

Chapter 321 - The Three Brothers

"Oh, what a pleasant surprise to find you here, spearmaster. Just as predicted you marched into Leften while accompanying my slave, huh?"

"The pleasure is all mine."

"Hah, you intend to play the gentleman here, as a wannabe Eight Lights leader? Hey, woman-loving spearmaster, you've been manipulated by a stupid lass. This is Leften. You're treading on thin ice here, you know?" Hogbar takes one step forward while laughing.

And behind him stand rows of leaders and subordinates of 【Noctal's Oath】. Hogbar signals them with his four arms and head.

Not to mention the catman spear user with the thin fur standing next to Hogbar...but, there are many other strong guys with Hogbar. A robed guy who's making a wand float without using his arms, a guy with blades growing out beneath his elbows, a blond guy holding daggers and a magic cloth, a guy holding a wooden sword-like training katana while covering both eyes with a cloth, and a guy who's got chains connecting metallic loops hanging from his arms.

Going by their movements coupled with their expressions and mana, they seem to be top-notch fighters. In this dangerous span of time...the exchange of life has already started.

I recall how Hogbar had tormented Nereis'Kary, reigniting my rage at him. My blood begins to boil. While feeling how my mana-soaked adrenaline races through my synapses,

"...Sorry for being a woman lover. And although I was just about to spend some quality time with those women, you spoiled it all. Besides, Nereis'Kary ain't no slave."

"...Your eyes got all bloodshot? Is that something to get so angry over?"

Hogbar turns the eye on his forehead in Nereis'Kary's direction. And while pinning his other two eyes on me, "...Kakakaka, Nereis'Kary...did you spread your legs for the spearmaster over there as it'd befit a sex slave?"

As usual he's got a way with his words that irritates me to no end. Even though I actually like catmen... Even his odious expression with its lowered eyebrows only boosts my anger as simple cat lover. But, I won't go along with his provocation.

"...Everyone, you get it, right?"

"Yes."

Viine removes her silver mask, preparing to activate <War Dance of the Silver Butterflies>. The pretty silver butterfly on her cheek clearly stands out. Next she fixes her hold of her bow, a small bow with a beautiful riser and rim design, making it obvious that she's ready to launch ranged attacks at any moment.

However, she doesn't switch into action all of a sudden. Viine's look is grim. Looking at her, it seems as if she's asking, 『Just how much ability does their group possess?』

As Viine focuses on protecting the princess, Mysty who's standing behind Rollodeen, answers, "Sure!"

She's been holding steel stakes between the fingers of both of her hands. It kinda looks like dazzling shiny stakes are stuck between her fingers. At a first glance, it's a ninja style. But, right now Mysty is wearing a professor outfit. Her nail color is crimson, so it seems like she's also using blood nail art.

I thought that she might use <Throwing> on the steel stakes while swinging her arms like a ninja, but the stakes melted away. The gooey, melted, scarlet metal is spreading on the floor. In the blink of an eye Mysty has created a pond-like puddle of blood at her feet. Several lotus flower-shaped metals are floating in that blood pond. Even metallic leaves are drifting across the blood's surface in great numbers.

Mysty's blood lake extends all the way to Nereis'Kary's feet. But it doesn't look like it's got any particular effect on her.

Then the scarlet liquid metal remaining in Mysty's palms starts to squirm around, and covers the back of her hands and every finger, transforming into a fingerless glove. The gloves' blood metal also advances on her wrists and forearms. It forms into a protective layer as it surges past her slender elbows up to her upper arms. In the end, Mysty arms are fully hidden by a layer of liquid metal. It looks as if she's wearing a thin undershirt. No, like superfine fishnet stockings, I guess?

Either way, it's an arm protector made out of Mysty's exclusive metallic fiber. It also fits with her tube top-shaped leather armor.

Mysty moves her red and black fingers, seemingly trying to get a feel of her new blood metal gloves and arm protectors. Her fingers move around as if she's playing a piano. After performing that check, she thrusts a hand into a small bag affixed to her belt, and then pulls out her hand just as quickly.

What she's now holding in her hand is a black, metallic lump. When Mysty notices my look, she winks at me with one eye, and then melts the black cluster of metal.

