

Vile 691

Chapter 691 First Spell Creation

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Two worshippers were seen fighting inside the battle ring. The Ogre Lord and the Orc Leaders exchanged moves at various places within a short period.

Both worshippers had been at it for a while. They had used their trump cards to their fullest. And yet, their opponent didn't seem to get deterred by them.

Wind-Fire Wings

Varhan used his fusion spell when he was pushed back by Kaal's weapons attack. He used his body's momentum to propel himself into the air before stabilizing his flight.

Varhan's wings started feeling the pressure as Kaal started entering his wind element to make the air around unnaturally heavy. The Orc, however, resisted this alternation with his own affinity to the wind element and took an even higher flight.

"Varhan... no matter how many times you try to find respite in the air, it's not going to do you any good."

With the force of the jump, Kaal created a mini crater. He somehow managed to get close to Varhan before launching his attack.

Kaal created numerous wind-element flying slashes aimed at Verhan during this time. At the same moment, the air around him turned jelly-like and tried to pin him in his place.

Wind-Fire Wings flapped and their fire spread around. It penetrated the jelly-like air that had been created around Varhan. With another blast of mana that was generated due to the spreading of wings, the jelly-like substance was incinerated, enabling Eren to move once again.

Varhan narrowed his eyes as he tried to change his position quickly. But at this point, he had come to realize that it was not possible to dodge all the attacks thrown at him.

Blitz Shield

Varhan wore his defensive cloak once again as he used his weapon spells to defend against the incoming flying slashes. Just when he thought he was done with everything, the jelly-like wind-element substances started forming around him.

"Hahaha. Even if you can fly, the wind is my ally. Let's see how you deal with this. Wind Fangs!"

Kaal said to Varhan as he was seen landing on the ground. He had already started casting another wind-element spell around Eren. He raised his free hand to guide the projectiles he was making.

A bunch of snake-fang-shaped projectiles began to form around Eren in the air. Each of these fangs was milky white and about a meter long. Their pointy sides pointed straight at Varhan.

Varhan looked at Kaal with a serious expression before smirking at him. He then started flying downward at critical velocity while his body was being coated in fire element mana.

'That meteor-like strike once again? I'll not fall for it the second time.'

Kaal told himself and smirked. He guided the wind fangs to follow Varhan's movements and prepared himself to counter his incoming meteor-like strike.

Varhan saw Kaal immediately trying to put himself in a defensive position. He had an evil smile on his face as he suddenly changed his course of action. He stopped in the air abruptly before flying way higher than before with Total Control and his time-element spell.

'Time to test this move.'

Kaal thought to himself as he made his wings wider and spread them. He then started flapping them while injecting them with his mana. The wings soon started to develop feather-like shards that buzzed and glowed with their distinct mana pulses.

The wind fangs generated by Kaal had almost caught up with Eren's sudden maneuver. They were about to close the distance when a shower of sparking fire-element shards hit them.

These were the same shards Eren had created on his wings. Then they began raining down upon the incoming wind fangs and on their creator, who had taken a pseudo flight once again to approach him.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

The wing fangs were blasted off by various small wind-fire shards attacking them at the same time in quick succession. Their creator was caught off guard as well. He couldn't run anywhere because he was in the air. He could not change his course. All he could do was defend himself with the weapon he had.

Bang. Bang. Boom.

Kaal faced numerous attacks from those small shards that managed to break past the defense created with his weapons. The sheer volume of the feather-like wind-fire shrapnels was so overwhelming that they managed to breach past Kaal's natural mana defense by landing on the same spot.

"Aaaaargh!"

The fusion of wind and fire had exceeded conventional damage output and its limitations. It started to hurt Kaal as he was forced to stop his pseudo flight and approach Eren.

Kaal gritted his teeth as he defended himself against the shrapnels falling from Eren's continuous use of the spell. He knew that he only needed to make it through the match and Eren's mana storage would soon run out before him.

Kaal wanted to face Varhan at his peak. But he didn't want to die at the festival to achieve that. Like most monsters who were born here, he wasn't overly attached to Echidna or its beliefs. Thus, when he saw that Varhan was giving him a tough fight, he immediately resorted to playing the endurance game.

Eren knew Kaal was planning to maintain a distance after seeing that he could use his fusion spell to attack. Even he was surprised by the spell's effect when he first saw it.

This was the first spell Eren had created with his own attainments in both his lives. The first spell he could call completely his own. He had this idea when fighting with Baran. And after continuous practice and countless revisions, he created this spell that was based on his wind-fire elemental fusion.

The first spell Eren had created was a fusion spell. In addition, it was an indicator of his progress in his elemental attainments. Eren watched Kaal approach the ground hurriedly and smiled. He wasn't willing to allow him to run anymore. The duel had been dragged on for far too long already.

"Fire Snakes!"

Chapter 692 Defeating Kaalmaahen

"Fire Snakes!"

Five large boa snakes appeared on the ground. They were larger than Eren's previous summons. They were also more lively and seemed to have much larger fangs.

These five snakes hissed as they watched their prey approach them at critical velocity. The summoned creatures leaped from their positions and targeted each of Kaal's limbs respectively. The last boa snake targeted his neck.

Hiss.

By the time Kaal realized Eren had set a trap for him on the ground, it was already too late. He ignored the wind-fire feathers crashing on him and turned toward the ground. He used his broadsword to chop the boa snake's head which was trying to attack his neck. But he couldn't do anything about the others.

The wind-fire feathers crashed onto his back and exploded. The boa snakes tightened around his limbs and bit wherever they could. Then they stretched all his limbs until he was unable to land safely.

Boom.

Kaal crashed to the ground with his transformed body, creating a mini crater. The snakes also felt pain when they crashed with him. However, they recovered from their pains quickly and cast fireballs each, adding to Kaal's misery. All this while, Eren rained down his wind-fire feathers on him continuously.

The butcher didn't stop there. He soon manifested two Solid Spells in his hands before throwing them down right on Kaal's already exposed back.

