

Chapter 2 - Story 25: Sacred Land

At the time when the blazing heat of summer was starting to slowly wane, a group traveled through the Solbiant Plains.

The ones walking at its head are more than twenty zoan warriors. Brawny warriors who all wore torso armors knitted out of colorfully dyed ivies.

The ones especially standing out among them - not only with their build, but also as they gave one the impression that they are everything but ordinary despite just walking - are the black-furred and the red-furred zoan — Garam and Zurgu.

And, following behind those two is a covered wagon.

The one pulling that wagon, which shakes violently at even the slightest unevenness of the ground, is a huge lizard called niryu. The one grasping its reins is a female zoan with bright chestnut-colored fur — Shyemul.

The one riding the wagon for which she, who is so honorable that she had been given the nickname «Noble Fang» by the zoan, acts as coachman is, of course, her "Navel Master" Souma Kizaki.

Behind the wagon with Souma on top, a huge cart fully loaded with luggage was pulled by a creature that was much bigger than a niryu.

And behind that, at the end of the group, dwarven warriors, who boast a muscularity yet different from the zoan, followed. The one leading them is the Warrior Leader Dvalin, a skilled dwarven artisan whose abundant beard extends down to his chest.

It's already the fifth day after they left the city of Bolnis.

The reason why Souma and the others traveled through the plains for many days with a big group like this was because of a piece of information delivered by a single zoan warrior who visited Bolnis several weeks ago.



The time when that warrior visited Bolnis was just when Souma was running about for the establishment of a school and an orphanage.

That warrior introduced himself as messenger of the Eye Clan, bowed in front the chief leaders beginning with Souma, and then said the following:

"I'm passing on a message from the Head Priestess. 'I wish for everyone to quickly come to the sacred land.'"

It's Garam who tilted his head to the side in confusion while looking bewildered.

"Aren't there still some days left until the Borollo?"

The grand festival of the zoan, Borollo, is originally a vernal equinox festival when night and day have the same length. However, this time it will be held on the autumnal equinox as an exception. Even so there was still more than a month left until then.

"Yes. —As a matter of fact, many people are already crowding the sacred land. Even for us, the Eye Clan, who normally manages the festival, it's been a few dozen years since we last held a Borollo. It's very embarrassing, but several disputes have occurred, and several clan chiefs are requesting to enter the sacred land earlier than usual."

The reason for the Borollo not being held was the crushing defeat of the zoan alliance against Holmea's army close to thirty years ago. For that reason many zoan know of the Borollo only from the stories told by their ancestors. It was only natural for them to be confused. As such Souma's group quickly decided to adjust its schedule and to head to the sacred land. Having said that, it will take close to one week to reach the place from Bolnis, according to Shyemul and the other zoan. As such it will take around two months to finish the Borollo more than a month ahead of time and return to the city. It's only reasonable that various preparations are necessary for such a long trip, but as Souma will be absent from the city during that time, he has to also arrange the policies during that time. Souma busily ran from one meeting to another concerning those preparations and policies. As he did, Yoash, who heard about his trip from somewhere, unexpectedly dropped by the feudal lord's residence for a short visit.

"Yoohoo! Lord Soma, please offer this by all means!"

What Yoash brought to the garden of the residence while saying so was a cart with the size of a small house. A mountain of baggage is piled up on the cart, and top of that it's covered by a canopy. However, what caught Souma's eyes even more was the huge creature pulling the cart.

"W-What's this thing...!?"

It was a creature that resembled a giant salamander quite well. However, its size is that of a small dump truck. And, its four legs, which support its rhinoceros- or hippopotamus-like, stumpy body, consist of hind-legs that are thicker and longer than the forelegs. It has an ill-formed posture of pushing out its butt. A big, round scar on that butt marks the remains of the cropped tail, very likely for the sake of not becoming a hindrance in pulling the wagon. Yoash proudly said to the surprised Souma,

"My, you don't know? Certainly, in these regions they might be rare. It's a large niryu inhabiting the distant south, a creature we call big dragon."

Souma nervously approached the big dragon which had a yoke and cross pieces affixed to its back instead of its neck, and examined it closely.

"Why has its mouth been tied?"

Its flat head, which closely resembled that of a great salamander, is firmly tied by a leather strap, making sure that it can't open its mouth widely.

"With this big mouth it can swallow a person whole, right? Isn't it a measure against that?"

Souma didn't want to believe Shyemul's answer to be true, but an answer stating "It's just as you say" was returned from his side.

The one who said that is the middle-aged man who had pulled the big dragon over. After introducing that man as dragon tamer, Yoash secretly whispers into Souma's ear,

"Because dragon tamers have the special privilege of being forgiven not watching their manners in front of royalty and nobility, I'd like you to pardon his impoliteness."

