

Vile 901

[Chapter 901 Rank-Up Program's Qualifiers](#)

White Raven Guild. Kukenan Plateau. White Raven city.

A grand and opulent hall. The walls and the ceiling were studded with nice-looking gems that formed various array mechanisms. The well-lit ambiance and pleasant atmosphere. An empty platform was levitating quietly at one end, waiting for someone to take the stage.

Mortals served sumptuous cuisine and drinks. Yet, there was a certain decorum that couldn't be hampered.

One could say that the hall's ambiance became the embodiment of minimalism. And yet, it couldn't help exuding a certain rich vibe that wasn't associated with any start-up guild.

"Woohoo. This guild is loaded."

Bhaa Laah the night elf commented as she looked around herself and saw the riches with which the hall had been decorated. Tumko Darata and his entire team had been summoned to the White Raven Guild's induction hall.

Drin Dawn and Bianka Bluedust were also present with their respective teams in the hall. Eren had called all his key guild members to make a few announcements.

Tumko scanned the area with his keen eyes before commenting.

"I am more curious about how the guy was able to hire so many talented rankers. It's like he cherry-picked the people and paired them in groups that would make sense."

Tumko's statement prompted a chuckle from his vice-captain Tal Waar. He shook his head and smiled before commenting.

"You are praising yourself by saying that. We were also invited to be here by him."

Tal Waar looked at Tumko intently before asking his question.

"Why did you accept his invitation? Do you think he'll lead us out of this prison named Anfang?"

Tumko chuckled as well when he heard another interpretation of his words from Tal Waar's mouth. He then sighed before answering his question.

"Well... no matter what we do, it's still a gamble. So why not put our bets on someone like Eren, who knows what he is doing from the looks of things? It would be stupid of us to find an escape route in a dungeon that has been completely conquered by him."

The team's tank Kavach also agreed with Tumko's statements. He added further.

"Tumko's right. It is better to wait than to find an escape route under adverse conditions. I just wish Eren would appear, give his two cents, and let us get started on our missions. I just hate waiting."

"How did the last mission turn out, Drin?"

Bianka asked Drin while their teams were catching up with each other. Biaka held a champagne glass in her right hand. With her left hand, she would often readjust the locks of hair and tuck them behind her ears.

Bianka knew that Drin's team had been sent on an imperative mission by Eren. She wondered what the mission was about since it looked to be a guild-related mission.

Drin was reminded of the mission he was part of when he heard Bianka's question. Kirin was leading the mission which involved subjugating a monster tribe. He chuckled before answering.

"Hehe. My last mission didn't feel like a mission at all, Bianka. Basically, I served as a pathfinder for my then-team leader Kirin. She only needed help keeping the crowd away from her while she dealt with the tribe leader.

Then there was this guy named Kaalmaahen. He fights like a monster himself. Anyway, my team's job was to secure a perimeter. The rest was handled by Expert Kirin and Kaalmaahen.

We were released from our tasks when Kaalmaahen defeated a quasi-Monster Overlord named Bigua. I don't know what happened after that as Kirin and Kaal took things from there."

Bianka's curiosity was piqued when she heard the details about the mission from Drin. She predicted that Eren had received something significant from the site by making Kirin take over after the tribe was defeated. That meant he knew exactly what the tribe had in store for him.

Drin looked at Bianka's curious face and smiled before speaking up.

"Look, I don't know what it is that Eren found at the site. But I guess we will find out soon enough. If my guess is right..."

Drin looked around himself and pondered a bit. He scratched his chin before making his predictions.

"This meeting should be about what they found on the site. Do you remember the rank-up program the guild mentioned to us earlier?"

Bianka connected the dots in her head and nodded at Drin. The rank-up program was supposed to help all rankers progress further in their respective ranking journeys. The White Raven guild had asked for active participation from all its members.

The guild had assigned the participants of the program valuable resources. In return, they had to stick to the routine suggested by the program and complete a certain set of tasks.

The program was pretty simple at first. But it started getting increasingly difficult for even the most talented rankers no matter which rank they belonged to. Only the key members of the White Raven guild managed to stay in the program while the others were kicked out.

Drin concluded that the meeting was related to the rank-up program and what Kirin found at his last mission site because only the members that were still in the program had been summoned to the place, leaving out the replaceable workforce of the White Raven guild. Second, the way Kirin talked made him see that the rank-up program was only meant to be a warm-up for what was to come for them.

Even the rankers that had stayed inside the program for this long were complaining that the assigned tasks and routines were getting more difficult by the day. And that they were being pushed to their limits for no feasible gains.

Some rankers did improve their ranking status because of the valuable resources provided by the guild. But they felt like the gains they had received weren't equal to the efforts they had put in. Of course, nobody complained about the program to the butcher himself. By this point, almost everyone knew what he had done.

A few guild members were excited about the program as well. Tuan Aag, Renar, Viper, Katalina, and others were among those who made the most of it.

[Chapter 902 Argo's Hustle](#)

Rankers like Van Wilder, Ketsu Hasu, and Silvera were neutral about the rank-up program.

In addition to doing what was asked of them, they kept taking missions side by side to avoid hindering their growth in any way. They didn't think of leaving the program just because it was getting difficult to continue. But they preferred if things stayed at the same level of difficulty while they enjoyed the resources the guild provided them.

Drin felt like he should be investing more time and effort into the program after all. The last mission made him realize something.

"I think that the rank-up program we have been through is only a qualifying round. The real-rank-up program will begin today."

Bianka heard Drin's predictions and had stress lines on her forehead. The routine and the tasks assigned to the program were challenging enough, to begin with. If it was supposed to be a warm-up, what would the real program look like?

Argo was in his miniature eagle form. The demon beast was very familiar with all the key White Raven members. He would approach them one after another and talk to them to see if they could provide him with some treats.

The bird brain was always hunting and hustling, looking for anything that he could eat or make use of. He would ask for some helpful ranking resources from the rankers he met, offering them advice, tips, or some puns in exchange.

