

Vile 81

Chapter 81: Rankless Party Members?

"I will now announce the names of the students who have passed my test."

A white-haired lady in her 60s could be seen saying this in front of a bunch of LA students. They were all standing inside a potion lab, near their respective tables and apparatus. All had worn white lab coats that were all F-Rank items due to the protective runes inscribed on them.

The lady was none other than Levine de Montmorency. She looked like a graceful old lady. She only had wrinkles around her eyes. And her grey-white hair attested to her long experience in potion-making.

Jake was very excited. Not because he had performed well in the test. But he felt like he had done the most inconspicuous, borderline legalized form of cheating AND had gotten away with it!

You feel accomplished when your efforts are met with success. But you feel unmatched exhilaration when your efforts and luck join hands to make you a success story.

That's right. Whatever Eren had predicted came to be true. Jake and Eren had only practised in an agility-based F-Rank potion named Gati. They practised till midnight yesterday and managed to completely nail down the potion's manufacturing.

Jake had it relatively easy because his element and inherent nature were made for potioneering. But he was surprised by Eren's expertise in potioneering despite him having a not-so-compatible aptitude in the field.

But accomplishing this feat with Eren's help had made Jake a tad bit nervous as well. Now he was ready to pay 20% interest to make yesterday's efforts worthwhile.

Finally Jake heard the name which sounded like music to his ears. His and Eren's names were among the only five students who had passed Levine's test out of 40 budding potioneers.

These five students would only need to pay a meagre amount of Merps to attend Levine's lectures and lab sessions from now on. The failed students either need to pay an exorbitant amount of Merps for the lectures or find a different professor entirely. Most were going to choose the latter option.

The failed students were jealous of the only five students who had cleared the test. Some even doubted the test was fair or not after the result was out. But Adapt Levine's decision was final. And nobody dared to go against it.

The students were discharged after the result was announced.

Jake and Eren made it to the canteen for their supper. They met up with Steve Austin and Becky White. The party-to-be was going to decide on its fifth member today.

"So what do you guys think about Renita?"

Steve asked while taking a bite out of his burger. The guy was a burger maniac. He had three burgers on his platter. The fourth one was in his hands, half of which had disappeared by now with the most recent bite.

Binge-eater Jake replied to burger maniac Steve in the same manner, with an equal amount of burgers plus some fries. Sullivan Jr was a food connoisseur, he treated all good food equally.

“Let’s see. Renita is going for a ranger class, so you chose her right? I mean, we don’t know anything about her besides that fact.

Eren is a close combat expert of our party. He’ll be our main damage dealer. He’ll be leading our charge.

I can take up a ranking technique related to enhanced HP, making me a tank of our group. Of course, my spell choices will be related to personal and party defence as well.

Becky here is going for a healer class. So the position of our party healer is covered too.

Steve is our berserker. He can take up the aggro and coordinate with Eren in our offensive. And in the end, he would serve as our finisher.

Now the only thing we need is a ranger who can take care of our long-range attacks while acting as our guide. But how can we be sure Renita is a good choice for our party just because she is a ranger?”

“Jake, the businessman in you just doesn’t take a day off, does he? You say all the right things but they don’t contribute to anything. I’m not saying we should recruit Renita right away. But I feel she’d be a good fit for our party. Becky, what do you think?”

Steve asked Becky about her opinion while trying to take the fries from Jake’s platter. But his hand was soon slapped away by Jake’s. The latter only looked like he was distracted by his burger. But apparently, he wasn’t letting go of his fries.

“Hmm. I don’t have a problem with Renita either. But we should wait for the intra-class ranking war to see her performance. In fact, why limit our observation to Renita? Wouldn’t it be better for all of us if we get to know about each other’s weaknesses and strengths before finalizing this party?”

It seemed that Becky was thinking of exiting the party even before it was formed. Steve tried to explain to her with the following words:

“Becky, I’ve formed this party after considering everything. Although I don’t know about our individual battle powers, I know how to find the right people and make them tick like clockwork.

This is the best I can find right now. To be honest, I was going for some other people to form a party with. Jake and Eren were not my first choice.

But they were among the few people who already had their BTPs hidden even before the explanation about how to set the BTP visibility to private was given to us. That made me intrigued and I chose them.

Even you, Becky, were not my first choice for a healer. But healers are always sought-after party members. I know I won’t be able to retain them when they are offered a position in another party led by someone stronger than me.

The ranking war performance you are talking about can help us come up with our battle style. But it won't be a deal-breaker in the formation of this party. Unless, you take a step back and decide to join someone else, that is."

Steve had things figured out it seemed. He wasn't wrong in saying that healers, particularly, good healers were always recruited with zeal in any party formation. But he had dissed Becky a little by indirectly calling her not so good of a healer.

"Hmph! I know my BTP value is low and you guys know about it. But healers don't require high BTP values, to begin with. I'm not going to fight on the frontlines. All that matters is my healing ability. And if there's someone average among us, it has to be this guy."

Becky pointed her finger at Eren who was busy keeping to himself and eating his fill. Eren only looked up and saw Becky pointing him out, post his name was called out.

"Hahahaha! Becky, why don't you wait for intra-class ranking wars to start before you embarrass yourself with premature judgement?"

Jake LOled at Becky who had her nose flared up. She was trying to make Eren the next target of the group's discussion so that any criticism coming her way could be diverted. Eren decided to give her a breather:

"It doesn't matter if I or you are average or not. We are all standing at the start line.

Forget about finding each other's strengths and weaknesses at this stage. Strengths can be enhanced with the right choice of spells and weaknesses can be covered with the right set of strategies.

We should prioritise finalizing the party members first and then focus on fine-tuning our teamwork. A team's might is stronger than any individual ranker at our levels. Therefore, Steve's approach is right.

But let's not wait until the intra-war starts. A lot of potential teams are also waiting for that event to take place so they've left some seats open in their ranks.

The influential party leaders would start hunting for their remaining numbers as soon as they came to know about a student's worth. That can make our recruitment process much harder than it is right now.

I don't have a problem with Renita. She will... Errr... I mean she'd be a good ranger. But why limit ourselves to only her?"

Eren smirked and looked at Steve. The latter raised his brows before responding him with a question of his own:

"Eren, I'm not trying to belittle our little group here. But man, let's face it. We are not exactly what you'd call extraordinary.

A student with higher BTP values and higher calibre won't join us. The guys in the middle have already been hired into their respective parties.

And making someone weaker than us into one of our party members will be detrimental to our entire party. So wouldn't it be better if we go for a five-pronged formation than a seven-pronged one?"

Steve concluded and waited for Eren to answer his question before having another bite of his meal. He had subconsciously started treating Eren as someone whose opinions mattered to him.

Five-pronged formation meant having five party members in a party while seven-pronged formation indicated that a party contained seven party members. Usually, the parties with similar numbers listed in their ranks would fight among each other.

If a well synched seven-pronged party were to fight with a party of seven members who could only effectively deliver the battle prowess of a five-pronged party, then it would be an easy win for the former. It was better if they limited their numbers and fought with another five-pronged party than risking fighting with a stronger team.

At least that's what Steve thought.

"I'm not trying to get anyone higher or lower BTP value in our fold. I'm saying we should hire someone with exceptional potential. Someone who doesn't know about their BTP value yet."

Eren let that thought sink in among his potential party members. Almost everyone understood the meaning behind that statement. They turned their heads in his direction in unison with clear disbelief painted on their faces. Jake was the one who could find the right words to confirm their mutual suspicion:

"Eren... are you... perhaps talking about rankless students?"

Chapter 82: Party without a Healer?

"Eren... are you... perhaps talking about rankless students?"

Eren was expecting this kinda reaction from the people gathered around his table. Rankless students were usually left alone to their devices. That's because they didn't have the qualifications to fight alongside Novice rankers due to their ordinary, non-mana powers.

LA would match up a seven-pronged party with another one of the same numbers in them. Despite there being rankless members on either side or not. Rankless students would be targeted first by the opponent party and roll that advantage into a victory.

So no Novice party would take up any rankless member. But Eren was suggesting that they pick up two more members from the same rankless lot.

"Yes, I'm talking about rankless people. But we will not list them as our party members until they break through into the Novice rank. Consider them as our reserve members.

I am sure no Novice party would be seeking any rankless students to join their team even as a reserve member. And the students would feel elevated by the fact that they are sought by a Novice team even before their official breakthrough. I don't think we'll face any obstruction in doing this.

The reason for this unusual move is simple. I know two students who would show tremendous potential once they breakthrough into F-Rank. Don't ask me the source, but it's a solid piece of news you guys can count on.