'It's said that even during the medieval times such special privileges were granted to craftsmen who were needed for their special skills, but I guess dragon tamers are the same here,' Souma comprehended.

In front of the two having such an exchange, the dragon tamer unfastened the leather strap that restrained its huge dragon mouth. And once he clapped its nape with his palm twice, the big dragon suddenly opened its mouth widely.

And then, just as they thought that it will raise a loud roar, a large amount of vomit and gale flowed out of its mouth in the next instant.

Due to the sudden occurrence, Souma screamed slightly in surprise and jumped back.

"Here, have a look."

While grimacing due to the stabbing, irritating smell that seemed to deeply penetrate the nose, Souma looked at the vomit as told by the dragon tamer and was astonished. Things similar to animal bones and a large amount of fur lumps were visible among the steaming hot bile.

"It's the fur and bones it couldn't completely digest."

Right at that moment a young helper of the dragon tamer dragged a calf that had been just killed over. The young man places the calf in front of the big dragon and the dragon tamer hits its nape once more with his palm. Upon receiving that signal, the big dragon opens its mouth, and swallows the calf whole with its gaping mouth.

Due to Souma staring at the big dragon, which gulps down the calf while making its big throat heave, in admiration, the dragon tamer proudly explains,

"If you feed it with a calf like this, it's capable of working for approximately ten days on water alone."

Souma affirmed with sparkling eyes. Compared to horses and cows which have to be fed continuously, it's convenient to feed it once every ten days for it to keep working.

"But, if it's like this, it looks like it will really eat people whole."

Souma said as silly joke, but the dragon tamer answered that with a laughter.

"Actually such stories are always handed down in any of the stables keeping these guys."

A beautiful, blonde-haired boy had been employed as apprentice in a certain big dragon stable. He was a very hard working fellow who was quite favored by the stable's dragon tamers.

However, one day that boy suddenly disappeared. The worried tamers frantically searched for him, but no matter where they looked, they couldn't find him. At long last the dragon tamers gave up on the search, and there were rumors that he probably ran off, tired of the tough work.

A short time later a dragon tamer was about to feed the dragons, but for some reason only one dragon wouldn't eat its fodder.

Thinking that it might have eaten something weird, he made the dragon vomit. It's said that the clothes of the pretty, blonde-haired apprentice came out with the vomit.

Due to the eyes of Souma and Shyemul, whom he told that story, becoming perfect circles out of surprise, the dragon tamer opened his mouth widely and laughed.

"Haha, it's just a rumor. Such accidents don't happen often."

'Not often' means the probability is low but it's still possible.' Both, Souma and Shyemul, took a step back from the dragon.

At that point they heard someone clearing their throat with an unnatural "Ahem."

"The big dragon is nice and all, but I'd like you to also turn your attention to the baggage."

Souma apologizes in a hurry to Yoash who pouts his lips as if sulking. Of course that act of his is no more than Yoash's way of having fun. Without any indication that he feels offended, Yoash says with a theatrical tone,

"Wine and beer ordered from many places! And, dried shellfish and fish caught in Jeboa's sea as well as our highly acclaimed fish sauce! Dried fruits! Pots and pans made out of metal! In addition I have put various other things together, all items that can't be found in the plains."

Yoash performed an exaggerated bow.

"I heard that you will become the king of the zoan, Lord Soma. In that case you must not go there empty-handed. Please take these goods with you by all means!"

Those are Yoash's presents to the zoan of the plains and at the same time they serve as congratulatory gifts for Souma's ascension to the rank of Clan King. However, there's no way that Yoash gives those things for free. Souma immediately guessed Yoash's aim.

"Umm, in short you mean to say, please introduce Jeboa's merchandise to the zoan?"

"Yoohoo! I guess it was found out."

Due to his usual cunningness, Souma couldn't help but smile wryly, uncertain whether he should admire him or be fed up with his antics.

However, Yoash's plan isn't that bad for Souma either.

In order to build a country where all races can live equally, interaction between the humans and the zoan are vital. However, right now there's still a hatred lingering between both sides which had been cultivated over many years. In the city both sides either ignore each other or don't intervene in the matters of the other side. Souma wondered whether there's any chance to overcome the discord between zoan and humans, but trade might become the saving occasion here.

'Besides,' Souma looks back at the wagon.

"Ooh! Booze, that's booze, isn't it!? This is great stuff!"

There he found Zurgu who is immediately commenting on the quality of the alcohol loaded on the wagon. Bringing his nose close to the wine barrels, he's sniffing their scent.

Seeing that, Garam trounced him with a harsh tone,

"Hey, Zurgu. Those are the belongings of Sir Soma."

For the zoan, a hunter's race, it's a law for the caught prey to be split among the most distinguished

people. Someone, who is lower in the hierarchy, arbitrarily touching the prey with their hands is considered impolite.

