Arangar City. It also saw huge traffic related to rankers' activities due to its geographical position.

The city of New Beginnings was a city located near the entrance to a place called Monster Canyon. It was not only big in terms of its size or population density. But it was also home to various guilds and adventurer parties.

This city-state had its own Duke. It had various districts. Each district had its own city lord.

Getting a place in the city of New beginnings was next to impossible for Eren. He also didn't want a bull's eye on his back. That's why he asked Levine to do his bidding for him.

Fortunately, the butcher had succeeded in his plan. Now he only needed to wait and see things fall into place for him.

After all, the city would never stop attracting more traffic. It was the most famous city close to Monster Canyon till now. The city served as a one-stop-shop for rankers on expeditions to Monster Canyon. Therefore, it was always lively, always churning money.

Unbeknownst to the citizens of New Beginnings, the foundation of a new city that was not too far from the Monster Canyon had just been established. A city that had the potential to compete with New Beginnings.

Chapter 606 Monster Canyon

Three days afterward.

Starting that day, the White Raven guild had a two-story building in the city of New Beginnings. It was located in the Guild District where all the other guilds active in Edinburgh had their branches.

The building looked old and decrepit. Arrays and runes previously carved in the premises had been erased in haste. As a result, some runes meant to exude light were turning off and on sporadically. Like some haunted theme park made for mortals' entertainment.

It had broken windows and cracked walls. The arrays meant for water generation had malfunctioned, spraying jets of water in between.

It wouldn't take a genius to figure out that the building needed a thorough revamp. Eren felt like discarding all his tasks and becoming a robber to satiate his ever-increasing need for money. No matter how much he earned and conned people, his needs would always find ways to make holes in his sleeves.

"*Sigh This is all I can do on such short notice, Eren. I hope you are not too discouraged."

Levine said while walking seductively ahead of Eren inside a large and empty hall of the White Raven guild. She had gotten rid of the hood and cloak that came with it. As a result, her bodacious curves were out in the open for Eren to see.

Eren's mana sense registered Levine's presence clearly after he took off her red cloak. He guessed that the apparel was what kept her ranking status hidden.

Levine had entered the liquid stage of the B-Rank in such a short time. Or to be precise, she had gained her regressed rank back after recovering this whole time. From the looks of it, she was closer to breaking through the solid stage.

With her restored rank and powers, Levine also looked younger and more beautiful than before. It was as if she was traveling back in time as she advanced in her rank.

And yet, Eren didn't try to ogle at Levine's increasing feminine charms. He stuck to complimenting her in the nicest way possible. The butcher knew when not to think with his dick after all.

"Haha! I am not in a position to bargain, Master Levine. This is already more than enough. So what if it is far away from the main road of the guild district? We'll manage just fine."

Eren said while smiling mirthlessly. He meant what he said. Having his presence in the guild district was critical for him and his guild, no matter how insignificant it may seem.

"I got this place from Amazeballs Assassins. Hehe. That's a funny name for a guild. Anyway, I heard the guild's main party was half-wiped in Monster Canyon and the other half was injured severely.

Their misfortune helped us get this property easily and within our budget. I just hope the place doesn't become a curse for budding guilds.

Don't repeat the previous owner's mistakes, Eren. Stay vigilant in Monster Canyon no matter how simple the missions might seem."

The previous owner of the building was a relatively small guild that had decided to close its shop and move elsewhere. Levine had used her contacts to get this place for herself and leased it to the White Raven guild without any harsh conditions.

Monster Canyon!

Eren chuckled depressingly when he heard Levine's warning. He knew the horrors of the Monster Canyon first hand.

After all, this was the place he had died in his previous timeline.

Even at that time, he hadn't underestimated it. It was just that Monster Canyon had a habit of catching rankers off guard.

A part of him wanted to tell Levine that Monster Canyon was not something that would spare you if you just stayed vigilant. It was also not the place that would give you rewards proportional to your efforts.

The place was just unpredictable.

The city of New Beginnings was created as a result of Monster Canyon's existence. It started as some well-known guilds of the past coming under one roof under the then king's orders and deciding to do clean-up operations with the military's help. As more guilds came and started following the pattern, a new city was built over time.

