

## Vile 971

### [Chapter 971 Unique Dining Experience](#)

Boom!

The rankers on Oliver's team were already mentally and physically exhausted from running the battle formation extensively. So when Behemoth attacked them, nobody was able to respond to the extent of their abilities.

Three rankers died right away under Behemoth's feet. The fourth was fatally injured because debris fell on him. Only Oliver and one other guy managed to get away safely from the behemoth's attacks.

Oliver couldn't assure his safety for long, however, because a certain demon beast was waiting in line when the safety barrier cracked. He swooped down from the sky and picked up Oliver as if he was catching a fish from lake water.

"Where you going, bitch? I told you I'mma dine on your carcass."

Kiyeeeh!

Shrouded in red lightning, Argo appeared at the scene and grabbed Oliver by his shoulder with his claws. The beast had managed to mimic Eren's movement spell to some extent. He also used his natural gifts and wind-element attainment to enhance his speed.

As a result, Oliver couldn't defend himself when the demon beast attacked him. The guy was already suffering from physical and mental fatigue. So he couldn't launch a counter when Argo took hold of him.

"Aaaaargh!"

Argo exerted some pressure on Oliver's shoulder with his grip and the claws sank into his flesh. Argo dropped Oliver over Behemoth's crown before placing his claws on his chest.

"Nooooo... please... Eren... sir demon prince... save... aaaaargh!"

Kiyeeeeeeh!

Argo only released his beastly cry in response to Oliver's pleas. He shrank his size and picked Oliver's eyes with his beak, putting the guy through more misery. The demon beast started devouring the C-ranker bite by bite, relishing every piece of flesh he got.

Streams of blood started dripping off Behemoth's face as Argo enjoyed his C-rank delicacy over its head. The bodies of C-rank entities and beyond were special. Even a drop of blood from these entities was highly potent and had innate magical properties depending upon the entity's elemental affinity and other factors.

It was also not easy to kill a C-rank entity. The organs in their bodies defied common sense known to mortals.

Their hearts could beat for weeks on end even after they were taken out. Their lungs could continue to function long after the hosts' deaths. Even their bone marrow continued to produce an insane amount of blood to keep the hosts alive.

Thus, as Argo was killing Oliver, the latter's body continued fighting the eventual outcome it was subjected to. To recover from his injuries, his body produced more blood and life essence. In the meantime, the demon beast devoured everything Oliver had to offer.

Oliver kept recovering bit by bit from his serious injuries. And Argo kept eating the regrown organs. A pond of blood had been created because of such a gruesome scene. The smell of blood traveled far and wide, and the mana pulses of such violence would give normal ranker goosebumps.

Oliver kept screaming to his heart's content. The Behemoth had stopped walking after it had done its job. But Oliver's screams made it feel as if the earth-element summon itself was voicing the injustice done to him.

Kirin appeared in front of Eren and dropped the dead body of the ranker who had managed to run away with Oliver. The latter was enjoying the last few drags of his Sativa Stick in silence as he let Argo finish his "exclusive dining experience."

Ivor kept a very close eye on Eren. He watched that Eren was smoking the whole time when he was competing against Oliver and his entire team. Ivor understood that his fight with Eren was nothing more than a stretching exercise for Eren.

"Haah! And the bastard says he is not addicted. Could have fooled me."

Layla appeared beside Ivor and took a keen look at Eren. She then shifted her gaze back to Ivor before speaking up.

"But that tells you something, doesn't it? It means Eren did not have to go all out against Oliver's forces. The same forces that had made us run away from them multiple times. He didn't even need our help. Not really. He could have dealt with the entire team by himself if he wanted to."

Ivor scoffed when he heard Layla's comment. She thought that she was pitting Ivor against Eren by saying that. But all it did was confirm the conclusion he had drawn for himself.

'This guy... he will become even scarier than that old hag if he keeps growing at the same pace. I... I need to think about my future carefully by picking the side that is likely to win at the end of the Lazarus Project.'

Eren and Ivor looked at each other at the same time by coincidence when Ivor finished thinking to himself. Eren gestured to Ivory to follow him before appearing above Behemoth's crown which was now a blood-soaked lake bed.

"Aaaaaaargh... demon... kill me first before you devour me... I... I can't take it anymore."

Oliver pleaded with Argo to finish the job first. He then looked around to find that Eren, Ivor, Layla, and Kirin had appeared nearby, just outside the pool of blood his C-rank body had created.

Argo was in a trance. He felt like his ranking breakthrough was approaching as he kept on devouring Oliver. He just kept on attacking the Hound without showing him any mercy.

Oliver's entire body was a mess at this point. Nobody could tell where it began and where it ended. Although one eye was missing from the eye socket, only his face remained recognizable.

Oliver looked at Eren and other people with hatred before commenting.

"Eren Idril, Arthur... Aaaaargh... Sir Arthur will not spare you. You will be .... Aaaaaaargh!"

The Hound then looked at Jason before commenting.

"You.... Ivor Osan... Jason Renar will come for you."

Ivor spat in contempt before speaking up.

"Yeah? He better do it. Otherwise, I'll have to start looking for him."

Eren didn't need to reply to Oliver's empty threats. He just looked at Argo and scrunched his nose in annoyance. The butcher used a mental connection to snap Argo out of his trance.

"You fat bird... look at the mess you have created. This is how you eat? At least finish the guy first. We are not savages, damn it."

As he stood at the place, Argo flapped his wings and looked around him. The demon soul fragment in him went dormant once again, making him seem lost at first.

"Uhh! What the..."

Argo remembered everything he had done and shook his head aggressively. He quickly used his eagle claw to crush Oliver's beating heart which was exposed in the open and killed the guy before speaking up.

"Damn.... My bad... boss. But I think... I... I'm having a breakthrough."

#### [Chapter 972 Argo's Breakthrough](#)

A boy could be seen sitting cross-legged in the middle of the blood pool with his eyes closed.

He looked to be 15ish years old— quite young and full of youth. He had a thick head of white hair that stood out against his copper-brown skin. When he opened his red eyes, they shone with unmasked ambition.

This young boy had a strange tattoo on his right cheek that made him look like a delinquent. He had an eagle-like curved nose and a sculpted jawline. He wore an expression of anger on his face. But that was because he couldn't control his facial muscles properly yet.