Boom.

A cloud of lightning mana bloomed amid the chaos created by fire and wind element mana. The red lightning canceled Kaal's weak mana defense and allowed other spells to do more damage to him.

"Aaaaaargh!"

Kaal yelled in pain as he was bombarded with multiple spells at once. Before he could muster the courage and energy to change his position, he felt two feet landing on his open body.

Red Blitz Bolt.

Eren executed his attack spell from his feet and pierced Kaal's back. Since his feet had landed on the upper side of Kaal's exposed back, one of the Blitz bolts struck the area near his heart. The other pierced his right shoulder.

Kaal tried to get up from his position after feeling immense pain. However, he was prevented from doing so by Eren's continuous use of various spells on him at the right time, on the right limb.

The audience watched in absolute silence as the events started unfolding in front of their eyes. They could have never imagined that Ror's son would get owned so badly in the final match.

"My son..."

Ror was just about to approach the battle ring when he felt Har Jahar's presence locked on him. He looked at his king pleadingly, knowing full well what he would say. And that's what he got to hear.

"Don't interfere in the ritual, Ror. You know what happens when someone interferes in the ritual, right? You don't want your original tribe to get wiped out, do you?"

Ror watched with maddening emotions as his son was bombarded with a variety of spells by Varhan. In the end, he couldn't watch it anymore and dropped his head—his eyes getting moist in the process. For he knew and could predict the result after this.

Kaal's transformation came undone after sustaining so many spells. The transformation itself was taxing on the body. So it came as no surprise when he felt incapacitated when he was kicked out of the state of Echi.

Kaal had been crying in pain and agony all this time. But when Eren thought that Kaal couldn't retaliate anymore, he stopped his attacks. He was exhausted too. And almost out of mana. The butcher wiped the sweat on his forehead with the back of his right hand while trying to catch a breath.

Varhan stepped away from Kaal and allowed him to turn and sleep on his back. He then looked at him to see his sorry face and almost moist eyes. As he struggled to get up, he looked at Varhan. However, he couldn't. His limbs didn't support his movements after all.

Varhan looked at Kaal and nodded his head in denial. He then took a long breath before pointing one of his swords at his neck. He swung his other sword and sent a mini Purple Reaver attack that created a line on the ground near his neck. A warning attack.

Varhan then looked at Har Jahar meaningfully. The latter waited for a while before addressing Kaal.

"Kaal, if you don't get up before I count to three, I'll consider this duel to have been won by Varhan."

Har Jahar said and looked in the audience's direction before speaking out loud.

"One..."

Kaal gulped and closed his eyes, causing teardrops to run down his face. He knew he wouldn't be able to get up from his current position in such a short time. So he admitted his defeat in a shaky voice while looking at his father.

"I... I accept defeat."

There was a deathly silence in the surrounding area as Kaal spoke. Har Jahar stopped counting immediately and looked at both the worshippers with interest. He didn't say anything for a while and just focused on observing Ror's reaction at the time.

Kaal's acceptance had sealed the fate for himself. It also marked the end of the duel.

The audience didn't speak for a whole minute before starting to clap for both the worshippers. There were also agitated speeches for Kaal and congratulatory speeches for Varhan. However, at this point, neither of the worshippers was paying attention to any of them.

Har Jahar got up from his seat after some time. His aura spread throughout the surrounding area, creating a heavy atmosphere. When the boisterous atmosphere quieted down, he spoke up in an emotionless tone to declare the match results.

"Varhan of the Durbag tribe wins the duel. Kaalmaahen will be given the responsibility of serving as the final sacrifice.

With this, the festival has entered the final phase. Bountiful rewards await us all. We all have something to look forward to."

Har Jahar smiled at his people before disappearing from his position. It was the time for final sacrifice.

Chapter 693 Learning About Sacrificial Ritual

"Who... who is this transgressor?"

An unknown voice sounded in the Telesterion as the spatial fabric above the air rippled from various points. All of the Echidnae got down on their knees and bowed in a submissive manner as they heard the voice.

It was the voice of their god's priest after all who was supposed to be even more significant than their king Har Jahar. Eren was standing on the altar platform near the spatial fabric disturbance. He knew that the question was meant for him.

The butcher held his arms folded behind his back as he looked at the ripples that were getting generated over the lucid spatial fabric. He chuckled before answering.

"I... I am what I need to be. Who am I talking to?"

Ror was visibly stressed when his new king casually addressed their god's priest, without answering any of their questions. But at this point, he couldn't do anything.

"Hm? You don't know who I am? How can..."

The voice was laced with surprise as it heard Eren's response. It also seemed to have learned something from that brief exchange. It took its time before adding up.

"Your Oni tongue sounds broken. And you don't know who I am. Am I talking to the denizen of the land of the forest?"

The voice asked Eren with curiosity mixed in its voice. The latter knew he couldn't hide that fact from the owner of that voice anyway. So he chose to play a different game before cutting all forms of communication.

Eren raised his hand and gestured for the war drums to stop playing. The sound of the war drums was somehow suppressed after the voice started talking. It was as if the war drums were located far away from the sacred hall. So when they stopped beating the war drums, the already present silence only intensified.

Eren then took a long breath before answering the question he was asked.

"That's right."

Eren spoke in a simple Oni tongue. It prompted the voice to ask another obvious question.

"Har Jahar?"

"No more," Eren chuckled before answering.

The voice was silent for some time and didn't speak. The spatial ripples also stopped forming with the same intensity as before. But they didn't stop.

"I see. What are you planning to do now?"

The voice started sounding grimmer than it already was. It had also started to change the atmosphere of the sacred hall. Ror and Kaal looked at the back of their newly crowned king, who kept his posture casual before answering.

"You tell me. What would benefit me the most? What opportunities are you ready to offer me? And at what cost?"

Eren had decided to poke the beast and see if he could gain anything out of it. The voice again took its time to reply.