As if to hide herself, Mysty creates a gigantic, simple golem out of that melted metal in an instant.

——Honestly, she's amazing. I'm a layman when it comes to metal refinement, but...could she be one of the best on this planet in regards to manipulating metal?

Well, my knowledge about metals is almost non-existent, so...there might be others above her...

Thereupon, the black panther Rollodeen purrs throatily. It looks like she's giving instructions to the new arrival, the golem. Does my partner consider it as her subordinate?

Rollodeen moves behind the golem. I suppose she intends to use it as a shield. She's patting the golem's legs with her tail. Moreover, Mysty's ability of an extending blood lake doesn't work on

Rollodeen's paws.

I thought it's something like a barrier lake combined with the fused blood metal, but does it raise mana instead? Or speed? Or a secondary +effect? It should have a positive effect on defense because of the metallic leaves.

As proof that my partner has walked across the blood lake, prints of her cute pads remain. Don't tell me...it's like concrete which is about to harden? Please spare me from sticky metal clinging to her paws...

My partner suddenly peeks out from behind the golem's calf. She's checking Hogbar and his men, obviously cautious as visible from her narrowed eyes.

The golem, which has turned into a huge shield, starts to lumber forward. The instant it leaves the crimson lake, the white floor develops cracks under its heavy weight. On top of that, its footsteps thunder across the salon. The golem bumps its head against the ceiling. It looks like this place is somewhat cramped for it, but...seeing how it can move around, it should be okay, I guess.

The golem also appears to be a simple fortress for the sake of protecting the princess.

I guess I'll use the opportunity and let out Alray and Hueremy, too. I take the charm-like cat dolls out of my pocket.

"Hmm?"

The enemies are cautious of my right hand. I bring my right hand in front of my eyes, and focus on my sixth finger 『Catiza』——

The Catiza finger falls to the ground, transforming into a golden caterpillar.

"Pyuipyui." She cries.

But I'm already touching my Dark Hell Bone Knight which summons the Burning Knights. Mana threads shoot out of the ring, gluing themselves to the white stones on the floor that seem to have been made in Holkerbaum.

In the next moment, the usual seething sound reverberates from the high-class floor, and just as red and black smoke rises from there, the Burning Knights materialize while clad in their respective colored smoke.

"Garururu."

"Nyagoo."

The big tigers apparently plan to protect me. While growling in Hogbar's direction, they open their muzzles as they twist their necks, threatening the enemies by showing their sharp fangs.

"Smoke, noise and big tigers? Are you some kind of illusionist!?" Hogbar cries out while stepping back.

The catman who's a spear user like me is also surprised, "Poisonous smoke? Spearmaster...I've heard already that you're no ordinary man, but..."

He retreats two steps while dumbfounded. But, even as he withdraws, he keeps a combat-ready, bent body posture. This guy is obviously a martial artist.

"Aniki, I've finished the preparations for a sword battle..." A largely built catman places a hand on the great sword's hilt peeking out from his shoulder.

He doesn't seem overly perturbed. While their other subordinates look dumbstruck, "Does the spearmaster also possess a summoner combat occupation?"

"...He's teeming with force."

Force? The woman, who appears to be blind, might be Hogbar's subordinate. Though I believe she belongs to a group hired by him...

All of them emit a shady atmosphere. They've retreated in order to take some distance from my surroundings. Probably because of the smoke and noise drifting out through the room's entrance...it's created a weird space and silence between us.

"Zemetas, at your service!"

"Adomos, reporting in!"

The Bruning Knights announce as they appear, as if to break the strange equilibrium. The seething has ceased already, too. But, smoke is still coiling around their rough bodies.

The lord of the Surgebald Earldom as well our enemies keep staring. Even the eyes of the many nobles and company officials, who have been attending the banquet, are focused on the Burning Knights. Well, I suppose it's understandable.

"...Catiza, reporting in!"

While the eyes of everyone are drawn at this weird spectacle, Ca-chan also appears as a silver-haired woman with choco-milky skin.