Argo had assumed his humanoid form after his breakthrough into the C-rank. In achieving a ranking breakthrough, he had left Eren behind. The C-rank had followed in the footsteps of Reen by being able to assume humanoid form.

When Argo stood up, he measured around 5.9 feet tall. Despite what Eren was used to calling him, the beast's humanoid form had a slim build with light muscle definitions. One could say that he looked as if he was in a caloric deficit with his athletic physique.

Argo stepped out of the blood pool in one swift jump and was greeted with a layer of red lightning that blocked visibility. As if red lightning curtains had been drawn around him.

"Stop flexing and wear these clothes."

Eren threw a bunch of regular clothes at Argo covered in lightning streaks. Argo caught the streaks with his bare hands before partially dousing the lightning tongues. Argo opened his mouth to speak but the butcher's stare made him shut up and follow his commands.

In no time, Argo was seen wearing a pair of black and white clothes that were clearly many sizes above me. The beast didn't like that he was given a bunch of used clothes.

"Yo boss, I'll need some money to go shopping. Don't expect me to wear hand-me-downs forever."

Argo ran his fingers through his white hair and adjusted his black jacket as he demanded money from Eren like it was his birthright. As proud as he was, Argo treated Eren like a family. So there was no shame in asking for something from him.

The butcher nodded his head begrudgingly. He knew Argo would start duping people if he didn't get what he wanted from him. His hustle knew no bounds.

Argo and Eren treated the former's humanoid transformation as a normal event. But others watching Argo had a different opinion.

"You.. you were a legendary-tier demon beast? How?"

Layla looked at Argo with a shocked expression as she asked him a question. She could confirm that Argo had stepped into the legendary-tier category with his breakthrough into the C-rank.

Argo focused his eagle-like gaze on Layla and shrugged his shoulders before commenting.

"I don't even know what that means. I guess I'm just that awesome."

Argo said confidently while attempting to walk using his humanoid legs. Since he wasn't used to his humanoid form, he just fell flat on his face, discrediting his previous confident attitude.

Kirin chuckled when she looked at Argo before disappearing into thin air. The butcher looked at Argo as if he was annoyed.

"Learn to walk first before declaring yourself awesome."

"I... I am born to fly, not walk" Argo retorted from his face-flat-on-the-ground position.

The butcher sighed before deciding to cancel his tank spell. He made the Behemoth walk to the same pit it had come out of before altering the landscape once again.

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Half-moon night. Chilled atmosphere. There was light snow deposition on the leaves of the forest trees. A bright source of light was the only source of warmth in this cold atmosphere.

A group of rankers could be seen sitting around a campfire.

This was the western end of the Dark Daniera forest— around three days' worth of colt ride away from Eren's last battlefield. The forest would end if the group traveled west for a day or two.

There was a living undead elf sitting among the group as well. One would have to check this elf very carefully to determine that he was a living undead. Because, unlike normal undead, he didn't have a lifeless face.

Plus, he could speak.

"So you're telling me that the attack on Healers' Nirvana was planned by another royal scion from Layos? Who would that be and how can I find them?"

Eren asked Shandil while having his beer-braised brisket. Kirin was sitting to his right while Argo was sitting to his left. The demon beast couldn't use the beast space anymore because Eren was still a D-rank entity.

Eren also preferred that Argo get used to his humanoid form. So the young demon would be asked to walk or sprint from time to time— a task he was failing miserably. So it was no wonder that Argo was not happy with his current circumstances despite being served quality red meat.

Ivor and Layla were sitting on the other side of the campfire. The former was playing with his daggers while the latter was jotting something down in her journal. It was as if she was recording interesting events that happened in her life recently.

Shandil was standing behind Eren with his eyes fixed on the flames released by the campfire from time to time. The living undead rolled his eyes unnaturally trying to remember some of the memories he had when he was alive.

Eren's spell and some of his modifications had brought him back to a false-life state. But it had affected Shandil's memories. So it was a while before he could answer Eren's question.

"Yes, sire. The royal scion's name is Shalana. She is a C-rank royal elf currently placed 13th in the line of succession. As for where you can find her... I don't remember."

The necromancer Eren scrunched his nose in dissatisfaction when he heard Shandil's reply. The latter sensed his sire's ire and came up with a fitting reply to pacify him.

"Sire, I don't remember where you can find Shalana. But I can always contact her and make her come to us."

### [Chapter 973 Ivor's Choice P1](#)

Eren always knew that there were liable to be repercussions for assimilating Healers' Nirvana into his guild.

He wasn't kidding when he painted a grim picture for Jiana saying there were consequences to taking over her guild. He hadn't said that just to get a favorable deal for himself.

The butcher knew how cultist organizations worked. After all, he was in business with some of them. So he wasn't surprised when he heard that the remaining members of the Midnight Moon along with some others were planning to attack White Raven city itself. It was their way of sending a message.

Eren felt that dealing with cultists was a lot more problematic than dealing with well-established forces or entities. Because he didn't know how to target them. The cultists didn't have fixed assets under their names. So he couldn't hold them accountable for anything.

This was the reason why Eren dealt with cultists by hiring other cultists. Still, the fact that he had taken over Healers' Nirvana could not be hidden. So he was expecting Midnight Moon and its allies to bear their fangs at him anyway.

Eren smirked to himself when he got the heads-up from Shandil. He was glad that he had prepared Shandil to be a living undead with a false lifehood infused into him. The butcher could use the royal elf as a beacon to get all the royal scions acting behind the cultist organizations before killing them in an ambush.

He made a straightforward plan in a few seconds before addressing Shandil.

"Shandil, you will call Shalana and all the other royal scions from Layos that you can find. Bring them together so we can kill them all in one go."

Eren decided to kill all the royal scions of Layos he could get his hands on. It was so that the ones who survived Eren's ambush plan wouldn't have sufficient force or influence to target him or his city.

Ivor stopped playing with his daggers and looked at Eren as if he was expecting him to say something like that. Only he could talk about killing a bunch of royal scions from the enemy kingdom like he was chopping veggies. He doubted even Edinburgh royalty would take such bold steps even after getting their hands on the royal elves within their borders.

