

## Vile 91

### Chapter 91: Party Meet

“Bro! You were just awesome. Winning two matches of this calibre shouldn’t be underestimated. And the fact that it was only the first day of the ranking war has added to your achievement.”

Jake couldn’t help praising his roommate after their party met up. Unlike Eren, others in his current party had decided to quit after their first compulsory ranking war. They were all waiting for Eren to finish up his second match.

Eren had been given first-aid by the academy staff after he got out of the battle ring. The caretaker used a simple F-Rank potion to close all his wounds and turn them into a bruise. Of course, the potion was diluted so that many students could be treated with it. Otherwise, it would have taken care of the injuries completely.

Rankers had supernatural healing ability laying dormant anyway. A night’s sleep would be enough for them to get over most normal injuries. And practising their ranking technique would further expedite that process. So it was natural that LA would cut corners in mass battle events like these.

Eren looked at his party mates as they made their way towards the nearest canteen. They were also looking a little worn down. But nobody looked as beat up like him.

“What about you guys? Sorry, I couldn’t pay attention to your battles. Jakey, at least you must have won, right?”

“Hahaha! That’s right. It was a little tough but I managed to beat my opponent fair and square.”

Jake subtly self-praised himself while stating his battle results. Becky scoffed at Sullivan Jr. as a result:

“Little difficult, you say! Fatty, you just barely managed to win over a girl because she didn’t have a flexible spell like yours. That too after taking so much of her beating. That caretaker had to use twice the amount of healing potion on you than usual to treat you. And you are still trying to brag about your win! Unbelievable!”

“Win is a win. No matter how you do it, against whom you do it. And I’m a firm believer in gender equality. I’m sure Eren is with me on this as well considering his performance with Renita. Hehe!”

Jake wasn’t disheartened by Becky’s rebuttal. He was just glad he could win at all. Especially after looking at a certain person in their team. Eren followed his gaze and soon asked away:

“Steve, what happened?”

“I.. I lost. \*Sigh. My worst fear came to haunt me in real life. I couldn’t activate the only spell I had on the time. And my opponent was a close combat expert. He saw that I was busy activating my spell and immediately got into an attacking range.

I tried to get away from him but my movement spell couldn’t overcome the movement spell the guy had. It was a one-sided beating. I had to admit defeat to save myself from the embarrassment of falling unconscious.”

Steve and his explanation on a sad note. He was sad that he lost. And sadder because he was the only one in their current team that had lost their first match.

“Oh! Never mind, Stevey. At least you now know the shortcoming of your spell. Becky, you won your match I take it.”

“Hmph! Why do you even need to ask? Of course, I won. Although I must admit, my opponent was no pushover. The worst was that she was a mage like me. Our match was dragged longer because of that. Thankfully, I only showed my defensive spell at a crucial time just before launching my counter. That caught her off guard and got her incapacitated.”

Becky tilted her neck upwards saying that. She was now more confident in her path as a mage because of this well-earned victory. Contrary to popular belief, she wasn't bragging at all. Her opponent really was a tough nut to crack. It was Becky's presence of mind that had tilted the match in her favour.

“That's good, Becky. See? I told you, you are better off as a mage than a healer. There will be a day off from ranking war tomorrow. Let's organize a party practice. I might be able to guide you guys in some areas. I'll send a message to Renita. She will join us as well.”

Eren concluded their chat and hinted that they should have their fill now. The group was disbanded for the day soon afterwards.

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Eren needed a rest!

He had sent his mana circuits on hyperdrive to accommodate two spells. The very definition of hyperdrive is someone or something delivering more output than they are supposed to.

During Eren's battle with Renita, the execution of primary Sedated Perception was autonomous and handled by the gem. So he didn't need to worry about that front. But he still needed to execute two spells while ensuring their enhanced output to keep up with the stacked spell. This overwork had affected his mana circuit. He needed a day's rest to recuperate from it.

Using two spells simultaneously is called dual casting. And the triple casting is when three spells are being executed by a ranker at the same time. If the dual or triple cast involved the execution of the same spell in iteration, then it was called spell stacking.

The spell combo involves the usage of the dual or triple casting of any variety and form. Any type of spell combo can put a substantial burden on the Novice ranker's primary mana circuit. Because it was not ready yet to sustain the prolonged usage of spell combos.

Only a few talented individuals among Novice rankers could make use of their respective spell combos effectively while ensuring a consistent execution.

And sending your mana circuit into hyperdrive without muscles imploding required even more expertise. It was something a ranker would only be able to develop over time.

Eren was no genius. He too wouldn't have been able to pull this off had he not had his experiences from the previous timeline. That very experience had given him the edge he needed to beat Renita, a genuine genius.

Renita was among those talented individuals who would seldom appear in their generation. She was self-aware of her talent as well. That's why she was confident in winning against Eren.

But she would have never thought that a guy her age could manage to send his mana circuits into hyperdrive to defeat her today. That too with the advantage of the ranger's class on her side.

Renita could use spell combos too. She could dual cast and had used the same to keep her movement type spell and attack type spell active at the same time.

But she couldn't stack her spells yet. It meant she couldn't enhance a single spell type's effect twice or thrice its original delivery.

Nor could she raise the output of her spell executions than their default values. That's why she only ran out of mana and was slightly exhausted but wasn't suffering as much as Eren did after their match.

Apart from suffering stacked Sedated Perception's side effects, the butcher's mana circuits were also affected severely. Due to that, he wasn't in a position to execute spells for the day. Otherwise, he would have continued his winning streak after using the healing spell and some potions.

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The next day!

Around 9 AM.

Eren met up with his new party at an open space surrounded by dense vegetation. These spots were created by students over the years just by practising their combat abilities.

Jake Sullivan, Becky White, and Steve Austin were the usual faces among those gathered. But they were accompanied by three more faces.

Renita Diabreo was there as well. She was standing alongside Becky who was telling her about some stuff.

Then there were two rankless students. They had been invited to be here by Steve and Becky on Eren's direction.

The butcher wanted Steve to handle their recruitment at first to cement his leadership. But he lost his ranking battle yesterday. That certainly wasn't going to improve the party's image in the recruits' eyes if he were to go alone.

That's why Eren sent Becky along with Steve. She had won spectacularly in her match against a strong opponent. Her presence with Steve would be enough to neutralize the negative psych impact.

Of course, by now everyone had understood that Steve was only going to be used as a front face. Eren was going to be their real leader in the dark. His performance was enough to assert his dominance over them. They just couldn't figure out why he insisted on Steve being the leader on paper.

Eren and Jake were the last pair to arrive at the meeting. The former straight up sat on the ground and hinted to others to do the same. The ladies were a little reluctant to dirty their clothes this early in the morning. But they subconsciously obliged at once after seeing Eren's emotionless eyes.

The crowd was now seated in a circle. The butcher started his speech after ensuring everyone was paying attention to him:

“So hi there! I’ll tell you why we are meeting today.”

### **Chapter 92: Ana and Bel**

“So hi there! I’ll tell you why we are meeting today.”

Eren spoke with a plain voice that didn’t exude any excitement. But one could subconsciously feel he was weighing his words carefully.

“But first, let’s have a little self-introduction round, shall we?”

I’ll go first. Name’s Eren Idril. I’m practising a lightning element technique and the spells of the same element.

I’m aiming to be a close combat expert. My BTP is 14. And I’ll serve as the main damage dealer for our party in the future.”

Eren looked at Jake who caught his cue:

“Hello. I’m Jake Sullivan. I’ll serve as the tank. My water element technique is of the same class and my spells in the future will also be based on the same class. My current BTP is 10 but I can feel...”

“Fatty, no need to come up with an excuse. Having a low BTP is not a crime. Especially if you could beat a stronger opponent than you.

We have a certain someone in our party who till yesterday had the second-highest BTP value in our group. Yet he couldn’t beat an opponent lower in BTP value than him.”

Becky’s haughtiness shifted the focus of the conversation from Jake to her before heading in Steve’s direction. But soon she pulled the attention back on herself, lest their real boss becomes angry!

“Alright. So I’m Rebecca White. But you can call me Becky. I was going to choose the healer’s path. But someone opened my eyes to the obvious truth in front of me and made me realise I’m better suited as a mage.

My BTP is 11. And I’ll take care of the medium-range attack spells. All the spells in my repertoire will be based on this role.”

Next was Steve’s turn. He was a little downcast by Becky’s snarky remark. But he was aware that she was speaking the truth. He summed up his perseverance to self introduce himself:

“My name’s Steve Austin. Yes, I lost my first match yesterday. But I’ll improve myself soon by working twice as hard as the previous me.

