

Chapter 322 - Sage Art Apprentice

Soleck and Nuha keep sidling up to me while staying on guard.

"..."

And Hogbar also walks over, slowly while staying silent.

In the meantime, the silver-haired guy with the daggers and magic cloth says, "Hey, blind woman, your partner seems to shoot arrows from outside, following the plan. You're not going to do any work?"

"...I feel the force. If it's that spear user, I shall fight him."

"I don't have a clue what you mean with that force stuff, but do you think you're in any position to be picky about your opponents?"

"I do."

The man listens to the woman's mysteriously confident words, and sighs as his pupils shrink down.

"...I see. Then feel free to head over to our employers who're currently confronting your beloved spear user."

"..." The blind woman stays silent.

Meanwhile the man takes his eyes off her, and shakes his hand. It's a slender hand, but a tattoo crest, depicting something similar to a cloth coiling itself around a shield and Ancient Latin words, is visible on his wrist.

"Okay, I'll head out first then. Gotta earn your pay after all, right?"

And then, instead of his daggers, he causes his cloth to move after he had it create a mark similar to the tattoo by coiling itself around his other arm before. The cloth is clad in mana, the exactly same one that entangled my <Chain> earlier. Its fabric looks like that of a thick towel.

Passing next to Soleck and Nuha's feet like a snake, it approaches me. However, without being able to reach me, it's shot down by Viine's beam arrow.

"I won't allow a 3 vs. 1. I'll take you on."

Viine appearance as she holds her bow looks really nice. She follows up by shooting one beam arrow after other.

"——Tsk! An elf with glossy silver hair? No, she's got a bluish-white skin. Possibly one of the rare dark elves?"

"...Correct. Unusual, right?" Viine replies proudly with a freezing stare as if she's trying to turn

everything she see into ice after lowering her bow.

Scary...but, you can call it very typical for a dark elf who is loved by the Goddess of Magic Poison Misea.

At this point she readies the jade bow she received from the goddess once more. She hasn't transformed it into a longbow. The string connecting the top and base nocks is a green light ray. As if performing Japanese archery, Viine draws back the ray. The green magic characters covering her skin from her fingers to her wrist rotate in spirals around her wrist. And then a green light arrow naturally manifests as if to match with the fingers pulling the ray.

Viine releases that arrow at the silver-haired guy as well.

"——A rare species? Is that the reason why you possess that bow? For it to stop Lyaguno's Magic Cloth——"

Like a ninja, the man rolls forward in a smooth motion. Propping himself up against the white floor with one hand, he pulls off a skillful one-handed handstand, as if doing some kind of circus performance, while dodging Viine's beam arrows. And then he has the magic cloth, which had been stopped in the air, return to him. His gestures as he handles the magic cloth clearly remind me of a female calisthenics athlete using a ribbon, albeit he's a guy.

Once again he manipulates the cloth, repelling an approaching beam arrow by spiraling it.

"Emissary-sama, is it okay for me to join the battle?" Catiza asks, apparently feeling the urge to fight after watching Viine shoot her arrows.

"Go for it."

"Okaaay." Catiza answers with a high-pitched, joyful voice.

Once she bounces her head around a bit, her silver hair transforms into the shape of a huge palm. Moreover, she extends her black nails that seem to have nail arts applied to them at the silver-haired man from both hands, and starts slowly moving herself as well.

Does that palm imitate the form of my mana hand? I won't point it out, but I feel like Catiza's usually slow movements become even more sluggish due to that huge hair hand. Furthermore, she apparently plans to fight without summoning her bonefish.

"Nnn, nya."

Seeing how everyone has started to fight, Rollodeen has become restless. Until now she's been hiding behind the golem's feet, but now she's jumped out of her cover, and has started to run. She extends several of the tentacles growing out at her neck towards Soleck and Nuha.

While the tentacles are airborne, the guy with the black dragon-like swords growing out of his arms states, "I'll chop up the giant protecting the princess——", as typical of a vanguard, and approaches Mysty.

Moreover, the magician guy with the floating wand announces, "Leave your back to me. I'll assist you," and follows the sword arm guy.