"I understand now. I would like to know more about you but that can wait. First of all, let me tell you that there are a lot of benefits you can get just by doing what I tell you to.

You just need to release the divine flame that you have taken hold of."

The voice asked Eren to release the divine flame just as Alephee had predicted. However, it had not yet embarked on the offensive against Eren. He knew the owner of the voice was thinking that there would be benefits to be gained for themselves if they cooperated with him. And that's what Eren was making them think anyway.

Eren and voice then started to have a brief chat about how the sacrifice ritual worked. The butcher was testing the limits of Anfang's world will by asking the voice various questions.

Eren had also come to realize that the pyramid was the reason behind him not suffering any backlash this time. The reason the final sacrifice could be held here is because of the subspace and the pyramid. So this was the right place for Eren to gain as much information as he could about the world of Echidna.

The voice had also started to realize that Eren was not interested in sacrifice and the energy generated by it. He was also not too keen on increasing his ranking status with the help of sacrificial energy or blessing.

He was more interested in how it could be generated and used to open the spatial channels between the two gates. But it wasn't that easy for Eren to conceal his intentions from the owner of that voice for long.

Soon, the voice started treating the knowledge it held as its asset. It controlled the flow of the information while suggesting to Eren things he needed to do to gain benefits.

There were times when the connection would completely disappear before the priest put some effort on their end to reestablish it. They both knew that it was done by the Anfang's Will so they kept on recalibrating their questions and answers.

In the end, Eren had a general idea of how sacrificial energy could be used. He was also made aware of how he could gather it using various means and procedures. In addition to keeping a connection with Echidna, the energy was also needed to open a channel between the worlds.

"Transgressor, our Lord God is kind and merciful. Even though you have caused a significant disturbance in the ritual, I can see that you are willing to cooperate.

Could you not release the divine flame in good faith? We can then form a mutually beneficial setup and take our talks further.

You are from the land of the faithless. I am sure you are still not aware of many things about the past and present. Your path to power is also limited by your lack of knowledge. Believe in our god and we shall offer you all that you desire.

How does my offer sound?"

Eren had almost gotten what he needed from the voice. There were some obvious blanks left behind by the owner of the voice. But they were easy to fill for Eren with whatever knowledge he had gained from the digested memories.

His purpose was fulfilled. Now he needed some time to use the knowledge to his advantage. The whole time the voice was thinking about using Eren as Har Jahar was not there to sort things out for them anymore.

"I'll think about it."

Chapter 694 The Name They Shall Be Loyal to Forever

"I'll think about it."

Eren said and smirked. The divine flame was not lit up on the altar anymore. He then summoned his two swords and jumped. His two powerful slashes caused the altar to crack.

"You..."

As the connection was severed, the voice could not finish speaking its thoughts. The spatial fabric returned to normalcy when the altar cracked and another huge amount of sacrificial energy was released from it.

Aleph helped Eren condense the energy in a sphere of 10cm radius before freezing it with her time element spell. Like this, Eren had severed Anfang's connection with Echidna for the time being.

'When I am ready...'

Eren said and smiled crookedly while spinning the sphere over the tip of his index finger. In the next moment, the sphere was lost and he looked around himself.

He jumped from the altar that was almost cut in half and landed near Kirin. He offered her hand to get up and led her towards a certain place.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

The sound of war drums was heard once again as the Echidnae saw their newly crowned king lead Kirin towards the throne platform that was located beside the altar platform.

The butcher sat on the throne first. He then invited Kirin to sit on his lap before looking at the crowd.

"You wanted to know my name, right?"

Eren's voice sounded in the ears of his audience. The spectators started looking at him keenly as a result. His soul sense spread in the audience, letting them know that he was in complete control of the situation that was unfolding in front of them.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

The war drums didn't cut Eren's voice with their sound. Instead, they provided a mystic charm to it, as if what he was about to say next wouldn't be a casual statement but a prophecy.

The children of Echidnae were influenced by the unique atmosphere that was created in the sacred hall at this point. They all knew that from this point on they had cut their ties with Echidna. They were now a different breed of beings that did not belong to the foreign world they thought they belonged to.

They belonged to their new king. The king they had seen transformed into many of the children of Echidnae in front of their eyes. They needed time to process what they had experienced today.

But at this point, nobody held the doubt in their minds that Eren was their king. They listened to him intently as he addressed them and was about to say his name.

"I am the man who will join the pantheon of the highest order there is.

Sages or Sovereigns are only titles for entities standing at the top of the food chain in the land of the faithless. I will exceed those peaks— those titles of Anfang one day and search for higher peaks."

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Eren said and wrapped his arm around Kirin's waist. Because she was so close to him, she was affected by his charisma and his soul sense the most out of the audience. The butcher caressed her rosy cheek with his fingers before adding up.

"I am not saying I'll be the most benevolent leader you will ever have. I might end up being more tyrannical than Har Jahar ever was.

But I can assure you this. you won't have to risk your lives without the promise of gaining anything of equal importance anymore."

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Eren felt the emotions of every Echidnae that were directed towards him and smiled. He tucked Kirin's golden hair behind her elf-like ear and pinched her earlobe a bit before speaking further.

"What are my goals you ask? I want the power of every form so that I can enjoy the freedom of every kind.

This was something that was said to me when I was very small.

Have dreams larger than your existence.

Through dreams, you gain strength.

Through strength, you gain power.

Through power, you gain victories.

Through victories, your chains are broken.

I didn't understand it back then. But now I do."

The effect of Eren's soul sense on his audience increased as he spoke. The spectators started feeling a bit of a headache because of it. Some gritted their teeth and tried to keep their sanity in check while under the influence of what they considered to be a spiritual attack.

Even Eren wasn't immune to using his soul sense on so many people all at once. Despite this, he discovered that he had the capacity deep within him to maintain its effects before speaking further.

"Being weak is a crime. Glorifying the weakness and trying to make it a norm is even worse.

Thus, I shall seek power, wealth, and more.

I will be evil about all my needs and desires, no matter what the cost is. And do my absolute best to achieve them."