We will not do anything crazy like hiring rankless party members and fighting alongside them. That'd be suicidal. It's better to call quits on a match than perform something fantastical like this.

What we'll do instead is keep them around with us till they break their ranks. And we can make them join our party once that happens. Steve, I'll give you the name of those students in a few days. Ensure that you approach them the right way and make them join our party as our reserve members.

But we need to nurture ourselves before we can think about nurturing the talents of the future. We need to perform well in intra-class wars to make our recruitment process smoother. The strong would only like to shake hands with the strong, after all."

Eren said this and then shifted their conversation over their ID stone communication by opening an audio channel. Steve, Becky, and Jake knew he was going to talk about something private that he didn't want any other student to hear.

"I will share another piece of information. We all need plenty of Merps in all our accounts. Jake and I have already liquidated most of our money into Merps to prepare for a certain event. You need to do the same.

All your BTP values are lower than 14 so you can't take up any missions from Besanc yet. Therefore, you won't be able to earn Merps through completing missions. That leaves you guys with only one option.

You have to convert a lot of your money into Merps within these two days. I'd say convert almost all of the Extols you have. Because this event will require a lot of Merps in your account to maximise your profits. Otherwise, you'd fall into LA's debt trap.

This event will have the power to influence our party's battle potential. It can give us the advantage we need to beat currently promising teams with seemingly stronger party members in them.

Therefore, Jake and I are risking sharing this information with you. Should Renita decide to join us, Steve, make sure you give the same hint to her as well. After all, the party is as strong as its weakest member."

Jake was glad Eren had decided to share this news with their party members. They needed to be strong as a team as well as individuals for them to keep on winning on every front.

Jake was the one who had asked Eren to give this piece of news to Steve and Becky as well. The latter pondered about it for a while before agreeing.

Otherwise, if having more Merps in your account was as important as Eren had claimed, the advantage that'd come with having them would be limited to two out of five party members. That'd be detrimental to them as a party in the long run.

"Eren, what are you talking about? What event and what is this all about accumulating Merps by burning our Extols reserve?"

Becky tried asking Eren but all she heard was static from the audio channel, which Eren had closed soon after. He had indicated that no further information will be provided on this topic. The team returned to talking normally after the ID stone communication was put to rest.

“Alright, Eren. I don’t know about Becky. But I’ll follow your advice. I’m sure we can find plenty of uses for our Merps even if the event doesn’t take place. So there’s no harm in doing it. Is there anything else you want to add?”

Steve was the first to recover. He was decisive when he needed to be.

“Yeah. Steve, your berserking path suits you....”

Eren paused for a while before looking at Becky and continuing:

“But I can’t say the same about you, Becky.”

“What do you have against me, Eren? Why are you guys criticising my path all the time?”

Becky was unhappy with Eren again zeroing on her seemingly mediocre talent. But that latter verbally marched on without caring about her feelings:

“I’m saying this for your good. Of course, I’m being selfish here as well. Because improving you would give me the chance to earn more Merps in future. In a way, I’m investing in you to get my returns. But that doesn’t change the fact that your prospects would be wasted on you being a healer if you don’t heed my advice.

You can’t become an exceptional healer with your fire element. Plus, your inherent nature is lividness, turning an ordinary fire into a dark bluish-grey one. Even if there are healing spells for your element, most of them are not suited for party healing. What’s more, the healing spells would keep on getting rarer as you progress further in your path as a healer while having such elemental affinity and inherent nature.

How about being a mage? Your affinity and inherent nature are better suited to becoming a mage. I’m sure the academy’s consultation must have also pointed to the same thing. So I can only guess that your drive to become a healer despite all that must be related to your commitment to someone or something.

But think carefully about it. Do you want to compromise with your career for the reason you feel is worth doing it now? Life doesn’t give second chances to everybody, you know.”

Becky got quiet after hearing Eren’s remark. He was right. It was her insistence that she become a healer due to reasons known only to her. But a voice of reason had sprung back in her head again. Telling her that the recluse and rude boy in front of her was right.

“Well...”

Becky wanted to defend her stance but Eren cut her off right away. He wasn’t interested in her reason to become a healer. He only cared about his party members becoming strong enough to help him beat up even stronger teams. He tried to make Becky tread on the right path so that she could become an effective member of his team, enabling him to get the maximum usage out of her. All of this was his investment to gain more Merps, which would become stepping stones to his success in this timeline.

“You should keep the reason for your choice to become a healer to yourself, Becky. We’ll not pry into it. What we want from you is you give your best to the party. And being a healer ain’t it.”

“But if Becky drops the idea of being a healer, who would be the party’s healer in our upcoming battles?”

Jake couldn’t help asking. The businessman in him wanted to prevent Eren from advising this to Becky. It could rob their party of a healer that they needed. Although he understood the benefits of long-term gains, he wasn’t too hyped about suffering in the present for it.

“Remember the two rankless students I talked about? One of them would be an awesome healer for our party. She would break into the Novice rank soon enough. But it would still take a month. For better or worse, we’ll have to participate in the compulsory inter-class battle without any healer in our ranks.

Don’t worry. Healers won’t have much to do in ranking wars, at least in the beginning. We would have gotten our compatible ranking techniques and spells by the time it’s our time to take part in inter-class battles. If Becky becomes a mage, she can cast an AoE whenever it gets difficult for us to find an opening.

Of course, Becky would become a glass canon after becoming a mage. So Jake will always have to stay together with her. The offence would be handled by Steve, a ranger, and I.

I’m telling you all this so that you could get a clear idea about your role in the party and choose your spells and techniques accordingly. I don’t want any of you to be clueless in that department when you are offered those choices in the upcoming event.”

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Author’s Note: Hello. Do you want me to explain the RPG terms that get used in the novel? Let me know what you think.

The term glass-canon describes a ranker or unit with strong offensive power but weak defensive capabilities.

Chapter 83: Student Welfare and LA’s Interests

“I don’t want any of you to be clueless in that department when you are offered those choices in the upcoming event.”

Eren concluded that statement and finished his grub at the same time. He left the table, picking up his tray to throw the leftover in the dustbin, leaving the group to their devices.

The butcher wanted a strong team. But he couldn’t just join a strong team that he knew would become successful in the future. First, they wouldn’t take a guy like him in their ranks. At least not right now. And second, Eren didn’t want to alter the future too drastically by joining their ranks and becoming famous along with them. It would be in his favour if an underdog team slowly developed over time, enabling him to control it the way he wanted.

Up till now, Eren had replaced certain personnel in getting the benefits while keeping the outcome of the event largely the same as the previous timeline. For example, Eren had only tried to replace Ken in taking Marla’s apprenticeship. But he didn’t aim for Marla to take another student as her apprentice apart from the protagonist.

Of course, he knew no matter what he did, the future would inevitably change as he kept on introducing small changes to benefit from them. But he couldn't just keep following the same tried and tested path only to end up the same way as his previous life, just to maintain his advantage of knowing about the future.

That's why Eren decided to nurture his party. He had done all he could. Now it was up to them to follow his advice or not.

Two days before the intra-class ranking war!

Day of the auction event!

An official piece of news started circulating rapidly across the first-year Novice rankers. LA was going to conduct an auction event at 5 PM for them, just after the homeroom lectures got over. The items for grab would be ranking techniques, spells, artefacts, and potions related to the F-Rank.

The initial prices of these items had been set lower than their usual prices if students were to get them from Novice's Treasury. They could get an affordable deal in the auction as long as the things that they aimed for weren't aimed by others with bigger pockets.

Merps was going to be the only official currency used in the auction event. But currently, the Extols-to-Merps conversion ratio was horrible, to say the least.

It was 135 Merps for one Extol when Eren had converted his wealth into the academy's currency. From that day, the conversion ratio kept on getting worse until it hit 70 Merps/ Extol when the auction was declared today.

Students only had this morning to convert their Extols into Merps if they wanted to participate in the auction with a sufficient amount in their account. And they couldn't ask for support from their homes because it was too late for that. So they had to accept that wretched conversion rate in their desperation to earn more Merps.

What the students didn't realize was that their desperation generated by mass hype had made them forget that they wouldn't gain any benefit compared to them buying the items normally from the Novice Treasury. So the students converting their Extols into LA's currency would not benefit from the auction event even if they were to get the items at lower prices than what they'd get from the Novice's Treasury.

A few students understood this marketing gimmick 101, but they couldn't help but follow in the same footsteps of those who didn't. Because the auction event might contain certain items that aren't usually available in the Novice Treasury. They couldn't just let other students grab what could be theirs if they were to just sacrifice a little bit of their wealth.

Of course, hope wasn't lost for the students who didn't have any financial backing or those who wanted to retain their Extols due to the wretched conversion rate. There was a way to pay the merit points in the auction event without having to convert your money into Merps.

