

Vile 961

[Chapter 961 Counteroffer](#)

Eren smiled innocently when he heard Shandil's offer.

The offer was very generous, he had to admit. Not because Layos wanted to invest so much in him. But because he could benefit from Layos in other ways.

Layos could offer Eren knowledge of the past if he made that one of the conditions for switching sides. He knew that Layos would not shy away from accepting him into its inner fold when the war was this close to the borders.

That being said, Eren had no plans of doing something like that. Minerva's Utopia was a golden goose he would not let go under any conditions. Layos would have to offer him a bigger and better goose for him to make the switch.

However, if he switched, Eren knew that his image would be used to fuel Layos' campaigns in Edinburgh. He would be revealed as the butcher to the masses. Eren was still not okay with that. Not because he was scared of infamy. But because he was vigilant about high-ranking entities under Arthur's control. The Duke was going to take things personally even if everyone accepted his identity and let things go.

However, Eren still wanted to know everything Shandil had to say to him. There was no harm in listening to the entire offer you are about to reject. Thus, he scratched his jaw as he spoke.

"It's all good to hear Rondo or Shandil or whatever. But why delay the "or else" part of your statement? Spit it out already."

Shandil didn't like Eren's crude way of addressing him. Even if he was from the enemy kingdom, he was still royalty. He expected basic decorum from the normal citizens of Edinburgh if and when his identity was revealed.

The butcher's reality check made Shandil see that Edinburgh was as rowdy as rowdy could get. It matched aggression with twice the aggression. Even so, he brushed that aside and answered casually.

"You can join us. Or else... We will let the fact that you are Osan Woods' Butcher out to the masses even before you have a chance to escape the kingdom's clutches.

I'm sure they will get the proof they need if they dig in the right direction. Knowing where to dig will solve all their problems.

Plus, we will make sure that the city of White Raven gets destroyed in cultist attacks. I have heard that you recently assimilated Healers' Nirvana into your guild. The same guild Layos has decided to wreck.

We had plans to shock the White Raven city for that deed anyway. We will just make a big splash if you don't cooperate with us.'

Eren made a 'that came outta nowhere' expression on his face. He didn't know that Layos's royal scions were personally causing chaos in Edinburgh with the cultists' help. It meant that the attack on Healers' Nirvana was also organized by another royal elf from Layos.

'Hmm? Jiana is an elf. I wouldn't want to generalize but does she share any links with Layos? Something that would make the royal scions target her personally?'

Eren had another random thought as he let his mind wander. He thought so because the royal scions were keen on running Healers' Nirvana to the ground even after they had successfully wrecked it. This kind of grudge cannot be politically motivated. It has to have a personal touch.

Eren shrugged his shoulders and let the matter go for now. He decided to ask Jiana directly when he met with her.

Eren was also glad that he had listened to Shandil's side. Knowing about the incoming attack on his city would allow him to better prepare in terms of preventive measures.

The butcher licked his lips and looked at Shandil with his predatory gaze before speaking in a very innocent voice.

"That's a very interesting offer, Shandil. But I have a counteroffer. Want to know what that is?"

There was a part of Shandil that found Eren's gaze disturbing. And that part was lowkey telling Shandil to get the fuck away from him. Getting inspired by the butcher and wanting him to work for him was one thing. But putting conditions on him and expecting him to obey the rules of his game was another.

Still, Shandil had his elven pride. He had overcome the illusion Eren had trapped him inside. He had even managed to injure Eren using the element of surprise. And he was very confident in his battle powers and elemental attainments. Worst case scenario, he had the means to get away from the scene.

Thus, Shandil didn't lose his composure when he replied.

"And what would that be? If your demands are not illogical, I'm sure Layos will try to accommodate you as much as it can."

Eren maintained his innocent smile before replying in a cold voice.

"How about I turn you into one of my minions? Someone who hangs between the domains of life and death and bends to my every command?"

That way, my secrets will stay safe. It'll benefit a bit from Layos. And I'll also be able to take care of a lot of things with you around. Not a terrible deal for me, right?"

Shandil took a step back when he listened to Eren's words and felt his overwhelming presence once again. The part of him that was telling him to get away from Eren was now screaming in his head to take action. It entered his head and activated all the levers associated with fear.

Alas, it was too late for him.

When Shandil took a step back, he realized something had pierced his heart. He looked down to see a space-element dagger's tip poking through his chest where his heart was. Without damaging his skin.

Shandil was aghast when he realized that he had been basically killed in action. Eren was still in front of him so he looked back to see who it was that killed him. He saw that a beautiful elf had appeared behind him from thin air without his knowledge and pierced his heart.

"Who.... uuuugh.... Who are you?"

Shandil spat a mouthful of blood on his clothes before asking the half-elf about her identity. The answer, however, came from the butcher.

"Oh right! Where are my manners? Meet my lovely wife, Kirin. Surprised, right?"

Hehe. As you can see, the fabled Osan Woods' Butcher is not as much of a lone wolf as you have me pictured, Shandil or whatever. I'm a family man too, damn it."

[Chapter 962 \[Bonus \] Another Living Undead](#)

'I... I misjudged him.'

Shandil regretted the fact that he attempted to see Eren through his lens. He believed that he could take on Eren for quite some time before calling it quits. He knew he couldn't win against him. He was not so weak as to not be able to escape him either.

This was considering Eren and Shandil fought seriously and Eren did not have any trump cards he hadn't used in the battle yet. But Shandil did not think that the butcher was okay with someone else doing his job for him. He had employed Kirin just at the right time to get rid of Shandil when he was at his most vulnerable.

Shandil was just a quasi-C-Rank entity while Kirin had the powers of a Monster Overlord, which made her as powerful as an Expert ranker. The foreign mana invasion initiated by her quickly took over his mana circuits and wreaked havoc inside him. Despite his best efforts, Shandil couldn't launch even a modest retaliation.

Eren appeared in front of Shandil and gripped his neck. He brought him closer and made him look him in the eye before speaking up.

"You should have seen this coming after studying me so much, you know. Why would I keep the fact that I'm the Osan Woods' Butcher hidden all this time and then allow you to ruin everything I worked for just because you told me to? It doesn't even make sense.