Eren had beads of sweat on his forehead as he felt his soul sense won't be able to hold out much longer. Unlike the mana sense which wasn't taxing to use in most cases, the soul sense was taxing on the person's very soul.

Still, he held on. This was the absolute control Eren wanted to imprint on every monster that was present in the sacred hall today. This was the proof of power he wanted everyone to have of him.

Eren looked at the now-pale faces of his spectators and couldn't help but smile. The sight somehow gave him the strength he needed to conclude things.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Anfang, Echidna, or the countless worlds and countless universes I know nothing about. My goals won't change no matter where I end up.

You can join me in my quest to reach for that pantheon. Be a spectator on the sidelines and watch me do the same without you. Or you can oppose me and get your existence erased from your current reality.

Either way, I'll get there. Either way, I shall reach the pantheon of infinities and claim my throne there."

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

"Eren Elijah Idril. That's the name you shall be loyal to. From now on and forever."

Chapter 695 Minerva Town

Minerva town.

This was a town inside Minerva's Utopia— a separate dimension a sage ranker named Minerva Midea had created to find a capable inheritor for her legacy. With the way things were progressing, this town was destined to become a city.

Minerva's town was surrounded by lush green forests and vegetation from all sides. In other words, the forest was part of the city's ecosystem.

The residential places for rankers and the management staff along with merchant shops were constructed around the tree trunks of giant trees. These tree houses and tree shops would host a variety of rankers.

A small river was flowing through the town, but its source and destination were unknown. This beautiful town would be reflected in the clear water of the river. The reflection of the blue sky gave the town an ethereal feel.

To reach from one shop to another while staying above the trees, various bridges and pools were constructed. The town would always have a lively vibe as soon as the first rays of the dawn bathed it in their illuminance.

Separate dimensions had their own ecosystems. Therefore, there were giant flowers, trees with giant fruits, and extravagantly large mushrooms surrounding the town. Some had even become part of its construction.

This town could only be accessed on a specific day of the week. One had to travel to White Raven city first to get here. After that, they would have to wait for the time when the spatial gates, which appear every week on a set schedule, would accept new challengers.

Today was going to be another new day in which this town would welcome new patrons. After entering the separate dimension, they would stay there for four days. After these four days were over, the participants would be brought outside the separate dimension.

The gates would only open three days after the previous batch of participants were kicked out. However, that only applied to those who participated in the tests conducted on the test grounds. In the separate dimension, the town was known as the safe zone. Those who had never left the safe zone could stay there for an indefinite period.

This was how the birth of a brand-new town took place in another dimension. It was run by the joint venture of three parties involved– White Raven guild, House Montmorency, and House Derringer.

The merchants and the staff appointed by the three forces could stay inside the separate dimension as long as they didn't leave the safe zone. Each week, they would welcome a new batch of rankers and offer them a variety of services.

However, the town only served as an emergency stockpile for rankers. Those who knew what they were doing would buy everything they needed from White Raven City where it was cheaper.

The three forces controlling the separate dimension had purposefully raised the prices inside the town so that rankers would start drawing comparisons in their heads about prices. Then they would begin preferring to buy in White Raven city and feel smart about their purchases.

After entering the separate dimension once and participating in the testing ground, rankers had to observe a four-week cooling down period in which they wouldn't be allowed inside Minerva's Utopia. The cooldown period would increase as the rankers progressed inside Minerva's Utopia.

The repeat participants would also see a decline in the rewards that they would receive in terms of quantity and quality. However, the testing grounds weren't the only places inside the separate dimension that could be exploited for resources.

Minerva's Utopia was a treasure trove. Its value would only increase with time as long as the people managing the place knew what they were doing. And so far, they were doing an awesome job.

The White Raven city. White Raven guild lands. Edinburgh.

This city served as the entrance to Minerva town. As such, it was getting busier ever since its inception a few months back.

It now boasted giant city walls that were manned by various rankers starting from Novice to Adept. One could imagine that these were only the forces that were shown on the surface. The city had many superior rankers guarding it against the shadows at all times.

The city walls did not mean the city would stay inside the secured area. It was still growing outward with various structures still getting built outside the first city wall.

Soon, White Raven city will have multiple districts with this rate of growth in construction and population increment. The city walls would only be used as reference points to distinguish between different districts.

White Raven had tremendous potential for growth. Nearby lands were all owned by a single guild. Since it was completely under one force's control, there were no disputes about its near limitless growth.

It would only take a few decades for the White Raven city to give a challenge to the city of New Beginnings if things progressed at the same rate. Of course, the city of New Beginnings was also growing, albeit at a slower rate than before. So for onlookers, it was tough to tell if the White Raven was a viable replacement for New Beginnings or not at this point.

The name White Raven had already created hype in rankers' psyches by being in the limelight for so many reasons. The guild's potions were getting sold at record-breaking levels and its tie-ups with two giant houses spoke volumes about its capacity.

Everything was being managed to its optimum level by those at the right place with the right designation. The city's management had turned into a clockwork where the system would take care of any of the problems arising inside the city without any of the higher-ups getting on the case personally.

White Raven city, which was being built in an intrinsic circle pattern, already had a radius of 50 miles. And this was just the beginning. It housed a variety of shops, restaurants, and other rankers-specific facilities.

Each day, it would welcome several rankers that had come here to try their luck inside Minerva's Utopia. Today was going to be no exception either.

"Lady Zee, it seems we have reached the place."

Chapter 696 Lady Zee in White Raven City

"Lady Zee, it seems we have reached the place."

Jules commented as she saw the city walls of White Raven from a distance while riding her colt. She was accompanied by lady Zee on her right and Tara Faelar on her left.

The trio had taken their time in coming here from Lionheart Duchy. The Illuminati sent them here to investigate the separate dimension and see if it could be used for their purposes.

