

## Vile 61

### Chapter 61: Spectral Screen

“Damn! Look at the ground from this point, Eren! It’s so cool. We should just keep on flying today if you ask me.”

Jake was very excited about his first flying experience. As were lots of other students. Only a few students stayed at the centre. Most of them were gathered at the circular edge of the platform, observing the grounds and scenes getting distant as soon as they passed over them.

There was no risk of anyone falling off of the edge. The platform had generated a dome-shaped transparent energy shield that would keep the students safeguarded. It had also prevented the students from experiencing overwhelming wind pressure, resulting in a calm atmosphere inside the energy dome despite the breakneck speed.

Eren was with Jake standing near the edge of the platform. He was looking below the platform like everyone else. But one could tell he wasn’t interested in what was happening to the ever-changing scenery.

A lot of the students weren’t aware of the blood-bound ID stone’s functions. But Eren was. This was one of the biggest investments the academy had made for its students without them realizing it.

The students will be briefed about their new and improved ID stones’ functions after reaching the academy grounds. But that didn’t mean they couldn’t use some of them at this point.

The Butcher calmed his mind and made a connection with the ID stone located in the palm using his mana sense. He called out to something in his head and saw the spectral screen in front of him that only he could see.

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Name- Eren Elijah Idril (Verified)

Organization: Lionhearts Adventurers’ Academy

Academic Details- Class 1/C.

Unranked Student (First-year ranking war status: pending)

Base Stats:

HP- 3.5/3.5

MP- 4.7/ 4.7

STR- 2.1

AGI- 1.7

INT- 2.4

BTP~ 14

BTP Visibility- Shown to All

Ranking Technique- Two-star, rankless Edinburgh's Standard Technique (Unusable)

F-Rank Spells- Null

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HP stands for Health points a ranker has. It indicates their overall health status.

MP means Mana Points. It quantifies the mana storage within the ranker's core.

The physical prowess of a ranker is denoted by STR while their agility in movements and attack deployment is quantified with AGI.

INT stands for intelligence. It quantifies the mental power a ranker can exert to think, cast spells, and more.

BTP or Base Total Point is calculated after summing up all the base stat values. It is often represented in a whole number after rounding off the summation. It gives an approximate understanding of the ranker's overall prowess.

Since BTP adds all the base body stat values a ranker has, it is the one that is taken into account the most when two opponents in the same rank are duelling.

BTP will allow for an easy understanding of characters' power levels with respect to each other using a single numeric value. Knowing about your opponent's BTP can give you a hint of their prowess. Therefore, it is the most sought-after information on the academy grounds.

Of course, BTP alone isn't an absolute indicator of a ranker's superiority. A ranker having higher BTP might not win against a ranker that has lower BTP than them. Many other factors will also play an important role in the battle. Like the number and type of spells available, their compatibility with the respective rankers, and their class.

A battle can turn either way if it takes place between two opponents having almost the same BTP as well as same number and type of spells.

But the derived stat can be used as a go-to tool to predict the outcome when the difference is high enough. Generally, if the ranker overwhelms their opponent with their BTP, they'll be able to register a win even if they belong to a non-combat class.

Eren was genuinely surprised looking at his BTP in this timeline. It was four units more than his previous timeline when he had first entered the F-Rank back then.

But in this life, Eren had received a boost of four units right from the get-go. That too when he had just joined the academy and broken through using a traditional technique. He could only concur that it was due to the gem that he had eaten and was now a part of him.

The two-star, rankless Edinburgh technique was the traditional technique Eren had used to break through into the F-Rank. It was widely circulated for the rankless populous. It was stable and straightforward. And simple enough so that it could be understood and used by everyone.

The technique had become unusable for Eren since he had already stepped into F-Rank. He needed a F-Rank technique now to resume his ranking journey.

The BTP visibility was a way for students to know about each other's BTP. It was currently set at 'shown to all' by default.

The default visibility meant it could be seen by any verified student and teacher of the academy in the near vicinity who knows how to use this function using their respective mana sense. Eren quickly changed the visibility to private.

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The Butcher couldn't help flashing a cunning smile after looking at his stats. He was way ahead of his past self in the current timeline. This time he was going to tread on the right path.

Jack saw Eren giving a weird grin to the scenery down below. He thought the guy had finally started to enjoy his first flying experience.

"I don't know what you are afraid of, trying to take pleasure in this flight so secretly. But I'm glad that you can smile after experiencing this thing. Otherwise, I would have thought you are not normal."

Eren didn't try to correct him. He suddenly had a thought.

Maybe Eren could use the identifier function of the ID stone in conjunction with his mana sense to collect information. He thought of using it on Jake since he was nearby. The latter was still not used to the function, so he wouldn't know how to keep his BTP visibility private.

Eren used the identify function to find out Jake's BTP. He also started using the function on other people and found out other notable students' BTP by covertly roaming all over the platform.

Eren Idril- 14

Jake Sullivan- 10

Ivor Osan- 17

Veronica Garcia- 13

Jason Storm- XX

Jason had acted smartly and already set his BTP visibility to private. Veronica either didn't know or didn't care enough to keep her BTP status hidden.

Ivor Osan knew so many things. He clearly must have known about the ID stone's functions. Despite that, he still kept his BTP status open to all. Maybe he wanted some students and teachers to see how superior he was to the majority of the lot found in LA.

There were a few exceptional students as well who had greater BTPs than Ivor at that time. Eren had recorded and remembered their visible BTPs. It was always good to collect data on his potential enemies and allies.

Jason saw Eren roaming nearby his group. He wanted to talk to him. But before he could approach the guy, Eren had disappeared from that spot.

Jason smiled mirthlessly at Eren's sneakiness. He wanted to talk to him using Matt's and Dom's subjects as excuses. But the latter didn't give him the chance.

Soon, the flying platform breached an energy shield that wasn't visible from the outside. The energy shield lit up green and allowed entry to the platform.

The flying platform soon landed on a space surrounded by tamed wildlife and vegetation. One could see various buildings and structures located in the distance.

The students dragged themselves off the platform reluctantly. Some delayed their exit for as long as they could. But it was clear the platform wasn't going to move until all of the students got down.

Rufus Rodriguez and his panel went away with the flying platform. Only a few professors and academy staff remained with the students.

"Oh! Old Lin, you came back early. Weren't you taking a leave of absence from the academy? Whatever happened to that?"

A buxom lady could be seen coming towards the gathered crowd riding on a big and muscular colt. She looked like an Amazon warrior with light abs over her flat tummy, complete with thunder legs, and heavy jugs that bounced aplenty as she was riding her steed uncaringly.

The lady had jet black hair, olive skin, and light brown eyes. She had an hourglass shape, albeit on a heavier side. With a height of around 5.7ft, she didn't look too tall. But still tall enough to assert her presence prominently.

"Good day, lady Marla. Yeah. Something came up and I decided to postpone my previous plans. Anyway, I have a new panel now. And came with these greenhorns. Is there anyone that catches your eye?"

Marla could tell Lin was changing the subject. But she didn't try to pry. She focused her attention on the first-year students and quickly found a talent within them.

Marla could see the guy had progressed much further in his ranking journey than most of his peers. He also exuded an aura of maturity and seriousness.

No....

It wasn't Eren!

## **Chapter 62: Enter- The Protagonist**

Marla quickly found the talent she was looking for in the first-year lot.

"You..."

She pointed at one student and asked him to come forward with her finger. She looked very dominating while doing that.

"What's your name, boy?"

The boy she was talking about had short, dark golden hair and golden eyes. He was tall with clear skin that had a tinge of red.

He was built muscular, a testament to his strict practice routine and sheer will. Among the bunch of boys that looked like they hadn't hit their growth spurt yet, he looked like the only one who could be called a man.

The kid lacked a beard. So he still had the boyish charm accompanying him with his seemingly mature body. A deadly combination for all the young girls' fluttering hearts.

"Name's Ken Riverine, ma'am."

Ken answered with a slight bow. His voice was firm and serene. He had the kind of bass in his voice that made him sound like an important man.

"Hmm? A Riverine kid? From the house Earl Riverine? But I checked all the reserved seat names. Your name wasn't in them."

"That's because I entered the academy by clearing the entrance test, ma'am."

All the students were surprised at Ken's shocking statement. He was from the house of an Earl. As if that wasn't shocking enough, he didn't avail of the reserved seat quota.

And entered the academy through an entrance test like a commoner.

Almost all the girls had already started becoming his fan-girls, commoners and nobles alike. The guys looked like they were looking at their biggest arch-rival. Even all the professors including Marla were amazed by Ken. The Amazoness couldn't help chucking:

"Hehehehe! Now that's what's called a hero-like entry. Kid, I have high expectations from you. Don't let me down. I'll visit you after a few days to discuss an apprenticeship under me.

Of course, I won't force you to take it. You'll come to know the benefits and disadvantages of having an apprenticeship soon enough.

Normally, apprenticeships start from the second or third academic year, depending upon the students and their merit points as well as their overall performance. But your BTP is already 18. You've just crossed the initial stage and entered the mid-stage of F-Rank. That's impressive at your age.

That's why I've decided to break the unwritten rule of initiating apprenticeship in students' second or third year for you. So at least think about giving it a try."

Ken's eyes flashed with opportunities. But he wasn't dense. Marla talked about the disadvantages of taking on an apprenticeship.

Therefore, Ken needed to know about them before committing something this serious. He had already been given a window to think about. The scion from Earl's house decided to make full use of it.