Students could raise the betting amount in the auction event with their monthly allowance in advance. Each student could bet up to a year worth of Merps, that is around 11K Merps in the auction event. The more the amount that was used in the auction event, the more will be the number of months that a student's account would remain un-credited each month.

Every month a student would be credited with 1000 Merps in their account. If a student uses 1000 Merps from this month plus makes use of 5K Merps advance that was availed to him by LA to buy a ranking technique, their account won't get accredited with 1000K /month for the next five months.

But this was not all. A huge number of job postings were released on the same day when the au. These jobs pay Merps to students in advance so that they could use these Merps into the auction event. The students could take up odd jobs across various fields in the academy to make up for their low balance at the cost of signing a binding contract with the respective academy department that had employed them.

So if a student was in a Merps crunch even after using the monthly allowances in advance, they would have to sign the binding contract of employment with the academy department to get an advance. Naturally, the amount paid in advance would be less than what normally that job would entail had they accepted it without focusing on the advance amount. But now the situation had forced the students to take up these jobs so that they could get their hands on the compatible techniques and spells.

This was a debt trap arranged by LA to make students more productive at the academy while enabling them to get the techniques that they wanted. If a student chooses to partake in the event with their overwhelming wealth, they are allowed to do so. They just had to pay a "little" extra than usual.

If a student wasn't willing to invest their wealth or if they were unable to, they could pay with their time and hard work to make up for it by signing a binding employment contract. Either way, students would get higher ranked items at relatively lower prices in one go, and LA would be the biggest beneficiary no matter which way the novice rankers chose.

The students that had chosen the way of the binding contract would have to serve their roles while tending to their studies in the academy. Their practise and usual study would obviously suffer because of their job, but they had to find a middle ground between both the tasks.

Most students, including the ones with sufficient funds at home, ended up signing employment contracts due to their low balance at the time of the auction event. They were not given enough time to arrange for help from anyone outside the academy.

Only students like Eren who had already converted their Extols into Merps were not caught between a rock and a hard place. That's right! There were indeed other students, apart from Eren and his party members, who had chosen to convert their Extols into Merps a few days back. But that was either due to pure coincidence or conversion that took place in anticipation of the auction event.

LA would randomly shift between having an auction event for a particular year or not during each academic year. So it wasn't that the students could say for sure if the event would take place this year.

When there was no auction event, the students had to purchase their spells and techniques from the Novice Treasury the normal way at usual prices. Of course, the monthly allowance advance and binding

employment contracts would be made available even in the case of no auction event, enabling the students to get the things that they want and paying them up through various means.

The binding employment contracts were made more student-friendly when there was no auction event. It was done so that the students who didn't get to experience the auction event would not feel that they had been cheated.

The Extol-to-Merps conversion had always been kept dynamic, preventing anyone from predicting the incoming auction event. Every other possible measure was taken to make the event as surprising as it was intended to be. Because in surprise, lies LA's advantage of making more money off of wealthy students and employing more ordinary students into their folds at a lower cost.

Almost no students attended their homeroom lectures after this official news was made known to them. They were desperate to either convert their Extols into Merps or look through job postings suitable for them.

There were plenty of jobs available for first-year students ranging from being a helper in various labs to serving as an apprentice chef in the LA's kitchens spread across various places on the academy grounds. Some academic departments like the department of sanitization didn't seem to have upper limits in the numbers of applicants they accepted. That meant anyone could become a part of the cleaning crew.

So the students were spoiled for choices. It's just that the amount of Merps their jobs paid them was lesser than they had expected. LA cashed it on students' desperation to get more Merps and employed them as cheap labour.

The evening arrived and raised the levels of anticipation in the minds of many Novice rankers.

The auction event was about to start!

Chapter 84: Sedated Perception

"A student from 1/A has raised the price for the book of Indra's Levin again.

7000 Merps going once... 7000 Merps going twice... Sev...

Oh!

There's another prompt on the screen sent by a student from 1/C, raising the amount for this item to 7500 Merps.

Is there anyone else who wants to raise the amount any further?

The technique is not available in the Novice Treasury, you know!

Just to make it clear to the newbie students. Even an amount of 10K Merps wouldn't be deemed expensive for a five-star ranking technique.

Still no takers?

7500 Merps going once!

7500 Merps going twice!

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And....

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Blaring beep sound and the removal of the entry named Indra's Levin from the list of ranking techniques displayed on the hall's huge spectral screen

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7500 Merps going thrice!

Congratulations to the 1/C student named Eren Idril for getting this five-star lightning element ranking technique. It is made for close-combat style. You will receive the book at the end of the auction event after signing a binding contract."

Jaime Lancaster congratulated Eren as a formality before taking a sip out of the small vial that he had seemingly retrieved from nowhere. He resumed his stoic face after the sip and restarted the bidding process for the next ranking technique in the list. The auction event was being held at the large hall named Novice Inspience.

Jaime was standing on a large, raised platform. There was a huge spectral screen placed in front of him that listed the current items for auctioning. A group of first-year students was standing below the platform. The students eyes fixated on the spectral screen.

There were five other professors like Jaime catering to their respective groups of first-year students. These Novice rankers were divided into six groups according to their elements.

The first five groups were dedicated to students with five great elements respectively. And the sixth group was dedicated to the entire lot of students who had derived elements.

Eren was part of the sixth group. The group's auction was hosted by none other than Jaime Lancaster. The same person Eren had seen in the Osan woods.

The students interested in the bidding item only needed to send the prompt of the raised amount through their personal spectral screens to make their bid. They would get the item if no other student is challenging their amount with another raise.

Eren was excited about a five-star ranking technique. He never got to practise a technique like this in the previous timeline. It had burned a hole through his Merps reserves. But he thought it was worth it.

But this was not the end of the auction event. First Jaime would auction all the ranking techniques made for various derived elements. The auction for spells, potions, and artefacts would follow soon after.

The auction event kept on progressing as it was scheduled. Eren soon obtained a few more Novice levelled spells for himself. He had obtained the higher-star variants of all the lightning element spells he was used to with.

The butcher also bought an F-Rank mana gathering array layout. Plus, there were two new additions to his list of spells now.

The total cost of the ranking technique, array layout, and spells had almost emptied the butcher's reserves. Now he only had around 700 Merps remaining in his account. But his battle prowess had received an unprecedented boost as a result.

Even with its speedy execution due to the inclusion of a spectral screen, the auction went on for a few hours. Eren met up with his party members after the auction got over.

The members kept on conveying their thanks to Eren who just nodded at them as a response. Even a low-key haughty girl like Becky thanked him for his suggestion and heads-up to gather more Merps a few days back. She had decided to follow Eren's advice and chose a mage class ranking technique for herself in the auction along with the spells related to it.

Jake, Becky, and Steve had avoided falling prey to LA's debt trap, thanks to Eren's warnings. Now they had more time for themselves to focus on their studies due to not having to accept any binding employment contract.

Of course, they would choose to enter employment later on when the binding contract became more student-friendly in a few days. They had to. Because they had ended up using the advance on their default monthly allowance. Therefore, their accounts wouldn't get credited with 1K Merps for around six months. That meant the trio was going to be Merps-broke for those many months until it decided to do something about it.

Now Jake, Becky, and Steve needed a stable source of income. They couldn't become the members of Besanc like Eren due to their BTP values not hitting the mark of 14. And they had already overdrawn on the support offered by their families. So the employment at the academy was the only way for them to curb their need for Merps.

Eren gave them a few pointers regarding their jobs postings. He told them to join specific jobs as per their respective classes so that they could also practise and enhance their class-related skills on site. The butcher mainly did that so that their job timings would sync and they could all be available at the same time while ensuring that their class-related skills are nurtured.

The group was about to head to the pantry to have their dinner when it heard a voice coming from behind:

"Little Idril, wait up!"

Eren and his party members turned 180 in unison only to observe that Adapt Marla was making her way towards them from a distance. Eren understood the reason for her calling so he told his group to go ahead to the pantry, saying that he'd join them afterwards. The group left and Marla caught up with him soon afterwards.

"Adapt Marla, what do I owe this pleasure?"

Eren asked while performing a slight bow. Marla was all smiles when replying:

"Hehe! You are wise, Idril boy, I must give you that. You addressed me formally again after meeting for the second time. You didn't abuse the freedom I gave you. These little subtleties are all signs of you being on the right path as a ranker.

I came to say my thanks. You know, your 'tip' would help me and my panel well tonight. The auction for Ace rankers will start now that the Novice auction has ended. And the auction for Adapt rankers will take place at midnight. We have loaded our accounts with Merps and expect a great haul from it."

