

Chapter 315 - A New Journey

I don't think that it has rained here, but as I leave the evil god's ruin, the stairway is weatherbeaten with patches of rust visible on the steps and rails. The weather on the fifth floor is just as usual; a cloudy sky that shines faintly with a scent of moisture hanging in the air.

"It's going to be a magic stone collection on the fifth floor, right?"

"Correct. I thought that I'd join you guys on a hunt before setting out on my journey. Hence, let's wander the wastelands for a bit."

"Okay!"

"Milord, I shall take the lead! I won't lose to those Burning Knights!"

"I'll be right behind Bia!"

"Nn, nyaa~"

"Nyaa."

"Nyao."

Rollodeen steps in front of Souther after changing into her black panther form, as if to protect a puppy. It's her usual acting as Souther's mother, huh?

Moreover, Alray and Hueremy take up position next to Rollodeen as big tigers. Souther yelps weirdly in surprise thanks to the sudden appearance of the cat army next to her, but then she jumps while nimbly twisting her body, landing on Alray's back.

"——Rollo-sama, I'm grateful about being protected by you, but this is the fifth floor. Even I can handle a place like this!"

"Fufu." Fuu covers her mouth with the back of her hand, chuckling, after seeing the unusual combi of Souther and Alray.

Our group takes up a circular formation so as to be cautious in all directions while advancing through the wasteland.

Soon groups of acid bone swordsmen and bone casters show up.

"My turn is up! Ksshhaaaaaa!" Bia yells full of spirit.

She charges like a heavy tank while shaking her broad snake belly. Drawing the monsters' attention, she gets attacked by fireballs from the distance and concentrated sword slashes in close combat. However, her armor plating and the magic shield easily repel all of these attacks. She overruns the attacking bone swordsmen with her thick belly, blowing them away in the process, and then cries ferociously. With powerful arm swings, she wields her magic sword like a log, mowing down

several swordsmen all at once.

Souther, who has been moving around as if crawling across the ground, deals with the bone casters. Her magnificent Flying Sword Style techniques, which she unleashes from low, bunny-like jumps, are deadly. She quickly slaughters the skeletons.

Next a pack of poisonous flame wolves appears - wolves with festering skin. As soon as they cause the black collars on their necks to broaden, they spit out crimson flames from their muzzles as usual.

Helme casts a water wall to extinguish those flames. Souther, who has gotten back on Alray, and Hueremy play the role of assault vanguards, attacking the wolves. A little moment after Souther and the tigers have started to move, Fuu, Rollodeen, Mamani, Bia and I join in with ranged attacks.

Helme focuses on the defense magic, blocking the enemy attacks. It's her backup for the vanguards who were about to be hit by the wolves' attacks.

"Nununu——" Bia is irritated about her own slow movements that don't allow her to join the front line.

Still, we steadily exterminate the wolves by cooperating with each other. In the middle of this Rollo's gang loses interest in the battle, and starts to play ice hockey with a magic stone. But none of us complains about the cats messing around as they please. The Lucival forces keep proceeding across the wasteland while slaying the monsters getting in our way.

Before long, the place with the two cliff-like towers comes into sight. At the same time I can spot countless adventurer corpses lying strewn around the first floor's entrance, a horde of death knights that are attacking those corpses, and a single floating death priest exuding something similar to an aura of majesty.

"Master, going by the looks of it..." Mamani begins with her nose twitching.

It's obvious, there are no survivors. All of them have apparently been killed by the death knights and death priest.

"Your Excellency, those numbers...it might be a stampede, I think." Helme comments with the skin on her whole body undulating.

She hasn't adopted one of her unique Helme poses.

"...There's slightly too many of them."

"I believe the adventurers inside the towers might have problems to carelessly step outside with those around."

"...The neighing of the skeletal horses is terrifying."

Mamani and Fuu appear to be surprised by the abnormal numbers of death knights. But yeah, they're right, these monsters have the same impressiveness as the plant monsters that rushed us at a

part of the 20th floor's forest. The death knights wear classy black armors as they sit on their imposing skeletal steeds. The Burning Knights are much cooler, though.

"I'm a Lucival, but I'm still afraid of these..."

"Nyano." Rollodeen protects Souther.

She caresses Souther's sheep-like, fluffy fur with her tentacles. When Souther gets pushed down by Alray and Hueremy, she screams cutely.

After watching that heartwarming scene, I shift my eyes back to the monsters. And then an idea flashes through my mind all of a sudden.

I've also got Divine Spear Ganghis, but this is the perfect opportunity for... I fiddle around with the smartphone-like display of my item box. After several peeping sounds, I retrieve Holy Spear Arost from within.