There were three ladies dressed in normal adventurer attire approaching the city at a normal pace. Lady Zee had become the focal point of the trio for the spectators heading in and out of the city. Her ranking status as an Adept ranker and her beauty couldn't make her stay unnoticed after all.

Lady Zee was about to tell the duo about something when she noticed another duo of rankers that were a bit ahead of them. They were also riding their colts toward the city. She recognized one of them instantly. It was Arizihana Agnoth from the city of Silvermoon.

'Hm? What is Silvermoon's city guard captain doing here?'

Lady Zee arched her eyebrows and thought about it. She then concluded that White Raven city was enough of an attraction for every ranker in the kingdom to visit at least once.

"Let's go. We don't want to be left behind."

Lady Zee said and increased her speed.

The trio entered the city after paying the entrance fee. There were many queues for applicants to enter the city. Therefore, the process was relatively faster even amid the huge in-flow traffic.

Lady Zee led the two young ladies toward a unique facility inside the city that handled Utopia's entrance-related applications. She started observing the city's ever-growing splendor while on her way to the facility.

She could see there was a huge plateau in the center of the city. It was so far from the rest of the city's construction that it didn't look like it was part of the city's construction. Yet, she could see that the place served as an observation platform for all the three forces that were running the city and managing the separate dimension.

The Kukenan plateau also boasted various constructions, not all of which could be seen from where Lady Zee was standing. She needed to get to a higher altitude to see what was really up there.

However, she also knew that the plateau was the stronghold of the three forces. They wouldn't allow trespassing or her meddlesome attitude toward the rankers.

Lady Zee and the girls with her had come here to get information about the place and the White Raven guild itself. As such, she noted all the things she could observe in her mind.

The trio reached the place soon. Lady Zee saw Arizihana at the same facility once again. She was going to enter Minerva's Utopia just like them.

There was another long line awaiting their participation. They could gain access to the separate dimension by registering at the counter at the end of the line. Her first task would be securing her entrance before proceeding with the rest of the recon.

Lady Zee, Jules, and Tara made it to the counter. A gorgeous attendant in blonde hair greeted Lady Zee with a charming smile on her face before speaking up.

"How can we help you today, Ma'am?"

Before Lady Zee could speak up, Jules' surprised voice came from behind her.

"Sharla? Sharla Hinsken? What are you doing here?"

Sharla raised her eyebrows when she heard a familiar voice speaking. She stretched her neck to see the source of that voice only to be shocked by finding out who it belonged to.

"Julie Ekhart! I am working here of course. What are YOU doing here?"

Lady Zee sidestepped and allowed Jules to take charge. She also found it convenient that someone from her group knew the staff of this place. She might be able to get more info from her this way.

Jules stepped forwards and greeted Sharla with a smile before responding.

"Hehe. It seems like you didn't know. I left LA in silence after all. I am no longer an assistant professor in the academy.

But I also didn't know that you'd leave LA to come here. When did that happen? And how did that happen?"

"Dear madams, could you have your reunion somewhere else? We are waiting in line here, you know."

A female ranker protested against Sharla and Jules' casual talk with her voice coated in annoyance. They both looked at each other mirthlessly before Sharla called out to someone to take her shift.

Lady Zee and Tara followed Sharla and Jules as they found a relatively secluded corner to have their talk. Sharla spoke first.

"Hehe. It seems like you don't know or care enough about who this city belongs to. That's why you are asking the question I guess."

Jules was confused when she heard Sharla's statement. She looked at Lady Zee who just shrugged her shoulders, letting her know that she didn't know what Sharla was talking about either.

"What do you mean? Does it belong to someone we both know?"

Sharla pursed her lips before answering.

"That depends. Did you pay close attention to your first-year students?"

Jules' eyes opened wide in surprise as she understood the implications of what Sharla had just said. She asked to confirm.

"Does that mean the city is owned by..."

Sharla chuckled and responded before Jules could complete her question.

"Hehe. That's right. The city was founded by one of LA's students who you should have run into when he was in his first academic year.

Eren Elijah Idril. That's the name of the founder of the White Raven guild. He is also serving as its guild master and technically the owner of this entire city and its setup.

I was invited by him to come here to handle this facility. Not Just I. He has invited a lot of LA staff, offering better income and ranking resources than LA. So coming here seemed like a natural choice."

Chapter 697 Test of Wisdom

"Eren Idril..."

Jules mumbled the name under her breath a few times before putting a face to the name. She remembered the young man with whom she had traveled to the city of Lionheart from the city of Osan. At that time, she was with Lin Karr and others, trying to find shelter under the protection of the academy.

Jules never could have imagined that such an insignificant-looking boy would one day own a controversial city like White Raven. She was really taken aback by Sharla's revelation.

Sharla laughed at her surprised look before adding up.

"I was the same as you when his message reached me. Hehe. But enough about me. Why did you leave LA? Have you decided to become an adventurer once again?"

Jules' expressions changed when she heard Sharla's question. She quickly thought of wanting to meet one guy before figuring things out for herself. But she didn't want to talk about her problems with someone like Sharla. So she smiled and nodded.

"That's right. We are here to take a look inside Minerva's Utopia. Can you please arrange three entry passes for us, Sharla?"

Sharla looked at the other two women behind her. She looked at Lady Zee and realized that she was an Expert ranker. She bowed to her before responding.

"You have seen the crowd, Jules. Most of the entry passes are already sold out in reserved bookings."

Sharla sighed and looked at the crowds that had been gathered at the counter. She looked at Jules and pondered a bit before adding up.

"There's an alternate way you can get entry passes for yourself. But it's going to cost you."

Lady Zee stepped forward and introduced herself when the conversation moved toward getting entry passes. Sharla told the trio that they needed to buy the premium entry passes that were four to five times the normal rates. This was because they hadn't booked their passes in advance.

Another way to obtain entry passes is by bidding. Another set of employees was assigned to the bidding process. It holds bidding events intermittently during the day. Rankers with deep rockets would be able to obtain entry passes that way without having to deal with the reservation.