"Aaah! See, my information came through. And you were doubting me then."

"Hehe! That was only natural. But I won't go back on my words. I'll give you something worth your information in a few days.

And I'll come to see your performance in intra-class battles. If you can perform well, I'll consider taking you as my apprentice despite your low BTP value. By the way, which technique did you obtain?"

"I convey my sincere thanks, Adapt Marla. I got my hands on five-star Indra's Levin for 7500 Merps."

"Oh! A five-star technique in LA is extremely rare. And you even got it for peanuts' worth considering its actual value.

Indra's Levin, huh! So you are serious about becoming a close combat expert. Good. Make sure you kick some serious ass in the intraclass battles.

The close combat experts are known for their boldness to enter their opponents' attacking range and beat them up head-on. I need to see the fierceness in you that is needed for this class to take you as my apprentice."

"I understand. Thanks for telling me what you want to see in my battles. I will make sure to quote-unquote kick-ass in my battles."

"By the way, did you set the base price for the E-Rank Mana Blessing you found?"

"Oh. I set the base price at 10K Merps. But I'm hoping it'll cross the limit of 20k when the final bid amount is set. Hehe!"

Eren smirked at Marla while replying to her. She realized this little devil already knew about the stone's worth even after still being a Novice ranker. She was excited to see the boy's performance now. She'd rather take a smart student as her apprentice rather than teach to some gullible fool.

Eren could be seen inside his dorm room now. He had imbued his mana into the mana-gathering array layout he bought from the auction and laid it inside his dorm room. It was an array with a Penta-star layout.

Eren then used all of his F-Rank Mana Blessings that he had collected from the Osan woods and planted them at the five distinct points over the array.

The butcher experienced an unprecedented level of mana purity of F-Rank gathering inside his dorm room now. With this array, Eren will be able to expedite his ranking journey in the F-Rank much faster than his previous estimations.

But Eren's attention was soon drawn to a particular spell scroll in his hand. He was most interested in this spell because he had never experienced the effects of this spell in his previous timeline.

The spell's name was Sedated Perception.

It was a four-star F-Rank spell belonging to the time element!

Chapter 85: The Real State of Epiphany

The spell's name was Sedated Perception.

It was a four-star F-Rank spell belonging to the time element!

This was the same spell Linda had in her arsenal. Of course, hers was an E-Rank one.

Sedated Perception was one of the most common spells among the time element rankers. And also one of the most hated ones at that. Because it largely contributed to the time-element rankers having to go through frequent bouts of uncalled-for time dilation.

Of course, Eren was worried about the side effects of using the spell as well. But he thought he should give it a try since his time element affinity would at least get utilized this way.

The self-casting spell's effect was simple. It affected the user's perception of time. When the spell activates, the user would experience a slow passage of time around him.

Some experts argued that Sedated Perception was not a complete time-element spell. They believed that a complete time-element spell would allow the user to interact normally with the slow passage of time without affecting their movements.

That meant time would indeed slow down around the user when they cast a complete time-element spell, but the spell would make it so that the user won't slow down with the time.

Of course, low-level rankers weren't privy to the authenticity of these claims. And getting used to Sedated Perception was hard enough. Low-level rankers would feel satisfied after completely mastering the spell without facing its side effects.

Eren was thinking along the same lines. He wasn't experienced in using time element spells. Therefore he deemed that he should focus on what's currently on his platter.

Eren put the spell scroll away. The spell won't be useful in his upcoming battle. He started reading the book and storing the contents on his virtual content storage with the help of the spectral screen.

Eren didn't like that LA was so prudent in sharing the technique in an old fashion way. He had paid a hefty in Merps. The least the academy could do was upload the technique directly on his ID stone. He would have been spared of manually storing the content.

It took him a few hours to understand the initial concepts of the technique while storing the content on his ID stone. Now he could access the content anytime with his spectral screen.

Eren only slept after reading the book completely. He needed to start practising his ranking technique. The initial stage section covered in the technique was simple to follow and had a few things in common with the lightning element technique he had practised in his previous life.

That's why Eren could start practising the technique as soon as he woke up the next day. He was going to practice the technique till evening. And then, he'd go through the spell scrolls of his improved spells.

Most of the students would also skip on their lectures like Eren. They needed to do last-minute preparations for the upcoming battles, after all.

The night before the intra-class ranking war.

Eren was done with reading through the spell scrolls of his improved spells. There were subtle differences between the three-star and four-star variants.

The four-star variants were more refined versions of their respective lower star counterparts. They contained a more efficient execution of mana points activation, allowing in better, faster spell deployment while keeping the mana consumption lower.

That's why it was crucial to have higher star spells. The rankers would find that their battle prowess shoot up just by making use of higher star variants of their spells. And since these spells were almost identical to their lower star counterparts except for changes in the algorithm of mana point activation, they could be adopted quickly. At least the spells in F-Rank were quicker to adopt among their multi-star variations.

That's why Eren took till afternoon to practise his ranking technique and get used to it. He used the remaining hours to fine-tune his usual spells to their higher star variants. It was 2 AM. Eren thought of calling it quits. He had finished his preparations and was ready to go through the ranking battle.

But before he did that, the butcher thought of taking a quick look at the Sedated Perception. He knew that he couldn't learn the spell in whatever remaining time he had before the ranking war. But he just couldn't calm his curiosity about the spell.

Eren opened the spell and started recording its content. Then he memorized the mana points activation algorithm of the spell and closed his eyes to recall it again.

The algorithm was nothing too complicated. Eren had been a D-Rank berserker in his past timelines. He was used to executing spells with higher complications than mere F-Rank spells. Compared to those spells, this F-Rank time element spell was no biggie on paper.

But the real difficulty of spells lies in the ranker maintaining its effect without injuring themselves in the process. That's why it was near impossible for Eren to use this spell in the battle tomorrow.

Or so he thought!

Something magical happened when Eren tried to execute his first time-element spell.

He experienced the most elusive event in a ranker's life.

Eren was pulled into a state of epiphany as soon as he tried to execute Sedated Perception.

It was like the spell itself was communicating with him, telling him how it should be better executed.

Eren felt like he was experiencing the passage of time quite differently in this state. He was aware of the things unfolding around him while his psyche communicated nonverbally with the higher consciousness brought about by the state of epiphany.

The butcher cut off his communication with the rest of the world and focused on absorbing what he could from being connected to the higher consciousness. He didn't know if and when he'd get to experience the state of epiphany again. He had to make the best use of what was happening to him at the time.

Eren also subconsciously activated his ranking technique while he was understanding the concepts behind Sedated Perception. What he had failed to realize was that due to the active spell's and state of epiphany's effect, his ranking technique had started working on hyperdrive.

There were tiny tongues of lightning dancing on his skin all over the body due to the ranking technique's activation. The lightning was harmless to him. It was just a manifestation of unelementalized mana in the surrounding getting converted into the lightning element mana under the technique's effect.

Eren learned everything about the spell in that blurred state of self-consciousness. He now knew there was a better way to execute Sedated Perception than what was recorded in the four-star spell scroll. He now knew what part of the algorithm needed to be changed or tweaked to make the spell easy to use for him while increasing its effect.

When Eren opened his eyes, he thought the morning must have arrived. He thought he had spent at least five to six hours in that state. But soon he was left flabbergasted. That's because when he checked his clock, it told him only about 20 minutes had passed in reality. The butcher couldn't help thinking to himself:

'Was Sedated Perception active the whole time I was in the state of epiphany? But how can it be? At my current level, it should be impossible to maintain the spell active for this long a time. Even if I could, the ratio of the time dilation just doesn't make sense.

My mana reserves are empty now. But how did I manage to keep the spell active for 20 minutes straight without overdrawing on my mana core and damaging it in the process?

I learned Sedated Perception in mere 20 minutes. Even if we consider that it is an F-Rank spell that uses only a primary mana circuit, the achievement to learn the spell from scratch and execute it flawlessly is something unthinkable for a guy like me who wasn't even a ranker a month back.

But most of all, I have progressed further in my rank in just about a day after I started practising the technique. My BTP value has shot up. If the word about my gains gets out, it'll create a sensation in LA.

There are many mysteries about this whole event.

Even a mysterious occurrence like the state of epiphany can not take all the credit this time. All things point in only one direction.

The swallowed gem!’

Eren came to that conclusion and caressed his lower abdomen with his hand. Of course, there was no gem to be found or touched. But the butcher felt that it was making its presence known by creating small miracles like tonight’s event.

Eren had an inkling that even the state of epiphany was brought about by the gem itself when it detected that he was learning a time element spell. Maybe this wasn’t a natural state of epiphany but something that was initiated by the gem?