My BTP is 14. I’ll be the berserker of our team.

I’ll serve as a damage dealer on the frontlines with Eren. I can also assist Becky with my medium-range spells. Due to my class’s speciality, I can use my skills to fill up the gaps left in our offence as well as defence.”

Renita didn't waste time and went up next:

"Hello. You guys already know my name. It's Renita Diabreo. My class is that of a ranger. I can take care of ranged attacks with my AoE spell. But my ranger spells in tracking need some practice.

My BTP value is technically 15. But it's just one step away from turning 16. That's why it is shocking for me that this guy could beat me up with his BTP of 14."

Renita didn't hide her displeasure from yesterday's battle results while eyeing the butcher. Listening to Eren's BTP value made it even worse. Now she wanted a rematch with him more than ever to settle her score. But the guy who was the target of her scorn acted like he didn't care and stated what he had to say:

"Okay. That's it for our regular party members for now. The reserve members would give their introductions next."

Eren looked at the two new people after saying that.

One of them was a kid with spectacles sitting unevenly on his nose. They obviously needed a repair. The boy had a lean build and his stature was a little smaller than Eren. The latter was immediately pleased that he wasn't the shortest guy in their party anymore.

The other student was a girl. She looked more mature for her age due to all the curves at the right places. She was lively and energetic.

Eren could see that she was barely keeping herself from speaking abruptly. She was still rankless after all. Even if they all were a student of the same class and age, she needed to give respect to the Novice rankers in front of her. She only spoke after Eren nodded at her:

"Yo, what's up, folks? So my name's Oriana Amaris. But I'd prefer it if you could call me Ana. First of all, I'd like to thank all of you guys for informing us about the auction event.

We weren't going to attend it due to still being rankless. But now we have good techniques and spells for future use. And that's all because of you.

And thanks a ton for trusting and inviting us to your group despite us still being rankless. I can't..."

"Ana, sorry for interrupting you. But let me be clear about a few things. First, don't talk about THAT event so casually anywhere. Even if it's just us at this place. Use your audio channel if you really have to. You'd cause great damage to all of us including yourself if a mishap happens.

Second, we did everything to make our party stronger. You can consider this as an investment from our end. And we'll accept certain standards of performance in your roles as a repayment.

This is a simple form of exchange. So you don't need to be overly courteous with us. We are one team after all.

And third, this is a round of self-introduction. We'd prefer if you could get back on that as soon as possible.

I'm not trying to be a drill sergeant here. But a party has to be serious in its conduct when there's a need for it to be so. We'll have time to talk casually after I finish whatever I have to say.

Trust me, it's important. That's why I've called you guys here in the first place even when intra-class battles are still so many days away from us."

Eren cut short Ana's blabbermouth. The latter bit her tongue to show that she had realized her mistake:

"Ah, my bad! Forgive me, sir Eren..."

"You don't need to call me sir."

"Then Novice Eren?"

"Tch! Plain Eren would be fine."

"Al... alright. Sorry, Eren. I just get carried away sometimes. Although I'm yet to enter the Novice rank, I know what I want to do. I'll choose the healer's path.

I've been told by Becky that we'll serve as reserve members. I don't know how we can help you with our current rankless status. But rest assured, I'll do everything I can to support my team."

Ana patted her chest in confidence. Ana's cheerful presence made the mood a little lighter for everybody. Eren only gave a mild smile as a response before looking at the kid with specs:

"Um... Nice to meet you. My name is Bel Longstone. I'm planning to become a historian. Like Ana here, I'm opting for a non-combat class. But.... But if you guys want, I can choose a different class."

Bel said this while adjusting his oddly shaped specs in vain!

### **Chapter 93: Pros & Cons of Apprenticeship**

"But.... But if you guys want, I can choose a different class."

Bel said this while adjusting his oddly shaped specs in vain! Eren pacified him with his words:

"Bel, you don't need to change your class for us. Rather, we wanted a historian in our team. That's why you were approached."

"But I didn't tell anyone about my choice to become a historian till now. How did you know that I'd choose this class?"

"Er... Bel, just look at yourself, man. Do you have what it takes to choose a combat-oriented profession? Do you think others can't see that and read you like an open book you are? Historian was going to be your most likely choice.

But that's not important here. I've called you guys here to inform you about a few things. That way, we'd be able to gain maximum benefits in the coming days.

First, Ana and Bel would not join our party until they officially start their ranking journey. But that doesn't mean they'd stay idle.

Ana, you need to apply for a job at LA's department of health. They'd place you in one of the infirmaries on the academy's ground. You would gain experience in treating rankers and earning Merps at the same time this way.

Likewise, Bel should apply for a job in the library department. You'd stay out of trouble while expanding your knowledge. Earning Merps is an added advantage.

I'd like all of us to get apprenticed by respective Adapt rank professors by the end of this year. The earlier you could pull it off, the better.

Apprenticeship isn't a cakewalk. There are some disadvantages to accepting it.

First, your day would become more hectic as you might get called by your master anytime they see fit. That can put pressure on you to arrange your schedule to accommodate your lectures, job, training, and more in such a way that they won't hinder your apprenticeship.

Second, you might have to tag along with your master outside the academy grounds if and when they need to do so. The Adapt level professors only take one class a week because they tend to leave the academy grounds to run errands for LA, partake in personal missions, answer a summons by the kingdom etc. So accompanying your master for almost a week might disrupt all your planning for the week.

Of course, Masters won't necessarily try to sabotage your routine. They'd take your job, lectures, and training into consideration and coordinate with LA before issuing a summon to you. But still, it might get a little difficult for us apprentices. Of course, there's a certain factor of risk involved.

And lastly, Master would pay in Merps or some other form for your services. But apprenticeship isn't all that lucrative Merps wise. You are better off doing your regular job if earning Merps is all you care about. But what you gain instead, in abundance, would be an on-field experience.

The monetary issue prevents most of the poor students from getting into the program, but trust me when I say this. You don't want to miss gaining experience right now. Especially if you want to be a good ranker of your generation.

The biggest advantage of this Master-apprentice program is that you'd potentially get an unrestricted amount of knowledge in your field. Your Master is responsible for teaching you stuff in your class. You won't have to pay in Merps for those learning sessions like you do for the academy's lectures and on-field programs.

And the second advantage would be that nobody would try to mess with you. It is quiet for now. But inter-year ranking wars have the potential to completely dry your accounts of all your Merps if you are unlucky and not backed by someone influential in LA or outside it.

In short, the advantages of receiving an apprenticeship far outweigh its disadvantages. We must aim to get into the program from the start if we want to get those advantages to ourselves. I want you guys to think hard about what you need to do as a ranker all your life.

Once you do that, gather information regarding any possible Adapt rankers from the same field who take in apprentices. Know about what conditions you need to meet to get apprenticed by them. And start working on those conditions so that you can fulfil them before your rivals.

Ideally, the apprenticeship program is for second-year students and onwards. But there isn't any rule about whether or not you should have the information and try to meet the conditions of apprenticeship. So that's what we will do. We are going to streamline our efforts so that we can get maximum output from our invested time and efforts.

I'd suggest you choose your masters from the field or job posting you are part of. That way, you will have maximum time with your Master who can guide you in your field while you are doing your job. Your master will be aware of your schedule on a personal level so the instances of your schedule getting disturbed would be minimum. Plus, you'd save time.

I, for example, have decided to opt for an apprenticeship offered by Adapt Marla. I'll have my Besanc missions as a source to earn Merps. Adapt Marla isn't a regular professor in LA. and she mostly stays at her posting at LA's border. So I'll be able to sync my apprenticeship with personal missions.

Besanc is the best place to earn Merps in a short time. But it won't provide you with the guidance you need to progress speedily in your ranking journey. Most of you guys are not ready for hunting outside yet. So we'll think about running missions for Besanc as a party when you get some experience under your belt.

I want us to raise our individual prowess, as well as our potential as a team to the best possible way we can in this crucial period. That's because there's going to be an event before the end of the year for our first years. That event will only allow team participation. And only the strongest team will be the biggest beneficiary of that event. I want that beneficiary to be us."

Eren stopped after saying till here so that his instructions would sink into his team members' heads. Only now did the others realize that Eren had been aiming to play a long game. Renia couldn't help asking:

"So you tipped us off about that event so that we could get the best techniques and spells for ourselves without going broke or employed. All so that we'd have a clear road to ourselves to get apprenticed. Why do I think that you are not gathering teammates but raising pawns for your benefit? And what's with this so-called event? I would have thought that you are spouting nonsense if your information about the previous event did not pan out. That being said, can you tell us about the event from the get-go so that we could trust you more."