"Sure! Of course. Right now I'm just taking a whiff. But, I'm sure we will be treated to it in the end. —Right, Sir Soma?"

If Zurgu goes as far as telling him that full of hope, Souma has no choice but to accept Yoash's offer. Once Souma nodded, Zurgu began to happily rummage through the wagon.

"Zurgu! That doesn't mean that you can ransack the wagon as you please——"

"Hey, Garam. Look at this. It's the first time for me to see such a big fish!"

Zurgu threw a huge, dried fish over to Garam who scolds him. Catching it, Garam is lost for words and frowns. After all he has never seen such a fish in the plains. It would be a lie if he said that he had no interest in learning how it tastes.

After revealing a short strained smile due to Garam staring at the dried fish with a difficult expression and Zurgu raising cheers each time he discovers something unusual, Souma also looked up at the pile of baggage on the wagon.

"But, how are we going to transport this much...?"

'Even if we use the big niryu kept at the feudal lord's residence, we will probably have to split all of this on two or three wagons. Because one big niryu is already reserved for the wagon with our luggage, it's not unlikely for problems with the transportation of cargo to appear in the city if we take further unplanned niryu with us on the trip.

Upon Souma worrying about that, Yoash hit his own chest once.

"Please do not worry. I'm giving you this big dragon together with the wagon in its entirety!"

Even Souma was surprised by that.

In addition to this wagon filled with goods, even the big dragon, who's considered rare according to Yoash himself, is added on top. 'I'm very sure, this all has cost a fortune.' As Souma hesitates whether it's really fine to accept all those things so easily, Yoash laughed in order to make him feel relieved.

"If compared to the expectations connected to starting trade with the zoan, all of this is a cheap price to pay."

In the eyes of Yoash, the trade with the zoan, to whom other merchants hadn't reached out yet, means a new business promising vast profits. If you consider it to be for this sake, an investment of this extent was trivial.

Souma, who was able to prepare unexpected presents thanks to Yoash, entrusts the city to Eladia and Marchronis, deciding to leave Bolnis one month before the autumnal equinox.

However, at the time of his departure, an unforeseen uproar took place.

Just when he was about to leave the city with the covered wagon driven by Shyemul, Jahangil, who should have remained in the city, silently boarded the wagon's tray.

It's been decided that all the zoan still remaining in the city right now will head to the sacred land once the autumnal equinox that heralds the Borollo becomes imminent. If the zoan, who even now

form Souma's biggest military force, are pulled out all at once, the city will be short of hands, and it wouldn't be strange for a rebellion to occur, using that opportunity.

In order to inhibit such an uprising, Souma asked the dinosaurians to regularly patrol the city during his absence. If the dinosaurians, who easily surpass a height of two meters, swagger through the city in groups, just that action will already serve as effective show of force.

"If the old man's going, I will go as well."

The one stating so is Mevlazard the eldest of Jahangil's three sons.

Mevlazard, who carried two single-edged swords, which are curved like shamsir, on his back, tried to board the wagon following his father.

Just as he's about to get on, a violent sound similar to a whiplash resounds, and alongside this, Mevlazard tumbles down on the ground.

Souma, who had instinctively ducked his head upon that painful-sounding bang, looks at the wagon's tray and finds Jahangil lying on his belly in there with his tail, which apparently knocked down his own son, swaying slowly.

Souma stares at Mevlazard wondering whether he's alright after being hit with the tail so strongly that it caused such a loud sound, but he, who's being dragged away while secured on both sides by his two younger brothers, is vigorously resisting. Due to that sight, Souma indulges in the out-of-place thought, "Dinosaurians are damn scary."

"Bastard! This is the wagon with Soma on it!"

Shyemul flared up at Jahangil who shamelessly boarded the wagon. At that Jahangil opens his eyes half way and stares at Souma. Then he robs with his huge build to a side of the small tray, willfully pulls the nearby woolen material over himself and starts to nap after yawning once.

Souma soothes Shyemul, who was about to get even more enraged due to that, with a "Now, now." Even normally the ones commanding the dinosaurians under Souma are actually Jahangil's second son, Niyusharl, and his youngest son, Palsharl. Jahangil doesn't show much interest in anything besides battle. Usually his only idling about like this while taking naps. 'Even if we leave someone like that behind, it will likely make no great difference.

"Well then, I shall leave the rest to you."

Sitting down in a place that was left free by Jahangil, Souma called out to Eladia and Marchronis, who came to see him off, and then headed towards the sacred land.

And, exactly one week after he left the city,

"Look, Soma. That's the zoan's sacred land Rollo."

Grasping the appearance of Rollo at the end of where Shyemul is pointing, Souma raised a voice of astonishment.

"Hoh. So that's the sacred land Rollo, huh...?"

At last Souma has arrived at the zoan's sacred land Rollo where the grand festival Borollo will be held.