Sharla offered the trio expensive entry passes through her connection before resuming her duties. Lady Zee watched the former LA staff from behind and laughed.

"Hehe. Whoever is running this place is extremely greedy. As far as I know, Minerva's utopia doesn't really have a limit on the number of rankers it lets in per week.

But someone has decided to make it a limited commodity to drive its prices higher. And people are following these made-up rules like sheep."

Tara also chuckled before adding up.

"We bought the entry passes at higher rates. We are part of that herd now."

Lady Zee looked at Tara with a frown on her face. Her somewhat angry expression soon became one of defeat.

"*Sigh. You are right. The beauty of this rigid system is the fact that even when one knows how it works, one can't help but become part of it. Let's go."

The trio eventually ended up in the town of Minerva. The three ladies explored the bustling town a bit before ending up buying basic information from a White Raven information counter.

The separate dimension had four testing grounds located in four different directions from Minerva's town. The safe zone was located in the center of the separate dimension that was bigger than the city of New Beginnings.

They had four days from the moment they entered Minerva's Utopia to walk through the four testing grounds. Furthermore, they could simply explore the area for resources rather than participate in the testing.

The northern testing ground was a giant potion lab building located around 300 miles away from Minerva town. Rankers could use the teleportation array located at the northern gates of the town to reach the testing grounds. Or they could travel there manually to search for other resources.

The potion lab was made for the Test of Wisdom. It would allow potioners to showcase their craft and get rewarded handsomely for it.

Minerva was a Sage potioner. So it was only natural that her Utopia would be focused on the craft of potioning. As such, the northern testing ground was what attracted the potioner crowd the most.

The northern lab was a giant building made out of runic limestones. It had four floors that were dedicated to ranks F to C. The rankers would be sent to the floors via another spatial array outside the lab building.

Once inside the lab, the rankers wouldn't be allowed to leave until they either completed or forfeited the task they had been assigned. They had a day to prepare for the task they had been given. Failure to complete the task in a day would also be considered a failure and thus no rewards would be offered to such rankers.

Talented potioners would certainly be able to finish the task before the deadline, enabling them to clear the first testing ground within a few hours. They could then use those hours to explore the separate dimension before moving on to the next testing ground.

The rewards obtained by clearing the Test of Wisdom were various precious potions and potion recipes. Minerva's Utopia had become a sacred ground for all the potioners in the previous timeline from F to C Rank because of this very reason. Even this timeline was bound to follow the same route.

Lady Zee couldn't find the information about the tests themselves because the information was said to be unreliable. The tests would be different every time and there was no set pattern. So there was no way to cheat or prepare in advance for the test.

"Let's check the place out."

Lady Zee said as she headed to the northern city gates. She observed that Arizihana and her friend had the same idea of checking out the test of wisdom first.

Chapter 698 Meeli

Every ranker would have a tattoo imprinted over the back of their right hand when they entered Minerva's Utopia for the very first time. This was a dark blue, circle-shaped tattoo with runic details inside it that made it look like an array.

The magic of the separate dimension etched this tattoo onto rankers' skin. Within the separate dimension, it was used for a variety of purposes.

Arizihana and Marie entered the teleportation array located at the northern gates of the pro-green town. While waiting inside the same array, other rankers conversed among themselves.

Soon the teleportation array lit up and the rankers waiting inside disappeared from their current position. They appeared 300 miles away from their previous position at the site reserved for the test of wisdom.

Over 4000 rankers of various races and backgrounds arrived at the testing grounds. They all saw a giant potion lab waiting for them that was in the middle of dense vegetation.

Despite the surrounding forest looking untamed, the lab did not appear to have been left to its own devices to be overtaken by nature. The lab as well as the area around it looked well maintained.

The ground on which the rankers were standing looked like a well-groomed lawn. There were various garden spaces arranged in large blocks around the lab, making it seem like there was a caretaker in charge of this place.

The rankers soon found out who that caretaker was.

"Welcome participants."

A soft yet firm voice sounded all of a sudden that was coated with mana. The rankers who had come here to attend the test of wisdom turned their heads to the source of that voice and saw an elf-looking child had appeared at the entrance of the giant lab out of nowhere.

The caretaker had a bit of a mature face for her childlike height of 4ft. She had a curious gaze with her dark green eyes. Her stout nose looked odd with her relatively large nostrils. Her lips were also exceptionally prominent and puffed up for her facial features.

With a measurement of up to 15cm, the girl also had longer-than-usual ears. She had a slim build that made her look delicate.

This child was dressed in peculiar attire. She was donning a helmet with an eagle's motif on it. A blouse that was made of vines and worn-out leather. She had worn shorts made of the same combination. She also wore an armguard in her left hand. And she was holding a wooden staff that was longer than her stature.

The wooden staff she was holding looked to be a very special artifact. It had snake-like green energy coiling around it continuously as she held on to it.

The caretaker had also worn leg guards made of green vines and leather. Even though it looked weird to most rankers, the girl herself was very comfortable and seemed to be in her element.

When she confirmed that she had the summoned rankers' undivided attention, the caretaker smiled and raised her free arm in a welcoming position before addressing them once again.

"I welcome all of you to my master's humble abode. Your wisdom for potion concoction will be tested on this testing ground. The participants are meant to be potioners. But it's not a hard and fast rule. Even normal rankers can try their luck."

Meeli spoke in her soft and firm voice that sounded clearly in every ranker's ears no matter how far they were from her. She looked at the crowd carefully before speaking again.

"You must already be aware of some or all of the rules. But I'll mention them again anyway. I'll divide the rankers according to their ranks and send them to the floor that is suitable for their respective rank.

The first floor is reserved for the Novice rankers, and the last floor is reserved for the Expert rankers. The rest of the rankers will be sent to the middle floors. I'll assign the test as per the floors and their difficulties would be adjusted to the rankers' ranks."

Arizihana listened carefully as Meeli the caretaker of the separate dimension explained the rules. She had confirmed that the rankers would be assigned a task to concoct a potion using the ingredients made available to them in a set time.