Eren had more questions than answers at this point!

But the fact that the gem had helped him learn the time-element spell effortlessly was undeniable. It had also aided in him progressing further in the ranking journey.

With benefits lying in front of him, Eren’s greed for getting more power for himself resurfaced.

The butcher thought that maybe he should have gone with the time-element ranking technique in the F-Rank itself. The gem could have helped him breeze through the rank at a faster pace.

But then he controlled his greed. The butcher concluded that he still didn’t know anything about the gem so it’d be unwise to base his entire ranking journey around it.

And fast doesn’t always mean better. It was in his favour that he progressed steadily in the most foundational rank. The state of epiphany was known for producing a lot of wonders for rankers without harming them. But he couldn’t just enter the state on his whims. Therefore Eren came to a sound decision.

What he had now was sufficient for now. He needed to cultivate his current advantages before taking a completely different path.

Then his thought process made him wonder about the reason behind his current situation.

Eren wondered if the gem was a Sage rank artefact.

The S-Rank entities were officially given the prefix of Sages. The items belonging to that rank also had the word Sage as their prefix. Therefore, the S-Rank artefacts were known as Sage artefacts. It was the peak of the ranking journey Eren was made aware of.

He had seen only one A-Rank artefact in his whole life even in the previous timeline. And that was the flying platform LA had used to transport its students. After that, he never got to witness the true prowess of a grandmaster artefact his ever.

So Eren had never thought about the sage artefacts in both of his timelines. He wasn’t even sure what people and items at that level could do. That subject was more of a distant dream for him.

But what if this gem was an S-Rank?

Or....

What if the gem was even ranked higher than a Sage artefact? Is there even a rank higher than S-Rank for rankers, potions, spells, and artefacts?

As it was said previously, Eren had more questions than answers. So he decided to stop thinking about them altogether.

What was important now was the fact that Eren could use the Sedated Perception tomorrow in the ranking war. It had now become a test field for him to field-test his new and improved-overnight time-element spell.

The butcher was looking forward to tomorrow's match.

Chapter 86: Becky's Banter

Ranking battles were a huge chance for Eren to get used to his custom-made time-element spell.

The state of epiphany had made him alter the sequencing of the spell's mana points. The changed algorithm had basically made it deviate from the original Sedated Perception, cross the boundaries of a four-star variant, and the rate itself as the sole five-star spell that didn't have any lower star counterparts.

The five-star spells were special in a way that they couldn't be executed by everybody effectively. Only certain people who were in sync in both body and mind with the creator of the spell could execute the said spell with its five-star alteration effectively.

When a ranker who is not the creator of the spell gets their hands on a five-star variant of it, they would always fail short of bringing forth its true prowess demonstrated by the original creator.

The difference of power and efficiency between a higher star and lower star variants of the spells only increased with the rank.

That's why it got rarer to find higher star variants of the spell the higher you climb the ranking ladder.

The ranking techniques and spells were almost always element bound. That meant almost all of them were related to their respective element.

The potions and artefacts on the other hand were made so that they could be used by all the rankers belonging to the said potion or artefact's rank. Of course, there were exceptions in the cases mentioned above, but they were rare and seldom used by the low-level rankers.

Furthermore, the inherent nature and mana signature of the ranker also affected the spell's execution and end result. It was hard to find two rankers with the same element and inherent nature within their generation. And if mana signature was to be considered, it was impossible to find the matches even if samples from different generations were to be considered.

In short, it was difficult to find a perfectly suitable candidate for a five-star spell that could adapt to it and display its true power and efficiency. If this compatibility were to be ignored, the top star variant of

the spell would be no different than a four-star counterpart in its power. The result would get worse with the increasing difference in the compatibility.

This was also the reason why rankers would seldom go for five-star techniques or spells. They wouldn't get their money's worth if they were to fail miserably in getting in sync with the said spells or techniques. It was better to take a three-star or four-star technique which they knew wouldn't cost as much as the five-star one while still delivering the intended results because their compatibility requirements weren't as high.

This was the reason LA's Novice Treasury was normally capped off at four-star variants, that too for a selected number of spells. The auction was the only time the students could get their hands on the four-star variants of their spells if and when Novice Treasury gave them the lame excuse of unavailability to provide the same.

That's why Sedated Perception had become a special spell in Eren's arsenal. He didn't think there'd be someone in LA with a five-star spell in their repertoire as him. Furthermore, Eren's spell had been altered by the insight brought about by the state of epiphany. This was an alteration that was custom made for him only. It might not be related to the original five-star variant of the spell anymore.

That meant Eren wasn't exactly using the original version of the Sedated Perception. And he doubted that the changed sequencing wasn't universal. The spell was limited to a special time-element user like him... made for him, by him!

If he were to record the changed sequencing of his altered spell on a spell scroll and give it to some other time-element user, they might not be able to execute it at all. The spell was going to be Eren's biggest trump card at the time of the pinch in the upcoming future.

The morning heralded the creation of bubbling excitement and uncalmable anxiety among the minds of LA's first-years.

Eren woke up and practised his ranking technique before getting ready to leave his dorm room with Jake. The duo met up with Steve and Becky before heading to Novice Incipience. The intraclass ranking war was going to take place at that venue.

"There's something changed about you."

Becky commented at Eren when they were walking towards the venue. The latter just shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"We were all someone else yesterday. And we will be someone else tomorrow."

The butcher casually replied with a philosophical sentence.

"Don't try to play dumb, Eren. My element and inherent nature let me feel the warmth of one's aura. And yours has just turned colder for some reason. What did you do?"

"Who knows? It might be related to my current ranking technique that I started practising? Or a spell maybe? I don't know."

Life is ever-changing, Becky. So it's only natural that the living follows in its footsteps. More importantly, you guys, how many spells did you learn and how many can you use ACTUALLY in the battle?"

Eren diverted Becky's interrogation with his bullshittery. He really didn't know what Becky was talking about. But he was just made aware that Becky's element and inherent nature had granted her a peculiar sense. He didn't want to risk her finding more about himself by continuing the topic.

His question was answered by Jake quickly after:

"Most of my time during these two days was spent learning and practising my ranking technique. I could only learn a defence-related spell called Yewiha Mekelakeya. It absorbs moisture from the atmosphere and creates a water shield in front of me.

The spell can be remotely moved and adjusted in its size and shape with my mana sense. So thankfully, it can be used for both offence and defence. But I'm not sure about its execution. I just didn't have enough time to practise it. What about you, Steve?"

"Well, my technique was straightforward like most earth element techniques are. So I didn't have to struggle as much as you, Jake. But learning about the spell was tough for me. I just barely succeeded in executing the spell by staying up all night.

My spell Yemidiri Medafi lets me coat my fists with earth elemental mana, enabling me to have serious punching power. But the mana conversion to earth element takes time as I'm not proficient in it.

I couldn't learn a defensive skill in such a short time. So... *sigh* I'll be a sitting duck till the only offensive spell in my repertoire takes effect."

Steve finished his report about his progress on a disappointing note. He looked at Becky next, nudging her to share her current state:

"Haah! I'm on the same boat as you guys. I have two spells, one offence and one defence. But I'm not sure about executing either of them the way I want.

This ranking war is such a sham. It didn't give students enough time to prepare. It's like LA wants its students to go into ranking wars with shallow preparedness."

Becky seemed frustrated at her progress. She thought LA had set most students up by declaring ranking wars this early in their first academic year. The butcher couldn't agree more:

"You are not wrong in saying that. LA set up the ranking war right after the auction event so that students would be desperate enough to buy techniques and spells for themselves.

But it also benefits the students, you see. They get to know if their technique or spells were suitable for them or not right from the get-go. Controlled battles are the most efficient way to figure things like these."

"Alright, Mr-know-it-all! Tell us about your progress. And speak honestly. Don't play with words like you are used to doing."

Becky looked at Eren with her inspective gaze and the latter could only laugh mirthlessly at her bantering.

“About my progress...”

Chapter 87: Spell Combo

“About my progress...”

I have practiced a movement spell and an offensive spell. My techniques and spells weren't too difficult and their executions weren't too complicated. So it was easy for me to learn them.

I'm confident about my offensive power. But the movement spell causes tunnel vision as it is too fast for my eyes. So let's see how I perform when I implement the spell in the battles today.”

Eren mixed a portion of truth in his lies. That made his bullshittery more believable to his group. They discussed some more before expediting their way towards the battle venue.

Lin greeted the class of 1/C as their homeroom professor.

“Good morning first-year students. Your intraclass battles will start from today. Today will be the minimum requirement matches that LA will randomly set for all of you.