The guild members had gotten used to his occasional visits as well. They would talk to him as if he was just another person. They offered him the resources he asked for since the advice he would give would always be multifaceted. They might not solve the problem completely. Sometimes, though, his words point them in the right direction.

Argo was also present in the hall. He landed on Tuan's shoulders before greeting him casually.

"Yo, T. What's up, dawg?"

Tuan was busy talking with someone on a spectral call in the corner, away from any group of rankers. There was a young woman on the other end of the call. She seemed to be frustrated with him from the looks of things. She canceled the spectral call when Argo came into the picture.

It was clear that Tuan had taken Eren's advice about getting back into the game. However, it seemed like he was still struggling when it came to having a stable romantic relationship.

Tuna sighed when the call was disconnected. He looked at Argo dejectedly before responding.

"It's good that you are a demon beast, Argo. You don't have to deal with these headaches. You don't know the pains and sufferings a chivalrous guy like me has to go through just to get his heart soothed. *Sigh."

Argo made a few guttural sounds, which sounded like he was dissatisfied with something. At least that's what Tuan felt. The demon beast scratched below his neck with his eagle feet before speaking up.

"Haah! You still suck in the game of getting puss... Grrrrr..."

Argo was about to speak in his usual cuss language when he remembered that his master had told him to tone down a few words that might come across as offensive. Especially when there were female rankers that were around him. So he turned the volume down on his voice before speaking up.

"You're still the same nutcase you used to be, you fool. You learned nothing from your wife betraying you, did you? Listen up, T. Chivalry is dead and bitches killed it.

I be learning a lot from my master's game. Let me impart you with some of that top-class wisdom if you are okay with giving me three of those D-Rank Crimson Fire Lotuses you have. How 'bout that?"

Tuan knew Argo wouldn't offer his "services" for free. He had taken after Eren after all. However, what he was asking in exchange was simply too much. He also wondered how Argo came to know about the fact that he owned exactly three D-Rank Crimson Fire Lotuses. The beast was pretty crafty for his age.

"*Cough. I... I'm ready to offer you one of those Lotuses."

Argo made a few more guttural sounds as if cursing someone under his breath. He cleaned his beak with his other eagle feet and responded.

"For someone so desperate for a change of perspective, you sure drive a hard bargain, T. Aight. Show me the merc first before we go any further."

Tuan pursed his lips before nodding. He took out the fire-element ranking resource from his storage and showed it to the demon beast. His eyes sparkled as he looked at the resource. As soon as he saw it, he quickly stored it in his storage space before closing the deal.

Argo educated Tuan about Eren's way of handling women in his life because that's what the demon beast knew most about. Tuan looked at the bird suspiciously because of the steps he suggested he take with his woman. He wondered if Argo was trying to mess with him.

Argo's suggestions were the opposite of what Tuan was used to practicing. But Argo convinced him nonetheless. One could say that the demon beast had his way with words, no matter how rough his language might sound to his listeners.

"You mean I should just leave if she starts arguing with me? Won't that aggravate the problem later?"

Tuan asked Argo in a voice laced with doubts. However, Argo was done with the fire-element ranker at this point. He had already provided him with advice worth one Crimson Fire Lotus. So the demon beast started wrapping things up.

"Bitches be crazy, T. You would want to avoid them when they are on their crazy.

A lot of guys get wrecked and have their shit flying because they become storm chasers. A normal response when you see a storm on the horizon is to run the hell away from it and think about the consequences later.

Of course, it's better to be surrounded by multiple storms. That way, you will be able to handle any storm. Hehe.

And speaking of storms and stormborns, my master's here. I'll see you around, T. Good luck."

Argo disappeared from Tuan's shoulders, leaving him with his question answered. However, the fire-element ranker's attention was quickly shifted to the levitating stage in front of him.

The guild master of the White Raven guild had come to address his key guild members.

[Chapter 903 There's A "But" Involved](#)

Eren appeared on stage.

He had worn a simple white tunic, paired with rugged brown pants. Voluminous locks of black hair cascaded down his youthful and subtly handsome face. His emerald green eyes shined from time to time. His presence would attract attention and his aura would intimidate.

The elemental attainments he had gained would fluctuate around him occasionally. And his soul sense would affect the people around him. They were all testaments to the powers he had harnessed over the years. No matter how much he tried to keep things under wraps, people were bound to get a hint about him and his accomplishments. Especially those who knew him well enough.

It was difficult for mortals to get close to Eren anymore because of his presence. Most would faint and others would have their mental health compromised. Some would have their heartbeats increased to unprecedented levels. Mortal men would feel enraged at the world and females would lose their sense of self in lust. Thus, only the lower-ranked entities served him.

It was common for Adept-ranked entities to have this effect on mortals to some extent. A ranker's control over their powers would typically increase once again when they entered C-Rank or higher.

The butcher too was suffering from a lack of control over his powers. This was because he was harnessing multiple paths and Abilities. And this was when he was working through special training conducted by Alephee to achieve better control over his mana circuits. One could imagine the kind of havoc he would cause to his surroundings in the presence of lower-ranked entities if he did not have the kind of control he was having at the moment.

The hall was buzzing with mumblings and chatter a few moments ago. But it grew silent the moment Eren appeared on stage. Even higher-ranked entities like Levine and others from her faction stopped conversing with each other when they saw Eren had gotten on stage.

'Solid stage! He progressed once again.'

Levine thought to herself as she watched Eren with keen expressions. She had asked others from her faction to be present here because of the things Eren had told her. To better fight Demonmir's faction, her faction had to grow in power.

The butcher didn't think that he could take Demonmir and his entire faction all by himself. At least not anytime soon. He and his guild needed some time to grow.

So the next logical option for him was to make Levine's faction capable enough for them to do his bidding. Demonmir was still too busy with his affairs to focus on Eren and his guild. But Eren didn't want to wait for things to turn wrong one day and catch him unprepared. Thus, he wanted to invest in Levine's faction as well.