Royal scions of Layos are better than the future backbone of this kingdom. But that is only when it comes to the right approach, planning, and battle capabilities.

When it comes to acting like brain-dead idiots who think that everyone should obey them just because they said so, you are all the same. Most of you don't understand that royalty doesn't mean omnipotence."

The light in Shandil's eyes was fading. But he looked at Eren with a gaze coated in injustice. The butcher laughed as he read Shandil's mind in real-time.

"I should listen to you just because you have leverage over me? What if I decide to destroy you along with that leverage? Have you ever thought about that?"

Too much royal power has blinded you into believing the world and everyone in it will bend to your will. And maybe that's true for the most part.

But that shit doesn't work for me. Rest assured though. You have a very high potential as a living undead. I'll make sure to do a better job than what I did with Meera."

Shandil closed his eyes as he listened to Eren's words. It sounded like a lullaby to him which was very comforting and thought-provoking. Sandhill's thoughts drifted into an unknown place when Eren finished speaking with him.

Eren injected his wrath mana into Shandil's compromised system as he was slowly losing consciousness. He was still alive despite his heart being pierced. But Eren had managed to make him drift to sleep and prolong his death by reducing his heartbeats. Then Eren snapped his fingers and healed his heart just enough so Shandil wouldn't die.

Eren wanted to create a living undead, just as he had told the guy. Progress in his ranking journey as well as his soul strengthening had allowed him to create another living undead like Meera. And he had the confidence to do an even better job than last time.

Eren couldn't make the guy progress in his ranking journey when he turned him into a living undead. So he was planning to forcefully increase his rank at the cost of his life. He had the necessary potions to do so. When the procedure is completed and the ritual is over, Shandil will turn into a living undead of Expert rank status.

"Lord Husband, should I cull the rest of the rankers as well?"

Kirin looked around while holding the now-sleeping Shandil by his shoulder. She let him drop to the floor when Eren finished injecting him with his wrath mana. He controlled the wrath mana in such a way that it wouldn't turn Shandil into a wrath creature. It would just temper his flesh so that Eren could obtain better results from the living undead ritual.

Eren followed Kirin's gaze and turned around. His summons had stood their ground for the most part. Some rankers, however, had been able to overcome them. It was just that they couldn't run away from their meaningless fights because of the active prism barrier.

Eren nodded his head and then looked at Shandil's fallen body before speaking up.

"Yeah. Go ahead, dear. I'll have to look after my merc."

Eren watched as Kirin disappeared from her position almost instantly. She then appeared right behind a certain ranker before using her fire chains to neutralize him. She started using her elemental attainments to tackle multiple opponents at once.

Ivor was done with half of the rankers he was supposed to finish as well. His pride armor kept him safe while dealing with multiple Adept rankers with the same level of toughness as him if not more.

Adept-ranked entities and beyond were difficult to kill even by rankers of the same rank as them. One needed to have an overwhelming advantage in terms of higher rank or better weapons to initiate a kill. To kill their opponents, one had to possess powerful powers like the Sin Series Abilities.

This was why Eren didn't fight Shandil directly even though he knew he could win. It wasn't about winning or losing the fight. It was about whether Shandil survived the fight or not.

The butcher couldn't finish Shandil quickly even if he tried his best. The elf was too talented to be done in a few minutes. Shandil had a high chance of escaping even the prism barrier they had put up given enough time. After all, Shandil had royal status and would have been given a lot of precautionary items to carry with him.

When Eren checked Shandil's storage space, he found out that his decision was right on the mark. Handil had at least three surefire ways to escape the prism barrier.

'Thanks for being so generous, Mr. Royal Elf. I'll make good use of your stuff.'

The butcher shamelessly claimed Shandil's possessions for himself along with the mask artifact he had. After all, his potential undead didn't need to have worldly possessions weighing him down.

Eren was willing carry Shandil's burden by himself. The butcher was very accommodating in that regard.

[Chapter 963 Infighting](#)

Rip. Swoosh. Zoom.

Meera sent Oliver flying with her fierce wind-element attacks. The latter had many wounds on his body that attested to how valiantly he had fought against the living undead.

Oliver was sent in the same direction as the prism barrier. Under Layla's control, Oliver was let inside the barrier instead of getting wall-plastered over it. Meera followed him quickly before the barrier became seamless once again.

Boom.

Oliver's body crashed into the ground like a meteor at a low angle. For a few seconds, the vector force acting on his body refused to decrease, creating a deep trench on the ground as he was dragged forcefully over it. When he finally stopped, Oliver was found in worse condition than he was a moment before— covered in dust and grime.

Meera appeared beside Eren in very poor condition. Her right shoulder had been dislocated and her guts could be seen through the injury she had on her tummy.

Oliver's attacks had damaged her. He needed to treat her right away so he took out Ice Fairy's Kiss and handed it to her. The latter gulped the contents of the vial down without any complaints or appreciation.

"Aaaaaaargh!"

Cough! Cough! Cough!

Oliver cried in pain and coughed up blood as he tried to get up. Meera's uncaring attacks really did a number on him. She engaged with him in a way that put her own safety at risk. But since she was a living undead anyway, all the repercussions of this kind of battle were Oliver's to bear.

His black clothes looked drenched in blood and his eyes seemed wild. If his face was visible to everyone, they would see he had hideous expressions contrary to his usual stoic look.

"You... cough cough cough..."

Oliver finally managed to stabilize his condition and stand up on his feet after forcefully getting rid of the foreign mana invasion. His internal organs were a mess and he had a killer headache. But that didn't stop him from speaking his next words.

"Heh. You got me there, Layla. Ivor Osan and the butcher. Two people who I had been meaning to find for so long found me instead.

You managed to swindle Sir Arthur and use his resources for yourself. You shook hands with those two people and gave them the powers that were promised to us.

Then you managed to stay on the run for so long and hurt us brick by brick. Cough... Cough... Cough. It's an impressive achievement on your part. I'll give you that."

Oliver scanned the area around him and saw Eren busy with some kind of ritual near an unknown elf. An elf whom Oliver had never seen before. This elf had recently broken into Expert rank through unknown means and died shortly after. The butcher started his pre-spell ritual right after that.

Oliver could not understand what was going on with Eren. But he soon found out that he couldn't approach Eren carelessly because the cause of his misery was standing beside him— Meera Medinah. She had been fixed anew because Eren had spent an expensive healing potion on her like it was no big deal.

