

Chapter 324 - Revisit of the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog

A blood message floats in front of my eyes.

『There's a lot of bluish-white tigers who charge at you while extending bone blades from gills at their necks—— Even as we're speaking, I've gotten rid of one by stabbing out Gadorices...』

『It's fine for you to come back here, you know?』

『Master, I won't come back yet. There's still many other monsters besides the tiger I haven't killed yet - so many that I can't actually detect all of them. I'd like to use this situation, and pile up some combat training while continuing to kill the monsters. I want to become stronger』

『Sure, you sure are enterprising and daring. Do as you see fit without worrying about us. It's going to be alright since we can simply follow the traces of your nice smell』

『Okay!』

I continue my blood messaging with Viine who's gone ahead as vanguard while at the same time scouting for us, although she's not Mamani.

The bluish-white tigers are called Galbound Tigers. I think they're designated as B-Rank in subjugation requests. They're profitable thanks to their great materials. But, since those materials shouldn't contain any mana, I don't really need them.

When I send her a message along the lines of wanting to make out, Rollo delivers a cat punch at the blood letters with a "N, nya——"

I don't know whether it's supposed to be a retort to its content, but the act of the blood letters vanishing instantly seems to be mysterious for my partner.

Bending down, I poke her head as she frantically attacks the blood letters, caress it gently, and then stand back up again.

While focusing on my right hand's sixth finger, I chant in my mind, 『Come out, Tsuan』.

The sixth finger loses its shape and falls to the ground, turning into a pulp of flesh that's firmly glued to the ground. As if performing a metamorphose, it changes into a golden caterpillar which wriggles around while squealing.

For some reason it then grows slowly as Tsuan.

This whole spectacle throws Rollo for a loop. Her pupils widen, showing her keen interest in Tsuan's transformation. Well, I guess it's unavoidable since the 'squirming mass' (Tsuan) in front of her eyes looks like a cat teaser.

Is Tsuan deliberately showing his transformation to Rollo?

My partner purrs, "Nnn," and brings her nose close to the object that's also different from a caterpillar about to become Tsuan. She checks Tsuan's smell by repeatedly sniffing.

"Rollo, no pad punches."

"Nya."

As I warn her, Tsuan turns into a humanoid, middle-aged guy.

"...Boss, you're goin' to put me to use?"

The surreal Tsuan's leg continues to be showered by cat punches, but still, that's a good attitude he got.

"Yeah. The last time I called you was during training, wasn't it?"

"Yes, on that stone paving..." Tsuan's face turns pale.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it's just...rather than training, the trauma of getting trashed by your spear..."

"Want to go back to being a finger then?"

"N-No, please wait. I'm happy about you calling me. I want to be of use to you, boss. I can't stomach losing out to Catiza and Purin."

Tsuan-san's face is slightly red as he's apparently embarrassed. But it'd be kinds wrong to punch him just because it's done by a middle-aged guy.

"Okay then."

"Great—— Still, this is some remote forest, isn't it...? It appears to be foggy as well, but the tall trees...resemble the Lebray Forest." Tsuan comments while surveying his vicinity.

Next he creates kukri-shaped light blades in both hands. Whirling the blades around in his palms, he grips them in an underhand grip. The patterns on the blades are similar to those of <Spirit Curse Chain Net>. Countless objects similar to light threads are carved into the blades.

It looks like Tsuan is overlapping this forest with his memories of the Lebray Forest or whatever it's called. At the same time, he might be speaking telepathically with Catiza and Purin.

"Lebray Forest as in the one in your homeland?"

"Yep, it's a haunt of undead villages, one of the forests spreading out in the west of the Outer Demonic City."

"Villages of undead...?"

Maybe it's related to this forest here or something...

"Yep, as a templar I killed furies and other monsters in there. Chapsis were too much for me alone, though." Tsuan explains full of nostalgia for his time when he was a templar.

Hankay joins us.

"Tsuan, you're Shuuya's disciple-something? Anyway, his subordinate? Also, we fought several times during his training sessions..."