He had the means to pull this off at this point when Kirin and Kaal subjugated Bigua's clan.

Eren first looked at Tuan and nodded. He knew that his demon beast was teaching the poor guy all sorts of questionable things. Thus, he decided that he should give a disclaimer to Tuan in private after his speech. That whatever suggestions Argo gave him should be implemented at one's own risk. And that he would take no responsibility for the outcome.

Eren looked at his crowd next and observed that everyone was looking at him. He liked the pin-drop silence in the room at the moment. This was the respect he had earned after working his ass off.

He would never get addicted to the fleeting sense of social status. However, he would not run away from it either when it was presented to him. Especially if he could make use of it to gain more for himself.

The butcher took a deep breath and smiled before speaking up.

"To all the White Raven guild members and our privileged guests— good evening. I'll be honest with you. I am not very skilled at formal greetings. I lack the kind of sophistication one needs to address a crowd. And yet, I would like to draw your attention to what I have to say all the same.

That's because the things I'm about to say do not only concern me and my guild's future. It affects the future of this city and everyone in it. It affects the kingdom's political landscape, potential war, and the covert and overt power play around us.

And lastly, it affects you. Your future as a ranker to be specific."

Eren said as he checked the sleeves of his pants. He unabashedly took out his Sativa Stick and lit it up. He enjoyed the first drag of his smoke and released it through his mouth before continuing.

"I am sure some of you might have guessed that this gathering is related to the rank-up program we have been running for some of White Raven's finest talents. I am here to tell you that they are right on the mark."

Eren looked at Drin and Bianka and smiled. He took a brief pause and allowed the hushed chatter that had sprouted in the hall to subside a bit before speaking further.

"We are moving ahead with phase two of the rank-up program and those who have made it this far are invited to participate in it. And rest assured. We will also offer this program to a select group of our guests in exchange for some benefits."

Eren looked at Levine and her group of rankers and nodded before speaking about the pros and cons of the program.

"The benefits of phase two of the rank-up program are tremendous, to say the least. It has the potential to increase one's elemental attainment in their respective element by leaps and bounds. And it can also allow one to progress further in their ranking journey without creating any anomalies in their path.

I am not talking about the eventual growth you receive with the right use of ranking resources in conjunction with your respective ranking techniques. I'm talking about tangible gains that are made apparent as soon as you complete the program successfully."

Eren's statement metaphorically raised the hall's temperature. Everybody was taken aback by the announcement he made. People started questioning each other and looking at Eren with doubt.

'There has to be a catch.'

Everybody thought the same thing when they heard an offer too good to be true. Eren read the mood of the entire hall and chuckled before confirming their pessimistic view of the program.

"Yep! There's a "but" involved."

[Chapter 904 Gambling & Elemental Array](#)

"That's right. There's a "but" involved."

Enjoying his smoke on stage like nobody's business, Eren continued.

"The White Raven guild has gotten hold of an ancient array that immerses a ranker in the pure elemental manifestations of their respective elements. The environment the array creates for the ranker helps them increase their elemental attainment to a significant level in a short time.

Of course, there are a lot of limitations imposed on the ranker. And these limitations change as per the ranker's capacity to handle the elemental pool they are immersed in. So there's no use in me listing them out. You will find your limitations soon enough if and when you decide to participate.

The array also allows them to increase their ranking status if they can manage to practice their ranking techniques while being immersed in the elemental pool. As long as you are confident in your ability to handle pressure, there are no technical restrictions on your growth.

But..."

Eren's words before the word 'but' sounded like a dream-like symphony in the rankers' ears. Alas, they were forced to snap back to reality when Eren started speaking about the risks involved in the updated program.

"But there's a possibility that the elemental pool might damage your mana core and kill you. Or worse, turn you into a mortal. There's also a chance that you might lose your sense of self in the elemental pool if you don't understand your limits and decide to stay inside the pool.

The elemental pool generated by the array can only be used once. Try to use it for the second time and it'll make your mana core implode and waste you in a second.

Furthermore, there's a chance that the elemental pool is not compatible with you. In this case, you will experience the side effects of your incompatibility even if you do all the other things right.

And... you only have one chance to bet on yourself and your growth. You have to bet on your future with your own life and current potential as currency.

To put it simply, it's a gamble."

Eren's voice started turning grim as he spoke about the ill consequences of using the elemental pool. He didn't try to hide the cons because he needed people with strong convictions to enter the pool.

People started murmuring when they heard about the consequences. Half of the rankers started hesitating about joining the program because the side effects were simply too much. Even rankers who had performed well in the first phase of the rank-up program found it difficult to be okay with phase two's negative effects.

Eren had heard from Ror that there was an Ogre tribe controlled by Bigua that had this elemental array on his tribe's grounds. Bigua had gained clarity of his own when he evolved to a certain degree from being a mere Ogre Soldier. He used this clarity to create this phenomenon for himself and his tribe.

Bigua wanted to avoid Kev Larson and Meera Madinah from visiting his tribe's grounds for the same reason. He had an ambitious plan to evolve into a true Monster Overlord and also help some of his trusted tribe members using the elemental pool. If his plan had succeeded, Bigua's tribe would have become a severe threat to rankers and other tribes in the Badlands.

If the special forces knew what he was doing in his backyard, they would never have made deals with him. Kev and Meera would have attacked him without considering the effects of their actions on the battle with the soldiers of Layos.

One had to say that Bigua was a crafty and talented Ogre. At the time of Drin's mission, he killed a member of his own tribe— Hiram with his own hands to prevent the situation from escalating. He killed the Ogre Lord and ended the matter then and there. Then he made a deal with the special forces of Edinburgh to obtain more resources for his project.

At first, Bigua's elemental pool was only capable of increasing one's elemental attainments in the water element. Only those who walked the path of the water element were able to use the elemental pool for themselves.