Oliver looked around some more and found out that someone had killed more than half of his team members in the most efficient way possible. Someone who couldn't be seen or felt with normal senses alone.

Oliver also found out that Ivor was busy fighting with five team members of his team at once. The pseudo-lightning domain had disappeared and Ivor looked exhausted. He had managed to kill 7 out of 12 well-equipped and well-prepared Adept rankers. This kind of achievement spoke volumes about how much effort he had put in.

Ivor cursed Eren for treating this fight as a joke. The guy had barely contributed and instead used Kirin as his proxy. Ivor could see Eren experimenting with a dead elf dude. He didn't know what Eren was doing but he could bet anything that it wasn't anything he wanted his usual people to know about.

Eren had also dispersed his domain of wrath after Kirin got active on the field. Kirin and Meera assumed all responsibility for his safety as he got busy creating his second living undead.

With the battlefield in this condition, Oliver didn't know if his words were heard by Layla or not. Because she couldn't be found. He didn't know to whom to direct the rage he was feeling inside his heart. He needed a vent to let his anger out.

Thankfully for him, the butcher's domain of wrath wasn't active. Otherwise, he would have turned into one of the fiercest wrath creatures.

Oliver had tried to keep tabs on what was happening inside the prism barrier for the most part even when he was fighting with Meera outside it. He knew that Eren had used the wrath creatures as pawns to attack the rankers alongside his summons.

Oliver realized something strange on the battlefield after he got inside the prism barrier once again. Everybody alive was busy fighting something or someone. But there was one person on the battlefield who wasn't attacked by anyone.

Oliver looked at Biru and the latter tried to avert his eyes. He immediately understood that the old man had also figured out the trick Layla had used on him.

Oliver's eyes turned red in anger as he looked at Biru. It was as if he was angry at Biru for trying to keep himself alive even after knowing that it was his well-being that was preventing anyone from escaping the nightmare.

Oliver disappeared from his place and appeared right behind Biru. Before the latter could react to what was happening, Oliver slapped his back with a peculiar-looking array disk in his hands.

The Master ranker couldn't retaliate because he couldn't use his spells anyway. So it was easy for Oliver to target the old man who was anyway destined to die in the mess. Oliver didn't want himself or the remaining five members of his team to die with the old man.

If Layla could use Biru to power her prism barrier, Oliver could also use the defenseless old man's life as a launch pad for his battle formation.

[Chapter 964 Might Of The Battle Formations](#)

Everything happened too fast for Layla or Ivor to do anything about it.

It was a well-coordinated move by Oliver. And he crafted it in a few moments after finding out how the prism barrier worked. The captain ordered the five rankers to use their joint attacks as a fake to free themselves from Ivor's control.

The remaining members of Oliver's team quickly approached Oliver and formed a battle formation in unison. The old man Biru lay in the middle of their circle with his dying breaths. There was an array disk attached to his back that was exuding a faint light and spreading strong mana pulses.

The array disk spread its floating runes across Biru's fragile body and completely covered him. The runes spread further and climbed onto Oliver and the remaining five members of his team.

Zimmm!

The battle formation was completed faster this time because Oliver sacrificed a defenseless Master ranker's life for it. As a result, it was executed faster and was relatively stronger and more stable. Plus, the battle formation was completed using six rankers instead of using too many rankers which would have only complicated it further.

"Hmmm?"

Eren finally completed his living undead ritual when he felt a strong mana pulse in the surroundings. He looked back to see that Oliver and his teammates had successfully formed a battle formation.

"Kirin darling, don't."

Kirin was about to attack Oliver and his group of rankers when Eren's words stopped her. She appeared beside Eren and looked at him curiously before asking.

'Lord husband, what are they doing?'

With the cat out of the bag, Layla appeared beside Eren too. She was a bit unsatisfied with the fact that Eren and Ivor couldn't get rid of all of Oliver's rankers on their own.

Ivor appeared beside Layla in his battered form. He couldn't keep his pride armor on himself anymore due to sensory overload. After dispersing it, he decided to catch his breath. The guy just sat cross-legged on the ground and started channeling his mana throughout his body to get rid of fatigue and prepare himself for another round.

Argo was also called forth since Eren had let go of the demon beast transformation. The beast had a bit of saliva dripping from his mouth when he inhaled the smell of blood prevailing in the surrounding area. But he also realized the situation was a bit tense so he didn't open up with his usual antics.

Eren looked at Oliver's group closely before looking at Biru's dead body. He immediately understood how Oliver had managed to activate a powerful battle formation with just five Adept rankers around.

Still, Eren wasn't intimidated by Oliver's stance. He looked at his opponents casually before answering Kirin's question.

'This is called a battle formation, Kirin darling. I don't think you used these in the Oni dungeon. So I'll give you a brief introduction.'

Since an unofficial stalemate was being observed, Eren decided to explain to Kirin everything he knew about the battle formation.

He was sure that the continent of Echidna would have something similar to battle formations as well. He just wasn't sure if the children of Echidna used battle formations in the same way rankers of Anfang did here.

Alephee had also said to Eren once that many peculiarities developed by rankers in Anfang were unique. For example, the Historian class never existed outside of Anfang. It was exclusive to this continent.

The battle formations weren't exclusive to Anfang. But they were certainly refined to perfection by the rankers here.

Kirin nodded her head when Eren finished his brief introduction. The latter paused for a bit before continuing.

'In a crude sense, battle formations could be called spells that get cast by a group. But that is a very simple way of putting it. They can exceed a spell's definition depending on who or how many rankers were involved in the battle formations, as well as where that spell is used.'

There are many types of battle formations— attack types, defense types, or combos of both. There are also battle formations meant for item or convoy extraction. Some are used to target single or multiple targets at once.

Some battle formations are only meant to be used against beasts while others are employed to gain terrain advantages. Battle formations apply a very simple rule and take it to the extreme— combining individual strength and converting it into group strength.

The reason battle formations are used by a bunch of Adept rankers to fight other Adept rankers and beyond is because of the outcome they generate. The addition of individual strength to battle formations would never be linear.

Successful activation of battle formations will always result in compound effects. The compound output will depend on the rankers involved as well as the synchronization among them.