"You don't need to imitate them. Burning Knights, Catiza, those guys are our enemies." I point the red spear of Baldok, which I've summoned into my right hand, straight at Hogbar and his ilk.

"Okaaay♪ There sure are many of them. But if they're your enemies, Emissary-sama, I'll slaughter them."

"Catiza-dono, I'll move first."

"No, I'll make the first move! I shall let them have a taste of my famous sword's, Crimson Bone Impurity's, techniques!"

"No deal! Stealing a march is not allowed!"

Those three, highly motivated people should be able to handle it skilfully.

"...Aniki, their numbers have grown all of a sudden, but I'll deal with that spearmaster."

"Kakaka, you might be the right person for this, yep..."

Hogbar's forehead eye looks at his spear-using brother. It looks like he's trusting him quite a bit.

"I think I'll team up with Soleck-ani? Sword battle...if it's this great sword...it's a bit narrow here, but..."

They're catman brothers, huh? As expected, Noctal's Oath must have experienced various things in the underworld, seeing how they don't get too surprised after watching the Burning Knights.

Hogbar's white eyebrows hint at him being the superior, eldest brother... But I'm actually curious about the silver-haired guy standing behind Hogbar, as if being hidden. He's a ninja-like guy...

The instant I ponder about this, the glass window close to Hankay shatters.

——New enemies?

Hankay forms a cross-block with his axes in front of his chest. It's a stance reminding me of one of the extremely powerful defense stances in modern boxing.

The one gallantly appearing after smashing the window is a woman with a spear at hand. A beauty with a suiting flower ornament, eh?

"——Huh? You still haven't started fighting?" The beauty asks across the table with its array of dishes.

"I suppose this will earn me a bonus then." The woman whirls her spear around with her slender hand.

Immediately following, a light brown snake illusion springs forth from the spearhead. The snake extends straight ahead, clashing against a merchant. The snake, which I believed to be an illusion, winds itself around the merchant like a living python, widens its muzzle, and swallows the merchant head-first —— not. The snake vanishes, leaving the merchant behind, alive.

However, in the next moment, "Gaaaaa," the merchant starts to scream with a pained expression. His eyeballs pop out, and dark blood spews out from his body.

In the next moment, countless bite marks, resembling the two holes left behind by snake bites, surface all over his body. And then his screaming stops all of a sudden. The merchant collapses after crouching down. A far too tragic sight.

The nobles and merchants all start at once running outside and inside to get away.

"You mustn't run away!"

"She's right, gather in one place...!"

The words of the princess and earl don't get through to the panicked people. At that point, Hogbar's subordinates,

"It's our turn."

"I'll get that guy."

With those comments, they start to ruthlessly attack the ordinary people who are in the process of running away. Several daggers thrown by the silver-haired man stab into a merchant. The guy manipulating the floating wand unleashes a wind spell from the wand's tip, causing several people to be blown southwards across the room.

The robed, mysterious guy steps forward to deal with a noble who scrambles to get away first. He whips the blade, which has a circular shape and is connected by a chain, down at the noble's head. The round blade, which rotates like an electric saw, bisects the noble's head as if squashing the skull and all. The noble's head is split in two halves. It's a terribly splattery sight. For an instant, it triggers a fear similar to that about Friday the 13th.

The nobles and merchants run around, screaming. They don't wear ice hockey face guards, but...a person wearing a cloth eye pad with a cross-shaped scar on the forehead chases the escapees. With unnaturally swaying movements, that person appears in front of a running female merchant, blocking her way.

The merchant's body suddenly freezes once she looks at the eyes of the man in front of her. The man with the cross scar...has had a black pattern appear on the cloth that seems to be stuffed into his eye sockets. Those patterns look like eyeballs. He also releases a black aura from behind.

That man addresses the merchant, "...Hey, do you know? Noctal-sama isn't just the god of the dark night's thieves. He's a great god possessing the key to open the door to the realm of the dead. I'm following Hogbar-san, but my loyalty lies with Nctal-sama, you know?"

Meanwhile the black patterns oozing out of his eye sockets wash over the merchant. Then the patterns gather at her chest, as if to devour her heart. The instant her chest swells up like a steamed bun, hot water and black, gravy blood bursts out from within her.