Steve didn't like that Eren was being questioned by a girl who had just joined their party. He wanted to rebuke her but was stopped by Becky. The latter is also keen on knowing about the event now.

But mostly, Becky wanted to see how Eren would reply. The guy was still a mystery to her. He had all the crucial pieces of information despite being from a backwater town. And nobody knew who or what his source to get such information was. Of course, Becky was intrigued. So she let a newbie question their de-facto leader.

Eren didn't even flinch when he was called out for his goals. He looked into Renita's eyes while saying:

"Look, I'd be lying if I said that I helped you gain resources because of the goodness of my heart. As I've already said, this is a form of investment.

But it doesn't mean that you didn't or wouldn't gain anything from my selfishness, does it?



Forget about me saying anything about the event before the right time to do so arrives. I'll not allow anyone to mess up with my plans by risking an info leak.

I'm only telling you to improve yourself as an individual and as a team. I'm doing all I can to help you achieve just that. And it's not like I would stay idle in the process. I'm not making my team stronger so that they can carry me in ranking wars and help me earn freebie Merps.

I'll probably work the hardest among you to reach my goals. So what's wrong with me asking you to keep up with me? If you want the easy life in LA, I'd suggest you quit this team.

We would have to ensure that you won't say anything about the event or any of the remaining members to anyone with a binding contract. Do that, and I'll ensure that there'd be no bad blood between us even if you decide to walk out of the team. I'll just find your replacement and aim for the same goal I've been aiming for from the very start.

"So I'll ask this to all of you. Who wants to quit being part of this team?"

#### **Chapter 94: Scrooge**

"I'll ask this to all of you. Who wants to quit being part of this team?"

Eren sent the ball to his team members' court. He blatantly dealt with all the in-your-face criticism coming his way.

He didn't want anyone to quit the team. Because he had thought really hard about who his teammates should be right after Steve had approached him.

He preferred doing things solo. But his past experiences had taught him that there were several limitations in that approach.

Joining someone's team would also restrict his plans. That's why he decided to form and control a team of his own. That way, he'd be able to gain party-based benefits while keeping his freedom intact for the most part.

So he had selected his teammates after a long round of deliberation. Obviously, he didn't want the efforts that he had invested in these teammates to go in vain. But if they couldn't understand that there's always going to be something expected from them no matter which team they belong to, he might as well let them go to make room for new candidates.

Thankfully, Eren didn't have to go that far. Because nobody volunteered to quit. Eren waited for a while before continuing:

"I'll take your silence as your confirmation to continue being part of the team. Good. Now let's talk about the possible improvements you can introduce in your current battling style.

Steve, you have the biggest scope to grow your strength in a short while. Your earth element spell Yemidiri Medafi belongs to a school of spells that I think is not suitable for you.

Thankfully, it is the only stray spell from that school of spells in your arsenal. You don't need to ponder over which school to choose at F-Rank. But figuring out the one that suits you most would help you at the early stages.

So it'd be better if you could just drop that spell. I'd suggest you a spell that would suit you the most.

The spell's name is Zemlyanoy Kulak. It belongs to a school that requires you to shout out the incantation or spell's name while imbuing mana in your vocal cords.

This school focuses on controlling mana flow from the outside with the help of auditory mana fluctuations. But in return, it allows for almost immediate execution by decreasing the casting time.

That's what you need right now. Your berserking class anyway draws enough attention on the battlefield. So you are not losing the advantage of surprise you never had. In contrast, it may work in our favor as your call might force our opponents to focus on you. That'd give us more room to counter their attacks and launch an offensive.

As for you, Jake..."

Eren kept on giving individual advice to all his party mates. The advice he gave to Steve was something the latter had figured out on his own in Eren's previous timeline after a few months.

Steve gave up on Yemidiri Medafi after a few months of failures and focused on spells that belong to a specific school. That decision finally changed his performance on the field and made him a capable berserker. His rise to prominence started from that point.

Eren had cut short that learning process by telling the guy what he needed to do. That would help him realize his potential sooner than naturally ordained.

Of course, Eren didn't remember the growth requirement for each of his teammates. He was a recluse so he hardly paid attention to the rising stars of LA. Whatever he could remember about those students was only a part of the truth known to the masses.

But Eren's knowledge as a previous D-Rank entity was still enough to guide the Novices. So he kept on ensuring his teammates' respective paths were optimized.

Everyone present at the scene was impressed by Eren's knowledge and know-how. Even Renita was no exception.

She had interrupted Eren midway and asked him how he knew so much about spells, techniques, and other miscellaneous stuff that wasn't strictly related to his field. The guy just told her that his aunt Nina had made him aware of these aspects from a very young age.

Eren's lie became believable because he told his teammates that Nina was a C-Rank, which was a known truth among them. They started paying more attention to the butcher as a result.

Then Eren organized a one on one duel among his teammates. He went up against Steve despite Renita's insistence to have a rematch.

Eren was a berserker in his previous life. He had most to offer in terms of guidance to the current berserker in their team. He'd often pause midway during their duel and instruct Steve about his stances. The latter would listen carefully and try to implement the same in his next line of attacks.

The other rankers battled among themselves as per Eren's instructions. Ana and Bel watched from afar. The duo was glad they could join a team with such capable members. And they were most reverent towards Eren who had impressed them with his insights.

The sun had to set for the team to end their practice session. Every student had now started stalking up on food in their ID stones. So an entire day without having to visit the canteen wasn't a big deal.

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The next day!

Eren entered the ranking war and completed his five screen-assigned battles. He had already fought two of them on the first day of the ranking war. Therefore he only needed to take part in three more battles assigned randomly by LA.

The butcher received five Right to Battle challenger passes after completing his fifth battle. The academy mandated that a student needed to partake in a set number of battles arranged by the spectral screen randomizer before they start issuing challenges of their own.

The number of mandatory battles differed from time to time depending upon the availability of students and their respective performances. But they'd be issued an equal number of challenger passes as the number of times they were required to fight.

Eren was unscathed but out of mana after his third match. He had tried different spell combos to calibrate their executions, efficiency, and more to his current standards.

The experiments obviously made it difficult for him to win the matches straightaway. But he gained a lot of insights into how to time Sedated Perception at the right time for each active spell.

The butcher again organized a party meeting the next day and started guiding his teammates. He fought with Renita after her persistent nagging and beat her up so badly that she didn't ask him to battle again.

Renita realized that Eren was only experimenting with his spell combos the first time they fought. He was easily able to defeat her if he restricted himself to his usual spell.

Of course, what Renita didn't know was that Eren was using spell hyperdrive when battling against her. But this time, he kept Sedated Perception out of the equation and controlled the uptime of the hyperdrive to minimize its side effects.

Renita's battle experience was no joke. The class of a ranger suited her. But that didn't stop her from gaining insights in close combat style after seeing Eren fight with his teammates from a keen spectator's perspective.

She was a natural fighter that focused on maximizing her battle potential in every aspect. Although her technique didn't suit the close combat style, her elemental affinity did.

So she used every trick in her sleeve to handle Eren when she fell into his attacking range. But even after so many attempts, Eren proved his battle superiority and defeated her fair and square.

Eren trained and guided Steve the most. The latter had realized that Eren knew more about the path of a berserker than any assistant professor whose private lectures he had attended after paying in Merps.

And the best thing about Eren's guidance was that the teammates didn't need to pay Eren anything.

Or so they thought!

But the shameless guy demanded a varying amount of Merps from each of them depending upon the corresponding efforts he had put in.

Steve needed to pay the most and Becky needed to pay the least. Ana and Bel thought they didn't need to pay anything since they weren't guided by their leader. But they too were charged for being an audience to his teaching sessions by a scrooge that was Eren.

Of course, what Eren charged was a lot less than the amount they needed to pay if they attended private lectures. And Eren's guidance was even more effective than those lectures.

But that fact didn't lessen the bitterness they felt towards scrooge. Now they would pay undivided attention to Eren to get the best value for their Merps.

Eren was aiming for this very psyche to develop from the start. Of course, he'd always welcome more Merps. But that wasn't his main objective in charging his teammates for his guidance.

Human beings had a habit of ignoring the things that were made easily available to them. And the freebies were something they paid the least amount of importance to.

The butcher ensured that his lessons and guidance were effectively implemented by putting the Merps tag on them. And it worked. His teammates started seeing the party meetings as private lectures after they realized they had to pay for his services.

Nothing that is worthwhile having... ever comes free in this world.

This also made Eren's teammates understand the importance of having a fixed source of Merps income. They had decided to implement whatever Eren had taught and guided them so far to get employed in their respective fields. Their accounts were shrinking in Merps after all.