The name of the city captured the emotions of every ranker that wanted to explore Monster Canyon. Though the place carried huge risks, it was also packed with unimaginable opportunities. Opportunities that can lead to new beginnings. Or a tragic end for that matter.

The rankers that had benefited from exploring Monster Canyon were too many to keep track of. The figure almost surpassed the number of rankers who had gone missing in the place, never to be seen or heard from again.

Apart from the riches and exceptional rewards it had to offer, Monster Canyon was also famous for one more thing. It helped rankers achieve breakthroughs when they were struggling with their bottlenecks. The nature of the mana in the place was such that it allowed rankers to advance to the next level or rank.

The place was known as a monster haven because of its peculiarity. It was a giant land that had many entrances and exits.

The monster-influenced mana was strong in the Monster Canyon. It had many monster nests, monster settlements, and monster dungeons that had unknown origins. Even the mana beasts that existed in the Monster Canyon were mostly tamed by monster settlements into doing the monsters' bidding.

Monster Canyon was a place for heroes and rising stars. It was a place for those who wanted to be more than their supposed limiters placed upon them.

It was also a place for desperados and daredevils. It was a place where one would turn to when all their options had been exhausted.

Eren of the past timeline had come here to have a new beginning just like everyone else. It was also to get rid of the bottleneck that had been bothering him for years.

In the end, Monster Canyon had claimed his life.

But in a way, it had also provided him with the new and refreshed beginning he craved for. The city of New Beginnings had delivered what it had promised to give to its population with its name.

'Back to square one. With higher stakes than before, with a better game than before.

Monster Canyon... Oh, Monster Canyon. Let's see who prevails this time.'

Eren said while clenching his fists. He subconsciously brought his fists closer to his groin in a defensive stance when he remembered the tragedy that had struck him moments before his death.

Eren had a score to settle with the place. Not just for claiming his life, but the way it had been claimed as well.

===

AN: Thanks Drin27 for your super gift. ;)

Chapter 607 Finalizing the Deal with the Derringers

The city of Arangar.

Inside a private facility that belonged to the guild Obscure Embers.

A spacious hall and a large round table. Five people could be seen sitting around the table. It could be seen from their sitting arrangements that the four rankers were divided into two groups.

One group contained a young man and a gracious yet seductive-looking lady. The other was made of three men of seemingly different ages.

"Eren, you didn't tell us a Master ranker would be involved in this deal. Then again, whatever makes you comfortable. Hahaha!"

Morty spoke first and broke the silence that had ensued for quite some time. He knew there was a psychological play involved here. Something along the lines of whoever speaks first has to make

compromises in the end. But frankly, he was tired. And a bit affected by the deafening silence. He had to speak.

Eren smiled when he heard Morty Derringer's words and responded in a cheerful voice.

"Hehe. My master has always been involved in this deal. Do you think I'm qualified enough to follow through with such deals when the stakes are this high? You flatter me, Morty."

Eren replied and nodded at Morty in a friendly gesture before looking at the two people who were sitting on either side of him. The man on the right was not that much older than Morty and shared his facial characteristics. The man on Morty's left side on the other hand looked old and in his 60s. And yet, his body was firm and his posture was upright.

'Late-stage Adept rank.'

Alephee said in Eren's head when he was looking at the old man. The butcher guessed these guys must have been Derringer's family's fixer summoned from the upper echelon to see if the deal was worth it. The young man who looked a bit like Morty must be his cousin that had been sent here to see what Morty was up to.

"Eren Idril, what is it that you would be doing business with us with? And what kind of deal do you expect from us? I'd suggest we get on with the updates instead of doing formalities. What do you say?"

The old Adept ranker spoke up in a calm voice. Eren didn't have to speak. It was Levine who opened her mouth for the first time.

"Minerva's Utopia. Eren has a plot of land that features its entrance. We are here to make a deal with you about the raw products it will generate in the future. Are you interested?"

That is me getting on with the updates instead of doing formalities. How is it?"

Levine spoke with calm dominance in the same stoic manner she treated her students in LA, except Eren. With the butcher around, she could be a bit more relaxed with the way she interacted.

As the knowledgeable old man listened to Levine's passive-aggressive way of making him eat his own words, he frowned. And yet, he could do nothing about it since she was stronger between them.