Ivor smirked before using a runic whetstone to sharpen his daggers. He once belonged to a family that was supposed to care about the citizens of Edinburgh. But he didn't have these responsibilities anymore.

Eren's plan to keep his guild out of trouble was going to intensify the enmity between the two kingdoms. But that didn't stop Eren from prioritizing his interests. Next, he glanced at Kirin before adding more.

"Kirin darling, take Shandil with you and figure out a plan to target all the cultists in one go. Kaalmaahen is busy handling his tribe. And I don't think Agatha would be able to spare you any rankers from the guild to carry out this mission.

So you'd have to look for someone else. Get in touch with Baran and form a strike team with him.

Money won't be an issue. Use whatever means you have to sneak the monsters within the kingdom's territories and target all the cultists who have decided to target us. I'll also ask Sirius to hunt down some of the high-ranking entities that can't be handled by you.

Stay low-key but let the killings make a splash. Let them know White Raven City knows how to protect itself in a way they couldn't have imagined."

Eren asked Kirin to strike at his incoming enemies first before they strike him. She had already proved her mettle by leading the charge against an entire Ogre tribe along with its leader. So he knew she could handle this task just as effortlessly.

Orc Lord Baran was Eren's Orc general that was in charge of his monster army stationed in the Badlands. Eren decided to sneak some of the monsters inside Edinburgh to use them against the cultists.

Kirin nodded at Eren's decision. She liked the fact that he could count on her for things like this. Just as she had done the last time, she decided to do stellar work on this job as well.

Eren then looked at Layla before asking her.

"What will you do now that you have been freed from Oliver's constant pursuits? Enter the city of Lancelot?"

Layla stopped writing in her journal and paused before looking up. She looked at the flames of the campfire dancing over the half-burnt logs as she spoke.

"Yes. I have completed my part of the preparations. I didn't want that wretched Oliver to follow me there. So I avoided going to the city for a long time. But the time has come.

Oliver is dead. Master Eliza's preparations are almost finished as well. And Arthur is busy with his secluded ranking practice. Even if he comes out of his seclusion, he will be busy stabilizing his breakthrough into the Grandmaster rank.

We have nothing to stop us from starting the Lazarus project.

I'm just waiting for you. When will you join me?"

Eren finished his dinner and looked at the star-studded night sky. He smiled when he heard Layla's question. Instead of answering her right away, he instead asked a question to Ivor.

"Thinking of Jason?"

Oliver's mention of Jason with his dying breath had irked Ivor. Jason was the guy who Ivor had counted on in his academy days. And the same guy had betrayed him and lured him into Purgatory.

"If only he wasn't Arthur's son..."

Ivor would have liked to get even with Jason for betraying him. But he knew that thinking about targeting Jason and doing it were two different things. Jason was Arthur's bastard son. The guy was also very talented.

Jason had gotten into Royal Renar when Arthur's artificial demon beast project didn't yield him the result he wanted. He was supposed to take Ivor with him. Due to a twist of fate, the two ended up on a different spectrum of life.

Jason got to enjoy all the top-notch ranking resources after he exited Purgatory. Ivor on the other hand was branded as the Osan Woods' Butcher. He was forced to live the life of a cultist— living nomadically and off the grid most of the time.

"There's a way, Ivor. Hehe. How about you graduate with me just for the heck of it?"

#### [Chapter 974 Ivor's Choice P2](#)

Ivor was too stunned to speak.

Graduating from LA and getting on the ladder of success was one of his dreams. His grandfather Isen Osan had also instilled that wish in him.

Eren couldn't offer him that path anymore. And with the increase in his rank, it was only going to get more difficult for him as a vagabond. After all, after the C-rank, getting ranking resources while staying outside the system was going to be extremely difficult.

Still, the butcher was offering him something to tick off his to-do list. He knew that the ship had sailed for him to come into the mainstream. The rankers' society as a whole wouldn't accept him. So whatever Eren was offering him wasn't meant to be official. Not that he cared at this point.

He was about to ask Eren about something when the latter threw something at him all of a sudden.

"This would be your key to coming to the capital with me and getting inside the event."

Ivor looked carefully at what he was holding in his hands. It was the same artifact Shandil had used to alter his identity. The butcher had turned the royal elf into one of his living undead and taken possession of his belongings. So the mask belonged to him from that moment on.

Eren had already communicated with Shandil and asked him how to use the mask. A special ritual must be performed for the mask to work, which involves the sacrifice of the ranker from which the identity originated. Eren couldn't believe that elves were involved in such practices when he first learned about them.

It meant that Rondo was a real person before Shandil killed him and robbed him of his identity. When the ritual was finished, nobody could tell the difference between the real and fake Rondo.

Eren got up and started pacing around the campfire with his hands behind his back. He took a short break before speaking further.

"I'll tell you how to use the mask, Ivor. But that is only if you are interested in coming with me."

Layla snatched the mask from Ivor's grip as the latter seemed lost in his thoughts once again. She noticed the runes engraved over it and was amazed at the craftsmanship of the elves.

"This... this is intent-based magic! Elves really are ahead of humans in using this branch of magic."

Layla made her comments and observed the mask for a bit before returning it to Ivor. The latter casually placed the mask over his face and looked at Eren. Chuckling, he asked.

"Fuck Arthur?"

Eren nodded his head before replying, "Fuck Arthur indeed."

Eren knew that Arthur was one of his biggest enemies apart from Demonmir. The only advantage he had over Arthur was the fact that the latter wasn't aware of Eren's role in messing up his plans.

As much as Eren liked to play hide and seek with Arthur forever, he knew the Duke would not let things go. Arthur was like a ticking time bomb in Eren's hands that would go off with one wrong move.

Thus, Eren decided to target Jason instead. Jason was Arthur's weak point. At least the butcher hoped he was. Arthur was focused on capturing Layla these days, which was detrimental to both Eren and Layla. So his attention could be shifted to Osan Woods' Butcher again if he manages to mess with Jason.



Eren had a simple plan. But he believed that simple plans had a higher rate of success because of how straightforward they were.

Jason was well protected by his team of guards daily, even when he was attending Royal Renar. Nobody would be able to touch him. Plus, the guy wasn't cannon fodder either.