He nodded at Marla and went back to his earlier position.

What nobody noticed was Eren was looking at Ken with pure hate in his eyes.

'The protagonist is here.'

Eren thought to himself begrudgingly. He had an old but now-nonexistent score to settle with this guy. He even called him the protagonist like it was some derogatory term.

'The vixen should be nearby if this guy has made an entry.'

Eren thought about the couple that was on their way to stardom and fame in the Edinburgh kingdom in his previous timeline. His blood started boiling even more when he thought about that vixen and finally located her in the crowd. She was glancing at Ken. Anyone could tell she was interested in him.

Jake was standing nearby Eren. He suddenly noticed a shift in Eren's aura after Ken made his appearance. But before he could ask him about it, the butcher controlled his killing intent and made it disappear in the thin air.

The students were then introduced to their dorms after being led to a distant place. The first-years' dorm region looked like a medium-sized and well structured urban township.

Every two students would be assigned a moderately big, single-story suburban house that had two bedrooms, two restrooms, and one common living space. It also had a small courtyard where students could practise their combat and movement skills.

The houses were a set distance of 30 meters apart from each other. The regions were divided by lush greeneries acting as the fences.

The first year's canteen was a few distances away from the township. The students were made aware that the canteen had set timings for breakfast, lunch, supper, and dinner.

Students had a one hour window for each food schedule. The next serving would only be made available at the next schedule if the students were to skip a particular time window.

Eren used his connection with Lin and made him assign a corner house at the far end for him and Jake. Lin had heard about the boy. That he didn't involve himself with kids his age. Therefore, he didn't mind cooperating with the same butcher that he was once hunting and currently felt hunted by.

Eren and Jake were in the same class, 1/C. And they also had potioneering as a common subject of interest. They were particularly polar opposite of each other when it came to personalities. And that's what allowed them to get along with each other just fine under one roof.

The day was long and tiring. It was 6 PM by now. The sun had started to set.

The students had their supper at the canteen. It didn't look like many would show up for dinner. Eren and Jake decided dinner wasn't necessary for them either. Jake had his snacks. So he'd be fine even if he ends up waking up at midnight due to sudden hunger pangs.

They both went inside the far-end house they were assigned to. The house had a security array. The energy shield was only lowered when it identified the occupants' identity with their ID stones. And it was raised back once again when they both went in.

Eren and Jake decided to call it quits early. They were going to have their aptitude test early in the morning tomorrow, followed by their consultation and their first-ever lecture. The lecture would cover the academy's rules as well as new and improved ID stones' functions.

Jake was excited for tomorrow. He hadn't checked his element affinity and was looking forward to prominent results.

Eren only looked excited from the outside. But he knew about his aptitude beforehand. Instead, he was looking forward to starting his revenge on people that had messed up his entire life in the previous timeline.

Eren retired to his room. And secured the door behind him with the imprinted locking array on it using his ID stone. He decided to rest on his bed as soon as he found it.

Closing his eyes, Eren thought about the one major incident in the academy that had single-handedly changed his life. It had made him considered by others as the worst student to ever graduate from LA.

It had all started with a girl!

### **Chapter 63: Sienna Slughorn**

It all started with a girl!

Wars are often linked with love for a reason.

Eren liked a classmate in his past timeline. Her name was Sienna Slughorn. He didn't know anything about her. All he thought at the time was she looked cute.

Of course, Eren didn't have the guts to confess his affection. But a vixen Sienna had figured it out by his shy yet consistent stares.

Sienna was the daughter of a viscount. And she liked Ken Riverine who was from an Earl family.

Ken was one of the top students of their year. And he looked mature and dashing.

But the girl didn't only think with her ovaries. Sienna thought of elevating her family's position by being tied to the house of an Earl.

It would have been fine if Sienna ignored a silly crush directed at her when she had set Ken as her goal. But she decided to use that against her ordinary admirer to further her cause.

This was Eren's third academic year! Every student had selected the subject of their specializations by then. The merit points were based on the assignments belonging to such specializations.

Sienna first introduced herself to Eren who was progressing steadily in his potioneering. She asked him if he could guide her in the subject. Of course, Eren didn't need to be asked a second time. He gladly accepted her request.

Sienna wasn't interested in learning of course. She pretended for a while then dumped all her potioneering assignments on Eren. She then pursued intimacy with Ken who was in a battle-oriented course.

Eren figured out Sienna's intentions after a few weeks of slogging his ass in her work. He was naive and inexperienced in a lot of things in his previous life. But he wasn't stupid even back then.

Eren quickly got over his childish feelings. He wanted to become a genuine potion master due to Nina's influence on him. So anyone messing with his potioneering routine had to be kicked out of his life.

He told Sienna one day that he wouldn't do her share of assignments anymore.

"Why are you acting so rudely with me, Eren? What has happened to you?"

Sienna had asked innocently when Eren refused to keep being her clown. Like he was the one to blame for hurting her and her interests.

"Stop taking me for a fool, Sienna. I have my things to worry about. So you'd have to complete the assignments given to you."

"Hmm? What else do you do all day? It's not like you have a life outside the lab, is it? You don't have friends. You are not good at anything other than potion-making.

Why not spend your time completing my assignments while you are "living the best time of your life" with these herbs? I might consider you taking me for a date if you do that, you know."

"Haah! You could've fooled me. You are already trying to get in Ken's pants. But he is in a battle oriented course that starts at the same time of the day the first-year potioneering lab stays open.

You are using me to go to his battle oriented courses. I don't have a problem with you getting together with anyone, of course. Not anymore.

But I'd suggest you pursue that relationship with your merits and efforts. Stop counting on me to save your ass from penalties that'd befall you if and when you fail to complete your potioneering assignments.

I don't want to spend my time only completing my assignments. Unlike you, most students take this subject to create a living out of it. I'm one of them.

I'll have to go beyond only completing assignments if I'm to become a successful potion master. That means experimenting with the recipes and finding my style of potioneering.

I'll need to invest time in exploring extra-curriculum potion recipes. Experiment with ingredients and draw my own conclusions from them. Study previous research papers. Read famous potion masters' books. And try to achieve three-star standards in all the basic potions of my rank.

I don't have enough time to do all this even if I don't take up your assignments. And you want me to reduce that time even further for your gains? And what would I receive in return even if I decide to do that like an idiot I was in the past? A whole lot of nothing.

Fat chance of that happening, miss. If you want to be close with Ken, deal with the penalty that comes from changing the course midway and take up battle oriented courses."

Eren refuted buying Sienna's bullshit.



He had already bought enough to last him for a while. Sienna started laughing like a maniac after listening to Eren's final refusal.

"You were less of an idiot than I gave you credit for. Hehe! I'll admit. I WAS using you. But I don't see anything wrong with it.

You were happy to be able to talk with a girl like me. And I was happy to allow you to do that in exchange for a little bit of favour.

A dork like you should consider yourself lucky that I even allowed you to serve me. You should be grateful. But instead of thanking me, you are trying to sabotage everything for me that I worked hard to achieve.

Listen carefully, Eren. I'll only say this once. Consider it a suggestion, warning, or downright threat. I belong from the house of a viscount. You DO NOT want to offend me.

If you do this favour for me, I'll tell my family to hire you as lowliest of potioneer even if you fail in the course. You'll earn a decent amount of money for a low amount of work.

The Slughorn potions are famous in the southern region.

Our family operates a fair number of supply-and-distribution chains. And we own many potion-making establishments spread across the southern region.

That's why I chose a potion-making course even when I didn't like doing it. I have to maintain the family image. So you can imagine why I can't quit this course.

You are right. I'm not interested in dating you. I never was. As cliché as it sounds, the family backgrounds matter. You look alright. But you are not even a baron. And I know from a valid source that your parents have abandoned you.

Your aunt Nina is the only guardian you have. But her status as a C-Rank healer can only garner her so much respect. That too is only limited to the city of Osan.

So anything happening between us is out of the question. Now that you've seen through this farce, I won't play the same card.

But I know how to deal with commoners like you. Let's talk business if that's what it takes.

You want to become a potion master, right? You'll have to extend this kind of courtesy to your suppliers and buyers sooner or later. Consider this extra assignment as a potion-making order from me. Furthermore, I can surely find a place for you to work in any of our Slughorn establishments if you cooperate with me.

But refuse my kind intentions, and I'll show you how angering me is never a good idea. Now decide, what will it be?"

Sienna blurted everything in one go. She stopped pretending and showed her true colours to the ex-cullible boy. When deception didn't work, she went for the carrot-and-stick approach.

One had to say her upbringing as a noble young lady was spot-on.

But Eren had already made up his mind by then. He would not get associated in any way with this cold-hearted vixen.

“Maybe you didn’t hear me the first time. I told you to either quit being part of the potioneering course. Or find some other way to be with Ken. But it’ll have nothing to do with me.

I don’t want your extra money or any position in Slughorn establishments. I’m perfectly capable of securing a good position as a potion master anywhere with my merits after graduating.

So now you have my decision. It’s a big, fat NO!”

Sienna’s smile became even wider after hearing Eren’s response. But now that smile had a shade of viciousness. She couldn’t believe the guy had grown so much spine after the realization of getting used to her scheme had dawned on him.

What pissed Sienna off, even more, was the fact that Eren had snapped out of his devotion towards her more quickly than he had gotten into it. It challenged her self-gratifying assumption that was based on pride, hubris, and self-esteem of being the most desirable girl in her class. This, to her, was even more unacceptable than just refusing to cooperate with her.