"How about using a simpler method?"

The one complaining to the cross-scar guy is the man with the swords growing out of his arms. The black dragon design on his swords are conspicuous.

The sword arm guy rotates sideways like a spintop, chasing after an escaping tigerman. In the next moment he slashes at the tigerman. His arms have changed into swords, but...I wonder, does he eat with his feet then?

Even while entertaining such a question...he slays one merchant after the other, without giving them

even the chance to scream out.

"The force...if there's no force, ash, no wheat will be sowed. I won't partake in any boring slaughter." Only the blind woman does nothing, merely leaning her back against the corridor's wall while muttering this.

"...It looks like the job has finally gotten started. I'll also do my best. Is it okay for me to kill the earl and princess over there?" The female spear user asks.

She's a beauty with a slender fox face, but it looks like she's a fairly skilled spear fighter.

"No. Nereis'Kary is my slave. You're forbidden to kill her. Kill the others. The earl is fair game, too. Our task is the assassination of the earl after all."

Hogbar...he's still obsessed with Nereis'Kary, huh? Hearing his words, the beastman knights protecting the earl ready their shields.

To be honest, I don't really care whether the others besides the princess love or die, but...although I've finally rescued the princess after a long time...the earl's death here would make me having brought the princess to this place meaningless.

Princess Nereis'Kary likely wants to rebuild Leften... It might be none of my business, but...I'll protect the earl and the princess. However, Hogbar's order to not kill the princess have given me a bit of relief.

"Oh, I see...okay, then I'll take care of the small fry, I guess." The spear woman rotates sideways with a motion revealing the underside of her poncho.

Her wielding the spear...is she a Wind Spear Style user? Or maybe a Ruler's Spear Style user?

"I'll take you on——" Hankay declares while readying his axes close to the spear woman.

The instant Hankay is about to make a move, an arrow flies at him from outside the window. Hankay repels it, using one of his axes as a shield. But, another batch of arrows is already heading for him. The arrows are special items which are charged with mana.

"There's a sniper outside——" Hankay warns us.

While striking down another arrow, he takes refuge behind the wall between the windows. Then, while pressing a shoulder against the wall, he peeks outside. The instant his face is visible from outside, an arrow flies straight for his onion head.

Hankay pulls his head back in a hurry, but the hair on his head flutters as the arrow grazes him.

The arrow dodged by Hankay continues its flight into the room, stabbing into the table with the banquet's feast.

"Fuck this! These pesky arrows!" Hankay spits out in anger while hiding behind the wall.

His target has shifted from the spear woman to the sniper.

"I'll take care of the shooter——" Hankay jumps outside the broken window, making sure to weave his way through the gap between the incoming arrows.

I guess I'll join as well. First, I'll have the Burning Knights fight against the spear woman.

"Burning Knights, crush the female spear wielder over there."

"Leave it to me!"

"I'll get the first strike in——" Zemetas steals a march on Adomos.

Without any agitation, the female spear user declares, "What? First-rate warriors engulfed by smoke? Don't tell me, spirit world knights? No way, right?"

While lowering her waist, she unleashes the spearhead, which is clad in light brown mana, at Zemetas, who's charging at her shield and shoulder first, with a thrusting technique similar to <Thrust>. Zemetas easily blocks her stab with his tough, square bone shield. And, as if to prove that he's improved his skill as a shield user, he swings down the bone sword in his hand at the perfect moment just as he lets the spear veer off to the side with his shield.

Zemetas has practiced those moves during the mock battles with me. The female spear wielder moves back, trying to dodge the sword, but she's too late. The bone sword's blade - I forgot its name just like that of the shield - cuts through her chest. The contents of her breast armor are severed alongside her poncho. Blood surges out of her small breast.

"Kyaaa."

"Zemetas, magnificent! Next is my turn!"

"Adomos! Test the technique of Spirit World Knight Holrain."

"Understood."

Formalin?

Even as I indulge in weird imaginations, the spear woman backs away to escape as the cut was apparently too shallow.

"——W-What's with you! Even though you look so heavy, your sword is quite fast, isn't it? What bullshit!"