Once their combination of vanguard and rearguard steps into the area where the metal is expanding like a lake, the lotus-like, round, metallic leaves react. Crimson and white magic crests appear on the leaves' surfaces. Rainbow-colored metals come into existence through those crests, and quickly extend upwards.

The sword arm guy responds to that. Just like a vanguard would do, he parries the metals approaching him from below with his black swords. But, there's too many of them, making it impossible for him to block all metals.

"Gyaaaaah!" "Uaaaaah!"

The robed man, who's been behind him, has tried to block the metals with wind magic and his wand, but he's too late. At the same time as the sword arm guy, he gets penetrated by metals at his legs, nether region, and torso. Both of them are skewered so tragically that it's hard to look at. Their blood scatters into the vicinity like a shower, and while screaming in agony, they're being lifted up to the ceiling by the metallic blades.

The corpses of the sword arm guy and robed guy dangle at the top of a flock of rainbow-colored blades that look like a grove of trees. Meanwhile a large amount of blood keeps dripping down from the ceiling. Mysty basks in that blood with her arms widely spread to the sides and a smile on her lips.

She's emitting the aura of an empress as Lucival <Head Servant Leader>. In the next moment, Mysty absorbs all of the blood.

"All of you are amazing..."

"Princess, their power is..."

Nereis'Kary, the earl, and the knights, who have been watching from behind Mysty's golem, all have become dumbfounded with their expressions frozen in place. The princess appears to be surprised to witness a side of Mysty she doesn't show usually as she's always researching stuff.

Even the blind swordswoman and the guy with the cross scar on the enemy side can't hide their surprise.

"The prospects are bleak. I'm considering a retreat." The blind woman states after spectating without participating in any of the battles.

Are the cross scar guy and her truly blind?

I'm pondering that question, but I assume that they likely are sensing the death of their comrades through their erasure of their magic sources. They don't try to approach the golem and the metal lake summoned by Mysty to protect the princess, earl and a part of the knights.

"...It's a success. <Rainbow-colored Steel Lotus Petals> is a skill I acquired by coincidence when I

mixed Rainbow-colored Soft Steel, the mysterious white meat from the 20th floor's guardian, and my blood together, and repeatedly ran magic pressure experiments while using up my stock on the high-class materials of Imperial Silver Crystals and Totoro's mask replicas..."

While Mysty, who returns to her usual professor vibe feeling like it's some kind of test run, keeps rattling down an explanation about her past experiments, Alray and Hueremy follow up on her while growling.

The cat corps, err, tiger corps charges at the catmen. Cats vs. cats?

"——Tsk! Looks like it won't be that easy to launch a joint attack." Hogbar clicks his tongue.

His whiskers bend disgustingly as he talks while staring at the tigers. The tigers move as normal for felines. But I guess it's not like he's searching for common traits.

"Aniki, Nuha, I'll handle them." Soleck announces

"Roger."

Nuha completely goes along with Soleck's plan. One of his four arms reaches for the satchel at his waist. He's a great sword user who looks gentle at a first glance, unlike his brothers. He takes out a steamed-bun-like pill from that satchel that's connected to his silver belt, and tosses it into his mouth.

Nuha's cheek rounds up as he chews. Does that pill taste well?

While he's eating, Soleck gets close to Nuha's back and swings his two magic spears like a fierce god, fending off the tentacle swords unleashed by Rollodeen. And then, Nuha lightly taps his brother's back, and as if performing a baton pass, leaps out in front, and brandishes the great sword he's holding with all four hands to the front.

Nuha's swinging of his big sword is fast like the wind. As his sword, which is clad in a deep blue, burning mana flame, passes through the air, it leaves pretty trails behind. The sword smoothly glides through the air, moving in all directions and also drawing characters like ∞ in the air. Its speed is terrifying.

The tentacles shot out by Rollodeen clash against Nuha's sword with a force breaking the bone swords. They get fully repelled with nasty metallic screechings.

While Nuha blocks Rollodeen's ranged attacks with magnificent swordplay, Soleck, who has been resting up in their shift system, turns his eyes towards Alray who's approaching with the fangs in her muzzle showing.

He twists his body lightly, and while saying, "I just felt like having some tiger skewer," he thrusts out the red magic spear in his right arms at Alray's head.