“Eren! My sweet summer child, Eren. I thought a shut-in nerd like you would know your place in the hierarchy. But turns out you are delusional. Never mind. I’ll help you realize your worth.

You want to be a potion master, right? I’ll simply take that away from you. I’ll make sure that you become anything BUT a potion-master.

I’ll ensure that you become a failure in everything you do.

Only after wearing the shades of despair will you be able to see what truly lies in your future. The house of Slughorn will ensure there’s nobody named Eren Elijah Edril acting as a potion master in this kingdom. And we will place a bounty on you if you try to leave the kingdom.

Prepare to say goodbye to these herbs you call your friends and this lab in some days. And remember the name that will be the reason behind your ruin. It’s Sienna Slughorn!”

#### **Chapter 64: From Potioneer to Berserker**

Prepare to say goodbye to these herbs you call your friends and this lab in some days. And remember the name that will be the reason behind your ruin. It’s Sienna Slughorn!”

Sienna slowly left the lab after declaring her threat. Eren had understood that his refusal would have repercussions. But he didn’t understand the severity of them at the time.

Sienna had ties with the potioneer in charge of the first years. He would be a mad potioneer not to form ties with anyone from the viscount Slughorn’s house. He was the reason Sienna could dump her assignments on Eren without anyone being the wiser.

The potioneer in charge couldn’t control everything that happens in the academy. But the first-year lab was his domain. He might not be able to grant Sienna merit points out of nothing. Otherwise, he might get in trouble after someone else cross-checks the assignments. But granting her the merit points and letting her avoid the penalty for someone else’s work was still feasible.

Sienna just asked the same potioneer in charge to make trouble for Eren and gradually decrease his merit points after finding 'supposed' faults in his assignments. The sold-out potioneer obliged.

Sienna started attending her potioneering assignments. But it came with a cost that Eren had to pay for.

Eren soon found out how deep was Sienna's reach. His prim and proper potion assignments suddenly started having errors in them. He would often get mistreated by the lab staff. The potioneer in charge would scold him for his 'poor performance' in front of everybody.

Eren's merit points took a huge dip as a result. He now had to work twice as hard for half the merit points just to not get flunk in the course.

But that was not all. Sienna soon ranted to Ken that Eren had tried to be all touchy with her one day when they were alone in the lab. Almost everyone knew about Eren's crush on Sienna. The girl had made sure of that with her previous gossip. So it wasn't difficult for everyone to believe in the same. Why would a girl lie, right?

Eren was a recluse. He didn't have any friends in the academy. His connections with the academy staff and teachers were even more imaginary. The news spread like a wildfire within the first-year community.

Soon the facts were twisted and Eren became even more of an abomination than Sienna had planned for him to be seen as. She fanned the flames even further. Eren's life in and outside the lab became more difficult with each passing day because of the naked jeers and constant threats from various groups affiliated with Sienna.

Eren's merit points soon became insufficient for him to continue studying potion-making in the academy. Eren was in his third academic year by then. Nobody would think of switching courses at this point. But Eren did. He did not have a choice.

The berserker course charged the least amount of merit points and had many options available in LA. it accepted any students who wanted to learn the way of berserking. It was a relatively straightforward path. Eren chose the path of a berserker when he only had two years remaining in the academy.

Eren had practised a potion-manufacture-centric F-Rank ranking technique when he first resumed his ranking journey after breaking through into the beginner's rank. But that technique was not suitable for the path of a berserker.

Eren had to regress in his ranking journey to adapt to a new berserker ranking technique. He also had to take up compulsory battle-oriented courses. There, as if mental miseries were not enough, he faced even worse physical miseries.

Sienna and Ken had become a thing by then. The girl had played her sympathy card the most. She acted like a damsel in distress whenever she saw Eren. Of course, a few students had seen through her farce but they too joined hands with her to gain favour from one of the biggest names in potion manufacturing.

So whenever Eren would come for a duel in the arena, he would get beaten up black and blue by members of Sienna's camp. She had again started coming to the battle courses to watch Ken's performance. She had given the same offer to someone else. And that someone couldn't refuse.

Eren was burning from within. He had not messed up with anybody. But it seemed to him that the entire academy was standing against him.

Eren was a hard-working man. He put double the efforts in the path of a berserker. But that didn't help him in stopping the constant humiliation coming his way. They called him many names: leecher, pervert, cheater, psycho, potential serial killer, charlatan potioneer, worst berserker in history, and many more.

Eren had found a census had been raised against him. Sienna had a major hand to play in it. But most of it was due to him not having a backer to count on. Not having enough connections. But it was already too late. Even if by some miracle, he tries to form any connection and his voice gets heard, it will never be enough to wipe out his larger-than-life image of being the worst student in LA's history.

Sienna had many accomplices in pulling the rug off of Eren's feet for good. She had Vivi Loren and Luna Selene to spread the gossip of Eren's apparent misadventures on a lot of girls, not just Sienna. Then there was Ron Valencia and Dino Moretti who was in the same battle classes as Eren. They would often challenge him and beat him up till he loses consciousness.

Eren had his patience's limit breached a long time ago at the end of the academic year. Something needed to be done. He could still get a potioneer's license even after getting graduated as a berserker with Sienna's help.

The license would be of the lowest grade. And Eren would be the worst passed-out potioneer from LA because of his lost practice. But even with all that, Eren had a chance to resume being with Nina. His career as a potioneer was more important to him than his pride.

Eren decided to go with pragmatism. He decided he would say perfunctory sorry to Sienna for the things he had said. If she needs her ego soothed with Eren's sorry, so be it! He was also willing to work for her. That's why he asked her if they could meet in private.

Sienna agreed. But she asked her friends and more to stand at a distance from their meeting point in case 'Eren decides to act rudely.' She also made her friends ensure that no third party was there and Ken was accidentally brought to their meeting place at the right time.

The evening of their meeting arrived. Eren was at the place first and observed the surprising lack of people. But he didn't pay any heed to it. He waited patiently for Sienna to show up.

Sienna had the same smile she had given to Eren when he had said no to her overbearing demands. Eren didn't mind himself getting ridiculed for the sake of his future. For the sake of helping aunt Nina in her work.

Eren wanted to start right off with a sorry but the Slughorn vixen opened her mouth before him:

"You know, you are still as dense as you were back then. We are way past sorry and retracting our words. You are more useful to me being a useless student these days.

Men's brains are as gullible as a young dog in heat. They would want to fuck anything that moves and believe in everything that would give them the treat known as self-gratification.

Your infamy has become the reason for me to get close to Ken. It has invoked a sort of hero complex in him. He now sees me as someone that needs protecting.

Why would I accept your apology now after achieving so much without it? In case you are wondering why I accepted your request. It was to make your case even worse in Ken's eyes than what he sees you be.

Saying this, Sienna ran straight at Eren and crashed on him. The infamous leecher and pervert was caught off guard. He tried to block her with his hands but that only made matters worse as she grabbed his raised hands with hers and placed them on her breasts.

"Aaaaaaah! Help. Someone help. Eren Idril is trying to r\*pe me."

### **Chapter 65: Recluse R\*pist Incident**

"Aaaaaaah! Help. Someone help. Eren Idril is trying to r\*pe me."

Sienna didn't waste time after assuming an ideal 'damsel' position. Her friends had accidentally brought Ken in the vicinity by then. He heard the shout, recognized the voice to be Sienna's and rushed to the 'crime scene'.

Eren wanted to get his hands off of Sienna. But he couldn't. He had regressed in his ranking journey due to changing his path to be a berserker midway while others only progressed. Therefore he couldn't get rid of the overwhelming BTP difference between him and Sienna even when the latter belonged to a non-combat class.

Before Eren could say or see anything, he saw a mana-coated fist gradually getting larger in his eyesight. Then everything went black.

When Eren came to be, he experienced severe pain in his nose. His eyesight had become groggy. His mouth had a taste of iron in it, which was his blood due to the severe injury. He tried to fix his eyesight by shaking his head but that action almost made him lose consciousness again.

It took Eren a while to gain complete clarity. When he did, he noticed his hands and feet were tied. He was still at the same meeting place. But now he was apparently in the middle of the crowd that was surrounding him.

Eren looked at the crowd. The people were looking at him in ridicule and scorn. Like he was the lowest human being on earth. His appearance of being bloodied with a broken nose didn't help his image either. It did not invoke the feeling of pity in any one of them. Everyone felt like he deserved it.

Even friends of Sienna who had kinda guessed what must have taken place at the scene didn't feel any trace of pity for him. It was his mistake for Sienna being Sienna and him being a nobody. They would use Eren as a ladder if they have to and a use-and-throw rug when they need to.

Eren saw Ken who was looking at him with barely contained rage. He was holding Sienna in his embrace who was weeping and whimpering on his chest. Her head had been buried in his pecks, her body glued to Ken's without any care.

Ken's one hand was caressing Sienna's head while the other hand wrapped around her waist. He had stretched his legs in a flipped-V to accommodate Sienna, compensating for his taller stature. The guy looked like an incarnation of justice with his pose and a damsel by his side.

Ken's one hand was coated in red. It was clear who had punched Eren. But as if the real-life knockout wasn't enough, the Riverine prodigy decided to punch the guy with his words as well:

"You piece of shit. You didn't have the brain to understand a simple no. So you resorted to forcing yourself on Sienna?"

