

## **Chapter 319 - Those Surrounding the Round Table and Noctal's Oath**



Outskirts of Fa'Dyke, the capital of Leften. Just like in any other city, various races were going back and forth on the main street with its array of inns and shops lining up next to each other. At the far end of that main street stood the high-class inn **【Wind-Fanned Fire】**, a three-storied building with a huge conspicuous fan-shaped signboard in front and a halo of boards depicting flames in the back.

The Wind-Fanned Fire had an exterior resembling a quiet townhouse. The roof had eaves connected by black tiles, and drainspouts decorated with oblong, shining silver snakes and black dragons. The exterior also used a design as was characteristic around Fa'Dyke.

The silver snakes and black dragons were famous for Black Dragon Hillhound and Silver Snake Outer who inhabited the 30-storied tower called 『Indomitable Lion Tower』 or 『Non-Cavern Lion Tower』. They were famous boss monsters waiting on the 30 floors of the tower whom no adventurer had defeated as of yet.

Of course, you'd be able to obtain an unknown number of treasure boxes by defeating the bosses. And as obvious from this very fact, no adventurer had defeated these two bosses in the last few hundred years. However, certain ancient scriptures and stone monuments wrote about a secret surrounding the tower.

Why was a tower, which extended high up into the sky, and the proof of countless boss monster subjugations called indomitable or non-cavern...? Why had the name lion been added to it...?

The answers were noted down in encrypted ancient letters, but...until this very day, those ancient scriptures and stone monuments hadn't been deciphered.

It was whispered that researchers of ancient history possessing deciphering skills shared a certain secret amongst each other... Moreover, it was said that countless articles of the deceased covered the tower's 30 floors like a carpet.

Reckless, skilled adventurers rushed onto those floors day and night, in pursuit of strength or aiming to strike rich, just to be sent packing after defeat. For this reason, the boss monsters, which would frequently appear on the 30 floors of the Indomitable Lion Tower, were regarded as a symbol of power, ranking next to Terrifying King Noctal, among the people of the local underworld and the adventurers.

Those shining snake and dragon drainspouts, interweaving black and silver colors, continued from the eaves to the ceiling of a large room as if crawling along the wall. And the ceiling of the third floor used an aubergine-colored, deep blue night sky as motif. The night was reproduced by gems in all kinds of shapes and sizes, as if depicting the Milky Way. Silver snakes and black dragons were depicted as three-dimensional objects freely swimming through the beautiful night sky while winding their long and slender bodies.

It was the epitome of art. A masterpiece by a famous person who used to be an adventurer and

engraver called Sage Wolf.

An item that should rightfully be called the centerpiece of this piece of art was installed in the center of the ceiling. It was a huge chandelier extending downwards with figures of snakes and dragons coiling around each other. The huge jaws of the snakes and dragons looked as if they'd come alive any moment to swallow the round table beneath the chandelier. Their mouths were thrown so widely open that the people around the table would be led into believing this. Furthermore, flames looking like several thin snakes were gushing out from the gaping dragon muzzles.

Those flames flickered around as if swimming through the air. Giving birth to fantastical graphic arts in the air, the flames repeatedly clashed into egg-shaped magic tools, which were lined up on the table in equal intervals. Each time they hit the eggs, pretty rays shot out into the air from the eggs' curved glass surfaces. It was a light show reminiscent of fleeting sparklers.

A final, powerful gleam remaining in the air was cast on the people surrounding the round table. Those sitting around the table, the men and women, had all received a high paying request. All of them were strong fighters. One seen as an expert for underground work, one who had been on a journey by chance, one with experience in various arena fights, one who would take on any work - be it legal or illegal, one who had killed many A-Rank adventurers, one who wanted to kill a certain beastman, and one who simply wanted to earn cash. Just as said, there were all kinds among them.

One of them, a human woman with a lovely, navy blood flower decoration on her head spoke up.

"Quite the lineup we've got here, eh?" The woman, who had clad her body with a poncho, thrust a short spear above her head.

A light brown snake, which was faintly swaying, was created at the tip of the spear's head. The woman sent the illusionary snake at a man in a short robe.