There are five battle rings set for the class of 1/C. Meaning five battles can take place simultaneously for the class.

I have a spectral screen in front of me that you all can see. Nobody has submitted the names of their parties so intraclass wars would all be individual-based.

This screen will randomly show the names of any two opponents and assign them their respective unoccupied battle rings. The students can either choose to go through with the match or call quits before participating.

A part of merit points will be deducted from their reserve as a penalty for their nonparticipation in the compulsory matches. I'd suggest you take part in the matches even if you know you are going to lose. The penalty for a battle loss is more affordable than a penalty for non-participation.

So let's get this thing going already, shall we?”

Eren heard Lin's speech and remembered the first time he saw the beginning of the intra-class ranking war in his previous timeline. He was a non-ranker back then. He had lost pathetically by a non-ranker like him.

But this time, Eren would ensure that the ranking wars become the biggest beneficiary for him. He looked at his base stats to see his progress:

Name- Eren Elijah Idril (Verified)

Organization- Lionhearts Adventurers' Academy

Academic Status- Class 1/C

Ranked Status- unranked

Merit Points- 22,725

Battle Points- 0

Base Stats:

HP- 3.8 / 3.8

MP- 5.1 / 5.1

STR- 2.3

AGI- 3.3

INT- 3

BTP~ 17

BTP Visibility- Private

Ranking Technique- Five-star, lightning element, Indra's Levin

F-Rank Spells:

LE, Four-star, movement type: Blitz Steps

LE, Four-star, defense type: Blitz Shield

LE, Four-star, attack type: Blitz Bolt

LE, Four-star, Area of Effect: Blitz Storm

LE, Four-star, healing type: Blitz Heal

TE, Four-star(?), miscellaneous: Sedated Perception

Eren first observed the number of merit points he had accumulated. His E-Rank Mana Blessing had been sold for a fortune from his perspective. It had basically retrieved all the Merps he had lost in the bidding while adding the extra amount on top.

Then Eren looked at his base stat values. He had observed that his agility had gotten the biggest boost followed by his mana points and intelligence.

The focus on particular body stat segments was due to the type of ranking technique he was practicing currently.

Each ranking technique focused on a particular set of base stat values depending upon its type. Since the technique was focused on close combat style, it would prioritize the ranker's agility, mana points, and intelligence over other values.

Had Eren been practicing a berserker technique in the past, it would have focused on raising his HP the most followed by STR.

Apart from raising a particular set of base stat values, a technique would also shape a mana circuit in such a way that it would suit the profession that is focused on. The primary mana circuit within the ranker's body would start to expand itself in a way that would allow them to exert their maximum potential for the field their technique was based on.

That's why it became unavoidable to regress in the rank when the rankers wanted to change their path midway. They needed to turn the profession-specific mana circuit they had built within their bodies into a primary mana circuit before restarting their ranking journey.

It entailed the necessity to destruct the existing mana circuit before a ranker can restart their path successfully. Destroying the mana circuit wasn't a pleasant process. Plus, it meant flushing the hard work one had put into it down the drain. Hence the rankers would think twice or thrice before changing their path.

Eren was weak in agility even in his previous timeline. But this time, thanks to the five-star ranking technique, his agility had been optimized for his profession.

The fine-tuning of base stats and construction of profession-specific mana circuits highlighted the importance of choosing the right technique for oneself. Eren knew that his ranking technique would keep on prioritizing AGI and INT the further he progressed further in his ranking journey as close combat professional.

Eren's spells also received a boost. They were now all four-star spells. But these variants had been revamped from their original creations by a high-ranking entity, especially for close combat experts. Hence the change in their names.

Eren now had a healing type spell in his element as well. Blitz Heal would generate a lightning field around the body's damaged area and expedite the body's normal healing prowess to supernatural levels using mana as a catalyst.

Lightning wasn't known for its healing properties. So the spell had a lot of restrictions compared to the original healing spells used by healers.

First, Blitz Heal was very taxing in mana consumption. So it wasn't ideal for consistent use. Second, Eren needed to stay still to form a stable lightning field. So it couldn't be used during battles or while moving.

Eren also noted in the spectral screen that there was a calibration error for Sedated Perception. It was mostly since Eren's spell had differed from the original.

"Eren Idril. What are you spacing out for? Your name is on display. Get into ring number 4 already!"

Eren was soon pulled out from his thoughts by Lin's shout. He looked at the spectral screen and saw that his name was on the display.

Battle Ring 4: Eren Idril vs. Bryan Grimaldi

Eren walked towards battle ring number four. He could see a teen boy taller than him walking beside him. He had to be Bryan since his destination was the same.

“Hey, little guy. I’d suggest you quit soon after our match starts. Otherwise, I won’t be held responsible for your injuries.”

Bryan announced as soon as he stepped into the ring. Eren could feel that it was done less for him and more for the audience currently watching them. He chose to keep quiet.

The guy had a BTP of 13, which gave him the confidence to beat any seeming newbie ranker. He only waited for the countdown currently getting displayed on the spectral screen to get over.

3...

2...

1...

0...

Start!

“Little guy, brace...”

Bryan activated his Fire Fist spell as soon as the countdown was over. His fists were first coated in colorless mana before catching fire. He was about to approach his opponent.

But alas, Eren was nowhere to be found! He had almost vanished into thin air after the countdown hit zero.

Bryan felt warning signs coming from his back. He turned 180 to tackle any incoming attack. He quickly swung his fist behind his back to discourage Eren from attacking him from his blind spot.

Bryan’s instincts were on point. His blazing fist driven by his instincts had almost made contact with Eren’s face. But before the fist landed, Bryan felt a sharp pain coming from his ass.

Eren couldn’t wait to execute Sedated Perception and Blitz Steps at the same time. He had done exactly that the moment after the match officially kicked off.

Blitz Steps was activated first. He quickly executed it to go behind his opponent. The speed was blinding even for Eren so he guessed Bryan wouldn’t be able to follow him with his eyes alone.

But Eren soon found out that the guy could handle himself well in a battle. That’s because he had turned quickly and was soon about to intercept his attack.

Eren’s tunneling vision due to the Blitz Steps had him blinded for a short while. That short span was enough for his opponent to launch a counterattack. Bryan’s blazing fist was soon going to land

But then...

Sedated Perception was activated!

And everything around Eren slowed down to an almost halting degree.

He could see Bryan's blazing fist was almost stopped in front of his face, just a few inches away from the tip of his nose. It was close enough for Eren to feel the heat radiated from that fist.

But the incoming fist attack had gotten so slow that it almost looked like Bryan was maintaining a steady pose for a live painting.

Eren too felt his body was immersed in water. His body had gotten as slow as Bryan. But then he executed Blitz Steps again and got the movement he needed to dodge the attack.

Eren kept Sedated Perception active while he traversed quickly through the almost stagnant world.

Eren could now launch a frontal attack on Bryan with the stacked advantage offered by his trump spells. But he chose to work extra to test his spell combo.

Eren had consciously controlled the effects of Blitz Steps to lessen the drawbacks of tunneling vision. It meant he couldn't execute the movement spell to its fullest potential during the battles.

But that all changed when Sedated Perception got activated. Eren felt that he could finally let go of his restraints in executing his Blitz Steps.

The Butcher's feet were coated in lightning again in that slow-mo world. He used his extreme speed and got behind Bryan.

This time, Eren had moved so fast in real life that even Bryan's instincts and mana sense couldn't follow him on time.

Eren kicked Bryan's ass with his lightning-coated feet as soon as he found an opening. His movement spell had enabled him to have a serious kicking force. And the same force showed its effect soon after.

In a normal, non-stagnant world, Bryan felt a sudden sharp pain coming from his ass as soon as his opponents vanished in front of him.

'How can this little guy be so fast?'

Bryan had this thought before his body was lifted into the air. Bryan soon found himself getting launched towards the edge of the battle ring where the dome-shaped force field was active.

Bryan's body struck hard onto the force field. He stayed at the position of impact for a while before the gravity pulled him downwards. He didn't get up from that impact because he had already lost consciousness.

Hardly a few seconds had passed since Eren's match with Bryan began. And nobody could believe it was already over.

All most of the students could see was Eren sporadically disappearing from the field and appearing behind Bryan. Then Bryan gets launched onto the force field, flat on his face.

Eren stopped his spell combo after his kick landed on Bryan. He wasn't looking at the opponent he had just beaten though.

The butcher's eyes were searching for a specific person in the crowd. They soon found their target.

Marla was looking at him from a distance with a smile plastered on her face. She nodded at him as soon as their eyes met.

'I'm going to do exactly what you asked me to do, kicking ass!'