"Blood Beast Corps, Helme, Alray, Hueremy, I'm going to test out this spear, so stay back."

This cross spear is truly like a spear if you thrust and lick a sickle if you pull it back. It wakes the wish in me to study the Hozoin Spear Style. [efn_note] Check here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C5%8Dz%C5%8Din-ry%C5%AB> [/efn_note]

I shift my eyes away from the spear, looking at Rollo.

"Nyaa." Rollo understands my grave gaze, and immediately transforms into her divine beast form.

Her head's contours are close to that of a dignified black panther. Several tentacles are growing out of her neck, swaying like hair fluttering in the wind. I won't describe her as Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged horse...but I guess it'd be perfectly fitting if you describe Rollodeen as a combination of horse and lion with a panther-like head. Well, I suppose you can simply sum it up with the term divine beast.

I jump on Rollodeen's back. Her fluffy fur allows me to feel a softness beneath my legs as I straddle her. She doesn't have a harness such as a front and back stirrup or saddle, but since I fit into her fur, it feels just perfect when riding her.

Just as usual, I grab the tentacle in front of me as rein. That tentacle changed its tip's form into being flat, and latches onto my neck.

As I share Rollodeen's senses while feeling her soft pad on my neck,

"Master, a shining crest has floated up at the right-upper part of your boot."

"His Excellency is wearing Arzen's Boots. But you're correct, a mysterious, red crest, as if combining spiderweb and dragon, has surfaced...is it related to some magic symbol?"

"Hee...you're right." When having this pointed out by everyone, I lean down while sitting on Rollodeen, peeking at my foot.

It's really there - a red symbol on the surface of my boots. Do the boots sense the mana of my partner? Or has my mana reacted to my excitement? Has it always been there?

I've got no clue. But, whatever. Right now we're on a battlefield.

I hoist up Holy Spear Arost diagonally into the air, signaling to my friends that I'm about to head into battle.

"——Rollo, let's go!"

"Nyaaa."

First up are the death knights on their skeletal horses. They hold bone lances in one hand, and square iron shields in the other.

I won't use <Chain Spear of the Ray System>.

Rollodeen powerfully stabs her big claws into the wasteland's soil as she charges, leaving a cloud of dirt in her wake. With her muscled limbs working at full power, she's achieved a tremendous speed. Something similar to mana particles is being emitted from her whole body. Maybe it's an effect of those particles, but I can hardly feel any head wind.

On top of that, a dazzling light trail, as if wind and space are torn apart, is generated by Arost which protrudes out of the aura of particles.

Our distance to the first death knight shrinks down to nothing in a flash. My field of view gets suddenly filled with the black armor of the knight, which looks as if it's scattering death itself.

I drive Arost into its armored chest. And even though it penetrates the armor, I don't feel any feedback. It's almost as if the spear has been sucked into the armor.

In the next moment, a cross-shaped flash shoots out of the knight's chest. The knight's body folds as it gets blown away. In the air, its torso breaks apart into upper and lower parts, and vanishes from existence. A large magic stone appears among the remaining ash of the corpse.

Next I turn my attention to the death knight in front of me to the right, and brandish Arost. The knight tries to move its skeletal horse, but it's too late. Arost digs through the knight's armor at the abdomen as it draws a semicircular trajectory in the air. The holy spear howls as if devouring the darkness with its light, once again gliding through the black armor without any resistance.

"Uguuooo."

The knight is blown off its mount with its body twisted. As five bright, bluish-white streams of light break out of its bisected torso, it turns into dust and disappears. I can see yet another magic stone rolling across the wasteland's ground.

I suppose the only flaw in this is that I don't feel any feedback from the attacks because they're probably too strong thanks to the light attribute... Still, I gotta admit, Arost sure is a mighty, holy

weapon.

Or rather, Rollo is running too far, and has thus overtaken the enemy group.

——Go back.

"Nnn." Rollodeen purrs throatily.

She tilts her head to the side, wondering whether she should attack the death knights again. My partner begins to run. She's powerfully kicking the ground with her muscular forepaws while her hindpaws hurl the dirt high up into the air, resulting in an explosive acceleration. As she runs, she skilfully draws a curve across the wasteland without losing any speed.

At the end of the curve, the group of death knights enters my field of view once again. They've put themselves on guard. Well, this much can be expected after Rollo and I have exhibited such a showy lance charge.

Steering their skeletal horses, the knights spread out. Breaking up is the correct strategy here. It's a knowledge they've obtained from killing many adventurers.

But, you see, I've got projectile weapons at my disposal as well.