"Stop——"

The instant that shout reverberated, the man's arms tore open. Not bones, but black dragon-shaped swords stuck out at the core of the tears. The flesh of the arms splattered into the vicinity with sprays of blood dancing through the air, but...no change could be observed on the man's face.

Thrusting out his arms with the gimmick-like swords, he stabbed through the illusionary snake. Penetrated by the swords, the snake vanished with a sizzling.

The woman, who had unleashed that snake, blared, "Hah, what an unfriendly guy you are."

Even though her snake had been defeated, one could still describe her as being completely calm.

And then there was a silver-haired man who had coolly observed the exchange between the two fighters from his seat. He possessed an edged body contour, and a hook nose. The colors of his eyes differed, one being indigo blue while the other was silver.

He shifted his eyes to the seat next to him. At the same time he poured mana into his odd eyes, triggering a change of his eyes' color into dark brown.

"You guys are..." The man muttered as he stared with his Demonic Eyes at the two people next to him.

One was a woman. Both her eyes were covered by a scarlet cloth, and she wore a Japanese-styled mantle.

Obviously having an impaired eyes, the woman replied with a calm voice, "True force, true force...aiming takes but a moment, and yet, at times it is not so."

The silver-haired man furrowed his eyebrows and tilted his head, as if saying 『True force? I've got no clue what you're talking about』.

Just like the man, the other people sitting around the table turned their attention to the blind woman.

Thereupon, "Come to think of it, you are?" asked a giant instead of the blind woman with a crossbow leaned against his shoulder.

He was a man releasing a peculiar aura. He seemed to be the blind woman's partner. At least that was what everyone in the room believed.

Glaring at the blind woman and the crossbow user, the silver-haired man announced, "...I'm Pierson, a bounty hunter. I think I saw you at the roadside, outside the Dignified Heaven's Shrine the other day."

Pierson wore a black leather armor with the muscle designs on its surface standing out. The silver thread bordering the leather was custom made. Many daggers were affixed to his chest like some kind of Explosive Reactive Armour. A golden buckle, a curved magic sword which was tied by a mana-laden black cloth, and a pipe with a metal tipped stem hung at his waist.

The giant checked out the magic armor on Pierson. 'Is he possibly that 『Magic Cloth User』?

While wondering about that, he said aloud, "...So you were there as well, huh? My name is En Bomel. My partner is called Ako Oblyn."

The name En Bomel sounded familiar to Pierson. He smirked by lifting a corner of his mouth, causing the gray cloth hiding his mouth to crease.

"I've heard of you. If I recall correctly, you're leaders of 【Quick Shadow】. Enako, the Professionals."

En Bomel moved his neck up and down, nodding at Pierson's words, "...The Pivot Council of Darkness has various factions, but we've withdrawn from 【Quick Shadow】. That said, you're the bounty hunter known as 【Magic Cloth User】, aren't you?"

"Hah, so you've heard of me, eh?"

"Well, yes. I recall having heard about a remarkable bounty hunter who's always caught criminals with the help of a special cloth. The only flaw is his greed for money. By the way, did you

participate in the battle at the Dignified Heaven's Shrine, Pierson?"

"No, I didn't. I was outside. I watched the situation while hanging from the edge of an eave."

"So the same as us, huh?" En Bomel said while scraping across his beard with his left hand's thick finger.

The fingertip had transformed unnaturally, now looking like the trigger of his crossbow. Pierson stared at his changed finger, feeling baffled. He spoke up while letting the battle at the inn play back once more in front of his inner eye.

"...The Eight Lights crushing, which included Bloody Long Ears, by the Shadow Wing Brigade. I wonder what will come out of this. There were many people, not only those of the underworld, who were curious about that battle during the night of the moon's remains, I think."

"Sure looks like it. Well, Ako and I were just present by chance. We were getting chased by a certain demonoid, you know?"

Pierson moved his scarred eyebrows in surprise.

"Chased by a certain demonoid, you say? For **【Quick Shadow】** to have a falling out...is it possibly related to the disappearance of the demonoid Naromivas Belahozuma who had exercised his authority in Pelneet?"