### **Chapter 95: Wankers and Wanking Battles!**

A new day arrived with many possibilities.

Today, Eren was aiming to use his challenger passes. He made use of the data he collected over the flying platform to zero in on the first five weakest students.

The butcher unabashedly issued challenges to these five weak-ass students. Of course, by now, Eren was recognized as one of the top fighters in his class. So even if they had to accept these challenges, they didn't go beyond the minimum participation amount despite Eren's nudging.

Eren quickly beat up the first four students mercilessly while experimenting with his spells combo. As a result, he was soon going to run out of mana after his fourth battle. That's why he had decided to finish his fifth and final match of the day.

But his opponent had other plans!

Ramy Richards was a straight shooter. He wore his heart on his sleeves and talked at length about what he was feeling at the time.

That wouldn't have been a major problem in itself if he hadn't had a lisp. His Rs would turn into Ws because of his speech impediment.

Therefore every word that had the letter R in it would be pronounced weirdly by Ramy Richards.

"You... Ewen Idwil... why don't you pick up fights with othaw students of your level? You cleawly know we aaw not youw match.

Such wanking battles won't give any leawning expewience to eithew you or us weak students. So why partake in these meaningless battles?"

Ramy started speaking before the countdown to the battle started. His speech made an explosion of laughter go off in the audience surrounding the battlefield.

"Hahahaha!

Wanking battle he says!

Kkkkkkkkk!

This was the biggest fumble Richie has made thus far. I'm gonna die of stomach ache."

One student started rolling on the floor after expressing his inability to control his laughter.

"I wouldn't want to be part of such a battle if you ask me. Say, what will be the rules of this 'wanking waw'?"

"Hehehe! Well, it depends. There should be categories like the longest wanker, the quickest wanker.

Then there should be categories based on the let's say the 'produce'. Its quantity can be one such criterion for declaring the winner between two 'wankers'. Hahahaha!"

The students kept on finding new things to talk about on the subject of wanking. The laughter only increased in its liveliness as a result.

So far the students had found alternate pronunciations and their respective meanings for some of the most popular terms.

For example:

Wanker: someone who partakes in wanking wars!

&

Wanking journey: a process a wanker has to go through to become the ultimate wanker of their generation.

Now every male student talked about being a wanker than their peers. Of course, the girls laughed at the jokes too. But they maintained a certain decorum. Or at least they tried to.

This gender-encompassing fumble was too wild to handle even for the battle referee who happened to be Julie Ekheart. She kept her hand pressed against her lips to control her laughter and nudged the participants to start the battle.

Apart from having such a lisp, Ramy was also gifted with the ability to keep a straight face in any situation. It held true even when his lisp turns a serious situation into that of a comedy.

He had been doing this from his childhood after all. He had a lot of experience handling such situations. So he didn't break his serious face and kept on staring at Eren who was also struggling to tame his laughter.

"Well... why don't you answer me..."

"Please don't speak anymore Ramy.

Listen, man, I'm doing this for the quickest and easiest way to earn Merps. I don't have any ulterior motive to humiliate my opponents. Why don't you quit as soon as the battle starts?"

"Haah! You wish. You think I'm not strong enough. But I'll wreck (intended: wreck, pronounced: wake) your ass as soon as you come in my attacking range!"

Ramy just couldn't keep his mouth shut and his fumbles at bay. His declaration of "'waking' Eren's ass" caused another bout of laughter to spread among the crowds.

That's right! Even the crowds of the audience surrounding other battlefields had turned into the spectators of Eren's match with Ramy.

Eren had a headache handling his current opponent. He was dragging the match unnecessarily without signaling to Julie of his readiness so that the countdown could start.

Just when the butcher thought of saying something, Ramy nodded his head at Julie indicating he was ready. The countdown started soon as a result.

This time, the gem dragged the match longer by executing Sedated Perception autonomously again. Eren wasn't as surprised as he was the first time. But this uncalled-for spell execution still confused him. Ramy was still far away from him. And the countdown wasn't over yet.

But he soon got the answer as to why the gem executed the spell!

"Beware! This guy is crafty. He is using silent incantation."

Eren heard a gender-neutral voice in the almost stagnant world. He didn't ask stupid questions to that voice like 'who are you?' because it was already apparent to him that it was the gem.

He also didn't ask the gem as to why it started to talk to him now all of a sudden. He had already realized that he didn't hold the initiative in their talk. If the gem wanted to speak to him, it could. And there's nothing he could do about it if the artifact decided to maintain silence.

Therefore, Eren mentally nodded at the suggestion while replying:

"Alright! Thanks for the heads-up. Let's talk someday about our situation when you think the time is right."

Eren focused on his current battle for the time being. He replayed the gem's warning in his head.

Only now did he realize how cunning Ramy was. He had been using silent spell casting all this time. No wonder he was trying to drag the match so much.

And Ramy could do that while speaking in between. That meant his casting type allowed him to hit pause on the incantation.

That meant his spell type was derived from two schools of spells, which allowed him to cast the silent incantation spells while being interrupted.

Such spell type places less burden on the mana circuit and focuses more on controlling the surrounding mana.

Of course, since he was controlling the surrounding mana with his mana sense and not employing the mana circuit that he could control with better efficiency, the casting time was long. And any interruption would stretch it even longer.

But the advantages of such a spell type made up for its disadvantages.

First, it would catch the opponents off guard if cast carefully. Second, it wouldn't deplete the user's mana as much as it would if they employed their mana circuits.

That meant they could battle with their opponents for longer.

And lastly, since the surrounding mana was getting used in the casting of the spell, the limiter on the spell's output wasn't dependent on the user's mana storage. They could cast such spells with the enhanced output if their intelligence and mana sense allows for.

In short, Ramy had the potential to seriously damage Eren if his attacks landed on the latter, despite their differences in the BTP value. Winning the match was still a far-fetched idea in most likelihood. But Ramy seemed optimistic.

He was probably trying to catch Eren off guard by distracting him and the audience with his fumble. His innocent fumble was probably faked too.

The guy knew that his lisp would prevent him from speaking such words normally. Yet he still did it. He was aiming to take down the mammoth standing in front of him that was Eren with the element of surprise by his side.

Eren wasn't aware of Ramy's battle style from his previous timeline. That's because the latter wasn't that famous.

It must've been because every opponent of his at that time would have taken countermeasures against him once his spell type and its weaknesses were revealed. Eren wasn't a spectator to these events in his previous timeline. So he couldn't have known.

'\*Sigh! I can't never really underestimate an opponent, can I?' Eren thought to himself.

He saw a faint intrinsic diagram forming in front of Ramy. It was the manifestation of the spell's activation. Since Ramy wasn't using his mana circuits to execute his spells, this manifestation was natural.

Eren saw that the countdown was soon going to turn to zero. He kept his spell combo experiments aside for now. What he needed to do right now was to take down Ramy before he could cast his spells. He wasn't a fan of being injured by a newbie with his craftiness after all.

Eren executed Blitz Steps as soon as the counter hit zero. The battle ring was laid over a sensor array. It could disqualify him if he casts the spell before the countdown finishes. But it apparently didn't stop Ramy from breaking the same rule because of the spell's peculiarity.

Eren quickly reached Ramy's back and performed a lightning-coated chop on the back of his opponent's neck. The difference in their body stats and the effect of Sedated Perception was enough for Eren to pull off such an act.

Ramy's spell diagram started dispersing in the air right after Eren's chop landed on him. The guy started closing his eyes, indicating that he was about to faint.

Sedated Perception got deactivated right after that. Eren looked at his opponent who by now crashed onto the ground.

'You almost got me, Wamy Wichards! Almost!'

The butcher had this thought as he turned to leave the battle ring.

## **Chapter 96: Discipleship**

"Please be seated. As I've already said, I'll not waste my time explaining the basics of potioning. Some of you have passed my entrance test. Others need to take up private lectures conducted by other professors if they wish to learn the basics."

Levine de Montmorency started her first lecture in the most straightforward manner possible. Of course, Eren and Jake were there among the seated students.

"The first year is only the beginning for you guys as students of LA. But I expect my students to have elementary knowledge in my field from an early age. That's because five years are far too short for me to bestow all that I could teach you.

The field of potion-making is as mysterious as the ranking journey itself. It needs a specific skill set that isn't found in every student of the subject. And that's a good thing for those who have it.

Potioning is one of the most lucrative businesses out there. That is if you're a good potioneer and know what you're doing. I can't teach you how to do business. At least I don't want to. But I can certainly guide you in the right direction when it comes to the art of concoctions.