While admiring the smart movements of the knights, I use my magic and <Chain>. I create a huge number of 《Ice Spheres》. I don't expect that spell to work against them, but it'll serve as restraint. Without a moment's delay, I also fire <Chain>. The chain penetrates a knight, and after entangling it around its body and reeling it in, I mow down its body with Arost. Rollodeen also joins in by stabbing several of her tentacles into its torso from the sides.

The group of tentacles, which has deployed in a fan form, is terrifying as it keeps spreading to the left and right. The tentacles skewer nearby and distant knights and steeds. With Rollodeen lifting her tentacles upwards, the bodies on her tentacles look like dango.

At that moment, Rollodeen unleashes a thin beam of ultra-hot flames from her muzzle, precisely evaporating the knights she's lifted up herself. This definitely spells the end for those.

But, the last remaining monster, the death priest, is somewhat different. It's precisely hurling black rays and pebble spells at Rollo and me.

In a hurry, I jump off Rollo's back, avoiding the approaching projectiles. Although my stance in the air is a mess, I activate <Magic Hand guided by Thought>. Using the crooked mana hand as a foothold, I evade the approaching pebbles by leaping into the air, and while doing that, I fix my eyes on the priest.

The quality of its counterattack is awfully high. Looking at it closely, the color of its skull and the size of its twisted wand are different from before, I think. Is it possibly a subspecies?

While holding such doubts, I draw closer to the priest while in the air. When I arrive above its head, I draw back Arost towards my back while holding it with both hands. It's a kendo posture where you hold the sword above your head. I put power into it by twisting my body like a shrimp, and

then I let go of the amassed power, straightening my bent spine back up in one breath and making Arost vigorously head for the priest's head.

The priest responds by hurriedly raising its mana-laden wand above its head. This reaction speed clearly shows that it's a subspecies.

But, Holy Spear Arost bisects the priest's head alongside its wand, cutting through its priest's garb, all the way down to its solar plexus. Blue cracks spread across the now headless body of the priest. The instant light gushes out from all those cracks, a flash consisting of several rays shoots up vertically, and the stronger version of a death priest vanishes like an ethereal dream.

Rollodeen has watched the fall of the priest. She points her head, which somewhat gives one the feel of her having matured, upward. The fur around her neck and the bunch of tentacles sway softly. And then she roars, "Nyaaaaaagoon——"

Her voice - a proud, beastly one - loudly echoes across the wasteland.

"Nyaaaa" and "Nyaagoon" are the loud replies of Alray and Hueremy.

While listening to the cats' roaring, the Blood Beast Corps and I devote ourselves to collecting the magic stones. With this, the area at the foot of the towers is safe again.

Now then, I think it's time to go home. I have Alray and Hueremy transform back into porcelain dolls, and store them in my pocket. After getting onto Rollodeen, I turn my eyes to everyone.

"It's about time for me to go back home. Helme, return into my eye."

"Okay!" She answers and goes back into my left eye.

Then I cast a strict look at Mamani.

"Captain Mamani of the 08 Blood Beast Corpse."

"Yes, master!"

"From now on you are to freely spend your time while listening to the opinions of my bloodkin."

"Thank you very much."

Representing all of the squad, Captain Mamani bows her head at me.

"I'd like to collect magic stones."

"I'll obey Rollo-sama, Master, and Mamani."

"Eva, I think I'll help with the magic stone collection while helping Eva-sama every once in a while."

After nodding at their responses, I tell them, "Okay, if anything happens, shoot a blood message."

"Okay."

"——Nya~" Rollodeen starts to move after bidding farewell from Souther.

We dash across the wastelands, returning normally without using a gate. Once we get close to the room with the crooked crystal, my partner turns back into a black cat.

This place is no different from before either. Magic light sources are floating here and there. Adventurer clans or parties are taking a rest after having built up camps.

I walk up to the crystal in the middle of the room while feeling their probing gazes on me. Without anything unusual happening, I place a finger on the crystal, chant 「Return」, and warp to the crystal on the surface, returning to the labyrinth's entrance, the octagonal building. It's a space surrounded by ashen, tiled walls with vertical openings.

Rollo looks up to the openings at the ceiling.

There's a queue of adventurers lining up at the crystal in front of me. And, once some of them speak up while touching the crystal on its rock pedestal...they immediately disappear, warping into the labyrinth. Watching that with a sidelong glance, I leave the building.

——Is anyone capable of long-distance reconnaissance willing to join the party 【Daring Heroes】 ~?

——I'm searching for a missing human with the name Toselia.

——Something is wrong at the eastern war front. At the same time, strange, eerie birds have been sighted over there.

I keep walking while bathing in the hustle and bustle of the First Ring Road. On the way, I take a turn to the right, entering an alley. I wonder whether I should visit Shana's workplace, the inn where I formerly stayed, but desist from doing so. Leaving the ring road, I head to the Martial Arts District without making any side tours.