However, everything changed when Bigua saw Drin mimic the effects of other elements with his shadow element. Bigua belonged to the Oni dungeon and was still in touch with the monsters inside it. He consulted with Durbag who was supposed to be a genius when it came to the study of arrays.

Durbag was the same orc who had constructed the pyramid-encompassing array to free the entire monster population from Har Jahar's tyrannic control by killing him. The array was then used by Eren to kill the Oni King using his own hands.

Even as an expert in arrays, Durbag was very impressed with what Bigua was doing. The ogre's knowledge of the subject was limited but he knew what he could do with it. The two monsters discussed and used various shadow-element resources to make this array compatible with almost anyone.

This was also the reason why Bigua wanted to kidnap Drin Dawn and conduct a few experiments on him and his shadow element. It was to alleviate the consequences of using the elemental pool. Alas, Drin was protected by Meera Madinah and Kev Larson at that point, preventing the Ogre from resolving the matter for the better.

A significant portion of the resources had been used in the construction of this elemental array. Bigua had even traded with the Oni dungeon and other tribes within the Badlands to make his project a success story. However, his efforts were thrown down the drain for him when Kirin launched an attack on his tribe.

Bigua was just about to use the elemental pool when that happened. He was challenged by Kaal and defeated in mortal combat in front of his entire tribe. Kaal was half-dead in his fight against Bigua but he managed to defeat the quasi-Monster Overlord by a hair's breadth.

Bigua had huge backing in the tribe who strongly opposed Kaal's hostile takeover despite the monster traditions in place. This rebellion was easily squashed by Kirin, using it as a reason to justify her interference in the tribe despite being a non-Ogre.

Kirin had managed to keep her word by obtaining the elemental pool for her husband. She rushed right toward the butcher after the mission concluded, enabling him to begin phase two of the plan.

[Chapter 905 Life, In General, Is Uncertain](#)

'*sigh. Can't say I didn't see this coming.'

Eren sighed as if he was dreading the work that lay ahead.

He could feel the discomfort most rankers had after hearing about the side effects of using the elemental pool. As a guild master of the White Raven guild, he needed to take on the responsibility of motivating its members as well.

"There's no need to overthink this and get diagnosed with chicken feet. I called it a gamble because there's some uncertainty attached to the updated program. But let's just get this straight.

Life, in general, is uncertain."

Eren gazed at everyone. His Sativa Stick was over. So he put his hands behind his back and started pacing back and forth on the platform before speaking further.

"If one has the right mindset and persistence, they'll be able to survive any program or procedure thrown their way. I know that fear is an obstacle for some rankers. They are afraid of failing.

They fear that they might die or waste their mana cores and become mortals again. Some rankers must be concerned about not being able to advance even after surviving the program."

The butcher could feel that his audience was getting defensive about the topic. Most of the rankers who were hesitating to participate in the updated program were thinking along the lines of "easy for you to say." That's why he needed to make something clear.

"Now... I'm not saying fear is a terrible thing per se. It serves as our compass and has the potential to point us in the right direction. Fear stops us from doing stupid things so we can focus on doing things that are right for us.

A bit of fear needs to be present in every beating heart to keep it grounded in reality. A fearless person is a walking hazard for themselves and those around them.

Suppose a boy in my childhood said he didn't fear Rank-1 mana beasts. And if he wanted me to accompany him into the wild so that he could prove his fearlessness to me and the entire world by proxy, I would have accompanied that jackass only to use him as bait and leave him there.

I wouldn't want guys like these around me at all. It's better that nature takes its course and the rule of the jungle gets rid of that problem for me."

Eren's speech was slow and precise. His words started resonating within the consciousness of his listeners. They also started chuckling while listening to Eren's story, thinking that it was a light joke. Only the butcher knew how serious he was when he gave that example.

Eren let the sounds of chuckles and laughter die down a bit before speaking in a grim tone.

"That being said, we also have to acknowledge the fact that fear is not real. Not really. Fears and limits we impose on ourselves are often just illusions we set for ourselves so that we don't get hurt.

No disrespect to my teacher or our high-ranking guests here, but there's nobody better qualified to talk about overcoming one's fear than me. If fear could be quantified, I'd be honest in saying that I have felt the most amount of fear than everyone else combined in this hall."

Eren stopped in his tracks and remembered the times when he had the jitters. They were no longer with him. He no longer had nightmares. But he would never be able to forget that feeling again. His mental state also started affecting the audience in front of him.

The butcher smiled mildly and continued.

"But even when I was fearful and my limbs were shaking, I never stopped doing what I wanted to do. Even while my body was feeling the jitters of the unknown, I never stopped moving forward. Fear physically and mentally affected me. So much so that I had to look for ways to control my jitters.

And yet, I'll go ahead and say that fear is merely a figment of one's imagination. I have denied its hold on me by doing that. With or without fear, with or without support, with or without accomplices— I'll achieve exactly what I wanted to achieve. The means will change but not my destination."

Levine looked at her students very attentively. She always knew that his ability to grab people's attention was as good as his skill at flying under their radar. It all depended on what he wanted from his

audience. He would change according to the need of the hour. And all of his transformations would always feel natural. She had started liking this quality of his a lot.

The butcher was on a different tangent when Levine was developing feelings for him. Thus, he ignored the gaze with which she was looking at him and spoke further.

"Words like optimism or pessimism will have zero value when you do the job you are supposed to do. I know a lot of the stuff I said is just something you already know. An obvious truth that nobody cares about until it starts to matter."

The butcher turned to his audience and narrowed his eyes. His aura fluctuated and started feeling dreadful as he spoke his next words very carefully.

"This is it for my motivation speech. As superfluous as it might sound, this is all I got. Of course, I realize that words alone cannot persuade all of you into doing what I want.

If you still cannot abolish fear from your heart, let me give you a bigger fear in exchange. This applies to all White Raven guild members who are present here. I'll kick you out of my guild if you decide to back down from the program now.

Fear is contagious and it spreads like wildfire. I want a team of elites in my guild and not a bunch of weaklings. You know what would happen if I kicked you out of the guild at this point, right?"