Alray sees the approaching spearhead, but doesn't even try to dodge it. No, far from evading it, she bites at Soleck's spear with a force that makes her regarding it as prey obvious. Soleck's thrust gets blocked as it's caught between Alray's tough, huge fangs.

『That was praiseworthy of Alray. Mana fangs sure are sturdy』

I don't think that Alray can hear Helme's comment, but Alray roars energetically like a wild beast, twisting her head and pulling the magic spear. Soleck loses his balance.

"W-What——"

He's agitated. Hueremy uses that moment to swoop down on him.

However, Hogbar, who's stepped forward while twisting his body, screams, "Don't look down on us, damn tigers!", and blows Hueremy away by delivering an upper kick against her flank.

Hueremy keeps messily rotating in the air with her body dented in. However, as befitting of a cat, she skilfully lands by placing her hind paws on a wall. Still, the place where she got kicked by Hogbar has deeply caved in. Hueremy seems to feel pain from that spot. She brings her head close to her ailing side, and licks the affected spot with her tongue while moving her head up and down.

She looks so miserable... This guy just pissed me off. Hogbar, you've just done something inexcusable.

"...Aniki, you saved me." Soleck thanks while fixing his posture.

And then he glares at Alray who keeps clamping down on the spearhead without any intention to let it go.

"I'll handle the tiger over here." Soleck announces powerfully, and moves his short spear by drawing his left arms close. Then he thrusts out the spear at Alray's collar.

I won't allow you to go ahead with that.

"——Alray, fall back."

"Nyaaa."

After Alray's ears twitch in response to my yell, she lets go of the spearhead, and withdraws to me

"There you are, bizarre spearmasteeer!" He shouts immediately after I enter Soleck's spear range in a forward-bent posture.

He whirls around the now released long, magic spear with his right arms, and then thrusts it out, aiming for my chest.

I keep up the distance on purpose. I advance while stretching out Baldok's butt end diagonally below with my right hand. That butt end blocks the red magic spear in front. The instant Baldok's Magic Dragon Gem and Soleck's spear clash, a flash occurs.

But, this light doesn't stem from the collision. It's because I had poured my mana directly into Baldok. And at the same time as the frozen, broadsword point clad in a white mist is created at the

gem just as I've imagined it, Soleck's spearhead slides off the upper part of the created ice blade. Since spearhead and ice blade graze against each other, sparks similar to spray of snow are scattered in all directions, covering both of us in snow petals.

As I slip into Soleck's bosom while feeling the coldness, I unleash a lower left kick with the intent to break Soleck's right leg. But, he shifts his body sideways, and retreats. He avoided my kick with a good timing while pulling back his leg.

Soleck does a rotation to the left while stooping down with his right leg as a cardinal point. As he shifts the grip of his short spear to his lower left hand, he unleashes a lower rotational sweep with the spearhead grazing across the floor.

I don't block the spear's blade with Baldok, but instead avoid it by retreating.

However, Soleck has predicted my move. While charging forward, he punches out his unarmed upper left fist while twisting it inwards. He's targeting my face with a corkscrew punch, huh?

I shift my head light with a sway, and while thinking that it sure is a punch characteristic of someone with four arms, I dodge the bushy fist approaching my head. In response, I shorten my hold of Baldok and swing the red ax blade up from below trying to bisect Soleck from the nether region all the way up to the chest.

However, at that point, Hogbar's sword interrupts from the side.

In a hurry, I turn the ax blade to the left, using it as a shield to fend off Hogbar's sword. Hogbar clicks his tongue after seeing how his thrust got blocked as he had apparently intended to use an opening in my defense.

Even while being irritated, Hogbar exchanges a look with Soleck which makes me feel their brotherly bonds. Moreover, Hogbar pours mana into the clock magic tool in his hand.

"Soleck, we can't cooperate with Nuha, but it can't be helped now. Let's do it."

"You're right. Though, a sacrifice will be necessary later..."

"I don't care. Come, unravel <Time Baku>." Hogbar moves so as to match up with Soleck.

After holding up the clock while chanting some spell, he tosses the clock into the air. As it flies, the clock releases mana with an ejection sound, and then it stops midair, floating.