Jason felt privileged to be a royal. But he never let pride get in the way of his learning. After all, he was often called a bastard son by his step-siblings and their mothers. So the guy had a kind of fire inside his heart that couldn't be faked.

Just like Arthur had once remarked about his bastard son, he was quite skilled as a ranker. His achievements would only accumulate with time as he looked after the fire inside his heart.

Arthur had also prevented anyone from helping Jason too much. At first, he sent his bastard son to LA while sending his legitimate children to Royal Renar to prevent a family feud. But when he saw that Jason was ready to take on anyone, he brought him to Royal Renar to compete with his step-siblings.

Eren was aware of these tidbits about Arthur and Jason because he liked keeping tabs on his enemies. He always ran away from Jason when they were in LA because he was not strong enough to even say no to him. And that decision saved him from attracting Arthur's attention.

Times change. At this point, Eren wanted to confront Jason instead of the other way around. He wanted to use him as a chess piece to influence Arthur in a certain way.

Ivor understood what Eren wanted to do to Arthur when he heard Eren's proposal. As he removed his mask, he asked the butcher in a downcast voice.

"When will you stop shooting from my shoulder? I hate being used as a pawn."

Eren stopped pacing around when he heard Ivor's words. He looked at the guy intently before gesturing to him to hand him something.

"Haah! Just give me the mask then. I can always look for some other ways to fuck with Arthur."

Ivor was lost for words when he witnessed Eren's uncaring attitude. He just knew in his heart that the butcher was perfectly capable of reorganizing his plans with or without him.

Ivor pursed his lips before placing the mask in his storage. He clenched his fists before replying.

"No. I will do it. Let me see how much that backstabber has progressed after ditching me in Purgatory."

As much as Jason didn't like being used as a pawn, he didn't want to let go of the chance to clash with Jason personally. Plus, he always wanted to graduate.

Ivor knew that his life was going to be put at risk even with the mask working for him. But he believed that some risks needed to be taken in life just to get peace of mind.

#### [Chapter 975 Planning For The Graduation Event](#)

Eren sighed dramatically when he received Ivor's agreement.

He shook his head and approached Ivor. The butcher placed both his hands on Ivor's shoulders and patted them before speaking up in a wise scholarly voice.

"You know young man... the road to revenge will only take you downhill. Try to be as forgiving as I am. You will be much happier that way."

Kirin chuckled but controlled her laughter elegantly. To support her husband, she stood up and left the scene.

Cough! Cough! Cough!

Argo on the other hand was not as subtle as Kirin. He started coughing as if he was going to die from it. He got up and placed his right hand over his chest to calm himself down before speaking up.

"This... cough cough cough... Boss... I think my allergies are acting up. Must be some side effects of eating that guy Oliver. I... cough cough cough... I'mma just walk it off."

Argo disappeared from his seat as well, leaving Eren alone with Layla and Ivor. Layla stuck her tongue at Eren too, telling him that she couldn't be fooled by his fake wise-ass speech.

Ivor was no fool to notice the tell-tale signs of Eren's bullshittery. He swatted the butcher's hands off his shoulders before reconfirming his involvement in the graduation event.

Eren sighed dramatically as if he truly wanted to prevent Ivor from taking the path of revenge. He could only agree to Ivor's demands as if it was Ivor's idea to go with him all along.

Layla had to admit that Eren was a master manipulator. He defused a tense atmosphere and convinced Ivor to join his plans willingly. She could say that even her master did not have this art in her skillset.

Eliza was a monster of a ranker and a half-blood with one-in-million talent. But when it came to manipulating people according to one's will, Eren had her beat. She could only use threats as a driving force for her manipulation to work.

However, fear and other negative emotions were not very effective manipulation tactics in the long run. The real manipulation was when the subject got excited to do what you wanted them to do all along.

Ivor was Eren's contingency plan in case he had to run wild at the graduation event. He could pin things on the mysterious Osan Woods' Butcher who managed to sneak into the event.

Ivor also knew how Eren thought at this point. He knew that Eren never did things out of pure goodwill towards him.

Osan Jr. had come to realize that the devil he knew was better than the devil he didn't.

Upon receiving Ivor's affirmation, Eren looked at Layla and clapped his hands before speaking up.

"That settles it for all of us, Layla. I and Ivor will go to attend the graduation event that will be held in a couple of weeks. Meanwhile, you move forward and settle in the city of Lancelot. See what can be done to advance our plans.

However, don't make any major moves until we arrive in the city of Lancelots. The graduation event shouldn't take more than a month or two. So keep that in mind before making your decision.

Layla pondered for a bit and carefully considered Eren's instructions before nodding. There was now a movement to release her Master from the shackles of her inevitable fate. And she couldn't help feeling excited about it.

Eren felt Layla's excitement and sighed. He only hoped that he didn't have to raze an entire city to the ground just to get his hands on a couple of resources he had technically no use for.

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Messing up with an old monster like House Lancelot was not a small thing. In more ways than one, the repercussions of doing something like that and getting exposed were going to be more severe than offending House Slughorn.

Eren guessed that House Lancelot had at least one Sage stationed in its city. And the Lancelot guild itself had various high-ranking entities working under its name.

This was the so-called big leagues. And he had to deal with them while being nowhere near them. House Lancelot was bigger than his organization in terms of the average ranking status of the roster of rankers, political power, economical background, and all the other standards of measurement one could think of.

Eren had worked really hard during these years to get to where he was. All so that he could execute Eliza's plans the way he wanted and get Reen back. If he had only been interested in his personal growth, he would have done the majority of things the same way. However, he would have adopted a different approach to change the outcome. His desire to get Reen back made him take a lot of detours.

Eren grew at an unprecedented rate on both personal and organizational levels. His city was one of the rising wonders of the kingdom. The city's prosperity made a big splash in the minds of the masses. And Eren's growth potential made everyone he came into contact with nervous.

But his growth was still nothing in comparison to organizations like House Lancelot which were sitting on piles and piles of old money and resources. Taking things from them was akin to waking up a wild beast.

As if that was not enough, Eren must also worry about Demonmir and House Slughorn. Then there were organizations like Midnight Moon which were trying to encroach on everything he had built so far.