Then he started processing the actual words and their meanings that Levine had conveyed and his stoic countenance.

He stopped writing in his journal as his pen fell. His face was covered in shock. His next words expressed his disbelief.

"Minerva... Sage Minerva! She was a potioner. Oh my heavens! Are you sure, Master Levine? Eren boy?"

The old man spoke with excitement. Eren imagined his eyes had signs of Eddies and Extols imprinted on them as he spoke. He wanted to lead the conversation and used Levine as a deterrent. But he decided that he should let Levine handle the rest if she wanted to.

Therefore, instead of leading the conversation he just retrieved three brick-like pieces of Andrium and placed them on the table. He then made the surface of the round table spin, making the Andrium bricks available for the Derringers to check on.

Eren and Levine both looked at each other and smiled as they saw the Derringers going silent with their keen eyes all over the bricks. The old man retrieved a small scroll that had a small and intricate array printed on it. He placed the brick in the center of the array. Immediately, the array started exuding pure white light.

"Pure... is too pure. Eren Idril, where did you find this?"

Excitedly, the old man said. Frankly, he was looking forward to dominating Eren when he first heard about the meeting taking place. But Levine's presence had made that a pipedream.

Eren chuckled and replied slowly.

"The same place my master told you about. Minerva's Utopia. There are a lot more from where that came from."

"Suddenly" the Adept ranker realized the conversation had started on the wrong note. And that being a Derringer doesn't mean he will always win every argument. So he cleared his throat and said in a very caring voice.

"Young man, it seems we were a bit hasty in starting our talks. Let's introduce ourselves, shall we?"

My name is Roth Derringer. I handle some of the business-related matters our House has with its partners. I am pleased to meet both of you."

Roth then looked at the young man beside Morty and hinted to him with his eyes that he needed to follow his lead. The latter nodded at him seriously before adjusting the collar of his shirt and replying.

"Hello, and nice to meet you. I am Mateo Derringer. You can say that Morty is my younger cousin.

I graduated from Royal Renar three years ago and am currently working under uncle Roth to learn the basics of business from him."

Morty officially introduced himself next even though he knew Eren knew about him. One had to say that Roth's demeanor had changed 360 degrees after learning that Eren and his side represented a gigantic opportunity for House Derringer. Mateo was taking notes.

Eren was looking at Roth and Morty with amused expressions. He spoke up and extended the formality.

"What's up? Name's Eren Elijah Idril. I am a student from LA currently serving in Edinburgh's army as a part of my on-field assignment. My guild White Raven owns the place that features the entrance to Sage Minerva's Utopia."

Eren said while taking out his Sativa stick from his storage. He tried not to smoke in front of his master. But now that they were not alone, he could take some liberties.

The butcher took the first long drag out of his smoke and spoke soon after.

"I'm hoping we can strike a comfortable deal for both of us. I don't want to seek any other party because that would be a hassle.

But... I will look for alternatives if I find that the deal is lacking for me."

Chapter 608 Boots on the Ground

"I will look for alternatives if I find that the deal is lacking for me."

Eren looked at Roth when he said that. He knew that only Roth had the real power bestowed upon him by the clan to take such decisions.

Roth nodded at Eren's statement even though it was laced with the threat of reneging on the deal. He had dealt with so many rankers in business that he was used to subtle threats like these. In business, one must put pride aside and think rationally. At least until a certain line is not crossed.

Roth thought that things were still in his control even though Eren had a Master ranker by his side. He had a whole House Derringer behind him. Even though the opposite party had a B-Rank, he did not need to worry about them.

Therefore, Roth turned to Levine and asked her courteously.

"Master Levine, I take it? Please allow us to know a bit about yourself."

Eren looked at Levine who had a light smile on her face at that time. She maintained her carefree attitude and spoke up without haste.

"Hello. I am Levine. Levine de Montmorency."

Roth's eyes opened wide when he heard Levine mention her full name. He then looked at Eren one more time, as if to confirm she was speaking the truth. Eren didn't have to respond to his look. Levine took out a runic emblem from her storage and placed it on the table before spinning the surface.

Roth quickly held the emblem in his hand and imbued his mana into it. He sighed and gave Levine her emblem back before speaking up.