"Hello, Hankay-san. Thanks for taking care of me back then."

"No problem, Shuuya's subordinate. It looks like both of us are going to get busy with real combat over here."

Just as he says, I sense a big mana source. What shows up next while firmly treading across the leaves on the ground is a huge bear monster exceeding a degoza bear in size.

"Guuuoooooooooh!"

Whoa, what a loud roar. Mr. Bear looks to be in a frenzy.

Hankay, Tsuan, and Mysty ready their weapons. Rollo growls like a beast for an instant, but doesn't transform into a black panther.

And then, while thinking of us as prey, the bear charges with yet another, loud roar while letting its saliva fly.

I guess I'll take it down with Baldok. At least that's what I planned, but Hankay rushes ahead, yelling, "——I'll take care of that one! Ugooooaaahhh!"

He charges with a battle cry, as if answering the bear in kind.

Hankay adopts the 『Crab Blow』 stance, as if telling me that it's a continuation of our ax training. From the front, as if to capitalize on the might of his ax blades, he unleashes a chain of attacks in a kachiage style [efn_note]A sumo term, look photo: https://data.smart-flash.jp/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/16085140/hakuhou_1.jpg [efn_note] by swinging his left ax down and following up with his right after a slight delay. After hitting the bear's jaw from the side, he strikes its shoulder and flank.

The bear falters while exposing a deep cut at its side.

While yelling, Hankay boldly slips into the bear's bosom, and slams the middle part of his ax's blade against the bear's head after lifting it diagonally from below.

The bear bends backwards in a grand manner. Its jaw has been pulverized, its muzzle is crushed, and its teeth-ridge has turned into mush.

It's a display of terrifying, destructive force by "Strong" Hankay. I wonder whether his moves

would also pass with the Strong Spear Style. I observe Hankay while focusing on learning as much as possible.

Hankay-sense rotates to the side while tilted as if using his small body as a weapon. His motions remind me of a small tornado. He charges into the bear's torso, and makes his thick armor and the metal forming the support of his shoulder plating [efn_note]Another term that's super hard to translate since it's a historical armor type that doesn't even exist in Western countries afaik. Here's a picture site: https://emuseum.nich.go.jp/detail?langId=&content_base_id=100488&content_part_id=000&content_pict_id=000 and the part of the support can be seen here: <https://www.meihaku.jp/app/uploads/2021/01/d37ffb7e68b71d5cc7c1e47b09b83e01.jpg> (it's the 立拳 part on the right side)[/efn_note] strike it in succession.

Furthermore, Hankay jumps up.

"Uubooooaaaaah!" He screams in midair, "——<Mountain Demolition>."

He unleashes a big technique, similar to the one used by Mr. Bucchi from Red Tiger's Storm. As the axes come down on the bear, they dig through its shoulders, passing all the way to the middle of the bear's chest. Its spine gets crushed, and the same happens to its waist and intestines.

As if marking that an ax master was here, Hankay twists the ax blades now that they reached the bear's lower body, and with a force that blows away the blood splatter clinging to the axes he's grabbing in both hands, he tears up the object, which has turned into a chunk of bear meat, marking it with a cross.

Rather than a teacher, Hankay looks like a martial artist who seems to have grown in size.

Pulling back the two axes towards himself, he readies them once more. That gesture reminds one of a martial fighter or daredevil in kabuki.

The thing that used to be a big bear monster has ceased to live. The chunk of meat collapses, looking as if it's leaning against Hankay.

"Yay! It's dead! I suppose we're going to have bear stew as it's passed down in the Budant clan for dinner tonight! Bear meat is somewhat smelly, but it'll work just fine with a touch of celyu powder! Gahahaha!" Hankay exclaims heartily, looking very happy.

It looks like his clan also got bear stew besides bird stew. Is the Budant clan a family of people who actually hide frying pans within their onion heads?

"...Wow, you can feel the years of experience from his ax techniques."

"As an ax teacher he sure knows his stuff."

Tsuan and Mysty praise.