On the street, I spot a dwarven woman. I feel like she's also been around during the jellyfish festival... Once our eyes meet, she hides her body with a cloak, and disappears behind a pillar. How weird.

I see a warrior with a cowboy hat wearing swords draped over his shoulder and at his waist, a scaled person with blue skin. I guess he's a martial artist. But without addressing him, I went back home.

When I peek at the courtyard through the front gate, Ajul and Hankay are just in the middle of practice. Ajul seems to match Hankay by just using two swords. While looking at their mock battle, I head over to the plant section.

Just as I'm about to ask Helme whether she wants to water the plants, I'm called out to by several servants. With the Millennium Plant's singing as background music, they inform me, 「We have received a new black tea set from Betty-san」.

Next I spot my Head Maid Isabell and my vice-head maids play ring throwing with some servants, including Mimi. The ring throwing follows the same rules as the game played by the children in Hekatrail. It seems like it's commonly played like this.

After joining one round of ring throwing, I leave while giving the servants high five's. As I walk across the courtyard, I discover Ajul standing around in a daze after having finished his training. Looking close, I can see how his eyeballs are following around small birds. That in itself would already make for a great märchen painting, but I take Ajul along to the stables, and introduce him to Popobumu.

Ajul immediately mounts Popobumu, but he's immediately thrown off.

"Throwing me off! What a magic beast!"

"Pubopubo!"

The sight of him speaking with his eyeballs going around in circles while Popobumu reacts by trumpeting is kinda funny. At this point, the cat gang also joins in, climbs on top of Popobumu, and spends some relaxation time.

I considered using that opportunity to test out the Divine Magic Gem I bought at the auction, but...then I decided to do so at the destination of my journey. For now I'll prioritize massaging Rollo. Going by her throaty purring, she's totally enjoying it.



Early in the morning of the next day, I'm told by Mamani, the captain of 08 Blood Beast Corps, that they've successfully repelled the adventurer clan called **【Terrifying Path Libkeel】** who are occupying a room inside one of the two towers, after getting into a fight with them.

After hearing about this, I tell her through a blood message that they shouldn't go too far, which also includes avoiding battles with guardian monsters. Treasure chests sure are fascinating, but I instruct them that it's better for them to not fight famous clans or try to reach the tower's top floor since they don't have anyone with lock-picking skills.

Because of this exchange as well, I skipped my daily training today which I've been continuing ever since the days I spent with Master, except for the few occasions where it was impossible. My body is aching, desiring to train, but...once in a while it might also be fine to leisurely spend a day in the living room.

As I'm enjoying the morning air together with Helme, Hankay, and the dozing cats, I'm drinking some fragrant ten-ten-dutea.

"This ten-ten thing really permeates throughout your whole body. It has many of those tiny grains, and it looks so weird, but it's a truly great drink. In the past, I had the honor to taste a drink combining the expensive, rare pritok and arcent fruits with royalty, but this one is far better. I'd love

to speak to the person who's developed this."

"You better don't. He's a shady freak who tried to make Viine drink some dubious medicine on their first meeting. Though I believe he won't try anything like that with you, Hankay."

"That dark elf lady, huh? Still, isn't he a ridiculous guy for trying to kidnap your subordinate? I'm going to crack his head open with my axes, no wait, I guess he's the guy who came up with this wonderful drink..."

It looks like Hankay has reached the same conclusion as I. He's the guy who developed this wonderful drink, so it's better to leave him be since he might produce other delicious things in the future.

He might get killed by Viine in the meantime, though. Now then, if Yui gets back today...I think I'll head over to the territory of the earl in the south of Leften while taking Nereis'Kary along.

After finishing her travel preparations, Yui told me, "Dad has extended his thanks, but I also want bid farewell with some words of gratitude after thanking Mel's folks for giving me work at the dark guild and buying a bunch of sweets recommended by Rebecca to use as gifts," and then went out shopping with Sweets Empress Rebecca. I don't know whether they're going to buy the recently popular chestnut sweets, but they will head over to the office of Remains of the Moon afterwards.

A few days ago I talked with Yui during the training sessions, who's so faithful that you can't think of her as a former assassin anymore, about the Baycala Church.

When I asked, "Isn't it risky for you to go there all alone?", Yui fervently answered, "If you say something like that, things will never get resolved. I've learned a lot from the recent battle against Leaf. I've fully realized that my katana techniques are still far too immature. <Dark Scattering> worked against her, but <Dark Feathers> was easily repelled. It gave me a little shock, but at the same time, it's a good lesson. That's why I have to take action to become stronger even while knowing that it's dangerous!"