『Your Excellency, what could that magic tool be?』

Even as Helme asks, the clock splits apart into smaller parts, disassembling. But, the separate parts gather in one place again. And as they join up like a puzzle, they eventually turn into a square, durable box.

From a clock to a box? It has an antic design with thunderswirl patterns on its exterior. Once the box's lid opens with a crispy sound, a light brown spider, which seems to be a cluster of dense mana, jumps out into the air accompanied by something like a small doll.

At the feet of the doll, magic lines similar to spirit tails remain connected to the box's inside. Are those chains rather than magic lines? A cluster of multiple chains, and small magic crests that have been carved into them.

『...Is this Hogbar's trump card?』

『Maybe. Is it my turn now?』

『Helme, you're my secret weapon, so not yet』

While having the spider float above its head, the doll thing suddenly expands its thin, half-transparent figure. Its head has a long nose, similar to a trunk, and its whole body is hairy like that of a monkey. It's wearing a happi coat with a design that combines Asia-styled thunderswirls and crupper ornaments. And beneath the feet connecting the monster with an elephant head and monkey body to the box exists a silver turtle. The thick legs extending out of the turtle shell also have many chains coiled around them, just like the monster.

The monster and turtle are connected to the box, seemingly tied down by chains. A long and thin snake twines itself around the turtle's shell. Don't tell me...with that figure...Genbu? One of the four gods protecting the celestial north.

The monster illusion riding that Genbu...is no monster, but a god?

Liquid drops tinged with the acidity of heavy metals pour down from the spider. The being which could be a monster or god has its whole body drenched in that rain. A whirlwind-like mana wind breaks out of its body as its wet, semi-transparent surface gets dyed in a color I've never seen before, allowing it to float in the air together with Genbu.

"...Yaahoooy. Long time no see, world. Ehhnn? A black panther, big tigers, and there guys around me look fun, too..." A very bassy voice with a heavy presence resounds from the semi-transparent being.

The being lets its eyes wander while saying, "But well...just as the contract I tied back then dictates, I'll assist you."

It says sadly, while looking as if it's going back into the box as the illusion spreads thinly... Instead it not only wraps itself around its owner Hogbar, but also Soleck. Once the illusion vanishes, the box falls to the ground with a clack.

The clock was a form it had borrowed temporarily?

The catman brothers are clad in a thin film of blue mana. It looks like they've obtained a magic divine protection. Especially the white compound eyes on Hogbar's shoulder are powerfully glowing with the muscles around them bulging as if they increased momentarily.

They charge with their increased physical abilities. Soleck is as fast as lightning. With his body still bent, he mutters the skill name <Fang Stab - Black Wolf>.

In the next instant, the short spear he's grabbing with his upper right and left hands is coiled up by an illusionary wolf. While Soleck adopts a motion slightly resembling <Thrust>, he lunges out his spear, trying to hit my solar plexus.

The illusionary wolf widens its mouth in reality as if roaring. A technique similar to Tofinger's Crying Ax?

Since it looks useful as a reference, I stare at the spear technique. At that point, the sword thrust of Hogbar, whose speed has increased, approaches my neck, but I clad my whole body in Magic Combat Style, moreover activate <Blood Acceleration>, and oppose his attack with speed.

However, Hogbar is surprisingly quick after having gained the blessing. I can't fully dodge his sword, resulting in blood spurting out as the blade grazes my neck's side.

——Ouch.

At that moment, the illusionary wolf bends as if to chase after my evasion to the side, and bites away at my flank while showing off its sharp fangs.

This bite gets repelled by Hal'Konk. I've felt how the wolf snapped its muzzle at my flank, but just what you'd expect from a Mythological item.

"——Gotcha!"

Without giving me any time to rejoice, Hogbar thrusts out the monk staff with a bladed stake with his other hand. However, despite the increase in his body's speed, the trajectory and distance of that bladed stake is simple to deal with.

I manage to avoid the stake's point by moving my head backwards, but that stake suddenly grows another bladed stake out of the pointed end's side, abruptly expanding its reach.

During the instant of me pondering whether I should block it by summoning Ganghis into my left hand, 『Your Excellency——』

Helme releases water from my left eye. A part of the liquid takes a shape similar to a hammer, and takes care of the now cross-shaped stake of Hogbar for me. Seemingly sucking up some kind of power, the back part of the hammer shines amusingly.