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All these reasons made Layla really wonder why Eren cared so much about being graduated. Since he wasn't interested in working for the kingdom or getting employed by other organizations, he should have let go of obtaining a degree.

The guy had an entire city to himself. He didn't need anyone's support to survive in the kingdom anymore. He could get his hands on any ranking resource for his rank without signing contracts.

So there was only one way Eren would get motivated to participate in the graduation event.

"You want something out of that graduation event. Don't you?"

[Chapter 976 Layla Meets Alephee](#)

"You want something out of that graduation event. Don't you?"

Layla quickly concluded. She was sure that only the prospect of obtaining significant profits would make Eren entertain the idea of being part of the rat race.

Eren smiled mirthlessly when he heard Layla's remark. He wasn't sure how much advantage he had at this point in knowing what had happened in the last timeline. But he wanted to give it a shot nonetheless.

In the last timeline, only the rankers from LA were involved in the graduation event. But after getting all the other academies onboard with the event, the stakes of the event had reached their peak.

'I don't care about the rankers participating in the event. But I can only hope that the setup of the event remains the same. I'll have one more trump card I can use if I get my hands on that reward from the event.'

Eren was willing to butcher all the participants that came his way to get his hands on the reward, irrespective of the covert and overt consequences. With or without Ivor getting on board with his plans, the things he wanted to achieve from the event were going to be the same.

Eren, Layla, and Ivor talked extensively about a few things to solidify their plans. Layla was supposed to head to the city of Lancelot after her exit from the Dark Daniera forest. Because the location was near the Dark Daniera forest, she didn't need to travel far. Ivor was supposed to head to Edinburgh's capital using routes available for rogue rankers and cultists.

Eren had decided to visit the city of White Raven to finalize a few things. He wouldn't return to the city for some time after he set out this time. So he needed to prepare a few things in advance. He also had to pick up Levine and Nina as they both were planning to come with him to the capital.

Layla decided to call it a night after the talk was over. Although the homunculus didn't really sleep, she liked to mentally think that she was resting. This way, she could subconsciously feel that she was no different from her previous self.

Layla looked at Eren's pendant and decided to visit her place after a long time. She couldn't keep tabs on the place for some reason when she was separated from Eren. But now that Eren was in the vicinity, she could use her control rights to get into her pendant abode.

Layla yawned lightly and said good night to Eren and Ivor while they were talking about something. Both were sitting in front of each other on their respective wooden logs around the partially doused campfire. She then disappeared from her place only to reappear in Eren's lap.

At first, nobody understood what had happened. A moment before Eren and Ivor were discussing the graduation event when suddenly Layla appeared on Eren's lap like she was interested in hearing stories and lullabies from him.

It took a while for Layla to understand what had happened. Her stunned face depicted the shock she felt in her heart.

Someone had kicked her out of her pendant abode.

"What... what is the meaning of this?"

Layla looked at Eren and asked him in an accusing tone. She thought a lot about it and found it unbelievable that Eren had interfered with an artifact that could only be altered by a Sage.

Eren was confused as well after hearing Alephee's question. He threw her words back at her.

"What is the meaning of THIS?"

Eren picked up Layla and made her stand. When she tried to get into the pendent abode, she ended up in the same position as before. The homunculus was kicked out of the pendent abode and forced to sit on Eren's lap once again.

Layla looked at Eren as if he was cheating on her. After pointing at him accusingly, she said in a threatening tone.

"Who is in there? And how can she kick me out of my own house?"

Eren looked confused at first. But then Alephee spoke inside his head and made him understand what had happened. Chuckling, he wrapped his arms around Layla this time before speaking up.

"Well... I kept a few of my Orcinas in there to..."

"Stop. Don't lie to me, Eren. Even if someone has managed to override my authority, only a homunculus can get inside the pendant abode. The artifact is made that way. Tell me, who is the person that is currently in my home for real?"

Eren pursed his lips when he heard Layla's words. Frankly, he wanted to keep Alephee's existence a secret from Layla.

But he also understood the need to speak the truth in these sensitive times. Especially after he was busted for lying. The three were supposed to work together to achieve a singular goal. So they needed to be as honest with each other as they could to lower the trust deficit.

"Alephee... come out."

Eren suggested Alephee come out and the latter obliged. It was only a moment before the two homunculi were seen staring at each other in silence.

Alephee was wearing a loose-fitting white top and brown pants. And her presence was as serene as the calm water of an unexplored lake. Still, Layla couldn't be fooled by Alephee's deceptive looks. She immediately considered Alephee a serious threat. Sinking into Eren's embrace, Layla commented.

"You... are not normal."

Layla sensed an unexplainable sense of danger coming from Alephee. She didn't want to admit it. But Alephee's presence overshadowed Eliza briefly in Layla's mind before returning to normal.

Alephee was supposed to have powers similar to an Adept-ranked entity, which made her technically weaker than Layla. However, Layla was not as childish as she looked. She understood that the young woman in front of him was more than she looked.

Alephee looked at Layla with a keen gaze and smiled mysteriously before responding cryptically.

"Well... define normal."

### [Chapter 977 Rank-Up Program's Success](#)

Agatha's private chamber. The city of White Raven.

Three days before Eren was due to leave his city for Edinburgh's capital, Edin.

Eren and Agatha were sitting upright on the latter's bed, barely clothed. Miss Manager was accessing her spectral screen and giving Eren an update on everything that was happening inside his city.

"Hehe. Among other things... Argo spent around 300 thousand Extols on buying random things. Thankfully, he spent it here so it will circulate back to us sooner or later."

Eren had stress lines on his forehead when he heard the report from Agatha. He wanted to argue that the circulation of money wasn't the problem but decided to let it go.

It had been a few days since he got into his city and started to manage a lot of its pending affairs. He had let Argo free and the fat bird managed to run wild with whatever liberties were given to him.

Nina was busy with her own work. So Eren tended to Agatha's "needs" day and night during these days. He also used his lust-induced epiphany on her. And this time, it was she who benefitted the most.

Agatha managed to make astonishing progress in her ranking status, thanks to the lust-induced epiphany, allowing her to reach the peak of the liquid stage Adept rank. It was to be noted that she had broken into the Adept rank not too long ago.