The higher you climb the ranking ladder, the more you realize the wondrous nature of mana. It is the genesis of all concepts that are related to mana. And as these concepts, spread across various fields, have the same origin, it becomes possible for an accomplished expert in one particular field to mimic the expertise of someone in the other.

Take our field for example. Potioning at the rudimentary level is supposed to be limited to be used by rankers and animals. Basically by the living beings. But at its advanced levels, it can be used to strengthen a normal weapon in such a way that it becomes an artefact.



Use potioneering in combination with specific spells and the concoction will spread on any surface to act like an array. The elemental effects of spells can also be trapped into a concoction so that they can be used as instant spell executions.

At its profound level, the potioneering can be used to advance quickly and steadily in your ranking journey without having any adverse effects. In short, the field is as vast as an ocean. Or probably more than that. It is only limited by the rankers' talents and imagination.

But you are far from achieving any of the marvellous feats in the field of potioneering yet. What you need right now is a strong start. The very first concoction formula I'll be teaching you guys is a potion named Novice Speed Boost.

As the name suggests, it is a potion intended for Novice rankers. It temporarily raises the AGI stat of a ranker upon consumption. The effect and potion's active time would depend upon its quality. There are no drawbacks other than the fact that one would feel exhausted after the potion's effect wears off.

As you must have known by now, this Novice potion is one of the most basic concoctions Novice rankers carry in their person all the time. Since it could stay potent for months on end, it has a very high stalk-up value.

Novice Speed Boost is an element neutral potion. Therefore, it can be used by anyone. But it is frequently used by close combat experts to enhance their natural advantage.

Now about the potion's formula itself...."

Levine started describing the potion's formula and its intricacies. She was very detailed in her explanations. And she also told her students about any possible mishaps that could happen during the process.

Most students present were glad that they had chosen to get lectured by Levine over other professors. Usually, other potion-maker professors would start by teaching about elementary potions. But here, Levine had given them a recipe for a Novice potion right in her first-ever lecture.

This was the most dream-like situation for students who wanted to make their career in the field. That's because they could immediately start the practice for a Novice potion as soon as the lecture got over.

These potioneer-wanna-be students didn't have many ways to earn Merps. But that could all change if they were able to make Novice potions. They could sell such potions to LA in exchange for Merps or they could trade them with other students.

This was the biggest reason for Eren to join Levine's private lectures. He could immediately start to encash his Novice pioneering skills while building a better foundation. He already knew about the potion's formula from his previous timelines. But he listened to the Adapt ranker's explanation with absolute attention.

Eren could now see that Levine was a better teacher than most Adapt level rankers teaching across various fields. Her suggestions were precise and her solutions to various potion-related problems were on-point.

Levine then talked about various aspects of Novice potioneering that one needed to pay attention to no matter what kind of potion they intended to make. Her lecture stretched till 2 PM, after which she decided to finish it by stating some precautions.

The students left the lecture room. Eren told Jake to do the same and that he'd catch up with his team in the canteen after some time.

"Hello, madam Montmorency. My name is Eren Idril. Honoured to be attending your lectures. I was wondering if I could have some of your time?"

Eren greeted Levine with a light bow. The latter stopped reading from her notes and looked at the origin of the interruption:

"What is it, boy? You should have asked about the doubts related to..."

"I don't have any doubts related to the potion, madam..."

"Miss Levine is fine."

"Alright. Miss Levine, kindly teach me the modified recipe you came up with instead of the standardized recipe you just explained."

"Eren boy, do you know what you are asking?"

"Of course, Miss Levine. I was trained by a C-Rank healer and a potioneer before coming into LA. So I know what it means for a potioneer to teach their modified recipes to anyone.

I'm confident enough in my skills as a Novice potioneer. Plus, I already know about the standardized recipes of all stat value enhancement potions.

What I want are the modified recipes of the same from you so that I would be able to make higher-star variants. I'm ready to go through another round of tests if that can allow you to see me as a worthy disciple."

"It's not about your worthiness as a potioneer, Eren..."

Of course, Levine was going to reject Eren. The guy just popped out from nowhere and asked her to take him as her disciple. A disciple-master relationship was even more personal than what apprenticeship would entail.

An apprenticeship ends when a student graduates or leaves LA. But discipleship could stay active for a lifetime. Unless of course if and when a disciple leaves their master behind.

An apprenticeship was a professional way of forming a mutually beneficial relationship between higher and lower level rankers. Although it was more up and personal than professor-student interactions, it still had limits. Moreover, it would usually have an expiry date.

But discipleship didn't have such an end date in a traditional sense. The rankers' custom dictated a disciple should be considered as your kin. The disciples also had moral obligations to listen to their masters even if they lost contact for years on end.

So it was natural that Levine would reject Eren's ludicrous demands. But the butcher interrupted her before she could do so:

"Please hear me out, Miss Levine. I'm not telling you to take me as your disciple without testing my worth.

I also know that you are looking for a rare C-Rank ingredient called Malva Hibiscus."

Eren said that and lightly smiled at Levine before continuing:

"And I know where to find it!"

### **Chapter 97: Beast Contract Spell**

"I also know that you are looking for a rare C-Rank ingredient called Malva Hibiscus."

Eren said that and lightly smiled at Levine before continuing:

"And I know where to find it! I'll get it for you to commemorate our master-disciple bond."

Eren waited for Levine to answer patiently. He knew he was reaching it with the Adapt potioneer in front of him but he wanted to give it a shot anyway. The latter narrowed her eyes and carefully looked at Eren. Then she spread her mana sense and carefully inspected the guy:

"Oh? You are very close to breaking into the mid-stage of the Novice rank. And what do we have here? Hmm! Element of lightning and there's something else as well. Element of time?"

It seems You have dual derived elemental affinities, Eren Idril. And both are rare as well. Let me pull up your file next."

Levine requested LA's administration to send her a file on Eren via her spectral screen. She carefully read his history to verify his claims of being taught by a C-Rank potioneer from a young age.

Only after confirming all this did she speak to Eren:

"Eren, I don't know how you know that I was looking for that ingredient but you are right. I'm desperate enough to find it through anyone even if I have to take you as my disciple.

I hope you know how difficult it is to find Malva Hibiscus. It is one of the most sought-after ingredients in the C-Rank. Unfortunately, it is also very rare to find and locate.

Most importantly, it'll almost always be protected by a C-Rank beast. You'd need a D-Rank party or higher to even steal something like this without duking it out with the beast.

Plus, you'd need to cross Lionhearts Beast Sanctuary and enter Thymiscira's Amazon to even have a chance of finding it. You on the other hand are only F-Rank. I saw that you've completed so many missions from Besanc but this expedition won't be like any other you've faced so far.

How do you propose to achieve what you claim to do even IF I were to consider that you know about its location? And there are so many risks involved for you in that expedition. You can even lose your life. Why don't we do it this way? You tell me about the location first and I'll reward you with...."

“Miss Levine, I thank you for being magnanimous enough not to ask about the source and authenticity of my intel. And thank you for worrying about my well-being as well.

Rest assured, I don't have suicidal tendencies. I know how to get my hands on that ingredient without harming myself. But I'd need confirmation from you that you'd take me as your disciple if I were to deliver the ingredient to you.”

Eren completed his proposal with an air of stoicism around him. He knew the risks involved in gathering a C-Rank ingredient. It was located at the edges of Themyscira Amazon after all.

In Eren's previous timeline, the same ingredient was found and retrieved by a 5th year LA student whose feats got famous along with him after he was accepted as Levine's disciple. The butcher was going to take the page off from that guy's page without being the wiser.

“\*Sigh! Alright. But you'd have to perform well in upcoming potioneering lab tests and prove your skills first. From your records, it is apparent that you are a good fighter. But how good are you as a potion master? I'd like to see the answer to that question myself.

I'll give you a go if you pass that test. You can prepare for your trip during this time.

Of course, there won't be any official binding contract from my side. You'll just have to take my word for taking you as my disciple. Because I don't want my name to get dragged in case you die, get injured, or go missing during the retrieval.

It'd be hard for me to convince your C-Rank guardian it wasn't my fault if you don't come safe and sound from your trip. I know rankers need to maintain discretion among themselves. Everyone has secrets after all. So I won't ask you about the source of your information.

But I'd give you a suggestion anyway. Make sure that your information is solid. I've seen far too many rankers falling into the trap of running after secret treasures only to get robbed by the ones who spread the rumours about such treasures in the first place.

Lastly, here. I'll lend these Novice potions to you. They might help you if you are in a pinch. You only have to pay for them if your retrieval trip turns futile. Otherwise, you can have them for free.”