Eren's body language and his cunning smile conveyed his feelings to Marla.

Chapter 88: Renita Diabreo

'I'm going to do exactly what you asked me to do, kicking ass!'

Eren's body language and his cunning smile conveyed his feelings to Marla.

"The duel in battle ring 4 is over. Eren Idril wins."

Only after Lin's voice confirmed the duel's result did the students standing around battle ring 4 come out of their shocked states. They looked at the unimpressive-looking kid with a range of emotions in their eyes.

"Eren, you did well. Blitz Steps, is it? I see that you've gotten a good handle on your movement spell. Your minimum requirement for intraclass ranking war is met. Do you still want to continue?"

Eren was shocked for a short while before nodding his head to express his wish for more battles. Shocked because Lin didn't recognize that he had used Sedated Perception as well with Blitz Spell.

A spell execution creates a certain fluctuation in the surroundings even if its effects aren't visible. The ranker's aura also changes according to their active spell execution. The fact that Lin didn't notice these changes either meant Lin was incompetent in recognising the time element spell execution.

Or...

The spell was covert due to its intrinsic nature or some artefacts.

Eren felt that it was both. He had changed the default algorithm of Sedated Perception under the effects of the state of epiphany. And he was also in the possession of his gem, which might have masked the time element spell's effect.

Either way, there was no way for Lin to know that Eren had actually used a spell combo in his battle. He chose not to correct his homeroom professor at all.

Eren's name was placed on the spectral screen again. Now the screen would randomly match him up with another student who has consented to battle again, either after winning or losing their first battle.

The names were getting randomly matched on the spectral screen after a while. Soon, Eren's next opponent was revealed.

Coincidentally, his next opponent was Renita Diabreo, the ranger his team was aiming to recruit.

"Hello. Name's Renita."

Renita expressed herself casually to Eren who did the same in response:

“Hello. I’m Eren. Do you mind if we raise the betting amount from 100 to 1000 Merps?”

“Hmm? Are you that confident in beating me? I had observed your match during my idle time. I accept that you are fast. And your perception lets you handle yourself better in close combat.

But unfortunately, I’m a worse match for you. What can you do if I don’t let you near me and attack you from a distance?”

Renita smiled at Eren after saying that. She was confident in her ranger skills, after all. That’s why she didn’t take offence at what seemed like an underestimation from Eren’s side.

“I know that my close combat abilities are restricted when faced against a long-range combatant. Usually, I’d need someone from my party to pin you down before I approach you. But our solo battle right now tilts the advantage in your favour.

But that’s exactly why I want to raise the stakes. If I can surpass my class’s restrictions during this battle, I’d be able to better familiarise myself with my combat style. And second...”

Eren smiled and looked at Renita while narrowing his eyes. The latter could feel a silently threatening aura coming from her opponent. Her smile vanished as a result. She replied with a stoic face:

“What is it?”

“Second reason for me raising the stakes is that you can take this battle seriously from the get-go. I don’t want you to find an excuse that you weren’t prepared to get away from the criticism, if and when you lose this duel.”

“Such bravado after winning a single match against a newbie berserker. Tell me Eren Idril, what would you give me apart from those 1K Merps if I win this duel?”

“I’d give you an F-Rank artefact that’s not much use to me if you were to win this. But Renita, this thing about additional benefits can’t be a one-way street you know!”

“Hmm. I don’t have any good artefact for your class. I can pay you in...”

“Who said anything about paying in Merps and artefacts? I want you to join my party if I were to win this. Do you agree?”

“You want to recruit me? But you don’t even know the first thing about me. And we’ve never interacted. What made you place a bet like this?”

“I have my reasons. My party needs a good ranger and you are it. We can discuss this topic later on. Right now what’s important is whether or not you agree to join us after losing this duel?”

Eren said that and sent a private audio communication request to Renita. The latter knew he was going to talk about something private so she accepted his request. A private audio channel was opened between the two opponents as a result:

“By the way, Steve Austin, who gave you the hint about a certain event, is from my team. You said that you’d think about accepting his offer if his information pans out. I know that you must have gotten the items you wanted from the auction event.

Therefore, you owe us one, don’t you, miss Diabreo? There’s nothing wrong in accepting an additional bet if you think about the agreement we had.”

Renita’s eyes were opened wide as a result. Only now did she understand how serious Eren was in recruiting her. He had already invested in her by providing her with the information about the auction event in advance.

And he was out to collect his debt now. This battle was just a coincidence. Eren would have approached Renita anyway if this duel didn’t take place between them.

“*Sigh! You are a mysterious man, Eren Idril. Frankly, I had other plans. I was going to pay Steve with Merps for his information instead of joining his party. But that seems out of option from listening to your talk.

Alright. I’ll join your party if you were to beat me.”

Renita finally agreed. Both gave a nod to their homeroom teacher after their private conversation was over. Lin started the counter in response:

3... 2... 1... 0!

Chapter 89: Three-Spell Combo

3... 2... 1... 0!

Renita started going backwards from her position while activating her offensive spell. Eren aimed to do the opposite of that. He spearheaded his assault with the best combo spell he had in his arsenal.

Blitz Steps and Sedated Perception worked their magic and the butcher managed to shorten his distance from his opponent by a large degree. He was just about 10 meters away from her. A moment was enough for him to cover that distance.

But then Renita’s offensive spell got activated. She created a mana Rifle out of thin air and sprayed a round of wind bullets at her upcoming opponent. That’s right. Renita’s elemental affinity was wind and her inherent nature was precision. The class of a ranger was an apt choice for her.

Eren saw that the wind bullets could tear through the effects of his Sedated Perception and catch him off guard if he didn’t dodge them in time. Renita aimed her shots with pinpoint precision. It covered her front and forced the butcher to defend himself while being forced to turn back.

Eren had to divert from his frontal assault to dodge the incoming wind bullets. He retreated and tried to approach the ranger from a different angle. But Renita was ready for him even from that angle.

She had the convenience of her long-range capabilities. Her offence also doubled up as a defence.

Sedated Perception was only used as a means for Eren to dodge the wind bullets. He had to think about another way to get close to Renita. The girl was skilled enough in her tactics. She kept on changing her position while maintaining a safe distance from him.

That's why the ranger class was difficult to deal with for close combat experts. The former wouldn't ever let the latter come close to themselves for the close combat experts to show their skills. Renita's battle tactics were the biggest obstacle the current Eren faced so far.

Eren couldn't keep more than two spells active at the same time. This was his current body's limit. He needed to come up with a different spell combo to break the stalemate. Otherwise, he would soon run out of mana and Renita would win by default.

Eren deactivated Sedated Perception and tried to activate Blitz Shield. The spell would create a defensive lightning layer around him for a few seconds, protecting him from any incoming harm.

But like Blitz Heal, this defence type spell wasn't suited to be used while moving. It would show flaws if the ranker didn't maintain a steady layer around them by staying still.

But Eren was ready to face a little backlash. The spell took its time to get activated. So Eren maintained a safe distance from Renita who was equally happy to do the same while taking pleasure in tormenting the latter with her long-range offensive.

By now Eren had been hit with a lot of stray wind bullets. His Sedated Perception wasn't active. So he didn't have the means to dodge all the bullets. The bullet impacts would hinder his movements and create bloody spots on his skin. Renita was an excellent marksman for her age. She made sure not to target the butcher's vital spot too much, lest she gets penalized for doing the same.

Eren's Blitz Shield was finally activated. His entire body was soon wrapped up in blue lightning that made him look like a non-human being. He didn't waste time and made use of Blitz Steps to quickly cover the distance that had been widened to a sufficient level now.

Eren tried his best to avoid the incoming wind bullets. The bullets that managed to breach his perception hit the layer of lightning created by his defensive spell. The spell couldn't negate the impact entirely due to being executed while moving. It did however manage to reduce the penetration power of the bullets, making them less threatening than they were.

Renita was caught in a dilemma. She was using a movement type skill along with her Mana Rifle spell. So she couldn't execute the third spell either. She had been shocked by Eren many times during this battle. The best combo spell that had worked for her so far wasn't all that effective against Eren.

The guy would easily dodge most of her precision-driven bullets like it was a child's -play for him. His movement spell gave her even more of a headache. Her class should have let her prevail against a close combat expert dominantly. But Eren was fighting like he didn't need a party to prevail against a ranger.

Renita was less speedy than Eren but the difference wasn't that big. Her movement spell had enhanced her elemental affinity's advantage. She managed to maintain a safe distance against Eren who tried his best to close the distance. But she knew that it won't be long before he catches up to her and that'd be game over for him.

Renita was a smart girl. She could see Eren had changed his style of approach. So she intended to do the same. She decided to answer Eren's fearless, self-harming offensive with the strongest spell in her arsenal now.