That's why Yui is going to head west. There's a little discrepancy with what I've heard from Hankay about her victory, but her emphasizing the parts where she was inferior just raises her evaluation in my eyes.

Yui has obtained power by becoming my <Head Servant Leader>. It means she can enhance her martial arts in the same way as me. This will result in me being separated from her for a bit, but...I've got Rollo with me.

I cast a look at the sleeping black cat. Her curled sleeping posture is adorable. It wakes the urge in me to caress her, but I limit myself to just enjoying the view.

I'm also going on a journey to Leften while taking Nereis'Kary along. Since it's close to Hekatrail, I should also visit Quiche.

As I recall the smile of the beautiful, translucent Quiche with the panorama of Baldok Mountain as a backdrop, I feel like her sweet scent is tickling my nose. While drinking my ten-ten and storing that memory back into the deepest place of my heart, I make up my mind that I should probably

move my body a bit anytime soon.

"Hankay-sensei, please take care of me again until Yui comes back."

I plan to do some ax training until she gets here. Hankay furrows his eyebrows after hearing my request. Hmm? He's not in the mood for training?

"...Hey, can you please stop with the sensei? Ever since you've started to call me like that, the servants here are referring to me as Onion-sensei, which puts me in a bind."

"Pfft!" I reflexively spit out the ten-ten in response to his remark.

The violet liquid ends up hitting Helme's head, who's floating in front of me.

"Your Excellency, you shouldn't waste ten-ten."

"Sorry——"

I wash her head with water from <Life Magic>.

"Fufu, your water feels nice, Your Excellency. Please shower me with a lot more of it." Helme pleads while I'm spraying the water at her.

Since she looks ecstatic, it must feel great to her. Maybe it's because I've got the divine protection of Water Goddess Akreshys. But, given that she looks like she's going to start panting in a weird way soon, I stop the <Life Magic> after confirming that all the dirt has been rinsed off her head.

"...Aww, it's over,"

"Don't say anything weird. Okay, we're heading out on the courtyard."

Thereupon, Rollo, who's been sleeping atop the table, reacts to my voice by twitching an ear, and suddenly rises up, "Nnn——"

She stretches herself by extending both her forepaws while purring. Afterwards she meows, and nimbly runs across the table. Kicking off the table's edge, she jumps towards the exit, and lands splendidly on the floor, just to quickly dash towards the courtyard, after passing through the living room. I think she's aiming for Popobumu's place. Popobumu is with Eva and Viine who have been walking around with the princess.

"As always, she's a quick and beautiful divine cat." Hankay mutters as he gets up from his chair.

It looks like he's been charmed by Rollo's walking figure.

"...I guess we'll follow her lead then."

"Uh-huh."

I head to the courtyard with everyone else, and just as expected, I find Rollo over at Eva, Viine, and

the princess. Nereis'Kary has apparently become completely enchanted by Rollo. With both knees on the ground, she's greeting Rollo, who's lying on the ground, with an indescribable vocal sound, obviously wanting to massage Rollo's soft belly.

Alray and Hueremy, who I've released earlier, are fighting over the spot at the back of Popobumu's head. Taking my eyes off their scuffling, I shift my eyes to the front gate.

There I spot Ajul standing in a daunting pose. His ring head with its many eyeballs stands out...but, he's seriously doing his job as a guard. Ajul has chatted up a servant who's about to go out shopping. I'm pretty sure that he's asking her whether she needs a bodyguard.

Next I turn my eyes towards the workshop. Mysty is out, but should come back soon, I think. I've postponed tackling the matter of the martial arts training at the academy, she mentioned in her complaints. But, her all-important sorcery doll development is proceeding well. Munjay's Rock Heart, the crystalline grains of Belbaque's Core, and the bluish-white fluid streaming through the pipes of the new heart have evolved by blending with each other smoothly.

『There's still left a lot to worry about as the pulse is rather erratic, but the operational efficiency has gone up』 Mysty told me, but I didn't quite understand what she meant.

Moreover, the framework and joints of the white heart are all brand new. Well...even I, as an amateur, can tell as much. The doll is obviously different from the previous, rustic version. Its shape and all the parts have been polished up. It feels like the miniaturization of the kornald part, mentioned by Zaga, has succeeded as well.