I had told her to press charges against you when you first tried to get all touchy with her. But she wouldn't listen, saying something about not wanting to use her family name against a student with a common background.

But look what that has gotten her into? She still tried to make peace with you by accepting your apology. But this is how you say sorry?

This has been my eye-opener.

I thought only rich kids acted spoiled and shameless. But I was wrong. The evil is in all of us, reserved-ordinary, rich-poor, common-noble. It doesn't matter.

You know what you have done right? You have ruined the image of all common students who have worked hard to get into this academy. You have also ruined the already criticizable image of reserved category students.

Sienna, listen to me. Don't back away from this now. You have to press charges against a maniac like him. Lest he becomes a threat to anyone else."

Sienna stopped crying. She didn't know what to do or say. It wasn't like she didn't want Eren to suffer anymore. But pressing charges against Eren would backfire on her.

When Sienna had claimed to everyone that Eren had tried to breach her formal physical boundaries, according to her it happened at the potion lab when everybody had left. Eren was only used to coming in contact with her and all the students at that time. Plus, he was used to staying late in the lab due to his additional practises. So that lie became believable.

But that lie contained Sienna's lie. The lab had visual monitoring artefacts. Had she pressed charges, the visual footage of the lab would have gotten analyzed and everybody would come to know she was lying through her teeth.

So Sienna played smart and skipped on pressing charges by saying something ridiculous to Ken. But the guy not only bought her BS, he even started respecting her for it. Yes, Ken was kind of a guy you'd find in hero stories acting as the protagonist while wearing the goggles of justice on his eyes.

Even in this incident, Sienna didn't have solid proof. She had cleared off this area from any potential eyewitnesses that would witness anything she didn't want them to witness. But in doing so, she had prevented a valid third-party eyewitness that would hold ground against such cases.

Therefore, the case would involve ranked entities if Sienna decides to press charges. Those entities could use special spells, artefacts or any other means to dig the truth out, which would again be detrimental to her.

Sienna saw the hope in the lab potioneer in charge of the first years that had come at the place as she had asked him to. The guy was completely obedient to her. He noticed her eye signs and stepped forward:

“Ken Riverian, you shouldn’t punch anyone outside the battle arena. It is against the academy’s rules. I will overlook this incident due to special circumstances but don’t break any more rules now. Sienna dear, tell me what you want to do now. Do you want to press charges or take a different approach?”

Sienna quickly thought of a way out. She remembered her promise to Eren at that time and decided to deliver on it:

“Sir lab in-charge, I saw a friend in Eren but he acted in this way, not once but twice. I should press charges against him. And I want to. But I won’t do that. Because the guy’s base nature wouldn’t change even if we throw him outside the academy and into some city prison. He would become even more dangerous than he is right now after being released.

Why not change Eren’s way of life then, to make him benign to society? I propose you sign a binding contract with him that would serve as a restraining order and more.

The conditions would be as follows.

- 1) Eren would not harm or conspire against any of his fellow LA students consciously, subconsciously, or through any other means or personnel.
- 2) Eren would not commercialize his potion-making anywhere consciously, subconsciously, or through any other means or personnel.
- 3) Eren would always stay within the Edinburgh kingdom and not leave it under any condition consciously, subconsciously, or through any other means or personnel.
- 4) Eren would be required to make every woman he is about to sleep with, say “I know I’m sleeping with a potential r\*pist, and I willingly consent to it.” The statement needs to be said word-to-word, and Eren can’t alter the words consciously, subconsciously, or through any other means or personnel.
- 5) The contract’s duration is a lifetime. Any form of breach in any of the above-mentioned pointers would result in Eren’s mana core getting wasted and him dying immediately afterwards.

Sir lab-in-charge, use a C-Rank contract you might have in store to bind Eren with so he wouldn’t be able to break it anytime soon. With this contract, everyone would feel safe and Eren would be able to turn a new leaf on his life.”

The viscount house’s vixen came up with the harshest terms for a mana binding contract. The first pointer was for her safety. She just added every student of LA to make it less obvious.

The second and third pointers were something she had already promised Eren to do with him. At first, she was going to use her family power to do that but she found a more efficient way to implement her judgement on Eren through the contract.

The fourth point was something Sienna came up with on the spur of the moment. She wanted Eren to live a miserable life. Keeping him sexually frustrated was a good way to do it.

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The fourth point was another reason Eren had resorted to using an aphrodisiac on women. No sane girl in her right mind would say something like this just before they were about to have sex and still proceed with the act.

Therefore Eren had to blur their consciousness and make them say that statement word-to-word before proceeding forward. Otherwise, he would die if the contract breach takes place.

The women would feel miserable after remembering what they had been made to say by the devil they had slept with. That's where all the disgust and dissatisfaction came from.

Eren could only find solace in hookers after the same scenes kept happening to him post his academic years. Then he found comfort in hookers who would say that statement as if it rolled off their tongues, sans the surprise and disgust.

Eren never looked back after he found professional help. Yes, he was still sexually frustrated. But he had found a channel to vent it, even if ever so slightly.

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Eren didn't say anything against signing a contract. Even if he cried that he was innocent in all this, it would not help him. The crowd might even turn violent in response to his genuine pleas.

And a sold-out lab in-charge was in cahoots with Sienna. What were his chances of finding genuine help from the academy? Almost zero, he thought.

At first, Eren had underestimated Sienna's reach. But later on, he overestimated it due to seeing the behavioural changes of entire lab staff and lab-in-charge. He thought there was no use going against the entire system.

That's why Eren chose to do nothing when he first heard about the fake gossip about him. He thought he was protecting himself from any potential repercussions when in fact he was making himself prone to more severe ones.

Regret is a bitter pill to swallow.

Eren didn't find any other choice but to sign the contract at that time. He wasn't sure Sienna couldn't buy an academy's investigator that gets assigned to his case if he decides to reverse-press charges of defamation on her. She had already bought a lab-in charge. How hard would it be for her to conspire with the investigation team?

The lab-in charge produced the C-Rank contract from his storage that he had bought by paying a huge sum of money. But he knew he'd get compensated by Sienna so he didn't mind using it here.

The contract took place between Eren and the lab-in-charge. It was practically impossible for the former to break the contract from his end. Eren read the conditions once again before signing the document with his blood. The sanguine blood was imbued in his mana that contained his mana signature.

The lab-in-charge did the same. The contract needed a name for its completion. The lab-in-charge proposed a name and everyone agreed with it.



The contract was given the name of 'LA's Recluse Rapist' to taunt Eren some more. The incident became famous in LA and outside it as a Recluse Rapist Incident.

Eren's life resumed after the incident. But it was never the same. He knew he wouldn't be able to go back to Nina's place with such infamy stuck to him.

Eren didn't want to drag Nina's business down by being with her. So he had dropped the idea of going to her place after graduating.

Plus, she knew about his recluse nature and his awkwardness when it came to girls. To her, that incident looked believable. At least that's what Eren thought.

The real victim of the whole incident didn't want to face his aunt's judgemental eyes too just to justify himself. He didn't want to go through another victim shaming.

Eren was a ghost of his former self. He put all his frustrations into at least passing the academy. Because that was all he could do to cope up with his mental state, channelling his energy into something that mattered to him.

Eren had always been a hard-working guy. That hard work, that sore body and worn-out sense of existence gave him the strength to sleep at night.

By the time Eren moulded himself into a half-assed berserker, his academic years were over. His merit points were just enough to pass the fifth year. The damage his image took was even worse than his grades.

The contract forced Eren to not seek or apply for potioneer's license. What would he do with the real or fake license if he can't commercialize his potions? His potion-making career was over.

With his infamous name, Eren couldn't find any hunters' or adventurers' party to be a part of for an extended amount of time. One way or the other they'd always come to know about his academic incident.

Even after the previous heat dying down on him after some years, Eren's name again sprang up when he tried to sleep with women using roofies. Eren stopped caring about hunting in the party when that happened.

Eren could not even leave the kingdom to seek better opportunities. He was trapped in a cell that was slowly shrinking on him.

Some years after Eren's graduation.

Even with all the risks he took in his missions and all the lucky encounters, Eren still did not manage to go beyond the initial-stage D-Rank. Most of his successful academy peers were either on the upper stage of D-Rank or had already stepped into C-Rank. They were in a better position in terms of the ranking journey, social standing, and economical condition.

A girl named Sienna Slughorn had delivered on her promise. She had sent him to his ruin while keeping him alive to experience it. Eren later came to know that she and Ken had entered C-Rank together and had gotten married.

Eren was even angrier at the world and himself after knowing such news about his peers. He felt sadness, wrath, jealousy, injustice and everything in between.

So the hookers and booze became his only respite, which became his eventual downfall as well.

### **Chapter 66: Aptitude Test**

The next day!

Eren and Jake woke up early and met each other in the living room. They had their breakfast together. Jake could see a lot of groups forming over breakfast tables. He wanted to introduce himself to a few of them, but it didn't look like Eren would join him. And he didn't want to leave the guy behind for his socializing activities.

They were required to gather at a huge hall that was located inside a four-story tall building, on the base floor. According to the board that was hung over the entrance, the building's name was Ranker's Incipience.

The hallroom of Ranker's Incipience was huge in both size and height. It had a ceiling height of four stories. Its length was more than 100m.

The hall had practically nothing inside as its interior compared to its large size. The students of 1/C gathered near a particular podium with the term 1/C written over it. Other students went to their respective podiums located at a distance from each other.