Renita let go of her Mana Rifle spell. The semi-transparent assault rifle was soon dispersed into the air it was made of. She spread her hands and soon loads of wind shurikens were materialized around her. They were spinning at crazy speeds and were floating in masses around her. Renita was almost out of her mana storage because of this spell.

But she found her targets. She willed the wind shurikens to target her opponent while guiding them with her mana sense. If the guy survives through even this spell, she'd have to accept this duel as her loss.

Eren was caught off guard by Renita's change of tactics. He hadn't approached Renita in a straight line to not make it easy for her to target him with her convenient long-range spell. He was shortening the distance between them at a gradual level thinking Renita would be up against the wall sooner or later.

But so many palm-sized wind shurikens were difficult for Eren to dodge even if he decided to retreat now. Now that the distance had been shortened, it worked against his favour and allowed the wind shurikens to surround him quickly.

Eren thought of stopping Blitz Steps at that time and focusing on Blitz Shield and Sedated Perception. It wouldn't let him remain unharmed through this ordeal but it would at least let him survive it. But his long experience had taught him that a spell like that would be extremely taxing on the ranger he was battling with.

Renita must have depleted her entire mana reserve by executing this spell. So all he needed to do was to survive the incoming spell. He'll be injured all over but he'd still be able to win.

Eren was aiming for a hard-earned victory that bordered on being pyrrhic.

But the gem had other plans!

Eren soon found himself in an almost stagnant world, which left him confused and shocked at the same time. This was the effect of Sedated Perception, sure.

But the spell hadn't been activated by him. Neither was it depleting the mana from his reserve. It was a completely autonomous spell that had been activated out of the blue.

This also meant Eren could keep three spells active at this time!

'*Sigh! This gem is full of surprises. It probably has a consciousness of its own. And I'm not naive enough to think that it'd talk to a Novice ranker like me. There are so many unanswered questions around it that I feel that I should just stop thinking about them altogether.

Let's just completely dominate this battle for now. If I can't win over a mere teen with a three-spell combo, I might as well quit being a ranker.'

Chapter 90: Stacked Sedated Perception

'Let's just completely dominate this battle for now. If I can't win over a mere teen with a three-spell combo, I might as well quit being a ranker.'

Eren said this to himself and quickly came up with a wild plan. He decided to stack the effects of Sedated Perception in his current situation. He already had an autonomous spell running for him. So it wasn't too difficult for the butcher to execute Sedated Perception.

The miscellaneous spell was soon activated. As he thought, the spell's effects were stacked and the slowly approaching, self-revolving wind shurikens even had their revolutions slow down to a halting degree.

Eren's body was also slowed down and he felt like he had been immersed into an invisible form of jelly. He activated Blitz Steps to his fullest potential. But that wasn't enough. So he overdrew his mana, sent his mana circuit on a hyperdrive and extracted the very potential of his movement spell.

The hyperactive Blitz Steps finally allowed him to make his way through the storm of shurikens almost unscathed. He had small cuts on various parts of his body due to some shurikens that were clustered so much that he couldn't dodge all of them. But the cuts were shallow and didn't cause him more than a little discomfort.

Eren should have used the three-spell combo of Blitz Steps, Blitz Shield, and autonomous Sedated Perception. That would have allowed him to protect himself better while approaching Renita head-on.

But the butcher wanted to see if the effects of Sedated Perception could be stacked. He wasn't sure if and when the spell would get automated again by the gem. So this was the best opportunity for him to see the effects of stacked Sedated Perception.

On the other side, Renita witnessed Eren getting hit by a barrage of her wind shurikens. She immediately regretted her decision to launch her trump AoE on the boy.

'Maybe I went a little too far!' She thought to herself. Eren was only asking her to be his teammate. There was no need to go to this extreme to prove her superiority, after all.

But the ranger's regret soon turned into an absolute shock. That's because she witnessed that what those barrages of wind shurikens pierced wasn't Eren but only his afterimage.

The same scene repeated itself in several places. Eren's various afterimages would appear on the battlefield. They would get pierced by loads of wind shurikens only to get dispersed into thin air. But soon another afterimage would be seen at a different place, following the same fate.

'Damn it. This wretched boy was hiding his skills deep. I should have been crueller in my usage of Wind Shurikens. Now I should...'

Renita's chain of thoughts was soon cut short. That's because she realized that she was staring right at her opponent's eyes. Their lips were inches away from each other.

Her jawline was being gripped by Eren's one hand. The latter's other hand had executed Blitz Bolt at the tip of the index finger. He directed his index finger close to Renita's neck. The bolt of lightning was just a centimetre away from making contact with her skin.

Renita had goosebumps. The skin of her neck was sending a threateningly tingling sensation to her brain. She looked down and found the reason for the same. Eren's offensive spell was barely keeping itself away from her neck.

The moment a ranger lets a close combat expert get close to them is also the moment of their loss. There's just no way they can get away in time before the latter strikes them.

"I accept de... I accept defeat."

Renita declared loudly. She hesitated to say the word 'defeat' but soon overcame it, thanks to her rationale. This was her only way to get away from this monster. She could read it in Eren's eyes that he'd not waver or hold back in executing the spell on her just because she was a girl.

He'd severely injure and incapacitate her to gain victory anyway. And that was a best-case scenario. Had it been a real battle, she would have been already dead.

Eren only let go of Renita's face after hearing her declaration. He didn't feel even a shred of a hormonal spike by being this close to a beauty like Renita. The reason he had pulled this move to intimidate her was that he was desperate.

That's right! Eren regretted stacking the effects of Sedated Perception. That's because he was feeling giddy as soon as he stepped out of the spell's effect. He could barely see what's in front of him at the time.

The butcher didn't intend to go so close to Renita's face at first. But his depth perception was heavily affected due to the side effect of stacked time-element spells. That's why he used his hand to hold Renita's face to get a sense of her proximity. By the time he realized how close he was to her, the latter was already shivering a little. So he decided to stretch his act and executed Blitz Bolt.

The entire audience including Lin's panel had gotten quiet during this time. Eren's previous performance was already shocking enough for the students of 1/C. But the skill that he had displayed during his match with Renita had left even Lin's panel of professors dumbfounded.

Eren concluded that Sedated Perception shouldn't be stacked even if the gem allows him to do so in the future. At least the current him should stay away from doing it in real battles. Otherwise, he'd be vulnerable to attacks befalling him post his spell execution.

Eren was glad he could test the effects during the ranking war. It was the best place for him to experiment with a lot of combos and analyze their advantages and disadvantages with a fresh perspective. He was intended to continue this trend for his next battles as well. But he'd have to stop his battle session today with this fight.

It took a while for Lin to get over the situation:

"Eren Idril wins the duel in the battle ring four. Boy, you've overdrawn on your mana reserve. Your mana circuits have also been affected. I'd suggest you don't continue any further. But I'll ask anyway. What will it be?"

"*Sigh!

Adapt Lin, you are right. I think this should be enough for me."

Eren looked at Renita after saying that. His face had gotten pale. And he looked like he'd lose his balance anytime. He started walking towards the hall's exit right after admitting that he won't continue his winning streak.

Only after hearing Lin's speech did Renita understand that it wasn't her that had pushed herself the most in their battle. She looked at her opponent closely to register her moment of defeat deep in her memory.

Eren had small cuts all over his body. His light-coloured, slightly torn clothes now had various red spots on them. His body was swaying a little as he walked towards the edge of the battle ring. But at that time, nobody dared to make fun of his situation.

The butcher had gotten over the restrictions placed by the inherent difference in class. That was enough to gain everybody's silence.

Renita stood at her place and subconsciously admired Eren's fierceness as she saw his departing figure. Then she remembered how her face was extremely close to his a while ago. Her cheeks immediately flared red as a result.

Renita wasn't like most teenage girls. She knew she looked beautiful but didn't try to encash it. Nor did she brag about it to her peers. She maintained a stoic air around her that was also devoid of any arrogance or pride.

But she never realized that her fabricated stoicism came from the fact that her beauty was validated by the people surrounding her. What if somebody her age decides to get over her visual appeal and act neutrally to her? Would she still be able to remain aloof in front of him? She found out the answer to that question at this moment.

Eren's behaviour had somehow irked Renita. He seemed indifferent even after getting up close and personal with her. The girl started doubting the standards of her beauty she considered herself to fall into because of it. And the reason behind that second-guessing also bothered her.

'Hmph! This wretched boy needs to be taught a lesson. I'll clip his wings soon enough. And there would be plenty of chances for me to do so. I'll be in his team after all'

The lady ranger decided to plan for the future.