[Chapter 906 Winning Has A Price](#)

Eren's words struck like thunder in his audience's minds.

The pin-drop silence seemed to get more intense in the hall. There was a lot of mana fluctuation as the rankers were overwhelmed by their emotions. When Eren talked about kicking out the members, they looked at each other with weary eyes.

The White Raven guild had created plenty of enemies by now. And the only reason the guild members could still roam and take up quests was because of the protection provided by Levine's faction and House Derringer from the shadows.

If any of them got kicked out of the guild in this situation, nobody doubted in their minds that they would be targeted by these forces first and foremost. Eliminating any of the members was practically signing their death warrants.

Eren spread forth his domineering mana sense and forcefully calmed the agitated members down before speaking up.

"The other day, I got to know that the royal family of Edinburgh has something similar to this program of ours, sans the consequences. Of course, it has its limitations and they cannot overdo it. However, it still makes one wonder how blessed these people are to be able to do something like this.

However, it can only be used by the royals and their closest family members. So we can forget about ever having the opportunity to get to be part of their lot."

Eren was reminded of Rehaal Renar. It was through his memories that he was made aware that the royal family had access to an elemental pool of their own. It was most likely retrieved from ancient documents that were not made public.

Rehaal and most of his cousins had made use of this elemental array to advance in their respective ranks. Of course, Rodrick was strategically kept out of this arrangement after his temporary disengagement from the royal family.

This was the reason why Rodrick was hesitant in regressing in his rank to change his class. He had to give up his participation rights to use the elemental array when he essentially reset his ranking progress.

Rehaal and a lot of Rodrick's other cousins that were part of the royal competition got ahead of him using the elemental array. The gap between them only widened when that happened, forcing Rodrick to seek shelter in White Raven city.

Rodrick was also present in the hall. He pursed his lips when Eren let closely guarded information about the royal family out. But at this point, he didn't care two hoots about his messed up family either. He had already said "fuck you" to them once. And he wasn't about to suck it up to them.

Rodrick would rather be part of Eren's rank-up program and suffer any potential side effects coming his way. He was willing to play the gamble Eren was proposing.

Eren looked at Rodrick and smiled wickedly before speaking further.

"It's funny if you think about it. In life, some people get to play by different rules than others. They can do whatever they want regardless of the consequences of their actions. But one has to earn the right to do so. Now there are two ways of getting this privilege: you can receive it as an inheritance or you can earn it through your dedicated work.

I think it is safe to say that the ship of us earning that right through inheritance has already sailed past the horizon. So we are only left with one choice by default. And that choice requires your blood and sweat."

Eren snapped his fingers and a teleportation array appeared on the platform he was standing on. It led to the isolated space in which he had relocated the elemental array taken from Bigua's tribe.

The platform Eren stood on was the updated program's venue entrance. The butcher took a long breath and continued.

"Look, winning has a price. And leadership has a price.

I will pull my guild members along when they don't want to be pulled. I will challenge them when they don't want to be challenged. I have earned that right because I have suffered more and will continue to suffer more."

Eren's words made sense to his audience even when they didn't want to admit it. At this point, almost everybody was ready to participate in the program. It wasn't because they were motivated to grow. However, Eren's words inspired them to have a survival mentality. The butcher knew he had changed the crowd's mood for the better. He decided to give them one final push to pass through the teleportation array.

"Equivalent exchange!

There was a reason you were okay with joining this guild despite its shallow roots and the dangers it was surrounded by. You saw that my guild provided best-in-class resources and invested a lot of its revenue in-house for its members. You believed that it was all for your benefit?

The White Raven guild has a successful potion manufacturing line and Minerva's Utopia as its key assets. But all will be useless if we don't have the necessary force to back us up shortly. Especially now when the war is drawing so close.

Therefore, we came up with this ranking program. It may not be the right solution to all our current or upcoming problems. But it's a start."

Eren's words subtly predicted a doom's day prediction for all the White Raven members. But that's just him preparing his guild for the upcoming storm. He won't always be around. So he needed people who could manage things on their own.

The runes inside the teleportation array lit up, prompting the rankers to prepare themselves for sudden enrollment into the updated rank-up program. The butcher controlled the platform and made it land on the ground and spoke up.

"I will never ask you to do anything I wouldn't do. I also know that there were better ways of breaking this program up to you instead of creating peer pressure. You may label me as a tyrant even after completing the program. But let me make it clear that I am okay with being labeled as a tyrant if it gives me what I want in the fastest way possible.

Now... those who want to build their future with the White Raven guild— step up. And those who want to leave the guild and risk what's waiting for them outside— step back."

Eren made an announcement and observed the crowd. As expected, everyone was onboard with the plan. The butcher smiled brightly before starting the teleportation array for all the White Raven guild members.

[Chapter 907 Capitalizing On Grim Pillar Town](#)

"You are not going?"

Levine asked Eren while tucking her locks behind her ears. All the White Raven members had been teleported to the isolated site of the elemental pool. Only Eren and Levine were present at the scene.

She and the high-ranking entities from her faction had come to talk with Eren's guild personally upon his invitation. And they were equally interested in participating in the updated program. It was just that Eren had calibrated the array for rankers up to the rank of Adept. So they would have to wait until the White Ravens are done.

Eren smiled at Levine and greeted the company she was with. The two were left alone once Eren started talking to Levine personally.

"Waiting for the right time makes more sense in my case, teacher Levine. I have just completed the solid stage of the Adept rank. I won't receive any significant gains if I use the program at this point.

Even if I manage to break into the Expert rank using the elemental array, my progress would halt there. And since my foundations are not that strong, I'd have to face a bottleneck for some time right after entering the next rank.

So I'll wait until I achieve Expert rank on my own. Only then can I maximize my gains through this one-time-use method."

Alephee had provided this suggestion to Eren right after he had gained access to the elemental array. The butcher wanted to use the pool immediately. But Alephee's suggestion made sense to him and he decided to wait. It wouldn't be long before he became an Expert ranker anyway.