"Forgive me and my juniors, Master Levine. We couldn't hide our negligence of not knowing about you beforehand. Please state your terms. We will try to accommodate you in every way we can as long as my House does not suffer a loss."

Roth looked at Levine seriously as he spoke. He had stopped paying attention to Eren when he realized that a major decision-maker from House Montmorency was sitting in front of him.

Eren didn't mind this effect. He was rooting for this effect from the very beginning. Otherwise, Roth would have wrung him dry in the deal. He did not underestimate the man's business skills or rank.

Levine knew what Eren wanted from House Derringer. So she started talking on his behalf and listing out his requirements. In Roth's opinion, his House would have to walk the extra mile in a few areas. Yet, in the end, he found that the deal was fair for both parties.

"Hahaha. I'm glad that we are on the same page about this deal. Please allow us to send a few rankers from our side to enter Minerva's Utopia to finalize the deal."

Eren didn't mind that and agreed quickly. He also knew that if Levine wasn't here with him, he would have first checked on the Utopia before making any deals. The name Montmorency had acted as a kind of assurance for him.

Just when Eren was about to get up, Levine placed her hand on his shoulder and made him maintain his position. The latter didn't have to ask for a reason. Roth spoke further.

"We have only talked about Andrium at this point, young man Eren. About the other raw products from..."

To deter Roth, Levine narrowed her eyes and spread her mana sense in his direction. She let him get stressed under her aura before speaking up.

"Eren only talked about Andrium with you because he would only sell that to you. House Montmorency has all the rights to buy all the other raw products. Especially those that are associated with potionneering.

Eren does not call me Master because of my ranking title. I'm also his teacher and his guide. So consider that it is him who is speaking when I make certain decisions for him and his assets."

Eren nodded at Levine's statement without a second thought. Roth wanted to try his luck, but it seemed that it would be in vain. But then Levine's next words reached him and he breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

"Of course, processing of Andrium will be entirely handled by you. And if there are other raw products that House Montmorency had no use for, we will let you know. After all, this pie is too big for any single organization.

Both of our houses need to work together to ensure that neither our interests nor Eren's, are harmed. You know what would happen once the news about Sage Minerva's Utopia gets out, right?"

Levine stared at Roth knowingly, and the latter nodded at her and started making calls. The Master potioner tapped her fingers in front of Eren's portion of the table. The butcher didn't know what she was asking. But then he looked at where her master was looking and realized what she was demanding from him.

Eren quickly took out another Sativa stick from his storage and handed it to her. Meanwhile, Roth appeared to be talking with someone over ID stone communication. He took his time before speaking up.

"House Derringer is ready to dispatch two Master rankers, 7 Adept rankers, a group of 30 Ace rankers, and a sizable bunch of Novice rankers to the scene.

They will stay there for about a year. We can talk about increasing or decreasing House Derringer's presence on the ground later on."

Levine shook her head in denial as she took her puff from the Sativa stick. Eren had come to realize that his thought of not wanting to smoke in front of his master was foolish. She looked pro at this. Of course, he knew that the reason for her using the Sativa sticks was him. He had involved her in his mess after all.

"Not enough, Roth. House Montmorency is thinking of hiring a Grandmaster ranker. But that will come at a later stage if the need arises.

I and other Master rankers will be staying in Eren's guild land for a long time. But we will be sending 10 Adept rankers and 40 Ace rankers.

Then there's the need for arranging security and surveillance arrays at strategic locations. We also need to start building the basic infrastructure of a town. A town that would have the potential of growing into a city eventually. Our plans need to take such a larger picture into account."

Levine paused and took a long breath after saying that. She caressed her head as she thought of many things at once. Now that she had accepted Eren's proposal, she needed to make Minerva's Utopia a success story for all of them. Her position in the clan was now linked to its success.

Roth listened to Levine's statements with keen interest but didn't reply. Because he knew she wasn't finished.

"Of course, we'll need to run the plan by the kingdom's bureaucrats and get it sanctioned. Our sides need to lobby the royal court for that. We'll also have to think about how we are intending to keep the vultures away from the meat on a diplomatic level.

Obviously, Eren doesn't have anything on him that can help us create a city out of thin air. And resources from Minerva's Utopia would take time to provide us with net profit.