"...Mortal woman, we're Burning Knights who have been repeatedly hit by His Excellency's magic spear, you know?"

"It's as he says. It's troublesome for you to underestimate us."

The spear woman can't hide her unrest towards the Burning Knights' forceful movements and

words. Her expression, which teemed with composure, has now completely changed. As panic colors her face, her back bumps against a glass window that hasn't been shattered.

I'll leave her to the Bruning Knights.

"Alright, I'll join Zeme-chan and Ado-chan~♪"

"——Wait."

I grab Catiza's long hair, pulling her back in front of me.

"Auu."

"You stay here. Except for the three brothers, we also got the blind swordswoman, the silver-haired guy, the wand-floating guy, the guy with the sword arms, and the guy with the cross scar on his forehead on our side. If you don't want to deal with any of those, go and assist Hankay who's gone outside."

"Okaaa♪ I'll rip the enemies in front apart~!"

"Please do, Catiza."

"...Kyupiiing♪ Did you hear, Viine-san, Mysty-san? Emissary-sama has asked for my help♪ Ufufufuun!"

Catiza seems to be excited to get a turn to fight for the first time in a while. Her silver hair repeatedly changes its shape slightly going back and forth between 『!』 and 『!!』. And then it finally shifts into an indecent, mushroom shape I don't really want to comment on. She's looking at my friends with a triumphal expression.

Reflexively I strike Catiza's head with the flat part of Baldok's ax blade.

"Focus, silly girl!"

"Euuh—— Understood."

Seemingly having recovered her calm after receiving my retort, Catiza joins the formation to protect the princess by moving in front of Viine.

"That silver-haired woman has transformed her hair into the shape of a dick. You saw?"

"Aniki, that girl's scary."

"Nuha, be careful. Still, seeing how her head has instantly returned to normal even after caving in...that woman could be a monster? Or some unknown demon..."

While Hogbar comments like that...he makes protuberances appear from the white, mantis-like compound eyes on his shoulder pad. He's grasping a pointed staff in the hand of his upper left arm. The lower left arm is holding onto a clock-like magic tool. The protuberances on his shoulder and

the items in his hands are filled with mana.

The clock-like magic tool feels especially dangerous, I think. It hides a dense amount of mana.

Just like I'm analyzing him, the three brothers analyze me while looking mystified.

"A spearmaster who can even employ monsters..."

"...That means he possesses abilities of a tamer or a demonic beast user. He's also a spear user...so he resembles Soleck in some respects.

"Aniki, that's why he's my target."

...Now then, time to cut down their numbers a bit. I'm also curious about the beastman spear user, but first I'll take care of Hogbar.

——I glare at Hogbar. As a restraint I throw a dagger at him with <Throwing>.

"——A dagger?" Hogbar frowns after repelling my dagger.

I adjust the angle of my left wrist while delaying the timing, and make one of my <Chains> head for Nereis'Kary by letting it crawl across the ground, past Viine, Mysty, and Catiza. In a flash, the <Chain> piles up in front of her, turning into a big shield.

——Alright!

Viine, Mysty, and Catiza are protecting her as well, but it's just for caution's sake.

Next I invoked countless 《Ice Spheres》 without chanting. I casually add ten 《Frozen Arrows》 for good measure on top of that, and at the same time, I have my other <Chain> head for Hogbar.

In response, Hogbar's comrade steps forward while saying, "Leave it to me," as he holds up both arms. Chained, circular blades fly out of his robe's sleeves. The blades fly forward at a terrifying speed, adopting a trajectory as if drawing a full moon in the air. With force, they carve out the ceiling and floor.

A skill that also works as defense?

The circular blades repel my spells. But, the pointed tip of <Chain> easily breaks through the blade, piercing through the barrier of circular blades. The chain's tip, which heads straight ahead with a speed that doesn't allow you to even predict its course, penetrates the robed guy's forehead.

At the same time as a low, dull thud becomes audible, his head and body pop as if having exploded. PGM Hécate II - as if his body got hit by that Anti-material rifle, the robed guy's body dispersed alongside his head. One down.

"Hogbar, you're next!" I dash towards him in a forward-bent posture after shouting.