The higher a man's ranking status and the more in-depth his elemental achievements are, the more fearsome he would seem to others. Battle formations were created to counter individuals like these. These formations are meant to suppress overwhelming individual strength.

This is why there is almost no ranker in the land of Anfang that can truly act as a lone wolf.

High-ranked entities who have the necessary strengths to tackle battle formations will never fail to record their names in the annals of history. But to get there, one needs to survive by being part of the group first.'

Eren's emerald green eyes shone when he said that. Battle formations were one of the reasons he never thought of handling everything by himself. He knew that if he acted hungry for power and kept on challenging the system, it was bound to get him one day. This was true no matter how strong he might be on an individual level.

A ranker's individuality would become more apparent as they moved up the ranking ladder. And some individualities were just too domineering to be handled by relatively ordinary rankers.

Battle formations were, in a general sense, law enforcers of the system that the people at the highest echelon would use to suppress the top-tier monsters of the world. Even a particularly talented Sage could be targeted by Sage-level battle formations no matter how strong their individualities were compared to other Sages.

[Chapter 965 \[Bonus \] Ranker's Individuality Vs Unified Strength](#)

There's strength in unity.

This unified strength couldn't be overcome by a solo ranker unless the latter's individuality exceeded that of a group.

Furthermore, the individuality of a ranker took into account everything from a ranker's elemental affinities, the number of spells he could use, the Abilities he had access to, their ranking technique, elemental attainments, weapon comprehensions, to the kind of gear he used for offense or defense. So when a ranker's individuality was referred to, it referred to his entire existence.

Eren had come to realize this truth in his last timeline. Unlike Eliza who had focused on individual strength from the beginning despite being part of a prominent clan, the butcher knew the importance of acting as a team.

After all, the people at the top would always look for lone wolves who stood out so that they could suppress them. So acting in the group provided Eren with the cover he needed to stay lowkey.

Eren believed that individual strength could always be harnessed in silence while acting as a part of the group. He would never challenge an entire system on his own. At least not until he was forced or ready to do so of his own accord.

Eren also explained to Kirin that battle formations didn't really need an array disk. It only acted as a mediator among multiple rankers belonging to different elemental affinities and attainments. Moreover, some high-ranking entities had better chemistry with each other or were simply talented enough to cast battle formations without using array disks. Battle formations cast by such rankers were on another level.

Eren also observed a peculiar thing while explaining things to Kirin. It was that Oliver wasn't using an array disk when he was about to activate the battle formation for the very first time. This was when all of his team members were alive.

The array disk allowed Oliver to use Biru's body as support for the formation as well as act as a mediator between the six rankers. It told Eren that the battle formation he had created was a makeshift one. Something he hadn't practiced enough with his team.

The silent standoff lasted for about a minute or two until Oliver decided to break the silence.

"You lot... Do you think you will get away with this? You will have to pay a steep price for targeting me and my team."

Oliver smiled wickedly at Eren and the rest before activating the battle formation. All of a sudden, the winds started blowing and the mana in the surroundings started to churn. Since Oliver was the commander of the battle formation, the effective mana grade of the formation was C-Rank.

The surrounding mana started to condense right over the airspace Oliver's group was standing under. Before long, a dense amount of wind-element mana started to take the shape of a sword blade. This was about a 50-meter-long blade that was giving threatening vibes all around it.

The hilt of the blade was next to form. Earth-element mana transformed into a solid form in the next moment before turning into a prominent-looking hilt. The large sword and the hilt were then inscribed with elemental runes by some unknown force. These elemental runes gave the giant sword an added edge. The blade was coated in scorching flames and lightning as a result of these elemental runes.

When the sword was completely formed, it was surrounded by various elemental attainments. It created small mana storms in the surroundings and threatened to affect the fabric of space.

At this point, a large sword could be seen hanging over Oliver and his team's heads. When Oliver swung the sword under his command, it cut through the air and sent out mini storms all around it. The gales generated by the sword were enough to send a lower-ranked mana beast 100s of feet away in the air. And this was when the sword wasn't even aimed at the subject.

After the Expert rank and beyond, spells and powers of the same grade started to affect the environment directly. If the battleground was near any prominent city, the city administrators would have sent their forces to check out what was going on.

Layla, Ivor, and even Kirin had grim expressions on their faces when they witnessed the power of the battle formation. If any of them tried to fight that sword monstrosity all alone, they knew they would be forced to pack their bags and leave OR be ready to face severe consequences.

Ivor knew he would have been in for a long session of suffering and pain if he had to tackle the sword. He didn't even know how to fight such a giant weapon in the first place. And he doubted his pride armor would be able to protect him for a very long time if he kept on clashing with the blade.

Layla clenched her fists when she saw Oliver showing the might of his battle formation. She could tell that the formation had not yet been fully activated. It meant that the formation was capable of harnessing even more power but the rankers involved in the formation weren't capable enough to unleash it. Or that the formation needed more rankers.

This was the first time Kirin saw a battle formation for real. She could say that the strength of the formation was impressive. She could sense that the manifested sword had some flaws that had been introduced due to errors in synchronization among the members of Oliver's team. Nevertheless, the weapon appeared threatening enough to intimidate the half-elf.

Oliver looked at Eren and his side with a tinge of false pity in his eyes before speaking up. One of the rankers that were part of the battle formation also took pleasure in seeing his opponents' faces. He laughed as he spoke.

"Tch. Tch. Tch. It was sad that we had to kill Master Biru for activating this battle formation. But his death as well as the deaths of all our team members will be avenged with this sword.

Hahaha. By the time we are done with these fuckers, they won't even have intact bodies that they can call their own."

[Chapter 966 Perspective](#)

"Hahaha. By the time we are done with these fuckers, they won't even have intact bodies that they can call their own."

The male ranker wanted to vent a bit after getting the upper hand. So he did just that. The female ranker beside the ranker who just spoke voiced her intentions next.

"Captain, I would like to chop that Ivor guy into two just for targeting my face too many times. I would like to see his soul leaving his body right in front of my eyes."

The female ranker had a huge slash wound on her pretty cheeks that was clearly caused by Ivor's daggers. She also had other similar injuries to her neck and arms. But the slash wound on her face stood out because she couldn't get rid of Ivor's pride mana. As a result, her wound was getting more severe and painful, turning her cheeks red now and then.