That means we need an initial investment from both our clans. Eren can be charged separately for our investment over time so that this construction project is profitable for everyone. But initially, we'll have to pour much more money into this project than we could earn."

Levine suddenly thought of Ottoman, and the wrinkles on her forehead intensified. She shook her head and sighed before marching on.

"I know how clan meetings work. Not every clan member will be up for the task. So we both will have to make quick decisions and get most members of our respective houses onboard.

The news about Minerva's Utopia is only known to Eren's team, me, and you guys for now. But it's only a matter of days before it spreads like a wildfire. We have more things to do than I've listed out in less time than we can estimate.

The scope of this thing is much larger than my student understands. I'll be honest and say that I hadn't thought that I'd be raising a city from the ground up one day. But I also doubt you have played this game when the stakes are this high, even if we consider this as your domain.

In short, what you have proposed to us is not enough. Call the higher-ups of Derringer House who would be in favor of this proposal according to you and let them know. We need more boots on the ground from your side."

Eren kept his mouth shut when the two got talking about the finer details of their deal. He let Levine handle the bargaining part while he spoke to her on her ID to make his intentions known to her.

Minerva's Utopia was going to make or break the White Raven guild. Therefore, the talk dragged on for hours on end. And each side made their concerns and their positions known to the other.

When Eren was out of the facility, the deal was still getting finalized between House Derringer and House Montmorency. His master and Roth were still in talks. They had let their juniors go free when the skeleton of the deal had been finalized.

Eren looked at the darkening sky and smiled.

'Hehe! White Raven's name will spread throughout this kingdom in a few days.'

He chuckled and started walking in a seemingly unknown direction. He soon disappeared into thin air, leaving behind flashes of lightning and fire.

Chapter 609 Praises and Poetry

The city of New Beginnings.

Late afternoon.

Mellow sky.

South-bound winds that were neither too warm nor too cold.

A black-haired guy with emerald green eyes and a clear complexion is seen waiting for someone besides a large, array-run fountain. This is the Lifestyle district of the city. It features various shops and activities that cater to the leisure interests of rankers.

The black-haired guy is wearing a semi-formal outfit. Dark blue denim pants and a simple white shirt paired with a long jacket in a dark brown shade. His eyes are glued to the scroll his hands are holding stretched in front of him. As if trying to make the right use of his idle time.

"You are always on the clock, aren't you?"

A serene feminine voice sounded from behind the guy. He smiled while still looking at the scroll. He closed the reading material and stored it in his storage, then turned toward the source of that voice.

Beautiful.

This one word was enough to describe the young girl that was approaching the green-eyed young man. She walked with unparalleled grace. There was a certain charm about her movements that couldn't be explained with words.

She was as mesmerizing as the most exquisite of paintings. Ethereal and timeless.

Her blue eyes sparkled when the sun rays hit them directly. It was as if a deep blue sea was trying to fit into that tiny iris.

Her lustrous blond hair was left loose. She didn't seem to care much about them as she just adjusted the bags by tucking them behind her ears.

The blonde girl had worn a sophisticated black-as-ink dress that looked elegant from every angle. The black-rose embroidery details on the dress and black-rose frills over it bode well with the dress' visual appeal.

'I thought sometimes her beauty couldn't be put into words. But I have to admit I did a good job anyway.'

The young man applauded himself for being so creative. Then he felt proud that he was going on a date with someone this stunning.

"Well... what are you looking at?"

The blonde girl had walked up to the green-eyed young man without him realizing. Or to put it more precisely, he was so engrossed in describing her beauty to himself that he lost track of time and place.

"Hm? Oh! Oh, yes. I was saying to myself how beautiful you are looking today of course. How can I ever look away from something this charming?"

I almost want to throw my cleverest cheesy pick-up lines. All of them. Every single one. In the hopes that at least one would crack you up. At least one of them would work on you."

The young man, for the first time in a long while, spoke his truth and nothing but the truth. Even he was surprised by how easy and liberating it was to just state the facts.

These days, he has been nothing but a scheming womanizer. So he liked being an honest womanizer for a change.

The blonde girl laughed when she heard the young man's opinions about him. She also felt flattered and delighted. Glad for the fact that she was going on a date with him. Glad to know it was happening. And finally, glad for the fact he was being hopelessly romantic about her.