"True force only shines through a katana..." The blind woman said something completely unrelated to express her own feelings.

She lowered her mantle, exposing a protective tube top consisting of a magic cloth. It clearly accentuated her womanly body. The only one knowing about the meaning of the true force mentioned by her in this place was En Bomel.

"...It might be related in some way, yeah." En answered while shifting the position of his crossbow.

"Hooh..."

'Is this blind woman a nutcase? Her version of Magic Combat Style is top-notch, and she's wearing first-class equipment. She looks like a skilled fighter, but...' Pierson pondered while looking at En and Ako from underneath his gray hood, but suddenly his expression changed.

At the same time he turned his eyes to the sliding door, because he had sensed mana.

"It's a decently paying job. I wonder what we'll be asked to do..." Pierson said with a muffled voice and his eyes turned dark brown.

He directed his Demonic Eyes at the room's entrance door. The light of the lamps standing on both sides of the sliding door piercingly illuminated Pierson's irises. Pierson possessed a superior **<Magic Detection>** skill. The one most outstanding not only in combat ability but also detection ability among those surrounding the table was Pierson.

Following his detection...the sliding door opened. And the one entering was...an unsociable catman, the guildmaster of **【Noctal's Oath】** - Hogbar Shafeed.

Hogbar had finished his detailed report about the Underground Auction and the movements of the Eight Lights to Prime Minister Zamdo.

Behind Hogbar appeared someone carrying a heavy-looking barrel made out of evergreen oak wood at their chest. A leader of **【Noctal's Oath】**.

Hogbar let his three eyes wander, scanning the situation inside the room...and after a short pause, he unfastened a few of the clasps at his collar, loosening the cloak. He swapped the cloak's cloth to the back, and after affixing the cloth with fasteners on his shoulder, he stepped into the room.

Immediately following, those at the round table reacted. One of them stood up, and screamed weirdly at Hogbar with a glare, "Hogbaaaaaar!"

The shouter's head and neck were bulging, as if she was suffering from a 'synthetic magic drug' (Crystal Meth) addiction. It was very odd.

The other people at the table were startled. The shouter caused black mana to chaotically gush out of her slender body. Her black hair and slender body reminded one of a Japanese person. As her raven-like hair swayed, the aroma of camellia oil scattered into the vicinity.

Originally it'd be a scent with a nice fragrance, but this one was steeped with the stench of poison.

"Urraaaaaaaaahhhh!"

The woman unleashed yet another strange scream that seemed to reduce the life of anyone hearing it, and held out both hands towards Hogbar while continuing screaming full of grudge. Then she abnormally bent herself backwards with the sound of bones breaking being audible from within her body. Her spine snapped repeatedly, her black hair floating above the floor.

The woman began to scratch the ground with the nails of both her hands, holding them inverted, while exposing her tits and belly. She headed towards Hogbar like some apparition. The steps of her bare feet promoted fear. As if filled by malice, the flesh peeled off her body, falling to the ground and revealing an ethereal body beneath. A 卍 mark was rotating on the forehead of her ethereal body.

In response, a tall, burly catman stepped forward, "Aniki, let me handle this."

The catman identifying himself as Hogbar's little brother held two long magic spears and two short spears in his four hands. He adopted a unique spear style stance, and activated <Magic Combat Style>, a skill of Magic Combat Step. He kicked off the hard floor with the soles of his boots, using a skill called Combat Step for short.

——The spear-wielding catman dashed forward, smoke rising at his feet.

As soon as he closed the distance to the woman while remaining in a forward-bent posture, he quietly muttered, "<Fang Stab>——"

In contrast to his quiet voice, it was a magic spear skill boosted by his terrifying speed and body movements. The powerful stabs of the vividly red gleaming magic spears in his upper right and lower right hands seized the back of the rotating woman, and penetrated through her back with a smack.

The woman's face instantly warped from a shaded, haggard expression into one of anguish.

"Geeehh!"

The catman ignored the woman's pained scream, and moved one of his magic spears while twisting its handle. The spearhead tore through her slender back, ripping apart her heart on the way. But the catman didn't ease on his attacks.