Ivor scoffed at the lady ranker and spat in contempt when her words reached his ears. The guy had just started her face because she was most concerned about that part of her body when they were dueling.

Osan Jr. noticed that very quickly and targeted her face to throw her off her game. It was evident by the wounds the lady ranker had on other parts of her body despite being in the D-Rank solid stage that Ivor had been successful in what he had planned to do.

Ivor regretted the fact that he couldn't finish this lady ranker on time. A feat he would have achieved easily if he wasn't interrupted by the lady ranker's other friends fighting beside her.

Another ranker looked at Eren and laughed like a maniac before commenting.

"Hahahaha. Just imagine how much Sir Arthur will reward us when we tell him the news and show him the chopped heads of Eren and Ivor.

The mystery will finally be put to rest. Just imagining the amount he will give me makes me feel rich already."

Oliver looked at the man who had just spoken with a look of pity. That's because he knew Arthur's financial situation well. Arthur would surely reward the rankers for bringing the dead bodies of Ivor and Eren and catching Layla alive. But it was not going to be anything too incredible.

The artificial demon beast projects had depleted a major part of Arthur's wealth. A huge part of his remaining sum was spent chasing Layla and doing things related to his breakthrough into Grandmaster rank. The guy was broke by Duke's standards these days. Oliver guessed that Eren would have more than Arthur at this point.

Still, Oliver didn't try to burst the guy's bubble. The reward will come after the task is completed. Consequently, Oliver looked at Eren and used his actions to warn him.

Oliver raised his hands and concentrated. He controlled the array disk he was using to maintain the battle formation before commencing his attack.

Layla and Ivor felt a threatening vibe coming from the sword just before it was about to make a move. The blood inside their veins churned and their faces turned ashen. They looked at each other and then at Eren's back before deciding to bolt from their stance.

Arthur used his lightning movement spell to get away from Eren whereas Layla used Hexen Bee to fly away. Only Eren, Kirin, and Argo remained glued to their spot with the dead body of a royal elf behind them.

Eren watched as the 50-meter-long sword came for him tearing through the skies. The wind pressure it generated was enough to depress the ground and crush the people under it.

Argo had appeared in his lion form. He put one of his front paws on the dead elf to make him stick to the ground and not get flown away in the air. He then roared at the incoming sword without even moving an inch from his place.

Kirin was intimidated by the sword's pressure too. She felt that this was the most threatening situation she had come across in her entire life. Never did she have to worry about her safety to this extent as she did now.

But then the half-elf looked at her husband and gained some mental strength from him. Looking at him, she wondered if what they were doing was bravery or stupidity. In the next moment, however, she corrected her own thought process.

'In the end, bravery and stupidity are just perspectives. Those who can weather their storms are brave. Those who cannot are labeled as stupid.'

And then there are those who just don't give a damn about anyone's perspective...'

Kirin smiled as she looked at Eren. Eren hadn't stopped her from running away from the place but she decided to stick close to him nonetheless. She stood by him and let the sword approach her.

Eren looked up and smiled crookedly as he felt a natural disaster-like attack approach him. He felt like he was receiving divine punishment for all the so-called wrong deeds he committed so far.

Argo's fearless lion roar was drowned out by deafening white noise when the sword finally swooshed down.

Zoom. Swoosh. Cut.

The large elemental sword cut through the ground like a hot knife would cut through a slab of butter. It struck twice in quick succession before resuming its resting position above Oliver's head once again.

It was as if the earth itself had been split in anticipation of the sword's attack. Hence, the attacks generated relatively less damage than was expected of them.

Still, the mana pulse the sword gave off when the attack was launched was quite something. One could say that the way Ivor and Layla reacted to the potential attack was a natural course of action for most rankers in their shoes.

A dust storm had been generated by the sword's attack. The surroundings were clearly compromised and the mana in the surroundings got too agitated for anyone to use their mana sense normally.

The ground Eren stood on became a blackout zone for his allies-in-combat as well as his foes.

[Chapter 967 Going On A Tangent](#)

Ki! Ki! Ki!

A different kind of mana was also let loose in the surroundings as a result of the giant sword attack. It created a peculiar sound as it manifested, like that of a hundred birds chirping together.

It was a non-elemental mana that had been influenced by sword comprehension.

This sword aura would split things randomly whenever it was amassed at a particular place in a certain density. Its only job was to cut everything in its path. The sword aura stayed dominant in the area and damaged it some more before it was summoned to a single place.

The sword aura started gathering near Oliver's team the next moment. It created a barrier around the rankers and protected them from any potential harm. The more the sword was used, the more the sword would be created and the more the barrier would get strengthened.

This was the beauty of the battle formation that Oliver had employed. The barrier prevented Eren and his mates from randomly attacking any of the rankers involved in the formation. Of course, the barrier could not be strengthened infinitely as it depended upon the amount of sword aura the members could keep under their control through the formation's help. Still, it wasn't something that could be overcome easily by Eren's side.

It was unknown what had happened to Eren and those who stood beside him.

But every storm comes to an end and every heart of silence is pierced by the sounds of life eventually.

In due time, the agitated mana in the surroundings was pacified and the dust settled. Layla and Ivor realized what had really transpired at the place.

They saw that Eren, Argo, and Kirin were still standing in the same position they did before the attack. But the ground on which they stood had changed drastically.

Two deep trenches had been formed on the ground at either side of Eren. These trenches intersected just a few meters away from where Eren stood and expanded in two directions, making it look like Eren was standing inside a V-shape plot with steep edges.

The ground beyond the steep edges had been depressed to such an extent that two mini valleys shrouded in darkness had been formed. Just a series of attacks from the elemental sword had changed the landscape by a huge margin.

Kirin had goosebumps on her skin being so close to such attacks. She was not scared by the intensity of the attacks themselves but the way she chose to remain unresponsive in the face of such an attack. After all, it was easier to react in situations like these than to watch it happen around you like some distant bystander.

The five members of Oliver's team had smiles plastered on their faces when they saw Oliver attack Eren's side with the elemental sword. Since it was Oliver who was controlling the formation, they didn't really know what he was going to do with his attacks. They thought that the Hound had attacked Eren intending to harm him for real.