The podium had someone waiting on them to arrive. It was Lin Karr with his panel of assistant professors standing behind him. Everyone from the class 1/C was present at the scene. Lin started his speech as soon as he counted the class students.

"Hello, students of 1/C. As most of you must already know, my name is Lin Karr. And I'm assigned as the homeroom teacher of your class.

Before you ask or think to yourself, let me state out the obvious. My parents were very inspired by our country's founding hero, Lin Lehan at the time of my birth. That's why they chose Lin as my name, hoping I'd get as good as the kingdom's idol we all hail as Sansara Sage.

My father is an array master while my mother is serving in the kingdom's army as a distinguished potion master.

Both of them, how should I say this...

They both are sorta like nerds with their specialization fields as their only interests in their lives.

Therefore, it's not strange for them to go with the same name as the biggest nerd this kingdom has ever known, Lin Lehan.

I don't know why the academy receives a few complaints every year from the students' families, saying that I've been tarnishing a great name? But let me assure you that neither my family nor I have any ill intentions behind keeping my name as Lin.

Now that any possible misunderstanding my name might have is out of the way, let's get down to business.

I have my panel with me that I would like to introduce to you. After all, they will be the ones you'll be seeing most of the week. I'll be available once or twice every week, mostly towards the end of it, to guide you.

Meet Peter Griffin. He is a capable E-Class ranger. He is well versed in tracking techniques and some other skills related to hunting.

This lady is Ela Thorn. She is an exceptional E-Class healer. She will teach you about first aids and various natural as well as manufactured medicines you can use depending upon the terrain and situation.

We have Julia Ekheart. Her class is special. Let's just say for now that she is an E-Rank hunter. She will expound on how to detect illusions and counter them.

And finally, we have me, Lin Karr. I will teach you about the fundamentals of mana arrays and their functions. Since my lecture will be once or twice every week, it'll continue for that whole day and you won't be able to attend anything else.

Let's first find out about your element affinity and aptitude. Just form a queue first and I'll tell you what to do."

Lin Karr ordered the students of 1/C to fall in line and the students obliged. Jake was standing ahead of Eren.

Lin would order the student at the front of the line to stand right over an eye of the array that was drawn on the limestone ground nearby from their gathering.

Lin had already told the students that they needed to imbue their feet with their mana. The array would be lit up after absorbing that mana inside its inscriptions.

The ground was inscribed with array details that would be lit up intermittently. Then a few spectral words would appear over the student who was standing in the middle of the array at the time.

Soon came Jake's turn. He stood inside the array eye and imbued his feet in mana. The ground lit up once again before forming words:

[ Elemental Affinity- Water

Inherent Nature- Unobstructed fluidity

Aptitude- Potioneer, array master, inscription specialist... ]

Lin had already described to students that they will have at least one elemental affinity and at least one inherent nature, and a few aptitude compatibilities.

Elemental affinity was simple to understand.

There were five great elements and a lot of derived elements. The five great elements were earth, water, fire, wind, and ether.

The derived elements were born from the combination of the five great elements in various proportions and permutations.

For example, ice is a derived element formed by combining water, wind, and cold fire.

Likewise, the derived element of lava would be the result of the fusion taking place between earth and fire.

Those who have derived elements as their affinity would also have the affinity for the elements that are involved in the derivation. That means if someone has ice as their elemental affinity, they can also be considered to have an affinity in water, wind, and cold fire mentioned above.

But great element affinities granted by the derived element would be different from their normal affinity standards.

That meant when one had their elemental affinity as water, their elemental affinity would not get divided. 100% of their elemental affinity belonged to the water element.

But water elemental affinity granted by having the derived elemental ice affinity would prohibit the ranker from having 100% affinity in any of the involved parent elements. If their ice element is formed by 70% water, 25% wind, and 5% cold fire, then the ranker would only be able to make use of the water element with 70% efficiency.

Having a derived element affinity came with its own set of advantages and disadvantages, after all.

For example, the derived element affinity meant possessing inherent affinities in at least two great elements or more. This was a huge advantage.

The ability to make use of two or more great elements meant having an edge over the rankers who only had one great element affinity in terms of variation. The ones with derived element had more spells and techniques to choose from.

The disadvantage of having a derived element affinity was the lack of suitable ranking techniques to choose from. The disadvantage became even more apparent when it came to oddball derived elements like mud, haze, sound, etc.

Another disadvantage of having a derived element and practising a ranking technique related to it was the sudden increment in difficulty level when it came to progressing further in a ranking journey.

A ranker practising a ranking technique corresponding to their derived element will progress at a slower rate than their peers when the amount of effort was the same.

The advantages and disadvantages of any element would usually nullify each other.

So having a derived element did not mean gaining superiority over other rankers. Nor does having a single affinity in one great element means your potential as a ranker is limited.

There's no superior element. Only superior ranker.

This was a saying famous within the ranker communities. It accurately highlighted the importance of ranker's hard work.

The term 'Inherent Nature' described the way the rankers' elements would behave normally. For example, in Jake's case, his elemental affinity was water. And the Inherent Nature section described the way Jake's element would behave inherently.

The Inherent Nature section would help the rankers zero in on a suitable ranking technique for themselves belonging to their element and nature. A ranker would progress quickly and efficiently while facing less obstruction if they practise in a ranking technique compatible with their element and nature.

The aptitude section takes account of rankers' body stats, mana signatures, elemental affinities, and inherent natures to suggest a suitable path for them.

The student would head to meet an academic staff appointed to them to discuss the path and class suitable for them, post their aptitude test. The expert would then suggest a list of suitable ranking techniques available in LA and their respective values.

The experts would also suggest the students in courses suitable for their element, path, and class. Of course, these courses needed merit points too.

Good thing was that the aptitude test and consultation was free. LA was heartless where it needed to but would also support the students where it deemed they needed supporting.

Next was Eren's turn. He went ahead and stood inside the array before imbuing his mana in his feet.

Eren had already taken a precaution and told Reen to wait inside his dorm room in her inorganic form. He didn't want her presence to interfere in his aptitude test.

Soon Eren's test became known to every student in class 1/C.

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Author's Note: Hello. 'A Chaotic Symbiosis' received third place (bronze trophy) in #WPC216. The writer in me is glad and feel validated. I Hope VEH does even better in #WPC218. ?

### **Chapter 67: Element of Time**

Soon Eren's test became known to every student in class 1/C.

[ Elemental Affinity- Time (ether + remaining great elements in differing quantities)

Lightning (wind + water + fire)

Inherent Nature- Devour, Speed, XX

Aptitude- Close combat expert, potioneer, weapon specialist, berserker... ]

Everyone including Eren was tongue-tied!

The students and Lin's panel were shocked because elements like Time were extremely rare. There were not many suitable ranking techniques and spells available for this derived element.

There was even an ongoing theory that time and space shouldn't be considered as derived elements at all. They should be counted in the list of great elements if not above them.

But having a rare derived element like time wasn't the end. Eren had another derived element affinity.

It seldom happens that a ranker has two derived elements. And the fact that one of the derived elements was time made it even more unbelievable.

Eren was surprised as well. He thought he already knew about what element he was going to have even before the aptitude test. Turned out he was wrong.

Eren had a lightning element in his previous timeline as well. So the test showing that element wasn't surprising to him.

But the element of time was something Eren wasn't expecting. He quickly thought of the gem he was integrated with, in this timeline. The gem had to be the root cause behind his newfound time affinity, an additional trait of devouring in his default inherent nature of speed, and malleable aptitude that was compatible with so many professions.

Eren thought he had his path figured out because he already knew about his affinity, nature, and aptitude. But now he needed to rethink his approach.

Lin's panel or the available academy staff were unable to give Eren an optimal consultation because of his time element. The element of lightning was rare and powerful. But it wasn't so out of the ordinary that the staff of LA would get stumped over.

But the concept of time was elusive. It had special ranking techniques and spells. And since these techniques and spells were limited in number, they can only accommodate rankers with certain types of aptitude.

Lin's panel and the academy staff neither had anyone with the element of time in their lot nor they studied or read anything about the techniques related to time. Frankly, they were not qualified to guide Eren. He needed special consultation.

Therefore, Lin declared that Eren will be provided with his consultation later on by the academy after finding the right personnel to do so. Eren agreed and went back to his place. This time his return was traced by a lot of eyeballs.

The aptitude test continued!

There were a fair amount of students with derived element affinities. But nobody could shock the crowd as much as Eren did.

Eren didn't mind the attention he was getting. He knew that soon this attention would shift to other pieces of information Lin was going to give them regarding how the academy works.

Then the rat race would begin. And his existence would soon get overlooked. If he acted the same way as his past self that is.

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Lin continued his explanation after the aptitude test and the consultation for all the students except Eren's were finished:

“Now that you have an idea about your element affinity, inherent nature, and aptitude, you can think about the path you want to pursue based on the given consultation and your preferences.

Make sure you take your time to choose the right path for yourself. Don't rush into anything. Taking your time, in the beginning, is always better than regretting your choice later on. You'll have to regress in your ranking journey to restart with a better path if that happens.

Now let's talk about lectures, merit points, and more!

If you think your entry into the academy was all that was required to gain any type of knowledge LA has in store for its students, then you are wrong. LA is not a utopia from your dreams.

Remember sir Rufus' speech. You'll have to pay for gaining knowledge and everything related to it here.

Of course, the academy won't suffocate the students from all sides. You have something called homeroom lectures.