With a smile, Hankay declares, "Next up, stripping off the bear hide!"

"The hide? Are you going to sell it?"

"No, I'm going to use it myself. You see, this place is unpleasantly cold, so it'll warm me if I put it on, right?"

"Okay, let me help you then. I'll dry the hide by sucking out all the blood."

"Oohh, having vampires around is handy. I leave it in your hands."

"Please let me have a bit of blood as well."

Thus, Mysty and I treat ourselves to the bear's blood.

My partner, who's changed into a black panther, has bitten the bear, especially its flank, and enjoys its meat. She bends back her head, chewing on the meat with her back teeth. I can't hear her praising how great it tastes, but she keeps devouring the meat while obviously giving off such an impression, getting completely entranced with the meat feasting.

I pass the dried bear hide to Hankay, who's in the process of cutting up the remaining meat. Using that hide, he creates a hat with a swift hand-tailoring.

...Spell me surprised. His quick tailoring techniques are astonishing, but...his appearance after putting the product on...strangely wakes the urge in me to call him Mr. Bear.

"...I'm startled. You mentioned that you'd actually use it, but I must admit, you're very skilled. Is it because you're a dwarf?"

"Something at this level isn't worth mentioning. Rawhide is precious on the battlefield. I often used it to make anti-skid weapons and shields as well as leather armors and food wrappings."

"Nyaa."

Rollo unleashes an air punch after reverting into a cat. It looks like she's also praising Hankai's skillfulness. And then she gets closer to Hankay, delivering a cat punch against him. It appears she got triggered by his surreal bear-head appearance.

"Guuuh, again? My legs aren't couprun roots or anything, you know!?"

Hankay runs away, resulting in Rollo chasing after him.

"Nya, nyaaaa."

The adventure of Rollo and the Hankay bear.

Just when they had such a harmonious mood going between each other that it made me slightly jealous, I perceived magic source responses.

"They've bunched up on the left side...those are Calamity Birds." Tsuan comments.

"It seems like we'll get our hands on some bird meat as well. I think it'll be time for the legendary bird-boar-stew passed down in the Budant clan to make its appearance."

"Sounds like I should leave today's cooking to you."

Just as I push the cooking duty on Hankay, the bird monsters, which have gathered on the left side, come into sight.

"...Boss, this fog pregnant with mana, and the big assembly of calamity birds...is this place close to an undead village after all?" Tsuan asks grimly.

"Are undead villages also engulfed by such a terribly thick fog?"

"Yeah, they are. The fog over there is just as heavy. Anyway, I'll take care of the calamity birds on the left side, boss..." Tsuan readies his glowing kukri.

He's right, I can see how the calamity birds are drawing closer, repeatedly peeking out of the dense fog. It'd be fine for me to handle them as well, but I decide to leave the left side to Tsuan, "Okay, Tsuan, you're up."

"Roger wilco. I'll start with a light warm-up first. I can't allow for Hankay-san to be the only one to show his good stuff in front of you!"

"I don't care whether you're a <Disciple of Light Evil> or some other disciple, but I've been just doing what I'm capable of, okay?" Hankay rebukes with a serious expression.

But, since he's wearing that bear hide on his head, he looks somewhat surreal.

As if welcoming the calamity birds with his shining kukri, Tsuan swings his weapons up over his head as if scooping something up while jumping and casting a sidelong glance at Hankay. He easily bisects a bird from below.

"Dealing with a huge number like boss can is impossible for me, but if it's one at a time——" Tsuan casually says with a cool expression while changing the angle of his kukri to protect his head after landing and whirling his kukri blades around.

At that moment, light threads spring forth from the edges of his kukri blades. Tsuan extends his hands upwards, turning a steel-like gaze at the birds. After deciding his aim on a single flying bird, he directs the blades at his target.

<Throwing>? No, wrong.

"——<Shelled Light Threads>." Once he mutters that skill name, the light threads shoot out towards the bird in a straight line.

He possessed such a technique?