Eren also welcomed Dianna into the city. After ghosting House Remus, she settled in his city. She benefited greatly from his Sin of Lust, as a result.

Eren's attainments of various elements and their Aspects were accumulated at a steady pace. So one could say that he didn't have anything to complain about.

Arjun and Lyon were next to join the White Raven guild. They had done exactly what Eren had told them to do, preventing the army from stopping their exit.

Eren looked after the arrangements for the newly joined members of his guild. Throughout the city, he attended several public events.

The batch of rankers that entered the rank-up program came out during this time as well. Surprisingly or unsurprisingly, nobody died. Some of them damaged their mana cores and mana circuits a bit but the damages were recoverable so there were no real losses.

Bianka, Drin, and Tumko Darata along with their team members had managed to make exceptional progress in their elemental attainments as well as their ranking statuses, thanks to the elemental pool. It would have taken them years to reach the level they were currently at after surviving the rank-up program.

The Adept rankers had the most to gain from the elemental pool. Their gains were significant compared to the risk factor they had by being part of the rank-up program.

Eren congratulated everyone that was part of the rank-up program. He set up the use of special resources and healers for rankers who got injured in the process as well. He also embarked on a few missions with the fit rankers to witness their program-induced growth firsthand.

The rankers who benefited from the rank-up program thought that they were doing quite well until they saw what Eren could do without having been through the same program. Every single one of them was blown away by Eren's progress while they were doing missions together. They realized why the man was their guild master at the time.

The next to join the rank-up program were Nina, Levine, Jiana, Amory, and all the other high-ranking entities associated with him. Eren would leave for Edin once Nina and Levine came out of the program.

Kirin separated from Eren after she entered the city of White Raven. She approached Baran who was stationed inside the Badlands. The half-elf has been given the task to target the cultists and the royal elves behind them, which were intended to target Eren's assets.

Eren kept in touch with Kirin and gave her a few pointers on what she could do. He also arranged his Half-Blood Bastion connection to aid the half-elf. As a result of all of Eren's measures and countermeasures, the city of White Raven was able to stay safe amid all the potential crises thrown its way.

Due to him handling so many things, the butcher didn't have time to chaperone Argo due to his extremely busy schedule. And the demon beast seemed to have taken huge advantage of that.

Eren sighed before speaking up.

"Spending money is fine as long as he can work hard to justify his lifestyle. Assign more lucrative missions to him."

Agatha pursed her lips and accessed the next spectral screen related to the White Raven guild. She chuckled when she found out what Argo was up to.

"Argo is way ahead of you. He has already taken missions worth as much money as he spent. He'll be pairing up with high-ranking entities on his next missions."

Eren smirked when he learned Argo was busy doing his own thing.

"That brat is smart. He doesn't risk himself by taking dangerous solo missions. And he knows that pairing with high-ranking entities on even riskier and yet relatively safer missions will give him greater rewards.

He is constantly putting himself on edge to improve on an individual level as well. I guess we didn't need to worry about him after all."

Agatha nodded at Eren's statement as she reviewed all the active missions currently available for White Raven guild members. She could see that Eren's work ethic had a hand in Argo's upbringing. But where Eren focused on cutting down on his expenses, the demon beast focused on simply earning more.

Agatha had a smile on her face as she felt Eren's hands climbing over the exposed parts of her body again. She was just about to close the spectral screen when an alert message popped up.

She read through the message quickly and swatted Eren's hand away before telling him in an excited voice.

"No... stop it, Eren. We need to get ready. Something huge has happened."

Eren didn't want to let Miss Manager go just yet. He could only blame that on the side effects of using the Sin of Lust. But Agatha made him read the emergency alert and that finally snapped him out of his overindulgence.

### [Chapter 978 Grandmaster Amory](#)

A secure facility on the Kukenan Plateau. The city of White Raven.

"Erni, when will he be out?"

Nina asked Eren in an excited voice as she stood beside his right side. A gorgeous elf stood to Eren's left. The elf also had an eager expression on her face.

This beautiful elf was also ranked as a Master. She had reached the city of White Raven a few days ago and was staying at Carvo Bianco vineyards since then. She immediately rushed herself to the facility when she heard about Amory's breakthrough.

Agatha was busy standing on the other side of the hall where the array controls were being handled by rankers from Levine's faction. Levine herself was with Agatha, discussing a few things with her.

The butcher was standing inside a giant hall that only had a spatial array serving as its base. This array served as the access point to the elemental pool of the rank-up program. He stared at the illuminated runes in the array before replying.

"Shouldn't be too long considering the feedback from the elemental pool we have recorded. I don't know how he is doing right now per se but he has managed to break into the Grandmaster rank and is alive.

The old man still has some spirit left in him after all. Can't say I'm not surprised."

Eren made an "I'm impressed" face when he said that. He reported what he knew from the information Agatha received on her spectral screen this morning. He then glanced at the elf standing beside him briefly before looking back at Nina with a "what's her deal?" expression. It was his first time seeing her in person and she didn't make an eye contact with him. So he felt a bit weird by her way of ghosting him.

Nina gestured to Eren to keep quiet and not disturb the elf. The two Master rankers knew each other quite well. Nina could understand why the elf was excited about another ranker's progress. That's because the ranker who had broken into the Grandmaster rank was like a father figure to her.

The elf had just joined Eren unceremoniously without even introducing herself. Despite wanting to engage Jiana in conversation, the butcher let go after Nina gestured. He then placed his arms across Nina's shoulders and rested his head on her right shoulder as he waited for the Grandmaster ranker to come out.



Eren waited patiently for the man's arrival because this man was going to be the first official Grandmaster ranker of his guild. He made him proceed through the rank-up program on his own in altered settings, to increase his chances of survival. And it seemed to work well.

Runes employed in the array suddenly lit up brightly and affected the surrounding fabric space. When the runes dimmed down, an exhausted-looking ranker was seen standing inside the center of the array.

This ranker still had his clothes on. It seemed that he had worn them hastily before being teleported inside the facility. He knew there would likely be people waiting for his arrival. And he wanted to look dignified in front of them. His newly acquired rank didn't allow him to have the luxury of being shabby.

But the man couldn't keep himself composed after suffering through the spatial alteration around him. As a result of his recent breakthrough, his body was exhausted and his mana reserves were depleted. So it didn't come as a surprise when he started to stumble on the first step he took.