"Oh? Interesting. So very interesting.

Hmm. Why don't you tell me how beautiful I look as we make our way to our reservation?"

The blonde girl spoke and held the guy's arm in hers before starting to walk in a particular direction. The black-haired guy was all smiles when that happened. It was a smile that seldom appeared on his face. Otherwise, his smile screamed certain doom for anyone who saw it on his face.

Praises and poetry.

The young man had a certain way with words.

His praises were on-point and personal. Sometimes very odd. But felt all the more welcoming to the girl who was receiving them with the way they had been said.

To the young girl's surprise and delight, she also found that there was a poet somewhere in there in the body of a 6ft tall close combat expert, who on his usual days, was trained to harm people up close.

A stark contrast to his otherwise persona.

The pair was in a bubble of their own. They didn't notice things happening around them even when the late afternoon's hustle-bustle was too loud and rambunctious to ignore. It was as if they had found a new world in each other's company.

Away from the schemes. Far from the brutality of the world. Distanced from their problems.

The place they were heading to did not have to be picturesque. Their journey toward that place was what mattered to them.

The young girl kept on listening as her partner praised her, talked with her, and made plans with her. He would sometimes go off-topic and talk about his crazy venture.

A new guild. A new city. A new play that would change his life, for better or worse. But he was out there. He was taking chances. He was moving ahead.

She listened to everything he had to say with the utmost attention without ever interrupting him. Because she knew those things were being spoken in the depth of her partner's heart.

She was happy for him. She was also excited for him. She had been watching him make use of every chance he got to maximize his profits.

Maximize his rewards. It was as if the man was on a mission. As if he wanted to prove to somebody that he wasn't a failure. She was inspired by that tireless pursuit of his.

She was selfish enough to want what he had and what she was lacking. An ambition. And a passion to make that ambition a reality.

Seek and ye shall find. She found her goal. She aspired to be a better ranker than him. She wanted to be close to him. She wanted to reach the top of this world with him. That's because she could see that that's where he was heading.

And in the end, she wanted him.

The young man was still a bit far from tasting the fruits of his labor. But she knew it was only a matter of time. The blonde girl had only seen one other man this driven and set on accomplishing big things in life. His story and the heights he had reached told her that the young man would soon reach that height too. Maybe surpass him one day.

They soon reached the place they had reserved for themselves. Against the young man's wishes, the blond girl had asked him to book the entire terrace of a fancy restaurant all for themselves.

This was a huge waste of money according to the young man who seemed to be struggling with his finances. But she seemed to not care. Because she knew he would be rich soon enough.

She had his promise that he would do everything she asked of him. And that's what he did. Albeit begrudgingly.

The blonde girl was a bit introverted. She wanted alone time with her guy. Yet she wanted to do everything a date was supposed to be. So this expensive compromise was her logical conclusion.

Chapter 610 Intimacy and Separation

Evening time.

The sun looked dim as if it was running low on its array-powered batteries.

The golden rays of the disappearing star made the white clouds and flying birds stand out more.

The winds carried the smells of all kinds of food.

There were a lot of street vendors selling mortal food. Some shopkeepers kept their businesses open exclusively for the city's ranker population.

The black-haired young man and blond-haired cute girl were holding each other's hands firmly as they were watching a drama play together at the city's open amphitheater. The actors and behind-the-scenes experts were all Novice rankers.

Earlier, the couple had ventured on a shopping spree post their lunch date together. The girl got herself all kinds of clothes and accessories, both ranked and rankless items. Of course, her date paid for them all.

Unbeknownst to the blonde girl, the young man was cursing the shopkeepers and itemancers for their high prices while displaying a graceful smile on his face. He could not hide the fact that the smile was forced. The trained eyes of the shopkeepers were made to see through their customers. Yet, they didn't show him any mercy.

In his mind, he even thought that they were crueler than he was to his victims.

Attending the play was the girl's idea as well. She had planned her whole day meticulously, and the play was an integral part of it.

With their spells and array setups, the actors gave a vibrant touch to the play. Their acting skills were only so-so. But when it came to the dramatization of the verbal and physical fights, they seemed more visually appealing than real-life affairs that only spilled blood and gore.