According to Mysty, 『Its shrinking and the strengthening of the exoskeleton is going well, but the problem remains the command codes. Just as I mentioned before, it's kinda complicated to do with the magic blast furnace I've got in the workshop. But you see, with the improvement of the other parts, I don't really mind so much as the construction has been proceeding very well. Besides, I might be substitute the magic blast furnace with something special brother used in the past』, just to continue with further explanations sounding very researcher-like, 『As for the matter of turning the new doll in a portable version, I've been referencing the <Ancient Magic> used by Alray and Hueremy, trying to adopt the parts I can handle myself. Since I was able to shrink the doll a bit, I know that I'm on the right track here. I've also received a vacation from the perverted headmaster geezer over at the academy, and I've built some connections as well. Well, I think they can find as many lecturers as they want anyway, and since I've understood what buttons to press with that perverted geezer, you can leave that part to me. Ah, please take me to the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog』

While rattling all of this down at the speed of Bia's talking, she noted something down on a parchment. I was bothered by the perverted geezer at the academy, but then I saw the parchment's content. Realizing how she had written down her usual bad habit of 『Shit, shit, shit』, I felt slightly relieved.

With this said, it's been decided that I'll take her to her brother's, Sol's, mansion next time.

『If there's any of the material hidden in brother's room left, I'd like to continue researching them for a while. I plan to transport a few of the magic blast furnace parts after putting them into my item box, but you see, I'm slightly curious about the place where my brother spent his time. I can't

believe that he chose that spot just because it's easy to hide there. The reason why he chose Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog might be related to the power of the ancient gods inside that forest』, she explained with a humble look.

As I'm recalling that conversation with Mysty, "Oooohh, how exquisite. It keeps revitalizing one from within...nuooh? My belly's magic gems have recovered a bit! The first magic gem...I think it's an effect matching that ten-ten juice, but spirit-sama, it's superb!"

Okay, certainly, Hankay's belly is shining. It looks like he's recovered his mana with a fruit of the Millennium Plant.

"Hankay, this a special reward for you serving as His Excellency's new sparring partner."

"Lulaaaa~ Spiriit, don't arbitrarily steal my children after they regrew at long laaaast~"

"That plant is screaming something or other. Is he alright?" Hankay asks while looking worriedly at the Millennium Plant.

"It's okay. Don't mind him."

"If you say so."

"Faaather~ I'm alriiight~ My looove~ is onlyyyy~ for youuu, faaaather~"

Helme holds the Millennium Plant, which has started to sing as if imitating my words, in one hand. She heads to the plant corner while releasing sheets of water spray.

In the meantime, I take Tofinger's Crying Ax out of my item box, and grasp its hilt with both hands. After splitting it apart, I swing the left ax straight down. Just as Hankay-sensei has taught me, I lift the right ax diagonally, repeating the basic moves of 『Crab Blow』.

Thereupon, Viine, who has been excitedly chatting with Eva and Nereis'Kary, retrieves a box full of potions from her item box, and approaches me while holding it at her chest.

"You're going to practice, right? I've prepared some potions, just in case."

"Thank you, Viine."

"..." Hankay glances at Viine, but doesn't say anything to her.

Brandishing the Adamantine axes in his hands, he gets ready by lifting his right hand and lowering his left.

"Shuuya, you're ready to go?"

"Sure, come."

The light reflected off his axes is dazzling. Hankay had fixed his hold on the hilts, adjusting the ax blades' positions so that the sunlight reflected from them would hit my eyes.

Immediately following, he charges at me with a roar. He unleashes a series of slashes after this light screen. He tries to hit my torso by swinging an ax from the side. I extend the ax in my left diagonally below, blocking his first attack by clashing my ax against his. A screeching, dissonant metallic sound reverberates.

Hankay keeps going. While twisting his body, he swings his other ax up from below. I retreat for the moment as I'd be at a disadvantage if I were to keep the combat distance.

After pumping Magic Combat Style into my legs, I kick off the stone floor, charging. Changing my stance, I swing down the ax in my right hand at Hankay.

"——So you've switched from Crab Blow to Ogre Blow. Well done! You're getting used to handling your axes." Hankay comments while looking at the ax blade coming down at him.

While keeping up his smile, he shifts his body sideways, and swings his ax from the side.

"How about this——"

I hold up the ax in my left, using it as a shield. Hankay's and my axes directly strike against each other. The impact causes a shock wave, accompanied by sparks. Just as I block his ax, I rotate my ax on my palm. While feinting to aim low with my eyes, I swing down Tofinger's ax once again with the idea of hitting Hankay's shoulder.

Hankay, who's currently bent down, screams, "Naive——" with the look of a demon, and folds waist and back inwards, just to rush at me headlong while carrying one ax on his shoulder.

Using the perfect timing, he makes the ax on his right shoulder clash with my approaching ax, and advances while capitalizing on his small build. The blade of my ax slides across his ax's blade, and he manages to slip inside my bosom while both axes give off sparks.

——Quick!