"Uncle Amory!"

The elf rushed to the Grandmaster ranker's aid as soon as she snapped out of her reverie. The latter laughed and welcomed the elf into his embrace like a father would to meet his faraway daughter after a long time.

"Hahaha. You are here as well? As you can see, lass. I am all fine and still kicking. I made it."

Amory patted Jiana's head before he started coughing. He said he was fine. But everyone in the audience could tell he needed a few days off to recover himself and stabilize his breakthrough.

Amory looked quite different from his past self. He still had shoulder-length white hair and a long white beard. But there were no prominent wrinkles on his skin anymore. He looked like his younger self.

Amory's posture had improved. His eyes sparkled with intelligence and one could see his atrophied muscles trying to highlight their presence through his clothes. His aura as a Grandmaster ranker couldn't be faked either.

Amory had managed to get himself into the very exclusive club of rankers with his recent breakthrough. And this came at a crucial time when there were signs of war. He could be considered one of the powerhouses in Edinburgh employed by the White Raven guild.

Jiana Jihang was stunned to hear Amory break into the fabled A-Rank. Eren had informed her that he was planning to give Amory special treatment by running a specialized ranking program for him. That way, the elemental pool could be attuned to Amory's needs.

But Jiana was quite skeptical about Eren from the get-go. She had called him a tyrant many times to his face when they were talking through the spectral call because of the way he treated her guild's lands post-takeover. She assumed that Eren just wanted to cut costs by making Amory not part of the main rank-up program that she along with the rest of the high-ranking entities was supposed to take part in.

Amory was then greeted by Nina, Agatha, and Levine who congratulated him on his achievements. Agatha had arranged a special mansion for the A-ranker on the Kukenan Plateau, taking his elemental affinity and attainments into account. She had customized his newly built house with specific arrays so that he could focus on his ranking progress even while he was stationed in the city.

In celebration of Amory's breakthrough, Agatha planned to host a special event within the White Raven city. It was a way to show the rest of the world that they had a powerhouse in their midst.

Amory was all laughs and smiles as he accepted compliments from the ladies around him. His body was telling him to rest but his mind was ever-so-hungry for the good wishes he received from his audience.

Amory was about to call it quits when he finished greeting everyone around him. But then he realized that there was still one person who was standing in a corner in silence, waiting for him to come to him.

Amory appeared right in front of Eren like a ghost before asking in a deep voice.

"Boy, why couldn't you greet me like the rest of them? Does this old man not deserve praise in your eyes?"

### [Chapter 979 Existential Paradox](#)

"Boy, why couldn't you greet me like the rest of them? Does this old man not deserve praise in your eyes?"

Amory let loose his aura around Eren in a threatening way. The old man had seen how Eren was unaffected by his presence last time when he was in Master rank. So he wanted to try the old pressure tactic with new vigor, testing where Eren's limits lay.

As the Way of Fire made its presence known around Eren, he felt as though he was immersed in a pool of extremely viscous lava. His skin and throat started to dry up as he felt the most intense form of dry heat. It was as if he had been turned into a mortal and left to die in a secluded desert.

Amory had fire element attainments. His violet flames had healing properties. He had become a top-notch healer because of his rare affinity and its versatile uses unlocked by him.

Amory gained new insight into his ranking path after being accepted into the Grandmaster rank. He realized that once one understands the way broadly, one can start seeing it in all things. It meant that exceptional proficiency in one field can be used to attain proficiency in other fields as well. As a result, Amory started seeing other uses for his healing flames when he broke into the A-Rank.

'Every aspect of the universe reflects an existential paradox. A duality of nature.

That which can heal can also be used to kill. That which can kill can also be used to heal.'

Amory repeated the lines in his head which were said to him by his old friend and Jiana's father Jin long ago. Jin had also passed the same message on to Jiana.

A knife can be used as a weapon to kill someone. And it could also be used like a scalpel to treat someone on the operation table. The intentions with which the weapon was deployed changed the outcome it generated.

Amory didn't really get what Jin was trying to say to him until today when he broke into the Grandmaster rank. A healer, he believed, didn't have much liberty to be on the offensive. It wasn't until now that he realized healers could become some of the most dangerous rankers by applying their powers in different ways.

Amory also felt inferior to Jiana to some degree because the girl had understood her father's words more deeply than he did despite having less experience than him. Her skill sets and achievements were reflections of just that. This was why she had been bestowed a kingdom-bonafide title after all. He knew it was only a matter of time before Jiana catches up to him and then surpasses him.

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Nirvana Flames!

Amory's attainments in the fire element created nirvana flames. Of course, he had made sure not to hurt anybody because of his elemental manifestation and had kept his flames mostly harmless. Otherwise, the facility would have turned into a burning prison for rankers.

Amory neither wanted to harm Eren nor make him look incompetent in front of others. The old man wasn't interested in a power struggle at all. However, something about Eren's presence always made him feel subservient to him.

The A-ranked old man wanted to fight off feelings of subservience by pitting himself against an Adept-ranked Eren, no matter how illogical that comparison sounded in anyone's head. He wanted Eren to back down from his stance just once to derive mental satisfaction from it. It was to reassure himself that his ranking status gave him the privilege to do so.

Anyone could see that Eren was struggling to stand face-to-face with Amory. The difference in their ranks was just too big. Yet, the butcher held his ground and smiled mockingly before responding in a voice coated in the provocation.

"Why would a boss go out of his way to greet his employee... just because he did something he was supposed to do?"

Due to being exposed to Amory's aura, Eren had to say his words with some difficulty. But he had an unmistakable smirk when he said that, preventing Amory from taking joy in his misery.

Eren knew that Jiana and Amory had plans to lead his guild from the inside after joining. The members of Healers' Nirvana wanted to have some form of autonomy while staying inside the White Raven guild. And Eren was willing to give them just that to some degree.

However, he wanted them to understand that he had given them this autonomy out of convenience and his own choice. He wanted Amory and Jiana to understand that he wasn't willing to fulfill every wish they had because he was under some kind of pressure to retain them.