Oliver too couldn't help having a light smile on his face as he watched the might of a battle formation unfolding in front of him. Just like Eren had guessed, this was a makeshift formation he was using with the help of the array disk. But that didn't mean that the formation itself was lesser in grade than the one he was supposed to use from the get-go.

Oliver was very satisfied with the outcome of his attacks for the most part. But then he saw Eren standing his ground, uncaring of the outcome he had generated. The Hound's face darkened when he realized his scare tactics don't work on the butcher.

Argo jumped over Eren's head and walked up to the edge of what looked like a cliff. He roared at Oliver and his forces before speaking up in a deep voice that almost sounded human.

"Bitch, you think we are some cowards who'd wet their undies and run away from this pansy ass move? Imma drive that sword up yours if you don't attack us for real."

The challenge Oliver posed at Argo made him highly reactive. The fragment of demonic soul inside him was irked by Oliver's move. For a moment, nobody talked. Argo's listeners didn't even get most of his threats. It was only Eren who had something to comment on.

"But you don't even wear any undies, you fat cat. And we can all see your "sword" hanging freely."

Another round of deafening silence ensued. Argo made an ugly lion face before speaking in an irritated voice.

"Damn it, boss... don't be raining on my parade, yo. Help a brother out here."

Argo then looked between his legs and smirked before saying proudly.

"And I'm not ashamed of my impressive manhood. Naah. I oughta be charging people for taking a peek at my family jewels."

Argo shook his mane like a lion king and stared at Oliver's force fiercely as he said that. Eren chuckled at Argo's statement before saying in contempt.

"Heh! Dream on. In what universe would people pay for seeing other people naked?

Especially if the naked one is you, you buffoon."

Argo stomped his two front legs on the ground before voicing his resolve.

"Wanna bet? One day, bitches would sell their left kidneys to see me and I'mma sell my nudes to the highest bidder. If not in this world, then some other world where I can pull off something like that.

Just gotta keep using the demonic possessions till I find a place to monetize my blessings. Knowtamsayin! Easy peasy lemon squeezy, baby.

In fact, I know just the right world..."

Argo stopped what he was saying midway and looked confused as if he was trying to remember some lost memory stored inside the demonic soul fragment. He then shook his head as if restarting his thought process anew.

"Anyways... There ain't no job too difficult for me. Ain't no task too tall for me. Ain't no chick too hot for me.

I am a legit demon prince, god damn it. I can do whatever the fuck I want."

Argo blew out some steam through his nose after declaring his convictions. The demon beast had managed to look pissed and proud at the same time.

"Monetizing your talent through some kinda auction, huh? Well... I'm all for it. But what if the highest bidder of yourâ€" "nudes"? Or whatever that is, turns out to be a man?"

Eren asked a counter question in a casual tone, seemingly forgetting all about Oliver's team. Argo looked at Eren scornfully. The angry-looking demon beast was about to say something to Eren with passion when they all heard an even angrier voice coming from the enemy camp.

"SILENCE!"

Oliver finally couldn't take Eren and Argo going on a different tangent anymore.

[Chapter 968 Demon Prince Argo](#)

"SILENCE!"

Oliver finally couldn't take Eren and Argo veering off on a different tangent anymore. He snapped. The formation was activated once again. The sword ripped through space and approached Eren's side.

Roar!

Argo roared at the incoming sword and charged at it with his beastly leap. Midway through the air, he shapeshifted into his hybrid form and surrounded himself with red and purple lightning.

'This demon beast is going to die not because of the sword but because of his baseless pride. Just like his master.'

Oliver smirked as he watched Argo's impudence. He was sure that he would be able to kill a D-ranked demon beast with his C-Rank elemental sword without much effort.

However, he didn't know at the time that some demons were just too demonic.

Argo activated his Devour Ability as he approached the sword and literally bit into it. The beast started devouring the elemental sword itself, which was supposed to be a rank above him. As a result, his normal figure started to get enlarged unnaturally and his muscles began to get strained.

Oliver felt a threatening vibe coming from the formation itself as if it would collapse. He stopped his elemental sword from approaching Eren and instead slashed it horizontally to get rid of the damned demon beast.

Suddenly, the winds started howling as Argo called them forth to do his bidding. The fire-element mana also surged around the demon beast. The elemental fusion of two elements took place and enveloped Argo in it.

Even the array disk started to shake because of the reverse flow of mana Argo had introduced into the formation. Argo sank his claws and his teeth into the elemental sword and activated his Devour Ability through his limbs as well.

The demonic side of Argo was taking hold over him in times of pinch. He released an eagle cry at Oliver before declaring his intentions.

"Bitch, who gave you the right to silence this Demon Prince? I'mma eat your carcass and chew on your bones like pretzels."

Kiyeeeeeh!

Argo released another ear-piercing eagle cry. The demon beast was clearly using intent-based magic coupled with his demonic aura that also affected people's psyches. And this combination came to him naturally as he expressed his individuality. One could say that his dormant memories were making him turn into the demon prince he declared himself to be as.

Creak! Creak! Creak!

Argo's bones were creaking and his eyes were turning redder by the moment. It was evident that Argo was suffering from having to refine a level of mana higher than his current constitution. But he channeled that suffering into sustaining himself. Using his Ability, he kept destroying his body and building it again to keep himself in the game.

Nobody on Oliver's team had come across a demon beast with such ferocity. For some reason, Oliver believed Argo's threat to be real and not empty words. The beast had gotten even scarier than his master, overshadowing everyone completely.

Argo's aura threatened to seep into the elemental sword itself. This was the first time Argo had released his demonic aura on his opponents to this extent. His presence became too domineering for Oliver and any of his team members to ignore. Apparently, the demon beast didn't like people who initiated challenges at him and then didn't follow them up.

It was as if Argo was turning into a different grade of the beast. This was no epic-level presence they felt. Argo seemed to be on his way to breaking into the legendary category with what looked like a potential ranking breakthrough.

"What... What kind of demon beast is this?"

The ranker who had vented earlier looked at Eren accusingly. He pointed at Argo as he spoke. The beast had climbed onto the elemental sword firmly towards its hilt and was not letting go.