Levine looked Eren in the eyes before sharing her doubts with him.

"Hmm. It looks like you're trying to wrap things up. It can only mean you are about to disappear from the city once again."

Eren chuckled before nodding at her. He bowed a bit and led her toward the exit before speaking up.

"Hehe. No rest for the wicked, teacher Levine.

You must be aware that my graduation test event will be held in Edinburgh's capital in about a month. Then there's a project waiting for me once I finish my graduation. So I want to be done with a bunch of tasks before the ceremony."

Eren laid out his schedule for Levine. White Raven City considered her one of its key figures. So she needed to know some of his plans beforehand. Levine had a stress line on her forehead when she heard about visiting the capital.

"Yeah. I am being invited by LA to attend the test event in the capacity of an ex-professor. Let's visit the capital together, shall we? Call me up once you are done with your tasks and we'll head there together."

Eren didn't mind traveling to the capital with Levine. But he felt like there was another reason for Levine to suggest they travel together other than seeking company.

"Are you worried that Demonmir might strike at me again with a newly formed team?"

Eren was already aware that Demonmir—Ottoman de Montmorency and Paladin of Pain—Reva Rain were at the capitol. As one of Edinburgh's most well-known figures and title holders, they were invited by the Royal Ren to attend the graduation event as well.

Levine nodded at Eren's question. She hadn't asked him about it yet but she was made aware that Eren's exit mission in the army had been sabotaged. She didn't know many details about it since on paper, the mission was completed and over with. It resulted in two army officers' casualties. And still, someone like Eren had miraculously survived.

What she didn't know was the fact that Eren was jumped on even before his exit mission. The details about that ambush were still not known to almost anybody.

Still, it was clear that the forces opposing Eren's rise were determined to keep on targeting him again and again until they succeeded. She could still manage things and protect Eren from obvious and

forthcoming traps while he was in the core of the Nightshade duchy. But her safety net would start to thin out when he traveled to the capital.

Eren knew what Levine was thinking. He chuckled before clearing a few things up for her.

"I don't mind traveling with you, teacher Levine. But rest assured, I will not be attacked anymore. Until I reach the capital, at least. Not because my enemies suddenly stopped targeting me. However, Demonmir would want to meet me now that I've survived this long.

Heh! I haven't met the guy yet. But something tells me he would want to meet me at the capitol at the time of the test event."

Eren shrugged his shoulders as he said this. It was as if he did not feel any pressure when meeting Demonmir.

Eren had learned a lot from the memories he had of Oslo before Alephee converted him into a human doll. He was especially interested in memories related to Demonmir. From Oslo's memories, he got to know a bit about Demonmir and a few of his personality traits.

Eren then tried memory extraction on Nico Chain's corpse which Alephee had killed along with his demon beast. His Ability didn't work that well on the corpses but he was still able to gather some more information about Ottoman.

Levine raised her eyebrows at Eren when he talked about Demonmir. She didn't know about the pre-exit ambush he had to go through. But something told her that it was exactly like Demonmir to look his enemy in the eyes. Especially when his enemy was a ranker like Eren.

Levine sighed looking at Eren. She didn't want to say this out loud but Eren was exactly like the young Demonmir in her eyes.

Talented and hardworking. Cunning and bold. Vicious and heartless when it comes to spilling their enemies' blood. Someone who wants to stand above others. Someone who would go to any length to achieve their goals. Someone passionate about the path they had chosen and would walk steadfastly on it, come hell or high water.

Eren and Demonmir could both be defined in the same way.

[Chapter 908 Need For More Master Rankers](#)

Eren and Demonmir could both be defined in the same way.

However, Eren had Demonmir beat when it came to achieving the kind of success he had achieved while still being this young and in the Adept rank. Levine knew that Demonmir was leagues behind Eren when he was in the Adept rank. And this was when he was supported by her family's resources.

Levine came to realize something when she started drawing comparisons between Eren and Demonmir in her head. She started by counting the similarities between the two. And ended up seeing what made the two different as well. The more she thought, the more she was sure of her prediction.

'Eren will surpass that bastard in the future.'

The Master ranker smiled when she thought about Eren's monstrous potential. She smiled mirthlessly before adding on.

"You know Eren, Morty Derringer told me that Demonmir had approached him. The bastard wanted to cut a deal with him and cut me and my faction off along with you. And House Derringer would probably have considered the offer as well.

But then your killing of Rey and Janos Remus got known. Do you know what they call your kill site? The Grim Pillar Town. A small town had been erected on the site overnight.

House Derringer has rejected Demonmir's offer ever since then. It considers you to be a greater threat than Demonmir. I don't know about your enemies. But you sure have spooked your allies a bit."

Levine said with a light smile on her face. The butcher raised his eyebrows before speaking up.

"Grim Pillar Town? Who's behind this? Those sons of bitches better give me a cut of their profits if they want to use my artwork as their landmark."

Upon realizing Eren had retained his greedy nature to capitalize on everything and anything that moved, Levine, burst into laughter. Eren's grim face, like he meant what he said, made her laugh even more.

She knew everything was alright with Eren when he showed her that he was still the old him. That success had not gotten into his head and he was still as prudent as he had always been.

"Alright. Enough with your jokes. Demonmir might not target you anymore. But he is not the only enemy you have. You have also pissed off uncle Sebastian and who knows how many others. So we'll be traveling together and that will be the end of it."

Eren was forced to agree to Levine's plans. The butcher was about to say something to her when he heard another woman speak to him.

'Isn't she laughing too easily at whatever you say? It wasn't that funny. And it wasn't even a joke, was it?'

Eren heard Alephee's voice in his head and ignored it. Of course, he wasn't joking when it came to collecting revenue from Grim Pillar Town. As long as it brought more traffic to his city, he was more than willing to erect more pillars like the last one. He was ready to adorn those pillars with the "souvenirs" of his remaining enemies. The butcher made plans to let Agatha handle this part for him.