Hankay sticks out his left shoulder, driving it into my belly. While feeling the pain from the impact, I withdraw by letting the soles of my boots slide across the floor. I haven't fallen down, but...in the end, my abilities as an ax fighter are low.

"...It's an ax handling you wouldn't expect of a beginner. But, your adjustment of the combat distance still needs a lot of work. Those Tofinger's Crying Axes of yours are crying for real."

A pun, eh?

"Maybe you're right."

Afterwards we have a furious exchange of blows mixing ax techniques and taijutsu. I manage to make Hankay-sensei fall to the ground a number of times. Still, I'm learning the finer techniques of ax mastery from him, but...I'm not quite acquiring a special skill.

"I'm back. Ah, you're training as usual, huh?" Yui greets.

I signal Hankay with my eyes to stop. He nods and stores away his axes on his back. Turning around, I run up to Yui, who's put down her light hand baggage on the ground.

Ajul, who's been standing as gatekeeper at the front gate, bows towards Yui. Yui is wearing a blackish uniform and Muntomi on her upper body, and something like a garter belt-like armor, which exposes her white peachy skin somewhat, below. The classy mantle she's wearing atop makes her look just like back in the past. Her brand new leg protectors suit her well.

Looking at those protectors, I'm reminded of the first time I met her.

"Yui, what about Rebecca?"

"She's working at the tea shop. At our parting, she told me with a smile and tears in her eyes, 'Being separated from Yui and Shuuya is very lonesome, but as long as there's love, it'll be paradise no matter where we are. That's why we'll definitely be able to meet again. We can use blood messages too. Also, even though all of us are saying this and that, we all know that we belong together. It kinda feels like we're going to join up unexpectedly soon anyway, you know?' After she hugged me, which is unusual for her...she told me that she's going back to Betty-san, and then we split after I confirmed."

"I see."

"Yep, so...my preparations are in order. I wanted to go to Sol's house together with you and Mysty for nostalgic reasons, but...I've got my own path to tread. That's why I'll follow Dad."

Yui's determination hasn't wavered.

"Got it. If something happens, contact me right away."

"Same to you——"

After flashing a smile at me, she leaps and hugs me tightly. Yui's body is as light as a gentle breeze. I tightly squeeze back. Yui embraces me, sticking to me as if fully entrusting me with her body.

Her nice scent passes through my nose. While breathing in deeply, I spontaneously kiss Yui's slender nape.

"...It's ticklish. But, I won't forget...your smell, Shuuya."

Her voice is as gentle as the plumage of a small bird carried by the wind.

"...I won't forget yours either." I hug Yui powerfully and roughly.

"Au, that's too strong...Shuuya." Yui trembles like a little girl.

"Sorry."

Yui draws back her small head, which she had placed on my shoulder, and bravely looks up to me

with her black eyes.

"No, it hurt, but your feelings got through to me. Still, I'll be lonely..."

"What, once you're on the road, the wind will blow any sadness away——" As I talk to her with a smile, Yui suddenly kisses me.

I feel her tender, soft lips on mine. But, a single streak of tears streams down from her eye. Once our lips part, she directs an impish smile at me.

"For a change I've stolen those irritating, womanizing lips of yours."

"Haha, irritating, eh? Don't bluff——"

Forgetting that we're in public due to her beauty, we spend some time hugging each other. And after we've had enough, I gently lower Yui's body to the ground. A calm smile is visible on her lips, but I feel like I've seen a pang of sadness cross the black gleam in her eyes for an instant.

"See you. Everyone else, too——"

"Yeah."

Yui swiftly turns around to hide her tears. She starts running, and jumps atop the front gate. And then she disappears.

"Yui sure is fast."

"No kidding."

Seeing my expression, Viine comes next to me, seemingly having sensed some of my emotions. Eva also moves next to me with her magic wheelchair.

"Nn, gone. But, since we can message her, there's no need to be sad."

Matching my line of sight with Eva's and Viine's, I nod.

"Yes, we'll see just how far she can take her swordsmanship."

"I've heard Yui's voice when she left, but she's gone on her journey already?" Helme sadly asks after coming close.

"Yes. Helme, as soon as Mysty comes home, we'll also head east. If you're going to come with me, enter my eye."

"On my way~"

Helme settles down in my left eye.

"...Shuuya, I'm looking forward to the souvenirs of your journey, okay?" Eva's voice is deep since

she's going to stay behind in Pelneet.

"Sure. What about the metal we obtained at the Underground Auction?"

"After melting a part of that strange, big clump of metal, I turned it into a stake-like weapon. I plan to use it together with my green imperial steel weapons. Mysty is genuinely researching it after having cut off a little part of it. She excitedly talked about tampering around with it as crafting material while letting her blood out. It was scary."