He circulated mana through his whole body, including the arms holding the magic spears he had pulled out with a magnificent spear technique, and muttered, "<Spear Fang Stab - Black Wolf>."

With the activation of the skill, mana concentrated not only in his arms with the magic spears, but also the other two arms with the short spears. His mana wrapped up his arms and short spears, creating the illusion of black wolves.

The catman, who looked like he was being devoured by black wolves from his two hands all the way up to his shoulder, advanced as if performing a sumo tackle, immediately unleashing the short spears at the bluish white ethereal body of the woman. It was a waist movement relying on the strength of his lower body - a spear style very unique to him.

The short spears with the squirming black wolf illusions stabbed through the ethereal body's torso. The ethereal body screamed in death agony, apparently being devoured by the black wolf illusions, while vanishing.

"...Hee, a spearmanship close in ability to mine?" The woman with the flower decoration on her head praised after having observed the course of events in silence.

"That's Black Wolf Soleck-ani for you!" exclaimed the martial artist dropout Nuha from behind Hogbar.

His voice was cheerful while his hand rested on the hilt of his longsword. He was a catman too, and Hogbar's little brother. His physique was a tiny bit bigger than that of Hogbar.

Nuha, and the spear user he called Soleck-ani were Hogbar's relatives. Or to be precise, they were cousins of Hogbar who was half man half catman. And Soleck also had another name: he was called "Spearmaster who leads the Black Wolves", based on his appearance and spear techniques. He had acquired the combat occupation <Beast Stab Spearmaster>, a derivation of Demonic Beast Tamer.

"Aniki, an opponent who uses such a weird technique..."

"Yeah, it's gotta be the folks from **【Oriental Temple】**."

Soleck closed his middle eye after hearing the name of the religious organization from Hogbar.

While sighing as if saying 'Again, huh...?', he affixed his beloved short and magic spears on his back, arresting them with clasps connecting his magic leather armor with the belts on his back. The instant he finished, ominous voices escaped his two magic spears.

Soleck didn't show any reaction to the voices coming from his back. With his magic spears crossing on his back, he looked at Haze's head with its conspicuous cross scar.

"...【Oriental Temple】 sure is a tenacious bunch."

"Haze, their bases in Leften should be mostly gone, you know?"

"Sure, but since old temples exist all over the place, it's impossible to completely shut them out." Contractor Haze replied Hogbar's question.

The amber-haired Haze had a cross scar on his forehead. His eyes were covered by magic cloths which sunk into his eye sockets.

Haze and Hogbar weren't real brothers. But, they had associated with each other like brothers since their childhood. And, although Haze seemed blind at a first glance, it was just an illusion. Ever since he got born into a poor family that worshiped Terrifying King Noctal, <Terrifying Eyes> dwelt within him, granting Haze a unique sight. As a small child he was sold to a slave dealer by his family who misunderstood him to be a disabled child, but...he somehow managed to escape by using <Terrifying Eyes>.

However, in the end he got chased down and cornered by the mercenaries under the slave dealer's employ. Being outnumbered and surrounded, Haze was certain that this would be his end. But then the burly Hogbar and Soleck appeared in front of him. At that time they were catmen who were ridiculed as Heinous Brothers in the local underworld.

After getting rescued by the two, Haze swore his loyalty to their 【Noctal's Oath】. Once he reached a point allowing him to support 【Noctal's Oath】 from the back, he distinguished himself in no time, and nowadays he was the actual vice-guildmaster of their guild.

That Haze had to pay a price for using <Terrifying Eyes>. He had to hold a ceremony of sacrifice for Noctal, whom he was worshiping, in a cave located at the Thin Wind Demon's Cliff of the Veil. Moreover, he was forbidden to leave the area with the Terrifying King's cave altar. For this reason, Haze couldn't travel too far away from this region.

Hogbar nodded at Haze, "...Well, it can't be helped. After all, we used a flashy method to recruit this time."

Hogbar didn't only address Haze, but also everyone else in the room. And then he opened his three catman eyes widely, unveiling a grave expression. After going all the way up to the round table, he spread his four arms.