Levine gave Eren a set of Novice potions that were worth thousands of Merit Points. The latter didn't show any reluctance in taking the same. He knew he'd succeed. So he saw those potions only as freebies.

“Thank you, Miss Levine. I'll be going now.”

Eren bowed slightly before taking his leave. Levine didn't think much about Eren after the conversation. She was taking a gamble without any risk involved to her. She'll think about taking Eren as her disciple if and when he comes in one piece with that ingredient with him.

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“Hello. I'd like to purchase a Beast Contract spell.”

Eren came to Novice Treasury after he had his lunch with his teammates. He assigned them their post-lecture training schedule and appointed Steve as an overseer. Renita wasn't happy that she was being bossed around by a berserker who was weaker than her.

But she didn't argue in front of Eren. The scrooge didn't like to take second opinions on his decisions. Of course, he told his team they can set a betting amount for their respective practice duels. That way, they'd all be serious even if they were conducting a practice session.

Eren's teammates were happy after knowing that they wouldn't have to pay a cut to the scrooge because he would not be present with them. Whatever they gain during their practise sessions from their opponent will be theirs to keep.

Eren skipped practise with his teammates and came to Novice Treasury to finally get his hands on a Beast Contract spell. Reen's problem needed to be addressed after all. He couldn't make her stay as a pendant or a coffee mug all the time.

"Your name is Eren, right? The kid who converted all his Extols just a few days before the auction event. You were very lucky that time, weren't you?"

What I find strange is your friends also had the same idea as you and liquidated all their wealth in exchange for Merps just at the right time. We can only call that a coincidence now, right? Haha!

Anyway. About the Beast Contract spell. It is a rare, element-neutral spell that can be used by anyone. Plus, it doesn't have a specific rank in the sense that it is dependent on who is using it on whom.

It's one of the most popular and most used transcendent spells out there among rankers. But most-used doesn't mean easily available, kid. You need to say goodbye to 25K Merps all at once to have that spell."

Eren knew the spell's price was going to be astounding so he was mentally prepared. Thankfully, the E-Rank Mana Blessing had earned him a hefty amount. Plus, he kept on winning big in his ranking battles. He also placed external bets on himself through his friends to gather more Merps. Plus, he didn't even spare his teammates and collected Merps from them for providing guidance every time.

That's why his account balance had reached a staggering amount of 26,320 Merps. The butcher knew the Merps were only a way to gain better results. They don't hold any real value after all. That's why he didn't feel reluctant in parting with the amount he had earned through various means.

Eren bought the spell as easily as someone buying vegetables. This was a special spell that needed an array sheet to work in conjunction with the incantation. Thankfully, the amount of 25K covered all the necessities for him to cast the spell on Reen.

## **Chapter 98: Incoming Hardships**

Nicholas Scott, the receptionist and the one in charge of Novice Treasury allowed Eren to complete his transaction before continuing:

"Haha! My boy, even the most rich-ass kids would find it difficult to part with such an amount while maintaining a straight face. But you are different, aren't you? I see no fluctuation in your mana signature even when your account balance has come down by so much.

I've checked out the records of your Besanc missions and ranking war results so far. You are a capable lightning-element fighter who also has an unused affinity in the time element.

I think you can take on a Novice beast and force it to submit to your will. This Beast Contract spell was the right decision on your part.

The Beast Battle Arena is still yet to be opened for first-years. But LA has reared plenty of Novice mana beasts in advance. I'm sure there'd be a lot of lightning element beasts among them for you to tame. I can arrange someone for you to take a quick look. What do you say?"

Eren realized that the receptionist of the Novice Treasury was keeping tabs on him. But it couldn't be helped. The guy couldn't technically touch him on assumptions. But his and his teammates' wealth conversion to Merps was far too coincidental for Nicholas to ignore the event.

"Thank you, sir Nicholas. But I'd like to visit the Lionhearts Beast Sanctuary to tame my beast."

"Staying independent, huh? I don't dislike it. But there are many ways spell casting can go wrong. Are you sure you don't want it handled professionally in a controlled environment?"

"I'm sure. Good day, sir."

Eren quickly left the Novice Treasury after his work was done. He didn't feel any negative emotions for him from Nicholas. But that didn't mean he'd let down his guard. Especially when he had so many things to hide.

Next, he went to Besanc and accepted some random lucrative missions. He was going to visit the beast sanctuary tomorrow and meet with Marla. He might as well earn some Merps while he was on it.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hello, Adapt Marla. How have you been?"

Eren slightly bowed and greeted Marla with his signature boy-next-door smile. They were at the LA's border check-post where Marla was positioned.

"Eren! Glad to see you. I'm doing great, thanks to you. I scored a new D-Rank spell that I had been wanting to have from LA for years now."

"How did you find my ranking battles, Adapt Marla?"

"Hmm. Your performance was more than enough to state your exceptional skills as a close combat fighter. But my only concern is that...."

Marla was about to say that Eren's BTP and his progress in the ranking journey was still not enough for her to even think about offering an apprenticeship. But she was stopped midway when Eren spread his mana sense and imbued it with his mana signature.

Marla felt that Eren was about to enter mid-stage in the Novice rank. His BTP value must be close to 18 if that was the case. She was surprised but didn't lose her cool:

"How?"

She threw a question at Eren only using one word. The latter also replied concisely:

“I’ll be disciplined by Adapt Levine de Montmorency soon.”

Eren spoke vaguely on purpose. But Marla thought for a while and concluded by herself after hearing his reply, nodding at him in response.

‘This is the beauty of speaking half-truths.’ Eren thought to himself.

Levine was a highly capable potioneer. She was known for making potions in various fields and categories. But the most sought-after potion she was famous for making was Novice Elixir.

The potion had a high business value. It would sell like hot cakes within LA and outside it once Levine sold them through various channels.

But the potion was heavily dependent on a few rare ingredients that were limited in production. Plus, the potion’s manufacturing process was tedious and time-consuming. Therefore, Levine only made a limited number of these potions each year. It was mainly done to boost her account balance so that she could invest money in research of her level.

Novice Elixir was widely popular for its effect of increasing a Novice ranker’s body stat values without any major side effects. Of course, the increment had its limitations. It wouldn’t allow a ranker to skip through stages within the rank. But it was very useful if a ranker had just crossed a stage within the Novice rank.

That’s why Marla believed that Eren had used Novice Elixir to reach his current body stat values. The kid’s increment stopped at the boundary between initial and mid-stage after all.

“How did you convince that stubborn vixen to take you as her disciple?”

Marla still asked the last doubt she had. As far she knew, Levine wouldn’t take a disciple unless it was something major done by the kid in front of her.

“Well, let’s just say that I have the means to offer her what she needs the most right now.”

“Malva Hibiscus!”

Marla blurted out the name of the ingredient she knew Levine needed the most. Only that ingredient can convince the Adapt potioneer to even think about taking a disciple.

“Yes. But let’s focus on our deal, shall we?”

Eren diverted the subject to his apprenticeship after confirming Marla’s guess. He knew too much talk on that subject would expose his half-truth.

“Al... alright. Listen, Eren. The reason I wanted to take Ken as my apprentice was because he was already in the mid-stage of the Novice rank. His mana core had been liquified and his mana circuit was expanding steadily within him.

That is the bare-minimum criterion for me to teach and employ my apprentice with ease. The biggest difference between a Novice ranker in the initial stage and someone in the mid-stage is not the body stat values. It is the speed of mana recovery.

A Novice ranker in the mid-stage can recover their mana and thereby stamina more quickly than someone in the initial stage. You might think it is not as important as body stat values. But you need to consider the daily routine an apprentice needs to follow to understand its importance.

Doing an apprenticeship is no joke. You have to do everything a normal student has to do. Reserve a time for self-training. Then partake in the training scheduled by your master. And follow your master in their work.

Plus, you have to take part in mandatory ranking wars.

Even the most vibrant students would carry black eye bags when they start their apprenticeship. That's why it is not meant for first-year students. They need to get used to their current curriculum before pushing their bodies to the limit.

No matter how hardworking you are, the efforts I put in you will be wasted if your body is in a perpetual state of exhaustion. Furthermore, the practice of close combat style would drain the stamina out of you in a jiffy.

You'd have to face these problems even when your body stat values have shot up so much in such a short time. That's because you are close to breaking through into mid-stage but you are not there yet. And it might take a while for you to achieve this stage breakthrough.

And don't expect me to go easy on you because of your situation or your favour. Those are two distinct things. On the contrary, I might push you to your limits harder than I had initially planned just to make you cross that bridge of being a Novice ranker in the mid-stage.

So you tell me. Do you still want to continue after knowing these hardships are heading your way?"