『Thanks, Helme』

『Fufu, it's "the usual"』 Helme's voice reverberates in my head since her main body apparently still remains in me.

Still it's a weird sight. Kinda like Helme's body being visible through a liquid...or the small core of a slime clad in mana, or a mysterious alien,

I feel like a crowd of electron-shell-like, small, spiraling stars and mysterious water are a part of this. Is it possibly a blessing of Water Goddess Akreshys? My thanks to Helme and the goddess.

※Piiing※ <Sage Art - Understanding of the Yellow Water Ribbon> ※Permanent skill acquired※
※Piiing※ <Spirit Ball Conception> ※Skill acquired※
※Piiing※ Acquired Combat Occupation of Sage Art Apprentice through the acquisition of a Sage Skill ※

Once I thank the goddess and Helme, I'm flooded by skill messages for the first time in a long while. <Spirit Ball Conception> is a special sage skill thanks to my unification with Helme. It's a fraction of the sage art-bases skills related to the water goddess. I guess it's the basics of sage art. It looks like sage arts are truly deep...

"...The hell!? It sucked up the mana of Time Baku!?"

"He kept something like that!?"

Helme, who had protruded out of my eyes as liquid, returns back inside. Soleck and Hogbar are surprised after having witnessed the somewhat divine spectacle. However, they still release mana from their whole bodies even while being surprised.

Suddenly the divine illusion combining elephant and monkey reappears behind the brothers. And, after overlapping with their bodies once more, the illusion vanishes again. In the next instant, their bodies are covered by neon-shining magic armor, as the pointed ends of their favorite weapons head for me.

——A speed exceeding <Blood Acceleration> and Magic Combat Style, huh? In that case, I'll transcend even higher spheres by accelerating my brain, submerging it in blood and evil. I activate one of my trump cards, <Demonic Cerebral Spine Revolution>.

It's my highest acceleration when combined with <Blood Acceleration> and Magic Combat Style. Blood gushes out all across my body. I adopt a forward-bent posture, and close in on them with a sudden acceleration.

"F-Fast——"

Soleck's three eyes are dyed in shock. And while recalling the technique he had used earlier, I copy him. With my body bent as I focus on the muscles all over my body, I unleash a lower, special thrust. I target the lower part of Soleck's leg with Baldok's red spear while leaving a trace of violet and red in the air. This might as well be named Leg Crusher.

※Piiing※ Fang Stab ※Skill acquired※

"——Guuaaah. J-Just what kind of perception do you have...? My technique..."

As Baldok's spear pierces through Soleck's leg, I acquire the skill. Without any break, I shift my body's alignment towards Hogbar, and summon Ganghis into my left hand. And then I focus on my shoulder dragon. Several ice pebbles are shot out of Hal'Konk's blue eye as surprise attack.

Hogbar can't react in time, "Gyaaaaah, my eyes...my eyeeeeees!"

All of his three eyes are stabbed by ice pebbles.

While his voice resounds in my ears, I step my right foot towards Soleck who's trying to recover his posture by stabbing one of his spears into the ground, and then release a <Darkness Drill> with Ganghis.

The spiraling, vibrating moon blades of Ganghis as they're clad in darkness break through Soleck's red magic spear, break through his shining magic armor, stab into his lower chest and penetrate all the way, coming out behind him.

"Gugeeh!"

Alright. After feeling a solid feedback from the white staff part of Ganghis, I erase it from my left hand that's covered by his blood. While performing a cartwheel with my now unarmed left hand as a cardinal point, I circle into the back of Hogbar who's covering his eyes. It's going to be revenge for earlier.

"Feel Hueremy's pain——"

Focusing on my torso, I switch to a kicking stance. With <Demonic Cerebral Spine Revolution> activated, I concentrate mana in my leg, and deliver an upper kick against Hogbar's neck.

"Ahyaaa!"

Arzen's Boot sinks into Hogbar's neck through the collar of the cloak he's wearing. The instant I hear a grating noise, Hogbar's slender neck warps and tears apart. Hogbar's beast head is sent flying.