As if aiming the chain, which had penetrated the robed guy's head, at its next prey, I have it head

towards Hogbar first. But, it gets entangled by something like a cloth that was shot out by the silver-haired guy.

It looks like that guy isn't just a dagger user.

The figure of the silver-haired guy pulling the weird cloth coiled around my chain enters my field of view. I erase the chain that got stopped. But, I don't do the same for my Magic Combat Step.

The instant Hogbar enters my spear's range, I powerfully step down on the floor with my left foot, twist my waist, and unleash Baldok's <Thrust> at Hogbar's chest.

But, a hard, metallic sound reverberates.

"I remember saying that I'd take you on." Hogbar's little brother says.

Baldok's <Thrust> hasn't hit Hogbar, but instead has collided with his brother's magic spear. Hogbar falls back, and in the same breath, his little brother steps out in front.

And, as if capitalizing on the physical strength of his upper right and lower right arm, he lifts his red magic spear, which is clad in a spiral of mana, while turning it, attempting to hook onto Baldok's spearhead.

Baldok's spearhead and his red spear's head grind against each other, scattering dragon scale-like sparks.

The catman and I are showered by those sparks. But, neither of us minds the burns on our skin.

"Just one arm, and yet so much power——" The catman yells.

The blade of the short spear in his upper left and lower left hands approaches. Fast——

In a hurry, I pull back Baldok with my right arm. And, continuing with a rotation, using my toes as axis, I settle into a sideways posture, allowing me to evade the <Thrust>-based techniques of the short spear. At the moment of my evasion, sparks scatter from Hal'Konk's surface.

As a counterattack, I deliver a water kick from my stooped position, trying to mow down the catman's legs. However, the catman swings his red magic spear's lower part upwards, blocking my boots with the spear's butt end. Then he inclines the spearhead while maintaining his half-rising posture.

"<Fang Stab>——"

A skill name as if breathing a whisper. However, contrary to his quiet, soft voice, he pushes out his spear powerfully after vigorously moving his body.

His low aim targets my legs or abdomen. It's a <Thrust>-based skill. I dodge that one, but immediately another <Fang Stab> closes in. It's slightly different from a <Thrust>. Twisting one's waist while making use of the trunk, and arm movements —— I guess that works as well. The setup, where he transmits the power by screwing his body resembles a <Thrust>, but his hold on the

spear is shifted faintly to the side.

Another <Fang Stab> approaches. At once I thrust out Baldok diagonally below, succeeding in blocking the low attack with the ax blade's top part. However, while receiving the wind power-like pressure, I fall back. My back bumps against the table behind me. I end up pulling on the tablecloth, resulting in the food tumbling down.

"...Avoiding <Fang Stab> on first sight, and completely blocking it on the next attack..." The catman mutters while holding onto his two spears.

I see respect towards my spear techniques dwell in his three eyes.

"Unlike with other weapons, I'm confident in my spearmanship."

"...I can fully understand. Spearmaster, let me hear your official name. My name is Soleck Shafeed, a spearmaster."

"Shuuya Kagari, likewise a spearmaster."

We nod at each other with a smile. At the same time I remember how I've drunk wine with a barmaid and him at the bar of a relay town when I escaped from Yui.

Soleck changes his hold of his two right arms, shouldering the magic spear. And then, without breaking his stance of bending his body which clearly shows the strength in his waist...he turns the short spear's head in his left hand at me.

I can sense how he's also talking with me through his spear.

"...Now then, personally I wanted to enjoy myself a bit longer, but this is a fight to the death. Nuha, anytime now." Soleck mutters regretfully, calling out to his brother.

After releasing mana from his whole body like an aura, he slowly starts walking in the style of a spear martial artist.

"Finally, huh!?"

Holding his great sword, Nuha cries out in delight as if having waited for this moment all the time while approaching Soleck.

"Master, be careful."

"Emissary-sama, do your best!"

Viine and Catiza yell worriedly.

"Garururu."

"Nyagooo."

Alray and Hueremy also cry while walking sideways with the claws at their paws extended. They've reacted to Soleck and Nuha's movements.