The butcher also felt that it was appropriate to state things at this point right after Amory's breakthrough instead of waiting for the dust to settle down. He didn't want Jiana to officially join his guild with the "I own this guild because of Uncle Amory" mindset either. So he had to make a scene and confront Amory then and there. He didn't mind being seen as the so-called tyrant if it served his purpose.

Eren's emerald green eyes shone and his soul sense was released to counter Amory's aura. He stepped forward and looked Amory in the eyes.

Amory could say with confidence that the negative effects of his exposed aura were being felt by Eren. That's because the others in the audience that had come to greet him had stressed expressions on their faces. And that was when they weren't the target.

And yet, Eren stood in front of him as if he had dealt with something much worse. As if what he had in his arsenal was or would become something much more potent.

Amory couldn't help having goosebumps on his skin as he felt Eren's soul sense affecting him. He felt that the butcher's eyes would trap him in an illusory world if he stared at them for long enough. Of course, he could resist the pull. But that didn't make him feel comfortable around Eren.

Eren was freed from suffering through Amory's aura when he used his soul sense as his protection. He broke his neck and stretched his arms above his head while maintaining eye contact with the newly turned Grandmaster ranker.

The butcher's voice changed and turned a bit sinister as he spoke his next words.

#### [Chapter 980 Subjugating A Grandmaster Ranker](#)

The butcher's voice changed and turned a bit sinister as he spoke his next words.

"It's really great that you broke into the Grandmaster rank. You have my best regards, old man. May you prosper even more. May you see the wider world that's out there.

I'll go ahead and say that here. I will celebrate your breakthrough with you and my city will also join in. I will make sure that everyone in the city of White Raven knows your name.

What's more? You will be paid handsomely according to your rank from now on. And your needs will be prioritized when it comes to procuring ranking resources for the entire guild. In short, you will get all the benefits and respect your rank deserves. And then some more."

Amory felt like he shouldn't have provoked Eren in the first place. He felt like the butcher was counting on such a scene to take place after Amory broke into the Grandmaster rank and became high on success.

Eren's way of handling Amory's breakthrough was arrogant. But the offers Eren extended to him made Amory confused about his intentions. The butcher smirked before finishing what he had to say.

"I will always respect a Grandmaster in every way I can if they can respect me back. I will not send them to do petty chores at my whims. Neither will I tell them to do something unsuitable for their rank.

But..."

Eren took a brief pause before continuing.

"But I want you to get something straight— you are my employee and I am your boss and not the other way around.

Not Agatha— Not Nina— and not your little girl Jiana... I... Eren Elijah Idril is your new boss.

The guild's prestige be damned. I would rather have disobedient high-ranking entities never join my guild at all than for me to feel the need to retain them at any cost just because it was going to bring more security and prosperity.

Do you get what I'm saying? You can pack your bags and leave if you feel that your previous leader is still your current leader. You can find a new nest for yourself if you let this thing called rankers' code of conduct stop you from obeying my orders just because I'm lower ranked than you.

I'm sure there are other docile guilds out there who'd dance to your tunes and pay you a fortune because of your rank. I'll still respect you and wish you all the best if that is your choice. But stay here and you'd have to follow my word."

Everyone was shocked when they heard Eren was willing to let go of a Grandmaster ranker in his guild. The butcher didn't bat an eye when he heard a few gasps around him. He spoke with the same conviction as before. He looked intermittently at him and Jiana when he did that.

"Don't think I won't dare to kick you or any of the ex Healers' Nirvana members out of my guild just because you have broken into Grandmaster rank, old man.

Need I remind you of the efforts I made and the resources I invested in your breakthrough? You think I'll let you boss me around because you now have something I paid for?"

Eren narrowed his eyes at Amory, who then lowered his gaze for some reason. The butcher then smirked before glancing at Jiana standing behind him in the distance. It was as if he was speaking to both of them when he said what he said to Amory.

Nina was a bit stressed when she heard Eren speak. She felt that there was a better time and place to discuss these things. And that he should have taken Jiana and Amory into private before he made his stance. Almost all the rankers were prideful creatures— some more than others. She didn't want Amory to feel offended by what Eren said based on logic.

Nina acted as the bridge between the ex-members of Healers' Nirvana and the White Raven guild. She, therefore, wanted to intervene between Eren and Amory so that the matter could be settled peacefully. But she stopped in her tracks when she felt someone placing a hand on her shoulders. She turned around to see Agatha standing behind her.

'I know what you are thinking, Master Nina. But when it comes to doing business, I haven't seen anyone as astute as Eren. If he feels that there's a need to address the issue this way, he won't listen to anyone even if we intervene.

Let us all be patient and trust in him.'

Nina was stunned by how mature Agatha sounded even when the half-blood was younger than her. Taking on mentally taxing duties as the manager of the guild and the city had fortified her mindset on another level.

Agatha also understood the need to rein in Amory and Jiana at this point. As a manager of the guild, she liked rankers who obeyed her orders, which were Eren's orders by proxy. She didn't want to deal with such high-ranking entities on her own when the butcher wasn't around.

Just like every time, Eren's moves had various facets attached to them. Agatha realized that Eren was handling the matter this way to make sure that the guild and the city as a whole would function smoothly even after his absence.

Amory's shoulders dropped and he retracted his aura. It was indeed true that Eren had paid for his breakthrough. Amory was reminded that he was struggling to survive against the sands of time before the breakthrough took place.

The old man sighed. He turned around and looked at Jiana briefly before commenting in a grim voice.

"I... I understand."

Eren remained silent for a while and let the atmosphere become as heavy as a mountain. He then flashed an innocent smile and changed everyone's mood. As he retracted his soul sense, the tense atmosphere dissipated. He slapped the old man's freshly developed biceps before speaking up.

"Then that settles it, old man. Rest assured... There'll be a huge celebration event to honor your breakthrough. Take some rest while we arrange a few things for your event."

Eren's attitude abruptly changed. He once again proved to Nina, Agatha, and the rest that his colors changed more frequently than a chameleon.

The butcher started treating Amory like one of his pals and not a senior ranker he should respect. And instead of being offended by it, the old man felt relieved. The very event could be seen as the existential paradox as well.

It was safe to say that Amory had subconsciously stopped seeing Jiana as his de facto leader. Instead, the old man accepted Eren to fulfill that role entirely.