But, I'm not done yet. There might be something like an attack by the flying head, a face surfacing on his torso, or something like that thanks to the box's effect. That's why, for caution's sake, I draw Murasame's hilt, and activate its blade by pouring mana into the hilt.

The light sword appears with a buzzing. I step forward while sensing its yellow-green light on my body, and swing its blade down. With a <Water Wheel Slash> I completely bisect Hogbar from his shoulder all the way down to his abdomen.

At that moment <Demonic Cerebral Spine Revolution> runs out. The blood aura drifts around me as if evaporating, and my surrounding vicinity looks dull and slow to me for a moment.

Hogbar's head bumps against the ceiling, and drops down to the floor, next to his headless corpse. It looks like he's died obediently.

Then, the box suddenly moves unnaturally. I guess it's reacting to our side...it doesn't look like it's doing anything besides moving, but I wonder whether it's fine to believe that the being from before is still inside that thing.

"——A-Aniki...gueeehh."

Nuha has continued wielding his greatsword, but...the instant he sees that his brothers have died, Rollodeen's tentacle bone sword stabs into his lower chest, just to be followed by a barrage of bone sword thrusts assailing his whole body.

In the blink of an eye, Nuha's body turns into a beehive, and he silently collapses. The great sword he used also drops to the ground.

"N-No way, Hogbar-san...Soleck, Nuha-san." The guy with the cross scar who seems to be a Noctal worshipper mutters.

Seemingly having lost all fighting spirit, he collapses on his knees, and brabbles some words while sobbing. The blind woman should have been near him too, but she's disappeared.

On the other hand, the silver-haired guy is still fighting against Viine. The battle of the Burning Knights against the spear woman has finished.

"Your Excellencyyy."

"I've crushed the spear woman."

"Emissary-sama~ That silver-haired guy is nimble."

The Burning Knight's shields are riddled with holes, but it looks like they managed to kill her. Since they're approaching me with their metals and bones creaking, the surviving merchants and nobles around us all scream at once.

Catiza draws her extended black nails back in and comes back to me, seemingly leaving the rest to Viine.

"It looks like most of them have been mopped up." Mysty returns her golem into a metal ball, and absorbs the blood-tinged metal barrier through her feet.

"I suppose..."

I shift my look to Viine who's still fighting.

"Just who's that silver-haired guy...he's still completely unhurt while taking on Viine and having dealt with Catiza's smokescreens."

"You're right..."

It's way of fighting is truly skillful. Using the elasticity of his magic cloth, he's turned the walls and ceiling into his own playing field. It confuses Viine who's switched from archery to dual wielding for the first time in a while.

"Hey, the outside archer got away."

"Hankay, good work."

I guess the sniper has also followed the blind swordswoman. Unlike the guy with the cross scar who's lost all motivation, the escapees seem to merely be hired hands.

"——Now then, my employer has died, so this job's over. Bye bye." The silver-haired guy declares his intent to flee while widely swaying his cloth covering his lower half. The color of his eyes changes into being different.

"Wait!"

"——"

Viine's restraint is meaningless. The instant the magic cloth coiled around the man's arm extends to the back, it wraps up the guy's body, and vanishes as if leaving a clone behind.

"There's quite a few who've run away. So, what are we going to do about that weeping guy...?" Hankay hasn't holstered his axes on his back yet.

It looks like it's not said that the guy won't rampage around or something. He turns his axes at the guy's head, who's sobbing with such a force that he's bumping his head against the floor, as if to say that he can smash it at any time.

"...Oi, crybaby, are you going to fight or not?"

The body of the cross scar guy jumps with a start, and he stops crying. Then he quickly lifts his face, staring at me.

His eye sockets are hidden behind a cloth, but he possess something like a power similar to Demonic Eyes. Since patterns of darkness are still showing on the cloth, he seems to be using his Demonic Eyes...

"Hey, what's your name?"

"...My Demonic Eyes don't work...?"

It's obvious that there are no eyeballs in those sockets. The inside of the sockets is stuffed with cloth. However, tears still come out even without eyeballs? Well, I suppose he's not normal.

The shady patterns oozing out of his cloth, and the release of his sinister mana still continue. It looks like he hasn't lost his will to fight. It seems he wants to keep fighting.

"Answer!"