They had tried to shake him off using the elemental attainments that coated the sword as well. As a result, Argo's skin ruptured in various places. But the beast would just intensify his Devour Ability to recover from the injuries he faced.

Eren shrugged his shoulders before replying.

"The kind that lets nothing get in the way of what he wants. I think I have stopped being his master. So you better not come to me for whatever he does."

Eren refused to take responsibility for Argo's behavior. The latter's shenanigans were sometimes beyond Eren's control. So it was better to let Argo be Argo. He looked at his demon beast and pursed his lips before deciding to act.

'I should probably pitch in. Preferably before he hurts himself and asks for more red meat and C-rank people as a reward.'

Eren decided to make a move. His hair turned completely white and elongated. The tribal tattoos on his body became apparent as he changed himself into a summoner before casting an earth-element spell.

This was an earth-element tank spell he had gained from Gilhouse Remus. Eren didn't think that he would need to use this spell anytime soon. But he was wrong.

The butcher was about to cast a spell on the V-shaped cut section of the ground. It would allow him to reduce his casting time.

Swoosh!

Following Oliver's relentless efforts, Argo was thrown from the sword. Oliver had almost dispersed the elemental sword while trying to get the demon beast off it. He destabilized a part of the sword that Argo was using as his foothold before swinging the weapon harshly. To prevent the beast from snacking on the sword, the Hound abruptly halted the weapon in midair after accelerating it with huge velocity.

Oliver had drops of sweat running down his cheeks. The battle formation put a tremendous strain on the operator's consciousness. Plus, Argo's unexpected way of destabilizing the formation made things more difficult for Arthur's Hound.

He only managed to get the demon beast off the elemental sword because it was him that was controlling the formation. He didn't doubt for a second that the beast would have either managed to eat half of the sword or broken the array disk due to instability if it was anyone else in the team assigned as the operator.

Kiyeeeh!

Argo released another deafening cry after he got up from the crater he had just created with his body. He shook himself up and stood with some difficulty. He shapeshifted into his eagle form which would allow him to fly with greater precision and control.

The beast was about to attack the sword, intending to devour the whole weapon brick by brick. Nevertheless, Eren's next words compelled him to stay at his place.

"Yo! Let your brother handle it from here."

Eren said to Argo in a mana-infused voice without looking at him. He rolled up his sleeves and lit up his Sativa Stick. The beast was thrown further back, but he heard Eren's message loud and clear.

Behemoth was about to be summoned to the field.

[Chapter 969 Variables](#)

Eren gulped down a vial of an expensive mana recovery potion as he looked at Oliver's team with his deep blue eyes. His otherworldly nature couldn't be masked when he was in this form.

Eren used the potion because he needed to refill his mana reserves. His tank spell took a huge toll on his mana reserves after all.

The ground quaked and the V-section of the ground that was cut by the elemental sword was lifted. A threatening amount of mana pulse was released as Eren finished casting his brand-new spell with exceptional skill as if he had been casting it for a very long time.

Behemoth!

Oliver sensed a threatening presence under Eren's feet. He didn't know how a close combat expert could cast a spell like this. But this was not the time to ask anyone.

He wanted to attack Eren right then and there before he finished casting the spell. Suddenly, he was subjected to the butcher's unleashed soul sense.

Oliver was sucked into the illusion of a gory world once again. This time he was a bit prepared and partially convinced himself that the illusion he was seeing was not real. But his soul was affected by Eren's soul sense nonetheless. As a result, the elemental sword halted in midair and couldn't finish attacking Eren and Kirin.

Eren used his soul sense plus Sedating Gaze to disrupt the enemy's plan of stopping him from using Behemoth. Doing this, he gained enough time to finish the spell.

An earth-element creature was summoned into existence by Eren's spell. It had a lizard-like face with a bird-like beak. The creature also had exoskeleton fangs near his half-open mouth.

The creature had a relatively short horn for its nose. A series of horns also peeked through its forehead and other parts of its face. The beast had spikes on its back that extended over its tail.

His entire body was made of earth. Light green, beast-like callous skin covered its entire body. The beastly skin made the Behemoth look even more intimidating.

Since Eren had summoned a D-Rank Behemoth, it was relatively smaller in size and less intimidating than what Gilhause had summoned for himself. Still, the beast's size was just right to tackle the large elemental sword with. And since its body was made from earth-element, it served as the perfect counter to a sword's attacks.

The beast stood on four giant, pillar-like legs. He had green eyes that shined brightly from time to time. And he also developed white spots all over his body.

Eren was now seen standing on the beast's head. Kirin stood just behind him. The butcher enjoyed seeing an elevated view of the surroundings from the beast's head. He felt as if he had a walking mini mountain under his feet that was ready to bend to his will.

'He... he wasn't dueling with me seriously.'

Ivor gulped as he looked at Eren from a distance. He was already too stunned to do anything after seeing Argo's fierceness. He thought that that was probably going to be the shock of the day for him. But Eren's new spell turned him wrong.

He also wondered why Eren felt like he had been turned into a completely different person. He wasn't used to seeing him with white hair and blue eyes. Ivor couldn't fathom the butcher shifting between classes on a whim.

"Don't think too much or get greedy for power. He is unique. You are better off staying as a close combat expert for now."

Layla popped Ivor's bubble of having multiple classes. The latter also didn't know when he wanted to be more like Eren. He was astonished by Argo first and then by Eren once again.

Layla looked at Argo intently before saying a few things under her breath. She knew that Eliza would try to help Eren on his path so he could play an active role in the Lazarus project. But she was also sure that her Master wouldn't offer Eren too many benefits as well.

The demon beast egg given to Eren by Eliza was supposed to be an epic-tier beast. But Argo's mana signatures made her think otherwise.

Layla felt that Argo's signature wasn't the usual one of an epic-tier beast. They rivaled the power of dragons and beyond. And this was when the demon beast hadn't even learned to shapeshift into humanoid form and harness his individuality.

'Too many... too many variables.'

Argo's incredibility didn't really threaten the Lazarus project. But the homunculus thought that she should be careful nonetheless. Argo alone was the biggest anomaly Eren had under his banner.'

Layla thought to herself. She then looked at Eren himself before having another thought.