Whatever the homeroom professor panel teaches, it will be free of charge for that respective class. That means you don't have to pay with merit points when attending lectures conducted by me or my panel. This is only applicable for students belonging to the 1/C class.

You need to find professors or assistant professors that belong to your element, class, subject of interest, or skill level yourself if the homeroom lectures are not enough for you. You'll have to pay with merit points to attend their lectures or be part of various programs organized by them.

Apart from lectures, the students will have to pay for lending books from the library, various ranking techniques, spells, and everything else that is worth your merit points.

The merit points can be obtained through completing training schedules, completing assignments, performing exceptionally in ranking wars and various other means you'll come to know later on.

There's no scope for cheating in any form. Your blood-bound ID stone will keep track of your every progress. It will also display the number of merit points you have.

Oh, right? Most of you still don't know the various functions of your new ID stones, right? Let me first list them quickly before proceeding any further.”

Lin started explaining ID stones' functions to the students. Most of them were surprised. They started firing their mana senses in all the directions at once after finding out about the importance of knowing the BTP of those around them.

Eren had already told Jake about keeping his BTP visibility private. And the latter understood its seriousness and quickly learned how to save his hide for the time being.

Most weren't so lucky. The students were going to act as both hunters and prey among themselves after knowing about each other's BTPs. Only then did Lin tell them about how to keep their BTPs private.

Everyone understood LA wanted them to fight among themselves. That's why they released information about BTP visibility after highlighting the importance of that particular body stat.

Every student had been accredited with 1000 monthly merit points after Lin's panel finished explaining the functions of the ID stones and how to use merit points.

Merit point was the official currency inside LA. It didn't have any physical manifestation. It would only get recorded on students' ID stones. And students would be able to carry out their transactions with each other or with LA and academy staff using these merit points.

Merit points suddenly became more important for students than the money and Extol they had.

But it wasn't like the Eddies and Extols were completely useless. A fixed amount of them could be converted into merit points. The exchange rate was subject to change on various factors.

Converting real money to merit points was practically wasting money, from a layman's perspective. Oftentimes one wouldn't get their money's worth. And merit points couldn't be officially converted back into real money.

But this exchange was worth it for students with heavy wallets. It had the potential of giving them the edge they were missing.

Of course, there was a monthly cap involved to prevent rich kids from gaining too much advantage. But the money still played a huge part in nurturing students to their fullest.

LA was an academic institute. But it needed money to run and function properly. The Kingdom's grants would only cover the academy's bare necessities. It gained a huge sum from keeping the merit points system ongoing.

Students got to know about the ranking wars that would start a week from now.

Ranking wars had many types. There were intraclass, interclass, and inter-year ranking wars on one vs. one level. Then there were party-based ranking wars of the same types.

So there were six types of ranking wars in total. Each came with its set of rules.

Winning in the ranking wars would grant you war points. These war points would be tallied each month to declare top students in each category. These top placeholders would receive additional merit points based on their position in ranking wars.

Intraclass wars would take place between two individuals or two parties belonging to the same class. A student needed to participate in at least one intraclass war every week, either personal or party-based.

The individuals or parties involved in the intraclass war need to bet a minimum of 100 merit points on the battle. Therefore, the winner would receive 200 merit points and the loser would gain nothing.

Students needed to participate in at least one inter-class war every month, either individual or party-based. It would take place between individuals or parties belonging to different classes within the same year.

The individual or parties needed to bet a minimum of 200 merit points for inter-class wars. The winner of the match would get 400 and the loser would gain nothing.



And finally, the students needed to participate in inter-year wars at least once every three months, either on an individual level or party-based. The betting amount would be 500 merit points.

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Apart from merit points, the students would also receive war points. War points would be granted by the match referee. And the amount was depended on students' battle performance.

Unlike merit points, the loser of the match would also receive war points based on their performance. If the match was neck to neck, there'd be practically no difference between war points allocated to both sides.

The merit points would be divided among the party members equally if a party has won the game. But the same would not be the case with war points. The number of war points would only be dictated by the students' involvement and their performance in the match.

In short, there was no easy way to gain war points. The students needed to actively participate in every battle and beat their opponents effortlessly to gain maximum war points for themselves.

The war points would decide the placeholders in various categories. Every set of top players from these categories would receive additional merit points by LA.

Intraclass war rankings would be updated every week. Only the top 20 students (out of 100) would be considered as placeholders in this category.

Inter class war rankings would be updated every month. Only the top 100 students (out of 500) would be considered as placeholders in the category.

Inter year war rankings would be updated every three months. Only the top 100 students would be considered as placeholders in the category.

Inter year wars would usually take place between the individuals or parties belonging to classes that had only one year of academic difference. For example, battles between first-year individuals and second-year individuals. Or third-year individuals and fourth-year individuals.

Therefore to gain maximum benefits, students would participate in all the categories and score a win in most of them. They could practically double or triple the number of merit points they receive monthly by participating and winning in ranking wars.

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There was no such thing as ties in these matches. Either the students need to force each other to give up or make them unable to battle.

If both sides are unable to continue the battle for some reason, then the result of the battle would be decided by the match referee based on their performance.

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The students would also receive various passes randomly after winning the matches. There were various types of passes one can gain and make use of during battles.

For example, the Right to Battle pass would force someone to accept their opponent's challenge even if they have already participated in a similar battle. Then there was the Right to Skip Battle pass that would allow someone to counter the Right to Battle pass or skip the minimum participation requirement.

Then there were opponent-restricting or self-strengthening passes. These passes were also individual-based or party-based.

Just like merit points and war points, these passes were issued on ID stones. The spectral screen would show the number of merit points, war points, and passes available to the students.

Normally these passes would only be issued by the match referee if and when the individual or a party showed overwhelming performance and won their matches spectacularly against equally tough opponents.

Students were allowed to exchange these passes among themselves unless they were user-bound. These passes could be stacked depending upon their types and situations.

These passes had the power to give the advantage to a weaker side to face a stronger opponent with equal footing. The students would normally store and use them only when they needed to participate in inter-year matches.

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The benefits of a junior side winning against a senior side were huge in terms of merit points and war points. The prestige that came with it was also incomparable.

Intraclass battles were usually fought between individuals. And students preferred meeting the minimum requirements in inter-class and inter-year battles by being in a party.

Intraclass battles would require students to place a minimum wager of 100 merit points. Even if they were to lose the battle, it wouldn't hurt them much.

But the merit point amount of 200 and 500, for inter-class and inter-year battles respectively, was too much for an individual to wager on. The chances of losing the match were higher in these battles. So losing meant losing a hefty amount of merit points.

Participating in these matches by forming a party would allow the students to share the burden. Even if they lose the match, the impact won't be that high. The only downside of party-based battles was the winning amount would be divided among the party members.

In short, ranking wars had created a certain ecosystem. There would be a steady supply of merit points if students were to participate and win in these battles consistently. They just needed to choose their opponents in such a way that it would always ensure their win.

That's why knowing the BTPs of your opponents was a crucial piece of information. Most students regretted not knowing how to use the ID stone's functions beforehand. They could have used that information to quickly score loads of merit points for themselves.

The ranking wars were going to start next week. First to start would be intraclass wars. Eren was going to use the BTP information he gained that day to wreak havoc on the students.

Jason was regarded as the newbie killer in Eren's previous life. He had dried the merit points of so many students that they had given him this name.

Just like Eren, Jason had also collected the BTP information about all the first-year students. Eren was the one who copied Jason's idea in this timeline.

### **Chapter 68: E-Rank Strengthening**

Lin kept explaining to his students some more nuanced details that the students would be required to know later on. He covered everything that was related to the academy's rules and regulations.

It was already lunchtime when the lecture was finished. The students rushed to the canteen and started having their lunch in a jiffy, lest the ordering window gets closed.

Jake and Eren did the same. But this time they were accompanied by a pair named Becky White and Steve Austin. Jake did most of the talking. Eren had already known about their BTPs of 10 and 12 respectively.

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The ID stone was an all-purpose artefact. It could be used to make note of things the user deemed necessary. A thought was all it took to store a text. The stored data would be seen on a spectral screen and could be accessed anytime.

Eren had made a special note of any student having lower BTPs than him. He had filtered out their names on the spectral screen and made a separate list containing the same.

Eren was going to hunt for these weaklings first for an easy load of merit points. He was no fan of beating a stronger opponent than himself just to get the mental satisfaction of being a superior ranker than them.

He had lived a life of old age. That age had taught him there are no benefits in cultivating hubris. Never underestimate your opponent or overestimate yourself. Because someday it'll lead you to your downfall.

He felt no shame bullying the weak. He knew he'd enjoy doing it because it'd give him maximum benefits with minimal effort. Although he wasn't shy about doing hard work, he didn't like to work in vain.

\*\*\*\*\*

Steve and Becky had joined the duo because they were looking to form a party for the upcoming inter-class battle. The party needed a minimum of five and a maximum of seven students to be formed. Steve would need only one more member should the duo decide to join them.

Eren gave a nod to Jake and the latter accepted their proposal to form a party. Steve looked like he wanted to say more but Eren got up from the table, indicating their conversation was over.

\*\*\*\*\*

Eren had not received any party request in his previous timeline. He wasn't even an F-Rank back then. He needed to search for people with similar bottom tier status as him to form a party with and compete with other such students.

It was an unwritten rule in the academy that rankless students will be left alone to their devices. That rule had saved Eren from being completely eaten up whole from the get-go.