Viine, who let the other guy get away, hits the back of the cross scar guy's head with Gadorices' dull blade. Since he's kneeling on the floor, it looks like an execution.

"...My name is Haze."

"Haze, were you trying to kill me with your Demonic Eyes?"

"Hahahahaha, obviously!" The instant he screams this full of hatred, even more patterns appear on the cloth above the eye sockets as if he's activated his Demonic Eyes, but his head tilts diagonally. Yep, his head goes flying.

Thanks to Viine's Gadorices. She swung down the evil blade with a cold look. Following that, she sheathes the sword in its conspicuous, red-scaled scabbard with a splendid dark elf swordsmanship motion.

"Master, sorry for deciding on my own accord."

"No, it's only natural. I think Haze intended to die while taking me with him in the end."

Viine's eyes become unforgiving once more as she looks down on Haze's corpse. She looks like she's going to stab him with Gadorices once more.

"Hiii."

All the surviving nobles, including Nereis'Kary, scream due to that execution-like spectacle. The earl and his knights remain silent. It looks like they're used to watching things like this.

"Princess, it's better to not look..."

"No, Mysty-san. This is my fate, so I'll accept it." Nereis'Kary smiles at Mysty.

It might be her self-awareness as princess, no, as queen who's obeyed by retainers. But, although I've killed the Eight Light Hogbar, the prime minister is still around. And although he was an Eight Light, it just means that a guild with a big influence got crushed. Since other dark guilds will thrive from now on, her true battle might start from here.

"...Are you alright, Nereis'Kary?"

"...Yes. Thank you very much for having saved us."

""Thank you very much.""

The merchants and nobles around the princess also thank me. Their eyes are blended with fear, but since they're also filled with respect, it doesn't feel bad. I react by reflexively lowering my head politely.

"...I'd like to express my gratitude as well. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Even though you had to take care of us as a burden, you annihilated strong fighters. You're a man exceeding the Twilight Knights just as mentioned by the princess. Truly, a heroic spearmaster. All of you are heroes." The earl says after wiping the dirt off his clothes, while starting to clap with his big hands.

The Twilight Knights, who've been deployed to him as personnel, place their shields on the ground, and applaud as well. The rest of the survivors, even including the waiters and servers, also begin a grand applause.

Viine and Mysty's faces turn red out of embarrassment.

『...It's only natural. But, Your Excellency, aren't you going to pick up that box?』

『I will. I'm not Mysty, but I'll run some experiments with it later, I think. I guess I'll use it inside the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog』

『Okay, I'm looking forward to it. I'm curious about that nose. It looks like it could shoot out water』

I continue my silly telepathic conversation with Helme, and then I pick up the pretty box that used to be a clock at first. While I trace its surface with a finger, it suddenly stirs, but I leave that for later, and put it away into my item box.

After all of us assemble, we bid farewell from the earl, princess, and the others. We're stopped by the earl with him saying that he'd like to continue the banquet and with the princess also insisting, but I refuse their offer. I'm also told by the earl to help out for the sake of the country, but that's not my job.

Though it's not like I've told him straight to his face that it's his job to take care of the prime minister. It might be faster if I sneak into the capital, and assassinate the prime minister personally, but...it's not like I'm head over heels with the princess, and I'm no knight who's sworn allegiance to her.

I am me. Initially I only promised the princess to safely bring her to her home country. And with the feel of a parting gift, I also managed to help Nereis'Kary by getting rid of Hogbar. I'd like to believe that I've repaid my debt from the past with this.

I say my farewells to the princess and those around her.

"Understood...but, Shuuya-sama, will we be able to meet again someday?"

I know Nereis'Kary's feelings.

"I'm sure we will, one day."

"Okay..." She smiles sadly.

I also force a smile, but I'm not confident that I've been able to put on a proper smile. Still, currently it's my priority to bring Mysty and Hankay to Sol's home.

I don't know the precise location of Sol's place within the forest with its thick fog. It seems like it's wandering within the whirlpool as typical for the Whirlpool Forest of Demon Fog.

After raising a hand, I turn around while feeling slightly depressed.

"Nn, nyaa~" Rollo, who's resting on my shoulder, also meows as if to bid farewell from the princess.