### **Chapter 99: Dicerros Left & Right**

"So you tell me. Do you still want to continue after knowing these hardships are heading your way?"

"I accept."

Eren didn't even think for a second before replying.

He already knew about the reason Marla was reluctant to take him as her disciple even after he had played his cards right with her. He had known what she said was bound to happen to him.

But the butcher was not going to shy away from putting hard work in the right place. Plus, if everything goes according to his plans, he might not have to struggle as much as Marla was planning to make him suffer. If the liquid stage was the minimum requirement for his schedule to proceed smoothly, he'd just have to enter that stage quickly. Simple as that.

"\*Sigh! Alright. I'll take you as my apprentice. I'll register the same in LA's records so that we coordinate our schedules smoothly.

Now let me give you a gift for your valuable "tip". You can also consider this as your apprenticeship reward on joining."



Marla retrieved a set of two Katars from her storage. The blades were 15inch long, sleek and sharp in size.

Each weapon had an H-shaped horizontal grip, which would result in the blade sitting above the user's knuckles. Then there was an armguard woven into its construction that allowed for a better grip while securing the gripped hand.

Because the weapon's blade is in line with the user's arm, the basic attack with a Katar is a direct thrust identical to a punch. That's why a Katar was referred to as a 'punching dagger'.

But the weapon could also be used for slashing. The design of the weapon allows the fighter to put their whole weight into a thrust, enabling an exceptional piercing power.

A katar user would target the head and upper body of their opponent, similar to boxing.

The sides of the handle could be used for blocking. The defensive capabilities would increase, thanks to the armguard.

But the weapon's forte was almost unblockable thrusts if used at the right time. It also allowed for quick parries and swift slashes. But it wasn't meant for defence. Not really at least.

A dual-katar wielder had to enter the fray with all their bets placed on offence. They must be agile enough to dodge their opponent's attacks and strike, made possible because of the weapon's small size and light-weighted ness.

Marla had practised katar arts that had a lot of concepts taken from knuckle boxing arts. That's why she could teach Ken Riverine in the previous timeline. Thanks to that, the guy made it as a fine pugilist in his generation even before graduating from LA.

Of course, Ken wasn't an ideal apprentice for Marla. She couldn't bestow a large chunk of katar arts to him due to him practising a close combat technique based on knuckle boxing. But it wasn't like she was looking to take him as his disciple.

But Marla thought of another approach with Eren if he could successfully sustain the training schedule assigned by her. Eren was a close combat fighter of the lightning element like her. Plus he was used to using daggers.

Marla could raise him to be a somewhat exact copy of her close-combat style. Provided the boy could keep up, that is.

Eren took the weapons from Marla's hand. They looked extremely simple yet exceptionally deadly. He heard the latter's words when he was busy observing the artefacts in his hands:

"There are five-star F-Rank katars. Plus, they have lightning-element runes on them, making them element-specific artefacts only meant to be wielded by rankers of the same element.

You won't find them in LA's Novice treasury or open shops due to them being five-star variants.

I had received them as a gift. But I soon broke into E-Rank. So they are barely used at all.

You are a lightning-element ranker who focuses on speed. This set is tailored-made for you.

I'd consider my debt towards you settled with this gift. And yeah, you can see the names the creator has given them on the inside of their armguards."

Eren nodded at Marla after she finished speaking. He was all smiles after observing the weapons. He was happy Marla wasn't being stingy with her bestowal.

As she said, the set was tailored-made for him. He checked the insides of the armguard carefully to locate the names and soon found some text in a very small font etched over the surface.

"Diceros Left and Diceros Right!"

The butcher read the names of his new names out loud. The parts Left and Right was indicative of the hands they were intended to be wielded with.

Eren ran his lightning-element mana through the weapons and their inscribed runes lit up. Unlike the element-neutral daggers he was used to wielding now which had the tongues of lightning dancing over its surface, the weapons he was using now didn't leak any lightning. This was the indication that the elementalized mana was running through the weapons via the runes without facing any resistance.

The katars only glowed faintly blue, and they looked less harmless than the daggers which used to shoot streams of lightning after every thrust and slash. But the butcher knew the weapons were many times more lethal than his now-ex weapons.

Eren had never used katars in his previous life. So he wasn't sure how he should employ them in his attacks from now on. His battle prowess as a close combat fighter would get plummeted before it could see rise from its previous peak.

That meant only one thing. More training was going to ensue.

"I'll give you a couple of days to get prepared. Meanwhile, I'll create a training and apprentice schedule for you to follow.

Of course, your ID stone will keep track of everything and will let me know if you slack off. The punishments for such fouls would range from extra work, extra training regime, Merps penalty and more depending upon the severity.

So make sure you follow whatever I tell you to follow and do. I'm planning to run some errands outside LA in a few weeks. I want you to be a decent fighter of your rank by then.

Is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

"No. I'll just run some Besanc missions in the forest and meet you right here after two days."

"Alright. Don't use the katars in the forest Eren. otherwise, a mishap might happen as you are not used to them."

"Ah! Thank you for caring for me, Miss Marla. You are as kind as you are beautiful."

"There it is. I was wondering where your glib tongue had gone off to. Humu. Praise me more and I might beat your ass a little less than what I had been planning on doing. Hehe!"

"Here to serve, master Marla. Now, if you'd excuse me!"

Eren bowed to his now-master after their conversation was over before heading swiftly towards the check-post's exit gate.

He had the most important thing to do in the forest.

The butcher was going to use the Beast contract spell on Reen.

### **Chapter 100: Transformation**

"Aaaaaaargh!"

An ear-piercing cry echoed through an untamed wilderness, away from the touches of civilization.

The moonlight was barely keeping away the dark conjured by the forest's dense vegetation.

A boy in his teens could be seen struggling with something very peculiar inside a cave located seemingly nowhere in the middle of the wild.

He looked to have short stature. His wavy black hair was a mess and his skin was sweating buckets all over. Of course, he seemed to have already anticipated his situation and therefore was only wearing his pants.

The ground beneath him was lit with various mana runes arranged in an array. That light generated by array activation was the only source of luminance in the pitch-black cave.

It looked like something semi-transparent was crawling on Eren's skin, slowly making its way upwards after covering the large part of his torso and limbs. This very act seemed to be the reason behind his scream.

His green eyes had been glowing with emerald luminance. His sharp but small nose and his V-shaped jawline had given him a kinda handsome yet boyish look.

But all that charm could not shield him from his ongoing misery. His entire body seemed like it was on the verge of transformation.

This was none other than Eren Elijah Idril. He had been going through a beast contract spell inside the Lionhearts Beast Sanctuary.

He had chosen an isolated spot for himself to go through with the process safely, away from the prying eyes. He had laid the spell's array after confirming that the cave was safe for him to cast the spell.

The butcher's condition was special. The demon beast he was going to sign the beast contract with was already tamed by him through the blood ritual. He didn't know what would happen if he decides to proceed further with the spell. But he had concluded that it wouldn't be anything normal.

Plus, he needed to keep Reen's identity hidden. Therefore, he couldn't perform the spell inside the safety of his dorm room. Eren guessed that the process would garner attention. So it was better if he did it in the wild.

And so far his guess had been spot-on, even more so than he had previously anticipated.

Eren knew about the normal beast contract spell. It would allow the ranker to form an unbreakable bond with their tamed beast.

But the spell itself was very simple. The ranker only needed to lay down the array that had two array-eyes positioned in the yin-yang style. Then the ranker needed to stand inside one of the eyes and chant some incantations. The tamed beast whose will to fight had vanished needed to stay inside the other eye.

The array would be lit up and the spell would activate after everything has been done correctly. The array would start shrinking. The runes present in the array would climb over the tamed beast and the ranker at the same time, finalizing the process.

At the end of the spell's execution, the beast would have its body melted and the resulting essence would get attracted towards the ranker standing inside the other array eye.

The essence would merge with the ranker on a superficial level. It would form a corresponding beast tattoo over the ranker's body, indicating that the process had been successful. All this would happen in the case of beast contract spell getting performed normally without any blood ritual involved.

The normal beast contract spell would destroy the body of a beast forever. Only its soul would remain trapped inside a runic tattoo that would have its visual features.

In return, the ranker would gain some or all the advantageous features of the beast, depending upon their elemental and inherent nature compatibilities.

That's why rankers would perform the spell on the beasts who had the same elemental affinity and inherent nature as them. A synched contract between the ranker and beast would ensure that all the beastly powers get acquired by the former. The beast's soul would also get preserved without any abnormality.

The part about inherent nature was vague. But generally, a ranker with ferocious inherent nature or battle style would prefer the beast of the same kind. And a ranker with sneaky attributes would choose to form a beast contract with an equally stealthy beast.