Later on, when he entered the F-Rank, he formed a party with a few bottom tier students. They only entered the ranking wars to meet their minimum requirements and were ready to lose some points in exchange for double the penalty they'd receive by not participating.

But this time, Eren had decided to wring these students dry of their merit points. He can't continue to crawl at the bottom tier and expect to get his hands on good things placed at the top.

And Eren won't stay a recluse either. At least he won't let his nature become obvious to guess. He needed to mix up with students while masking his ambitions and plans. He needed his presence felt just enough so that he could remain part of the crowd while trying to gain one up over it.

That's why he thought of partying with Steve when the latter approached him in this timeline. The guy was aiming to become a berserker. He had the qualities of a natural leader.

Steve's presence was overwhelming on and off the battlefield. And he had a good eye for people. Eren's presence would get masked under the guy's shadow if the former made the right use of him.

Eren didn't care about Becky White. She was an average healer from what Eren remembered from his past timeline. She didn't excel or suck in her job.

Steve's team in Eren's previous life was average at best. Only the leader stood out from the rest. It was to be seen if his party in this life would follow the same fate or break the pattern!

\*\*\*\*\*

Eren retired to his room again. Lin's lecture had continued from where he had left off. The guy got to his core subject, which was the basic functions of arrays. Eren could see Lin's lack of expertise in the subject.

It was obvious that Lin was no genius in the field of arrays. He had been given that subject because of his parents and the guy couldn't refute the role to maintain his image of being worthy of the name given to him.

Academy wouldn't do something like this under normal circumstances. That meant Lin was forced to teach and in a way re-learn stuff about the field of arrays by someone higher in the ladder at the expense of students' misery. They would often get confused because of his conflicting statement in the field.

Only then did the class of 1/C understand why the previous students complained about such a professor being their teacher on arrays. The honorary hunter's first name didn't paint a fair picture above his calibre in arrays.

Eren locked the door of his dorm room, took the coffee mug off his shelf, and ordered it to return to its normal form. Eren had been given the choice of either turning into a coffee mug or necklace and she

chose the former. She felt her first inorganic form was the most relaxing one while she was forced to do nothing.

Reen soon morphed into a mass of slime before plopping over his shoulder.

Reen assumed the shape of Elena over Eren's shoulder in a miniature form and rubbed her body off on his neck by engulfing it like a necktie with her stretchy hands. Her eyes were closed and she had a smile like that of an innocent kid while she did this act.

Elena was a healer from Dom's party. She was one of the first females Reen had eaten. The slime demoness would often shift between morphing into females she had eaten so far.

"Eren, why do I have to separate from you every so often? I feel lonely when you are not with me."

\*\*\*\*\*

Reen's cognitive abilities had started growing at a rapid pace. Her intelligence wasn't to be underestimated. She just lacked experience in certain things when it came to societal and human interactions. The same experiences that she was gaining slowly but surely.

Reen had started realising her sense of existence more prominently, and consequently her master's too. It had dawned on her that she missed Eren. And Eren's promise of feeding plenty of 'food' to her in exchange for her prolonged inactivity wasn't going to cut it anymore.

Eren had another headache to worry about. How to feed Reen inside the academy? He certainly can't kill a student here. There were easier ways to commit suicide.

That left Eren with only a certain option. He was going to use that option extensively for the coming week to polish his combat skills and feed Reen at the same time.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Don't worry, Lil Reen. This arrangement would only be for a few weeks more until I have enough merit points to get a few things. Let me get a special spell for us from the academy. Then we'll never have to stay apart from each other"

Eren assured Reen to curb her feelings of longing and loneliness. Reen agreed and started rubbing her 'mini-Elena' body on him even more.

Eren had to go "all in" in the ranking wars in this timeline. He had many reasons to do so. One of them being Reen's problem, which needed to be sorted out sooner than later.

\*\*\*\*\*

Eren remembered his aptitude test after looking at Reen. The newly found inherent nature of devouring must have been the result of his connection to Reen. Forming a bond with demoness slime through blood ritual must have changed his mana signature, resulting in him gaining her inherent nature as well.

Eren wasn't sure if the gem only granted him the element of time. Or if there was something else. According to Lin, the XX error was an array miscalibration error.

This was because Lin didn't know about the existence of the gem inside Eren. It would have been a normal case of miscalibration had there not been an external and extraordinary factor added into the equation. But Eren knew the case wasn't normal. He guessed the gem would have the prowess to generate that error.

Eren didn't want to ask anyone about it and land himself in even bigger trouble. Curiosity kills the cat! And even her nine lives aren't enough to save her hide when that happens. So Eren didn't press Lin either and let him conclude the matter with miscalibration.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Butcher thought of something and wanted to try it out:

"Reen, isolate this room using your mana sense first. Then armour my body like usual."

Reen obliged. She first covered the dorm room using her mana sense. Then started coating Eren's body to make him enter his devilish form. Eren wanted her to start from the most basic power-up she could grant him.

Eren then observed the changes in his body stats using the spectral screen. As he thought, the ID stone was able to quantify the boost he received after entering the devilish form.

His MP and INT didn't receive any boost. But the values of HP, AGI, and STR had gone up. This affected his BTP value as well.

Eren's BTP was at 14 before assuming this form. But that value had been shot up to an incredulous number of 30, which was regarded as the limit of F-Rank.

Eren asked Reen to strengthen him some more and that had finally changed his BTP value to 42, in the realm of E-Rank. This was the limit at which Reen could strengthen Eren before his body started facing drawbacks.

This was an improvement. Eren could only strengthen himself to the limit of F-Rank when he was rankless. But now that he was in the initial stage of F-Rank himself, he could skip an entire rank and enter E-Rank after Reen strengthened him.

The BTP value of 42!

Eren had to field-test and adapt to these strengthened body stats before he could make use of them. But he needed to be away from prying eyes before commencing his battle practises.

This was tough to do in the academy. But not impossible. Eren would need to spend some merit points to book an isolated practise room for himself. Another reason for him to earn more of them.

## **Chapter 69: Linda's Consultation P1**

The next day.

Six days before Eren's solo intra-class ranking war.

Eren was waiting inside a simple room in the evening. The morning's lecture was conducted by Peter Griffin. He was a goofy guy but his ranger skills were good. Too bad, Eren already knew about what the assistant professor had to say in his lectures.

Eren tried not to sleep in class due to his waning interest in the lectures. His sheer will and Peter's entertaining comments somehow managed to keep him awake.

Eren had been told to wait in this room located in another building for his pending consultation. He didn't know what to expect from this session. Even he didn't read much about the element of time despite being a D-Rank adventurer in the previous timeline.

A person opened the closed door and entered the room. Eren looked back from his seat and was shocked to see someone he knew. But he masked his surprise with a welcoming smile and slight bow before that person could notice it.

The person who was going to offer consultation was a woman in her 30s. She had generic features and average stature. The most highlighting part about her was her hair, which was blood-red. The woman also reeked of a distinct booze smell associated with Golden Grain.

This person was none other than Linda Cardel from Jaime's panel. Eren had eavesdropped on the party's conversation in the Osan woods when it was out camping inside the forest, looking for the Butcher. What they didn't know at the time yet was that the Butcher got on their trail instead. Linda took her seat in front of Eren and pulled up Eren's aptitude test on her spectral screen.

"Hello, young one. Name's Linda Cardel. I serve as an assistant professor in sir Jaime's panel. I'm told you have been detected to possess a time element and require some consultation. What have you been told by that idiot Lin so far?"

Eren was in a dilemma. Should he oppose the way Linda had addressed his homeroom teacher or should he let it pass? This wasn't because Eren liked Lin and was hurt or offended by the way this drunk lady with a loose tongue addressed him. But because he wanted to maintain decorum, even if it was as true as twenty Eddies bills. He decided to choose a middle ground.

"Ah! ADAPT Lin told me that someone with a time element would be better able to provide consultation. So he told me to wait till the academy finds someone. He also told me that since the element of time is rare, the techniques and spells related to it are extremely difficult to get one's hand on as well as expensive."

Eren highlighted the ADAPT part in his speech by speaking it a little louder before honestly telling Linda what he knew about the time element so far.

Adapt was an official prefix to address a D-Rank entity. Similarly, the prefixes for F-Rank and E-Rank entities are Novice and Ace respectively. The C-Rank entities are formally addressed as Experts before their names are called out in a formal setting.

Linda nodded at him before expounding further on the subject:

"Indeed. Element of time is as elusive as the element of space, probably even more since there aren't many ways we humans can make use of it. The concept is too vague for us to wrap our heads around.

That's why understanding the element of time and aptly employing it in your profession is even more difficult than getting techniques and spells related to it. There were not many time-element rankers in the past. And those who were didn't describe enough about what they thought of using that element for themselves. The power of time manifested differently within each of them. So it was difficult to draw a linear relation.

Only one thing is common among all time-element rankers. Most of us have a drug addiction to deal with the side effect that comes with using time-related techniques and spells. That's because most of us have to deal with uncontrollable bouts of time dilation.

Experiencing time dilation can be the most wonderful, most beneficial, most bizarre, and most horrible thing.

Wonderful because it alters your perception of time than your peers around you, allowing you to experience the passage of time differently than them.

Beneficial because when you see everything in slow motion, you technically have more time to think about the right countermeasures in case you are being attacked.

But slowly that time dilation starts looking bizarre because no normal ranker would be able to keep up with you even when you want to have a normal conversation with them outside the battles.