"Yes! It's just a little part. That material has actually small, unknown life-forms in it. I might be able to put it to use by combining it with other metals! But, I wonder where that metal comes from. A vehicle that's fallen down from the sky, was it...?" Mysty explains after coming back.

A lump of car metal that's fallen from the sky, huh? It's maybe originally been a garbage truck, a dump car, or an armored vehicle of the Na Palm Integrated Planetary Military Alliance. Or maybe car metal that's been transferred here from another dimension. Either way, it's a mystery as unknown life-forms are contained inside the metal.

"...It's questionable whether you'll make any progress on that research, but well, it's you we're talking about, so you might put it to use in your sorcery doll. Anyway, right now we're going on a journey. Rollo, Viine, you come as well! Mysty, are you okay going dressed like that? Hankay, what are you going to do? If you're coming with us, get on Rollodeen. Nereis'Kary, you're going back to Leften, right?"

"That sounds fun. But Hekatrail, huh? The place where I fought against Bloody Long Ears..."

Well, it's because you've fought all over the place, Hankay.

"I won't force you. The position as vice-captain of the guards is available as well. If you stay here, you can spend your time in this mansion while thinking of it as your home."

"That's fine with you? Although I pledged my allegiance to you..."

"I don't plan to tie you down. So do as you like, Hankay. You're a free man."

"Gahaha, you're an unusual lord. But, that's a freedom-loving spearmaster for you. A typical Shuuya. In that case...I'll also try going on a journey to hone my skills while being your subordinate. I'll freely...no, I'll accompany you for a part of the way. You might need a dwarf that can serve as a wall, right?"

"Sure, it's possible that we'll need you, I guess. Well, hop on then."

"Alright. But, I won't enter Hekatrail, just so you know."

"Okay. I plan to go to the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog first."

"The place where Mysty wants to go, right? That's cool with me."

At that point, "Nn, nyaa."

"Pubopuboooo"

Rollo's voice echoes across the courtyard as she bids farewell from Popobumu. Then she turns around, and comes running while changing into her divine beast form.

Nereis'Kary, who runs alongside her, suddenly stumbles and falls down. Viine lends her shoulder to the princess, and walks over while supporting her.

"——Hankay-san, best regards. I'll go dressed like this. All the tools I need are inside my item box." Mysty jumps on Rollodeen's back with those words.

"Sure, it's the beginning of a new job. I'll be your bodyguard at the Whirlpool-something." Hankay says with a smile, and also mounts Rollodeen.

Eva waves her hand from her wheelchair. Is Rebecca still at Betty-san's place?

Just when I wonder about this, Rebecca shows up in front of the gate, still wearing her tea seller clothes, and screams while crying, "Shuuuya, you idioooooot!"

She looks frantic, but adorable, and at the same time, miserable. And then Eva approaches Rebecca, gently patting Rebecca's small back.

""Master, please take care!"" The servants, including Isabell, gather on the courtyard.

All of them look sad. But, it can't be helped.

"Nn——" Rollodeen throatily purrs at everyone.

"Pubopubo——" Popobumu cries.

"Nn——" My partner answers.

Rollodeen gazes at Popobumu while slowly flying up into the sky. And Popobumu looks at Rollodeen, as if they've reached some kind of mutual understanding.

Haha, somehow it's very pleasant to look at those two. It reminds me of the time when Rollo rode at the back of Popobumu's head.

My partner purrs for a farewell, flying at a speed that's not her usual, explosive one. She might be aware of Nereis's Kary, who's also on her back. She calmly hovers by spreading her griffon-like, black wings. I mean, Nereis'Kary is an ordinary human. She might die in the instant Rollodeen uses her usual acceleration.

As I look at the gate from above the mansion, I spot Veronica, Mel, and Benett standing there.

『Guildmaster, see you. Be careful, okay? I'll handle the Valmask family that's picking a fight with us』

『You can leave Vero-cchi to me, okay...? Guildmaster, thanks for the other day』

『Guildmaster, we're in the process of changing to the name of Dignified Heaven, but please leave the current name of 【Remains of the Moon】 to us. Since I've heard that you're heading east, I've told the one in charge of our new office in Hekatrail, just in case. The new hire over there is a light-brown-haired beauty called Sherry. Since I've also arranged for other beauties, I think you'll like the place』

Nothing less of my vice-guildmaster Mel.

Each of them bids farewell by sending blood messages. Wait, Sherry? Don't tell me...

While thinking that, I send replies to all of them, but just to make sure, "Everyone, thank you! Let's meet soon again!" My voice echoes across the Martial Arts District in the skies of Labyrinth City Pelneet.