The beastly features could be covert or overt depending on the way the ranker handled them. Some rankers who had made use of the beast contract spell would prefer to show their beastly features while the others would keep them hidden.

But that was not all. A ranker could choose to invoke the soul residing in their tattoo through the beast manifestation. It was another part of the beast contract. It would create a semi corporal body out of mana for the beast to temporarily reside in and perform their master's bidding.

It didn't matter if the mana body got destroyed. The beast would return safely to its master's side if and that happened, getting retracted into the tattoo. Or the ranker could choose to do it willingly after cancelling the beast manifestation of their accord.

The spell was advantageous to rankers in many ways. First, their bodily resilience would increase. Some of the body stat values would shoot up, enabling the rankers to gain a one-time boost in their ranking journey.

Second, the rankers would gain the natural talents of the beast while keeping their intelligence intact. It allowed for better use of the same beastly features, raising the overall battle prowess of the ranker in one go.

Third, the mana body of the beast in the beast manifestation would only be limited by the ranker's rank. An F-Rank user could only grant their beast a body made of F-Rank mana. But the beast would be able to exert the maximum potential of that particular rank with the body manifestation.

That meant an F-Rank user in the initial stage could have a trustworthy, undying companion in the upper stage of the same rank in the form of their contracted beast, as long as they could support the mana consumption.

This also meant that the beast contract spell did not have a rank restriction. Its rank would automatically rise with the ranker.

Plus, once cast, the beast contract spell would remain active until the user decided to end the contract with their current beast. Upon contract termination, the beast's essence would disperse in the thin air and its soul would be released from binding.

The beast that had its contract terminated won't be able to be summoned back. The ranker would also experience a regression in their ranking journey. But the side effects won't be too severe for them.

Therefore it could be concluded that there were almost no disadvantages of the spell. It allowed a ranker to amplify their battle power in a short time without facing any apparent consequences.

The beast contract spell wasn't called a transcendent spell for a show.

But something entirely different to normal spell execution was happening to Eren and Reen.

Reen had been blood bound to Eren through the blood ritual. So the array couldn't treat her as a different existence to Eren.

The spell didn't destroy her body. Nor did it do anything to her soul.

A fusion of bodies was taking place instead of the fleshly essence of the beast turning into a beastly tattoo. The semi-transparent stuff on Eren's body that was climbing up was Reen herself. She was getting fused with Eren's body.

The whole process was extremely taxing on both Eren and Reen. The former felt like his skin, his innards, and his bones were getting dissolved in acid. And the latter just sent distress signals to her master via their mental connection.

Eren couldn't see what was happening to him because he had closed his eyes and bit his lips to sustain the severe pain he was feeling. But he could feel that his fleshly essence and Reen's slimy stuff were getting mixed through the spell execution.

All of Eren's spells were inadvertently getting manifested as his body's coping mechanism kicked in. That manifestation destroyed his clothes and made him butt naked.

It took a while for the process to get finished. Eren was then seen laying on the ground with his hands spread apart. His eyes were closed.

He wasn't unconscious. Just severely exhausted from the whole ordeal.

Eren stayed that way and fell asleep. He had already closed the only exit the cave had. His cynic, paranoid nature had forced him to choose a location that wasn't populated by any dangerous beast. So he didn't have to worry about his safety.

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The dawn of the next day had just started making its presence known when Eren opened his eyes. He first looked around himself with his groggy thoughts and blurry vision.

The cave was still dark. But there were rays of lights piercing the makeshift closure made out of rocks and leaves.

"Eren, are you awake now?"

The butcher heard a voice coming from seemingly nowhere. He recognised it to be Reen's so he started to look around some more to find her.

"Reen, where are you?"

He couldn't help but ask. His disorganised thoughts were slowly calming down in his head.

"I'm here!"

Said Reen. And immediately afterwards, Eren saw transparent slimy stuff coming out of his palms. It looked like his skin was melting. But he didn't feel any pain.

The slimy stuff oozing from the palms of his hands got concentrated and formed a mass before turning into the body of a beautiful female.

Eren opened his eyes wide open after seeing Reen take a corporal body that wasn't a mana body formed due to beast manifestation.

Reen's body wasn't destroyed in the beast contract as it normally should be, thanks to the blood ritual with Eren. But that was not all.

When Eren tried to get up, his hands and feet became jelly. This was the beast contract spell's effect taken to the extreme.

Normally, the appearance and manifestation of beastly features on ranker's body had a limit. They couldn't cross certain boundaries set by the ranker's body.

But what Eren was seeing right now was the breach of those very boundaries.

"What happened to us last night wasn't a beast contract spell."

The realisation struck the butcher and made him aware of his current situation. But that didn't help him come out of his current predicament. He wanted to get up but felt like he didn't have any bones in his limbs. His torso also felt like it could cave in if there was some pressure applied to it.

"Reen, how do you... should I say... solidify your body from the slimy stuff."

“Hmm? I just will it and it happens. Is it that difficult to do? Hehe! Am I perhaps a genius?”

“Oh, you are. Now send me your thoughts so that I can analyse them and fix myself.”

Eren had decided to ask the expert. He didn't panic after seeing Reen's features getting manifested on his body. Neither was he worried about whether or not it would make things difficult for him or not.

He thought with a calm mind. He realized that the blood ritual wasn't the only spoiler in the beast contract spell. Reen herself was the biggest spoiler.

Her elemental affinity didn't create any conflict with Eren at all. Not because she had lightning element affinity. But the butcher felt that she had affinities for all the elementals, making her element neutral.

Same thing with Reen's inherent nature. It didn't have any specific inclination towards anything. Her body, elemental affinities, and inherent natures were entirely malleable.

The slime beasts were identified by their super flexible bodies. But they weren't known for having all the elemental affinities or completely malleable inherent natures.

This was not natural. Nature sought balance by distributing each creature with its share of advantages and disadvantages in such a way that it'd negate things in the big picture. But Reen seemed like an exception to that rule.

'There is something much deeper hiding behind Reen's existence.' Eren concluded. Otherwise, she couldn't have been able to keep her body after the process was over.

The beast contract spell destroyed the beast's body so that the contract would get established with less conflict. And there would be naturally some conflict within the beast and the ranker's compatibilities, no matter how synced their elemental affinities and inherent natures were.

But with Reen such conflict did not exist. She was completely compatible with Eren to the point that the spell treated her the same as the ranker who was casting it.

There was no beast tattoo as well. But he had just seen that Reen was part of his body a moment ago, sharing his senses and lending him hers.

It was like Eren and Reen had become mutually inclusive and exclusive existence at the same time.

“\*Sigh! Reen, there's something seriously wrong with you.”

He said that while analysing Reen's incoherent thoughts for a solution to being jelly and solidifying at will.

It took him a while to make sense of things. He soon figured out a way to make himself return to normal and get up.

Reen had puffed her cheeks after hearing that. She wanted to register her protest. But Eren asked first before she could do so:

“Reen, do you feel any different?”

“Um... no! Not now. But I felt a little different while I was part of your body. And what’s with that spell anyway? And why didn’t you tell me it’d hurt this much to go through with that process?”

Reen again changed to her natural slime form before plopping onto Eren’s shoulder while complaining a lot in Eren’s head. Then she changed into a miniature girl and kept on pestering him. She soon melted into Eren’s body without any resistance, like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Eren wanted to shut her up. But an idea formed in his head after seeing Reen’s fluid transformation into various shapes. It clearly wasn’t possible for him to turn jelly, he still had blood, bones, and other things that made him human after all. But what if he could change into different people like her?

Eren immediately willed his body to stretch and adapt to a different shape. It was difficult at first. But he soon got the hang for it.

The butcher first pictured himself to be Dom Walker, the first E-Rank hunter he had killed in this timeline. Soon his hair grew and changed colour. His stature increased in height and size.

One could see a slightly different and naked Dom Walker standing inside a cave after Eren’s transformation was completed. Of course, his first try at such transformation didn’t give him spotless results.

He still couldn’t get all the facial features of Dom right. And his original features were slightly making themselves apparent. But even this was enough for him. With time, he’d be able to take any shape he wanted with impeccable perfection.

Dom-looking Eren had a wicked smile plastered on his face now. He could achieve so many things with this new power of his that the possibilities froze him in his thoughts.

But he prioritized one thing the most to take advantage of his newly acquired transformation powers. He needed to make contact with a certain someone while not being Eren Idril.

“Julie Ekheart, what are you up to these days?”

Eren smiled mildly after asking this question to nobody in particular. He knew things were going to get interesting for him now.