Eren and Levine made their way to her suite. There were a few details they wanted to finalize before they moved on to the next set of tasks. It was related to the use of the elemental pool for high-ranked entities.

The use of such an array for rankers above the Adept rank became increasingly complicated. The array needed a constant stream of special resources belonging to the respective elements to keep it functioning. And this burning of expensive resources wasn't something one could pull off in an individual capacity.

Eren and Levine both needed to sit together and figure out how many high-ranking entities would enter the elemental array. They also needed to discuss the resources that would be used in the process.

The student-and-teacher pair sat in front of each other at Levine's desk before charting out a plan. The butcher was glad that he had his guild's funds backing him up. Otherwise, forget about sponsoring his guild members. He wouldn't have been able to make the program work for himself.

"There's one more problem I have regarding entering the elemental array myself. From the data you have provided me regarding the array, I and Zethos won't be able to enter the pool by ourselves. We'll need two more B-rankers who are willing to take this risk and share the burden with us. At least one, if we want to keep it close. Otherwise, we both would be throwing our futures as rankers away."

Zethos was another B-ranker from Levine's faction that Eren had met not too long ago for the first time. She had invited him to the White Raven city when she was made aware of the array by Eren.

Zethos was very loyal to Levine. So she thought of rewarding his loyalty like this. However, the lack of B-rankers made it difficult for her to participate in the rank-up program.

Levine was very confident about clearing the program. She had no doubts in her mind that she could progress in her ranking journey by leaps and bounds without any hurdles. This is if and when the elemental pool is made available to her. However, she wasn't willing to take unnecessary risks by entering the pool with just one ranker.

Eren was about to say something to her when the communication artifact inside his storage started sending him alerts. The message looked urgent from the looks of things.

Eren excused himself from Levine's study room and stepped out. He only turned on the voice feed of the artifact to listen to the other side. He heard someone speak to him in a desperate monster tongue when he did that.

'My king! You finally picked up!'

Eren narrowed his eyes when he recognized the voice.

'Ror? Why are you out of breath? What happened?'

'My king, do you know someone named Nina and Amory?'

Eren's expression turned grim when he heard Aunt Nina's name. He thought she was in trouble so he didn't waste any time affirming Ror's speculation. He urged the quasi-Monster King to give him more details about what exactly was going on.

[Chapter 909 Convoy Recovery](#)

'Tell me what is going on.'

Eren asked Ror to be precise in his report. That latter obliged.

'My king, this human healer, and the old man who's with her attacked me while I was on my way to meet Baran as you told me to. I want to avoid confrontation with them since I heard your name from their mouths.'

So all I can do right now is run away from them. But they... Aaaargh... these humans are not leaving me alone. This old man is especially persistent. As if he wanted to die at my hands. What should I do, my king?'

Eren didn't know what to say to Ror after he heard about his situation. But he was glad that Aunt Nina was safe.

It had been a few months since Nina left the city of Curar with Amory and a female Adept ranker from her guild. She first visited the city of New Beginnings and dropped the Adept ranker off there. This was because Nina and Amory were about to visit a zone meant for Master rankers in Monster Canyon and an Adept would only get in the way.

Nina was supposed to visit Eren in his city after ensuring that Amory wasn't taking any unnecessary risks in his forced breakthrough. But for some reason, he lost contact with Nina after entering Monster Canyon.

Eren could only blame the peculiarities of Monster Canyon for this. He wasn't really worried about her safety. She was a full-fledged B-Rank healer who was very aware of which zones in Monster Canyon she was supposed to check out. Plus, Amory was with her who was supposed to be someone only a few steps from achieving the Grandmaster rank.

Still, there was always room for "what ifs", especially when it came to exploring Monster Canyon. The butcher knew this better than anyone he knew. After all, the place had claimed his life once.

That's why Eren wanted Nina to contact him as soon as she could. Which she didn't do. So all he could do was wait for her update.

'Haah! She should have called me.'

Eren sighed. Only now did he understand the misery of keeping someone in the dark about their whereabouts after being on the receiving end. He decided to call Agatha up from time to time whenever he pulled stunts like this. At least as much as he could.

Eren listened to Ror's pleas and sighed. He pondered for a bit before giving Ror a few basic instructions. He also gave him pointers on how to get rid of the human rankers following him.

The quasi-Monster King never really ran away from any fights until this day. Plus, he didn't know much about humans' way of tailing monsters in the land of Anfang since he had seldom ventured outside the Oni dungeon.

Ror listened to Eren's points keenly and understood them well before cutting the call off. The latter knew that the Ogre Overlord was more than capable of staying away from his pursuers if the right instructions were provided to him.

Eren didn't know much about Amory or Aunt Nina's current strengths. But he was confident that Ror wouldn't be at a disadvantage fighting two B-Rank healers at the same time. The only reason he ran away from the fight was that he was afraid of injuring someone his king knew personally.

Eren chuckled when he thought about the situation. To sort the mess out, it seemed he would have to intervene himself in such a high-level battle. He immediately thought of killing two birds with one stone.

The butcher looked at the door of Levine's study room before walking up to it. He knocked on the door twice before entering.

"Teacher Levine, I think I have found two B-Ranked entities you need for entering the elemental array. I'll just go ahead and get them."

Eren already had plans for letting aunt Nina enter the elemental pool when he learned about its existence from Ror. This was another reason he was waiting for Nina to contact him.

It was just a matter of convenience that Amory was added to the list. Of course, he would ask Healers' Nirvana for compensation for allowing Amory to use the elemental pool.

Levine looked at Eren carefully before speaking to him in a careful tone.

"I hope you know who to count on, Eren. I don't think we should pick any random ranker for a program this sensitive. We don't know how the royals will look at us running the program..."

Levine was about to warn Eren against contacting some random Master ranker just for the sake of filling in the numbers. She could have done the same if the number requirement was all she cared about.

However, Eren cut her off before speaking up.