Practising the element of time changes your perception of time slowly but surely. It either makes you experience things happening around you slowly or at a fast rate depending upon the technique and spells you are using.

Soon you'll find that your normal sense of time is being overwritten by the altered perception.

Your normal sense and the altered perception, therefore, would fight within themselves to define what's normal for you. This often results in time-element rankers experiencing sudden bouts of altered time perception even without them employing any techniques or spells at the time.

Soon, the advantages of having a time element are overshadowed by this side effect. Experiencing a time dilation when you don't want it can make you angry and anti-social because of the frustration that comes with it.

Imagine you are talking normally with your party members. Then suddenly the altered perception hits you and you have to hear their voices in slow motion. These voices stop making sense when the altered perception is cranked to a sufficient degree. And when you start talking, the party members with normal perception of time won't be able to make sense of what you said in a rapid-fire speech. Then imagine almost all human interactions like that. Horrible, right?

Therefore, a time-element ranker has no choice but to use some drugs to keep these bouts to their minimum or curb their effects. It can turn out to be pretty vexing otherwise. I'm no stranger to using this "time-tested" remedy myself.

It is considered bad luck to have a time element. First, you'll have to struggle twice as hard as normal people with normal elements if you decide to continue your ranking journey while keeping that element at the centre. You will have to face difficulties in getting appropriate technique and spell suitable for



your nature and profession. You will have to get them at a way higher cost even if and when they do become available to you. And third, you will have to deal with the side effects.

But it's not like the element doesn't come with an advantage.

First, when you get a handle on your element, it becomes almost impossible for anyone to kill you instantly during an ambush.

Second, you will be the most deadly force mid-battle because of your spot-on counters and extraordinary responses even by rankers' standards.

This is especially true for close combat experts with the time element who can tear through the opponent's defence like a thin sheet of paper. The time-element mages can't be interrupted during their spell-casting. That's because they're already done speaking out the incantations before their opponents thought of disrupting them.

Third, elements of space and time are special in the way that they are derived from the fusion of all the great elements in different proportions. So theoretically, you'll be able to use any great element for yourself. Although you won't enjoy 100% affinity in any of them, you can introduce variations in your profession to make up for it.

And finally, the fourth advantage. As the element of time is a derived element born from the fusion of all the great elements, its spells won't create a conflict even if you decide to practise any other ranking technique.

The effectiveness of the time-element spells would decrease as a result. But you won't have to struggle as much to get a decent ranking technique. Neither will you have to resort to working harder than most of your peers just to keep up with them. Plus, the bouts of time dilation would be less frequent and less severe than what you'd get if you practise in the time-element ranking technique.

Furthermore, choosing to practise in any other element won't turn out to be a bottleneck in future when your mastery over your time element increases. You can always decide to choose a time-element ranking technique the next time when you rank up without having to regress in your journey. The zero-conflict advantage with other great as well as derived elements extends in this pointer as well.

Even I practise a wind-element ranking technique and only use time-element spells related to my profession as a historian. I'm the first and as of now the only known time-element historian of my or your generation currently active in the entirety of Edinburgh kingdom. I have many advantages over normal historians, and that too when I don't even practise a time-element ranking technique.

Is there anything you want to ask about the explanation provided so far?"

## **Chapter 70: Linda's Consultation P2**

"Is there anything you want to ask about the explanation provided so far?"

Linda stopped her speech and asked Eren to see if he had any queries. The latter voiced his question soon after:

"Ace professor Linda, do you think the profession of a close combat expert is more suitable for me than being a potioneer according to your explanation?"

Eren asked with slight anticipation. He didn't have to think this hard when he only had the element of lightning as his element. Although the great element of water was considered to be the most ideal element of a potioneer, he could do just fine using his lightning element.

That's because Eren's derived element was made from water, wind, and fire. The spells related to water and fire were very useful in potion-making. So he dealt with his lack of 100% water element affinity by introducing variations in simple potioneering spells related to water, wind, and fire.

But if his new time element pushed him towards being a close combat expert, then he'd have to rethink his priorities. He'd still walk the path of a potioneer. It's just that he will have to prioritize being a close combat expert more.

"Yes and no. If you can get time-element spells related to the profession of potion-making, the element will play a vital role. If not, then being a close combat expert will be more suitable for you since it is relatively easy for you to get the elemental spells related to that profession.

Do you know why I called Lin an idiot after looking at the result of your aptitude test? It's because of his remark of calling the 'XX' entry in the Inherent Nature section a miscalibration in the array. Technically he is not wrong. But he has failed to understand what caused that miscalibration.

The array used for aptitude testing works on previous database entries of rankers that have been accumulated over a long period. Your mana signature changes according to your element, inherent nature, and a lot of covert and overt factors about you.

Theoretically, even the minutest of changes in rankers' ranking journey can be traced and deduced with their mana signature. Of course, the array used for the aptitude test isn't that advanced. But it doesn't have to dig deep into the rankers' pasts who have just started their ranking journey.

The purpose of maintaining database entries of such mana signatures generation after generation is so that the array can find a few close matches to your mana signatures and predict what professions will suit you best based on those matches.

Inherent nature is something that has been categorized by very high-ranked entities after considering a large sample size. Since the mana signatures reflect the trait of the rankers, it also becomes possible for rankers to predict the mana signatures based on their traits. This linear relation is the principle behind the functioning of the array.

The array would show blank space or XX error when it doesn't have a matching entry in its database. This is extremely rare considering the database has been nurtured for so many years now. But it couldn't be helped since the case was related to someone with a time element. The rankers belonging to the time element are rare. So the sample size of time-element database entries is restricted as well.

The XX means there's no entry of another time-element ranker with a similar mana signature as you. The inherent nature of your time element is different from what had been observed and recorded in the database so far.

Lin couldn't understand the reason behind the miscalibration even after studying and teaching arrays for a living. Hence I called him an idiot. The knowledge of one's parents won't get automatically transferred in the child's brain after all.

Lin should REALLY think about changing his first name. It's an insult to the Sansara Sage, having this ill-informed array master teaching stuff about arrays to gullible students, as someone who shares his first name.

Anyway, coming back to your problem. I checked your aptitude test results and they are pretty skewed if you ask me. Your time element doesn't have a known inherent nature as displayed by the XX.

Then you have another derived element in your arsenal that has three great elements fused into it. But even after all these anomalies, the professions you can opt for remain relatively traditional and well-known.

I can understand the compatibility for a close combat expert and weapon specialist because of your lightning element and inherent nature of speed.

Element wise, you are not a perfect match for potion-making. But since your file record mentions your guardian as a C-Rank healer and a potioneer, I can imagine you must have dabbled in making elementary potions from a very early age. And that is reflected in your mana signature now.

But the inherent nature of devouring isn't linked with either of your derived elements. Plus, you even have a berserker listed in your weird aptitude compatibility choices. If I didn't know you were a 16-year student, I would have believed the person undergoing this test was a beat-up ranker who had probably dipped his luck in a lot of professions before finally deciding to focus on a single path.

Your mana signature is convoluted enough to derive such an assumption.

Do you know what's even weirder? Your time element hasn't influenced your aptitude compatibility choices as far as I can tell. It's like someone has lent you their elemental affinity. Which is as bizarre as it is farfetched.

Maybe your mana signature has two or more polarizing attributes that sometimes complement and sometimes create conflict with each other. We are never really entirely sure about anything when it comes to time-element rankers.

So I'll conclude my consultation by keeping things simple. I'd suggest you choose the easy way. Focus on getting an F-Rank lightning element ranking technique related to the profession of close combat expert first.

Keep everything related to time-element ranking techniques on the back burner for now. Think about getting them once you have broken into D-Rank or above.

Prioritize finding attacking-type time-element spells related to the profession of close combat expert or any other suitable profession. And then include them if and when you can in your battle style.

You can keep treading on the path of being a potioneer, thanks to your derived element of lightning. You'll need to work hard, but you'll eventually get the results you want with enough investment.

Are there any other queries you have?"

Had it been Ken Riverine in Eren's shoes right now, he would have chosen to go for the most difficult path like a 'true protagonist' he was. He would have opted for a time-element ranking technique to

practise from the get-go. And then he would dominate everyone on his level with his focus, commitment, and sheer fokin will.

But Eren was not like Ken. He agreed with Linda's practical consultation.

The Butcher was not looking to cut corners in his hard work. But a particular path's efficiency was equally important to him. That's why he deliberated hard over choosing the right profession in this timeline. Otherwise, he would have opted for the path that he was most familiarized with, the path of a berserker.

Eren knew what Linda was talking about when she said it seemed that element of time was something that was lent to him. He knew this was due to the incorporation of that gem.

It was the gem's power manifesting in Eren's elemental affinity and inherent nature. He preferred polishing what belonged to him first before working on the power that he wasn't familiarized with for the time being. So he chose to go with Linda's consultation. He declared his intentions to Linda before taking his leave.

Linda was left alone in the room, seemingly brooding over something. It wasn't apparent with her cadence, but a sudden bout of time dilation had struck her when she had entered the room. When a ranker is proficient enough in their innate powers, they tend to activate their powers subconsciously using the honed sixth sense. Therefore she could minutely observe Eren's changing facial expressions before the latter took note of the event.

'Why did this kid act surprised when he first saw me? Does he know me? And if he does, why did he mask his expressions quickly after?'

Linda was trying to come up with an answer but she couldn't find anything on the kid. She just shook her head and decided to give up on those trains of thought. For now!