While acting all bossy, he asked, "...Yoo, going by the fact that you've come here, it's fine to interpret it as you havin' accepted the job, right?"

"..."

All of those sitting at the table silently nodded.

"Well, it's 'cause the high-class combat slaves I procured at the Underground Auction simply won't do, you see. I'm lookin' forward to you as a new force capable of opposin' the spearmaster of **【Remains of the Moon】**." Hogbar declared to all of them, while focusing on staying solemn.

Next, Nuha stepped forward from behind him, asking, "Do we really need this many mercenaries despite you and the others being around, aniki?"

Hogbar put strength into his eyes while wondering what he was talking about, "Yes, we do."

Without caring about Hogbar's stern look, Nuha further added, "The opponent is an Eight Lights, but it's just one guild with their stronghold in Labyrinth City Pelneet, right? Nothing won't happen as long as we don't start anything from our side, don't you think?"

That was Nuha's expectation. Hogbar's long eyebrows warped slightly. While tapping his temple several times, he asked, "Nuha, are you an idiot?"

"...Foolish Nuha!"

"Kakakaka, nothing less of Nuha. Aniki, it's a waste of time to explain anything to him." Soleck laughed while pressing his upper left and right hand against his head.

"Soleck-ani, even if it might be a waste, please explain it to me!" Nuha thrust his four arms out and pleaded with big eyes, possessing a naive atmosphere when compared to his elder brothers.

"...Nuha-san, haven't you realized from guildmaster's state?"

The three eyes of the somewhat dimwitted Nuha squirmed and rotated once. "Hmm? Haze, what do you mean...?"

After rotating his eyeballs, and listening to Haze, Nuha finally noticed that Nereis'Kary, who Hogbar had always led around like a toy, had vanished. The irises in his three eyes widened.

"Your favorite slave princess is gone!"

"That's how it is. This is my fault. I've already informed the prime minister about it. He gave me permission for this mission. This is the very reason why we've gathered these mercenaries."

"Got it. So we're going to infiltrate Pelneet?"

Hearing Nuha's question, Hogbar sighed and then answered, "...Now listen, you don't think that the princess will use Oseberia, Remains of the Moon, and the spearmaster to raid this base of Leften's peace faction?"

"The princess will use..." Nuha pondered about what he was told in his own way.

"Just stay silent and do as Soleck and I tell you."

"What's with you!? I know that without you telling me! Don't look at me so coldly, okay!?"

Hogbar and Soleck ignored Nuha's retarded plea. After exchanging a look with Soleck, Hogbar placed the palms of two hands on the table.

Then he spoke to everyone gathered around the table with a grim look, "...Sorry for showin' you somethin' unsightly. I think you can predict it already, but the objective of this summoning is the assassination of Earl Surgebald."

This declaration caused a ruckus among the mercenaries.

"Do you plan to start a civil war in Leften?"

"For us to begin a war..."

Hogbar stared at them with a sharp glint in his eyes. With his right hand he stopped Soleck who was about to complain about the mercenaries' rude behavior towards Hogbar, despite this being a gathering of strong, distinguished fighters.

And then Hogbar nodded as if to show off his dignity as guildmaster of a dark guild, "...I don't care if the assassination will result in a civil war. We've already received a big amount of cash from His Grace the Prime Minister, you know? Thus we plan to accomplish our task as befits an Eight Lights guild."

Haze nodded at Hogbar's words. Haze was a believer of Terrifying King Noctal. And although he possessed the Demonic Eyes he had been granted by Noctal, he was still an ordinary human. He also got contacted by demons who were led to him as they were interested by those Demonic Eyes, but as demons were similar to monsters in treating humans like trash, he had turned down all approaches by the demons.

"...I don't feel much of a force from you. But, I feel the force from the person over there. And, this is the same as 'A person with a beginning has definitely an end.' Seeing how we accepted the request, we'll participate." The blind woman announced while holding a sword cane above her head.

Following her, the giant lifted his crossbow above his head.

"Likewise. It's a job paying good money, so Shelled Battle Archer En Bomel will join as well." He announced their participation while proudly declaring his nickname.

The other skilled fighters around the table also decided on their participation one after the other.