The blond girl oddly enjoyed the play in front of her while the black-haired boy kept on dissecting their lack of skills in choreographing the fight scenes. He talked about the producers failing to add a touch of reality to the drama. He talked about how they could have effectively made use of certain spells or arrays.

But the blue-eyed girl only laughed at the guy's comments. He always said them at the right time when the actors were about to fumble. The pair laughed at the actors' expense. And so did the audience.

And yet, the laughter only seemed to cheer the actors up even more. The drama also contained a humorous element after all. While it looked accidental, the comedy was planned and planted at the right time.

The play ended soon after. The happy and satisfied audience started to leave. The viewers had already paid for the show using Extols.

If it was up to the black-haired young man, he would never spend his money on such plays. He was in dire need of money after all. Such expenses would only make more holes in his sleeve, which was already bleeding money.

But now, he was glad that he had come here and watched the play. He was beginning to think that maybe he should cut himself some slack and enjoy the moments once in a while.

He was bound to stay broke for a long time. He might as well become even more broke by enjoying these moments with his date.

The couple walked in the direction that would soon take them outside the Lifestyle District. Their next destination was the northeastern city entrance, which was far from them. They had to use rental carriages.

"Eren, I'll have to tell you something."

Altashia spoke after she and Eren boarded the carriage. She was looking outside the window as the scenes in front of her kept on changing. The wide streets of the city of New Beginnings weren't to be scoffed at.

'Hm. My city will also need big roads and rental carriages.'

Eren made a note of these things before responding to Altashia. He had already understood why Altashia had gone silent the moment she had gone silent.

"You are leaving the army, aren't you?"

Eren asked. A light smile appeared on his face. A smile that wasn't really a smile.

With a stoic expression on her face, Altashia nodded to Eren. Unlike him, she wasn't bound by her on-field assignment anymore. She didn't have to prove to the kingdom that she was a trained ranker. That's because her status as an Adept ranker was proof enough.

"Um. My Adept rank has allowed me to graduate from Royal Ren. It has also allowed me to make use of the special resources the academy has to offer to its Adept ranked students.

I don't have to serve in the army anymore. I am also relieved of any binding contracts. Staying here would only hinder my growth."

Eren patted the back of Altashia's hands while holding them in his. A smile spread across his face before he added up.

"You better not slack, Al. I'm right behind you and I'll do my absolute best to overtake you soon."

The couple remained silent for a while. Eren and Altashia both knew that this was bound to happen when she had a breakthrough into Adept rank. This date was the first time they had been this close to each other. But it also served as a way for them to bid farewell for the time being.

Intimacy and separation.

Contrary to what Eren was expecting, Altashia didn't laugh at his jab. She did not deny his claim. She narrowed her pretty eyes on him before speaking with a serious expression.

"I'm inclined to believe you would do just that if I stayed here. Why do you think I'm leaving this early?"

Don't underestimate me, Eren Idril. For a change, I'm planning to go all out with my ranking progress when I leave the army.

Let's see who wins the duel next time. Hmph!"

Eren gulped empty air when he heard Altashia's proclamation. If her progress till now was her taking things at her pace, he dreaded to think how far she would go when she dedicates herself to advancing through her ranks.

Eren's progress had intimidated Altashia. Now she thought of becoming serious in her efforts. So she contacted her Gramps and told him about her breakthrough.

Altair smiled at her when he was called by his granddaughter. But in the next moment, he told her how slow she had become. And yet, instead of her usual anger toward her grandpa, she agreed with him.

"I want to train with you for a bit. I also need some guidance."

Altashia spoke to Altair on the call. The latter was a bit surprised by his granddaughter's sudden shift of mood. So he had to ask her what had changed.

"I... I lost."

Altashia said those words with difficulty before cutting her call, leaving Altair with a blank face. Soon that blank face broke into hearty laughter when he realized that his granddaughter had finally tasted the bitter fruit of loss.

Altair thanked the person who had defeated Altashia. Because of them, Altashia had found the drive she was missing in her ranking journey. Because of them, she was now able to invest her heart and soul into her hard work.

Altair didn't know that his granddaughter had not only lost a duel but also her heart to the same man. He also didn't know that she had decided to cover all the bases with him before her separation from him.