'We always knew he was going to get stronger with time, thanks to his bloodline. But this... is incomprehensible. How was he not apprehended by the forces of Anfang with his staggering progress? I need to consult with Master Eliza— see what she has to say.'

Oliver could see Eren looking at him casually while enjoying his smoke. The butcher was waiting for Oliver to attack him this time with his elemental sword.

The Hound looked at Eren grimly and added.

"I won't ask when and how you obtained these myriad powers. Because I know you won't tell me. I won't ask you about your past as Osan Woods' Butcher because it doesn't matter anymore.

However, I do want to ask you something very pertinent. And I'd appreciate it if you could answer me. What is your role in matters related to Purgatory?"

According to Oliver, Eren or the Osan Woods' Butcher should not have sided with Layla. Because he had no reason to. And there was no sign of him using the artificial demon beast as well. As much as Oliver was intimidated by Argo, he knew that he was not the artificial demon beast that they had created inside the lab.

Arthur knew bits and pieces about what kind of powers Eren would have. And although Argo's Devour Ability paid homage to the artificial demon beast's powers, he was nothing like Eren.

[Chapter 970 Meat Patties](#)

Eren smirked when he heard Oliver's question.

Eren then turned around and looked at Kirin. The half-elf understood what he wanted from her. So she nodded at him before vanishing into thin air.

The butcher looked at Oliver once again before responding.

"Why should I tell my targets anything when I know they won't be able to do anything with the information I will provide them?"

Your only option is to die here. And if you are hesitating to attack me, that's fine. I'll come for you instead."

Earth Steps!

Earth Manipulation!

Earth Spikes!

Wrath mana!

Eren made the Behemoth use the integrated spells he was summoned with. The Behemoth used the earth-element movement spell without causing an earthquake as feedback, thanks to the Earth Manipulation spell.

The Earth Manipulation spell was used to reshape the behemoth's gigantic body, making it magically lighter than it was. As a result, Eren's Behemoth wasn't as towering as Gilhouse's. But it was nimble and very responsive. Nobody would expect a tank summon like Behemoth to move with such agility as what Eren's Behemoth was capable of.

Earth Spikes were created all around Behemoth's body to strengthen him and provide an edge to his attacks. This was Eren's personal touch that Gilhouse couldn't pull off on his own despite being an earth-element summoner for a longer time than him.

In the end, Eren also injected wrath mana into the Behemoth, making him stronger and more fearsome. One had to say that Eren had taken Gilhouse's legacy way further than the dead guy could imagine.

Oliver cursed Eren for not even extending basic decency to him. He then yelled at his team members to warn them about the potential danger approaching all of them.

"Don't you dare relax! We can only defeat him if we fight together.

HERE HE COMES!"

Boom!

As the Behemoth attacked, the elemental sword was swung. It managed to lodge itself inside the Behemoth's left shoulder, apparently trying to chop its head. However, the spikes dispersed the force behind the attack, so it was unable to do its job.

Oliver was very responsive when using the elemental sword. The only problem was that the earth-element summons didn't have the usual weaknesses of other summonses.

A large amount of soil and rocks was released from Behemoth's wounds as debris because of the sword's wound. The Behemoth roared loudly just before it attacked Oliver's team's safety barrier.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Behemoth used its front limbs to attack Oliver's team. It was as if the beast had learned to box with its front limbs and it was only targeting a small area under its feet. Earth Spikes all over the summon's limbs made its attack more potent.

Swoosh. Swing. Cut.

Behemoth continued to be attacked by the elemental sword with all its might. But apart from giving the summon a few slash wounds on its giant body, it couldn't do much. Meanwhile, the sword aura barrier Oliver's team had created for its safety was weakening under Behemoth's constant attacks.

The elemental sword tried to target Eren as well. But the guy was simply too fast to be attacked by a giant sword. He would just disappear from his position using either Blink or his lightning movement spell before appearing at his place once again.

This was the reason Eren wasn't scared of the elemental sword. He knew his response time was too quick for the giant sword to attack him. He couldn't do anything to the sword himself. In addition, he couldn't pull off the stunt Argo had done. But a large yet slow as fuck sword wasn't enough to intimidate him.

"Hahahaha. Bitch I'm lightning."

Eren laughed as his afterimage was pierced by the elemental sword. He had dodged yet another personal attack on himself while maintaining a constant barrage of attacks on Oliver's team through Behemoth.

The butcher liked the face Oliver made every time Argo called him a bitch. So he did the same and engaged him in mental warfare as well.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The events kept happening in a loop for a few minutes. Behemoth had a lot of chunks of its body parts missing due to the elemental sword. The Behemoth would regenerate part of his missing body parts by using the earth beneath him and attack Oliver's safety barrier with new vigor.

When the elemental sword failed to take care of him, Eren was bombarded with a bunch of long-range spells cast by the rankers on Oliver's team. Eren would simply dodge them or use various spells he had in his arsenal to counter them while shifting his position all over the Behemoth's body.

Eren knew exactly where to travel all over the large moving mountain that was Behemoth. His ever-changing position made it difficult for Oliver's team to even intercept him.

The C-Rank barrier was finally weakened. Not just because of Behemoth's constant attacks. Oliver could no longer maintain the battle formation because of mental exhaustion. When Oliver finally couldn't take it anymore, Behemoth broke both the safety barrier and the battle formation simultaneously.

Boom!

Behemoth's last punch allowed him to finish the task he was assigned to. The summon had lost a large portion of his front limbs because it was colliding against a barrier made of a C-ranked sword aura.

The more the elemental sword was used on Eren and Behemoth, the more sword aura was generated around Oliver's team, strengthening the barrier. But Oliver's mental burden of maintaining the sword aura as a defense barrier was increasing as well. Thus, when Behemoth kept on attacking Oliver's team relentlessly, it managed to break both the barrier and the battle formation in one go.

"Heh! Offense is the best defense.

Behemoth... give me meat patties."

Eren's sinister voice was heard by Oliver's team from above. He was looking at them while standing over Behemoth's right shoulder. The summon released another ear-piercing cry before following the summoner's commands.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

Oliver's team was exposed to the Behemoth's direct attacks for the first time under its feet. The situation was akin to an elephant trying to squash a bunch of ants.

No matter how further they all wanted to run away, some of them were about to get crushed under the beast's giant feet.