They could use any recipe they knew of or use any processing method they were familiar with. The concoctions would be collected and judged simultaneously at the end of the test.

The top three placeholders who had performed better than the rest would receive special prizes. All those who had successfully concocted the required potion would be given a potion or two as rewards.

There were points to be gained from each testing ground. Each testing ground would allow rankers to score points out of 100. It was said that those who scored 100 on all of the testing grounds would be allowed to take a special test by Meeli. Clearing the test would make the ranker who had cleared it the inheritor of Minerva's legacy.

The rules were simple. Almost all the testing grounds inside Minerva's Utopia were favorable for potioners. The northern testing ground was especially so. As such, most of the rankers that had chosen to come here were potioners.

Lady Zee's group and others like her who were no potioners or barely knew anything about concocting them had come here to check the place out. Lady Zee wanted to finish her recon on other testing grounds first before she focused on the southern testing ground which was meant for rankers like her.

However, for rankers like Marie who had come here for potioning opportunities, the test of wisdom was their center of focus. The halfling looked at her partner before commenting.

"Ma Cherie, I don't think you should waste time participating in this test. You can head out to the other testing grounds. I'll meet you there once I'm done here."

Arizihana nodded at Marie's suggestion and watched her back as she started walking towards the array meant for her rank like the rest of the participants.

The halfling had decided that she would perform her best in the test of wisdom. She soon disappeared from Ari's sight and appeared inside the lab.

Meeli's visage appeared on each floor simultaneously when the rankers for the test across all ranking statuses were finalized. She clapped her hands before announcing with a smile on her face.

"Let the test begin."

Chapter 699 Test of Courage

The western testing grounds inside Minerva's Utopia.

It was a place known as Mini Monster Canyon in that its entrance was just like the Monster Canyon found outside the separate dimension. However, the size of this Monster Canyon was relatively smaller and the monsters were only restricted to being plant-based monsters.

It was called a Test of Courage for the simple fact that the plant-based monsters had created their unique hierarchies inside the Mini Monster Canyon. The monsters and the participants were not separated according to their rank. Any ranker could face a monster of any level.

The Mini Monster Canyon had an invisible spatial barrier that rippled every time the rankers stepped forward to enter the canyon. Upon crossing that spatial barrier, they would be teleported to anywhere inside the Mini Monster Canyon.

Therefore, the challengers were not able to plan ahead for the courage test. They had to immediately decide if they wanted to continue their journey inside the Mini Monster Canyon or leave the place.

The rankers could choose to leave the place immediately after entering if and when they realized that the heat was too much for them to handle. They'd just have to activate their tattoos on the back of their right hand and they would be teleported outside the Mini Monster Canyon.

The rewards for staying inside the Mini Monster Canyon were the corpses of the plant-based monsters they slayed. Apart from that, the rankers would also be rated out of 100 points. They would be scored as per their performance inside the Mini Monster Canyon.

Rankers could stay inside the Mini Monster Canyon for up to a day before they were sent outside by the Utopia's preset mechanism. Since it did not have much to do with potions, most rankers who were not potioners preferred participating here.

Arizihana had come here using another teleportation array after leaving Marie to her devices. She knew Marie would take her time to complete the test of wisdom correctly. There was no point waiting for her there.

A huge landscape opened in front of Ari as she got close to her destination. There were mountain ranges that were obscured by clouds and mist. The sunlight felt dimmed because of these mystic elements lingering in the air.

It felt as if the air there was wild and full of life. It was as if the whole fauna of the place was one giant beast breathing in and breathing out to create the mist and mana miasma.

The Mini Monster Canyon had a giant entrance between two mountain ranges. The place was supposed to be less intimidating than the actual Monster Canyon outside. However, it didn't feel like that for most rankers who had come here to challenge the test.

Ari soon heard the sounds of rankers waiting outside the canyon's entrance in groups.

"We are a group of five, looking for a healer. If there's any healer among you, please join us. We will ensure equal distribution of resources among all of us. Plus, the healer will have a bonus."

"We need a ranger for our team, you guys. A ranger who is also well versed in tracking spells. If there's any ranger among you, I'd..."

"Berserkers! We are a Berserker specialist team looking for two more berserkers. The resource distribution will be determined by the contribution of the efforts."

"We need an Ace ranked close combat expert. Ours is the most well-balanced team of rankers, only lacking a close combat expert to serve as our group's damage dealer. If there's any close..."

Ari could see various groups waiting for more rankers to join them outside the field set for the test of courage. People who pass through the spatial layer in groups will be sent inside the Mini Monster in groups for the most part. This was the reason rankers were forming their own groups outside the canyon's entrance.

Even if the rankers couldn't control which place they would be sent to inside the canyon or which monster they would have to face first, they could increase the chances of their survival and better resource farming by being part of a large group.

These groups were made of rankers with mixed classes, backgrounds, and ranking statuses. Most of these groups would come to a formal agreement before entering the canyon. The critical point to discuss was the resource distribution which needed to be discussed beforehand before the group entered the canyon.

Hence, the area outside the canyon's entrance had turned into a market-like place where people of various backgrounds were checking each other out like merchandise.

Only C-Rank entities were bold enough to enter the place without any groups. At their level, forming groups would serve no purpose and would only slow them down without any tangible benefits.

Ari naturally decided to be a part of the group to minimize the risk of entering the testing grounds. She didn't want to be part of a large group so she gazed around her without saying anything.

She soon found out that there was a group of two guys waiting silently a bit away from the crowd. It didn't seem like they were much keen on looking for anyone to join their team.

Ari approached the two rankers while observing them keenly. One of them looked like a tank. The other was a close combat expert.

Like Ari, the tank was an Ace ranker in the solid stage. He appeared to be in his 40s with the typical heavy armor outfit that was expected from his class. He looked like he was brought here against his will but was too afraid to voice his dissatisfaction. The other person was a young man in his 20s who had worn light gear for easy movement. It looked like the tank was afraid of this young man.