"It'll be fine. One of the rankers I'm talking about is my aunt Nina. I trust her completely. As for the royals objecting to our program, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

We won't run the program long enough anyway. It costs a lot to operate an array like this, and I'm not running a charity. The rankers we have chosen will probably be all there is to it. So there's nothing to worry about."

Eren straightforwardly sorted the matter. Of course, Levine asked him about Nina and her whereabouts. The butcher gave her a brief description of Nina's current progress before getting up to leave. He walked towards Levine's window instead of taking the usual exit route.

Argo was summoned in his eagle form outside the window. The demon beast flapped his wings and generated a mini typhoon around him before giving out an eagle cry.

"Kiyeeeh! Let's wreck some shit."

Argo could form perfectly sound statements ever since he had digested an Expert ranker for himself. He still struggled to keep the cuss words out of his mouth for a long time. But his vocabulary had grown a lot as opposed to using a certain word to describe everyone and everything.

"We are not out hunting, you fat bird. It's just a simple convoy recovery. Let's go."

As Eren climbed up the window's ledge, he sighed and said to Argo. Lightning struck and he appeared on Argo's back who had already started flying toward the horizon.

[Chapter 910 Almighty Push](#)

'He... he cares about her. That's rare. Very rare...'

This was the first time Levine had heard Eren say he trusted someone completely. She could also sense the rare form of affection Eren had for Nina when he talked about her.

'Hmm. I wonder how close he is to this "aunt Nina" he talks so affectionately about.'

Levine had a random thought as she watched Eren get away from her vision. She snapped out of her reverie soon enough and concentrated on her next set of tasks.

Eren inadvertently sensed a bit of jealousy from Levine for a fraction of a second as he flew further away from her place. But he ignored it and focused on getting to Nina on time.

Amory Stowage seemed desperate to achieve a forced breakthrough.

He had been chasing a Monster King for days on end. But the Ogre in question decided to run away instead of accepting his duel. Nina had been trying to help him by keeping track of the monster using spells exclusive to her. However, she eventually lost track of the monster and both of them were forced to halt in their tracks.

Ror, on the other hand, doubled back on his steps after he realized that his presence wouldn't get detected by his pursuers. He waited for his king to arrive at the scene. Meanwhile, he was given the task of safeguarding the very pursuers who wanted to use him as a guinea pig for the old man's breakthrough.

Ror could only sigh at the irony of protecting someone who wanted to kill him. He was then reminded of Eren making his son Kaalmahen a chieftain of a huge Ogre tribe and decided not to complain anymore. He could say that the quasi-Ogre King had undisputed affection for his son and his king by proxy. After all, he was oath-bound to follow everything Eren commanded him to do.

Unaware of their prey's situation, Nina wasn't happy when Ror got away from their pursuit. This monster was just what Amory needed to achieve a breakthrough. Losing him now meant Amory losing his chance to achieve a breakthrough anytime soon.

"It's strange. It feels like the Ogre suddenly grew brains and started messing up my tracking spells."

Nina felt extra frustrated for some reason. It seemed like there were more mental stresses at play than just helping Amory break into the Grandmaster rank. She looked at the seniormost guild member on her team before saying something with a bit of hesitation.

"Uncle Amory, I think we should go back and check up on the guild master. It's too late to..."

Nina stopped what she was about to say midway for some reason. She clenched her fists and looked at Amory with a pitying look in her eyes. The old healer chuckled when he understood what she was trying to say to him.

"It's too late for me to achieve a breakthrough, right? So you want me to give up and leave this place? Lass, I know why you are saying this. However, will it help the situation if I return and meet the guild master while still being the same old Master ranker?"

That girl needs me to break into the Grandmaster rank. Only then can she ask the kingdom of Edinburgh to make moves on those damn cultists."

Amory looked frustrated and angry. It seemed his breakthrough was not a personal matter anymore. He had another, more compelling reason to break into the Grandmaster rank.

Nina didn't know what to say to Amory that would make him turn back. Both of them needed to go back to the city of Curar as soon as they could. They had already lost so much time in the Badlands because of the unnatural space-time continuum of the place. She couldn't contact Eren because of it.

Nina could understand why Amory wanted to achieve a breakthrough. She had also tried to help him as much as she could. But she had come to realize that Amory had gotten even weaker than at the time he had entered Monster Canyon. At this rate, he would just be throwing his life away for nothing instead of having a shot at a forced breakthrough.

Nina was about to say something to Amory when she sensed someone approaching them from a distance. Her surprise turned into joy and her joy turned into worries before a lot of other emotions were added to the mix. That's because she recognized the presence of the ranker heading their way.

"Hmm? Who's this brat approaching us in such a bold manner..."

Amory was about to cast a detainment spell on the approaching ranker when he heard Nina's voice.

"Wait, Uncle Amory. I know him."

Lightning struck and Eren appeared in front of Nina with a light smile on his face. The latter ran into him as soon as he did, being embraced by him right away.

Amory raised his eyebrows when he saw Eren and Nina reunite with each other. He had never seen the B-Ranked Master healer get so close to any other ranker. The two of them didn't even talk for a while. They seemed lost in each other's embrace.

"What are you doing here? And how did you find me?"

"I came looking for you."

"You... you shouldn't be here. This is a zone meant for B-Ranked entities."

"And you were supposed to call me."

"I... I can explain."

"You should. But there's no need to do that right now. What's today's color?"

"Color? What color?"

"The color of your pan..."

"Aaah! Little rascal..."

Amory saw the couple engage in a peculiar way of conversing with each other. He then saw Nina pushing the young man away from her with great force like he had done something indecent to her.

Eren was pushed by Nina so hard that he flew toward a bunch of trees and ran through their trunks before destroying them. It took a few moments before he managed to stop himself from acting like a wrecking ball. The butcher sprouted Wind-Fire Wings behind his back and killed his momentum before taking to the air.

"Hahaha. You are as impulsive as always, Aunt Nina."