This close combat expert had brown eyes and dark auburn hair. He had a well-defined jawline and a light brown beard. Ari felt that his nose was just the right size for the rest of the young man's facial features.

He stood six feet tall. He had a slim build that attested to his class as a close combat expert. His gaze was steady and the air around him felt like he was ready for a killing spree.

"Are you looking for another member to form a party?"

Ari asked while looking at the close combat expert.

Chapter 700 Bert

"Are you looking for another member to form a party?"

Ari asked while looking at the close combat expert.

The close combat expert had something special about him that Ari couldn't quite put a finger on. It appeared that he was in charge of the small group based on power dynamics.

It took another moment for Ari to realize why that was the case. The close combat expert was an Adept ranker. Although it looked like he had just broken through into the D-Rank, he was still a rank ahead of her.

The close combat expert looked Ari in the eyes before nodding.

"We are indeed looking for someone to join a party. You are a knight, I take it?"

Ari nodded at the young man's question before adding up.

"That's right. I specialize in medium-range spells. Do we wait for more rankers to join us?"

The close combat expert shook his head in denial before speaking up.

"There's no need. This old man here is a tank who can cast healing spells just fine. I know just enough ranger-specific spells to be able to help us in our hunts.

Since you are a knight, I assume you'd be able to do a variety of roles yourself. We are more than capable of challenging the test of courage. Any more, and the test would lose its meaning."

The scoring system of Minerva's Utopia was automatic and impartial. It would consider even the smallest aspect of performance shown by the rankers to judge them. Usually, bigger groups would have lower personal scores because of this system.

Because of that, it was suggested that the rankers taking the test seriously should assemble a team with minimal numbers and enter the monster Canyon. Otherwise, no matter how well they had performed while being part of the larger group, their score would not be satisfactory.

Arizihana could understand why the close combat expert wanted to keep the group's number to its minimum. But she still thought they would at least include one more member to have a balanced team.

But before she could suggest anything regarding the inclusion of one more ranker into the group, the young close combat expert spoke first.

"That settles it then. My name is Bert Chu. You can call me Bert. This old man is Romel. What is your name, Miss?"

Roman was a bit angry when he was referred to as an old man by Bert a second time. But he had learned his lesson not to piss Bert off even before he had stepped foot inside the separate dimension.

Roman was a swindler who looked for opportunities to make quick money. And he had been quite successful in his endeavors after entering White Raven city. He had started selling counterfeit potions to rankers before changing his identity.

Of course, Romel was vigilant in who he was swindling. He wouldn't have tried to swindle someone like Bert had he known he was an Adept ranker.

Just like Arizihana, Romel was unable to tell what Bert's rank was until he allowed him to know. But by the time Bert spread his mana signature to let Romel know that he was a D-Ranker, he had already sold him a bunch of potions most of which were counterfeits.

Bert didn't punish Romel with a heavy-handed approach. Instead, he just made him come with him into the separate dimension. Bert's cold eyes and his bloodthirsty air didn't allow Romel to say no to him.

And now, Romel was stuck with Bert for who knows how long. He started to regret coming to White Raven city to look for swindling opportunities.

Arizihana pursed her lips and sighed in her mind before telling Romel and Bert her name. They introduced themselves a bit more before coming up with a simple battle strategy.

The trio soon entered the Mini Monster Canyon.

Shambling mounds.

These were the type of monsters Arizihana, Bert, and Romel were up against. They were large, animated plants with predatory tendencies. They were also known as shamblers.

These plant-based lifeforms were moving, vaguely man-shaped monsters of rotting vegetation. They fed off of the flesh and blood of living creatures they had engulfed and crushed within their bodies.

Arizihana, Bert, and Romel were sent near a swampy region. The surroundings had a foul odor that wasn't immediately apparent. The plant-based monsters around the area were used to trap mana beasts. The dead mana beast bodies would rot inside the plant monsters' partially see-through bellies. This was the origin of the rotting smell.

Shambling mounds had plant-based bodies that looked to be made of the tree trunk, vines, and green leaves. Their bodies were also covered with flowers, which gave off an alluring aroma. The flowery aroma masked the rotten smell the monsters exuded. The monsters would then camouflage into trees, before attacking the mana beasts who came into the area due to their aroma.

It had been around 20 minutes since the fight had started. There were tens of Shambler Soldiers and Slambler Leaders lying on the battlefield. All dead and waiting to be claimed as rewards.

Arizihana and Romel had fought for the most part. Bert was supporting them whenever possible while trying to conserve his mana.

There was a reason for him to do so.

Arizihana was fighting with a Shambler Leader and four Shambler Soldiers at the same time. Her ice-element spells had created chunks of ice on the battlefield that were scattered all around her. Her ice-element sword had red and green colored gooey stuff attached to it that could be called the Shamblers' blood.

Romel was defending the fort against two Shambler Leaders. He was a tank with heavy defense armor and defense-oriented spells. Thus, he was tasked with only keeping the Monster Leaders busy. He was to make sure they didn't interfere with Arizihana's fight.

These monsters had a set pattern of attacks. They would extend their limbs like vines and try to capture their opponents in their grasp. Their touch was acidic and they had durable bodies that resisted most sharp objects.

The only way to kill them was to crush their head-like matter that was inside their bodies sitting over their torso under the protection of vines and wood-like skulls. Ari had to close the distance between the monsters and attack them using her sword. Her sword needed to penetrate deep into the monsters' skulls for her attack to work.

Just when Ari was done taking care of two more Shambler Soldiers, she felt a distinct mana signature from behind her.

Bert smiled and disappeared from his place when he felt the mana signature of three Shambler Lords coming at them. He appeared 50 meters away from his previous position and took out his two D-Ranked daggers.

Bert didn't stop there. Fortunately, these plant-based monsters lacked the brain to coordinate like normal monsters. They had approached the trio from the same direction. It allowed Bert to cast his spell on them all at once.

Lightning Vines!