As soon as the threads coil themselves around the bird, Tsuan reels in the threads back to the kukri blades. That maneuver resembles my retracting of <Chain> into its factor mark. But, his kukri look

strangely cool. The hue of the blades changes like steel, and they swell a bit like air vents.

And once he's finished pulling the bird close, Tsuan swings his kukri as if jerking his shoulders forward. Immediately following the cross slash, he twists his body around, and distances himself without getting hit by any blood spurts.

『I sense your smell from the light threads manipulated by Tsuan, Your Excellency』 Helme mutters in my mind while looking at him through her Spirit Sight.

"...He's a quick guy who's become even faster compared to before. Shuuya, that nimble Tsuan guy isn't a human, is he?"

"I wonder. Tsuan's appearance is no different from that of a human. But, since they can change into three people, he's strictly no human...well, just consider him to be that kind of a race."

"...Sure, I'll think of him as a Light Evil race then." Hankay nods, agreeing as if repeatedly chanting, 『I see, I see, I really see』.

"It's just the opinion of an amateur, but the battle style of Ca-chan is rough and cute, but Tsuan-san's battle style is smart. It feels adult." Mysty comments after shooting down a bird with a stake used with <Throwing>.

She analyzed Tsuan's way of technical fighting by using his light threads in her own layman style. It must be because Tsuan is experienced in fighting as a former templar.

Afterwards I watch Tsuan putting in effort as <Disciple of Light Evil> with Hankay and Mysty, and then touch the ring on my finger, summoning the Burning Knights.

"Leave it to me. Black Burning Knight Zemetas is on it!"

"Likewise, Red Burning Knight Adomos has answered the call!"

The Burning Knights are much more excited than usual.

"Ooooh, as expected, Your Excellency has been pleased with our recent performance!"

"Zemetas, don't be complacent! It is the result of us having played a big part in the earlier battle."

"You're correct. At this point, the spirit world...hmm? This place! In the past..."

"Ooh, you're right. This fog, smell...there's no doubt about it!"

The Burning Knights talk cheerfully while sounding solemn. It looks like they simultaneously recalled a memory from the past. While emanating the aura of knights, warriors, or samurai, the red and black flames gleaming deep inside their eye sockets are flickering. They turn their tough heads, which would cause any human to succumb to fear, as they survey their surroundings.

I think those flames...are kinda like replacements for eyeballs, but they're mysterious nonetheless. Well, they're Burning knights with fire and smoke cladding their bodies, so yeah...

"Nya, nya, nyaa~" Rollo runs up to them.

While hitting the shins with cat punches, she points towards the forest with a bean-sprout-like tentacle grown out of her neck. I'm pretty sure she's saying, 『Big-Boney, Lucky Bones, we're off hunting ~nya』.

She has immediately started to give instruction to the Burning Knights.

"Lord Rollo, I shall accompany you. This soul of black bones will defend you to the last."

"Just like in the past, we shall set out to put this forest under our rule once again."

"N, nya." Rollo produces a self-satisfied look.

And after changing into a black panther with a poof, she starts walking towards the left, taking the Burning Knights with her, as if to demonstrate the dignity of a supreme ruler.

"...There go Rollo-chan and the knights."

"It's okay, they'll keep a reasonable distance from us. Oh, they've already started to fight. We'll follow Viine's scent."

"OK."

"Let's go. I'll show you my ax techniques."

Having cleaned up all the calamity birds, Tsuan has returned to my side as well, "Let's go, boss."

We all advance through the Whirlpool Forest. The ground covered not only by dry leaves but also by many wet leaves is easy to slip on. In exchange, I find pomegranate-like flowers that don't grow anywhere but here.

Additionally, pill bugs with pink human teeth growing out are wandering about. And aiming to hunt these, caterpillars with their bodies covered by cellophane-tape-like, semi-transparent silk are hanging in the trees. I also discover winged bugs who are dripping viscous saliva from the tips of their trumpet-shaped snouts. Those are flying while emitting fluorescent light from their bellies...

It's my second time in this forest, but the various, mysterious views possess a kind of fresh feel, allowing us to enjoy ourselves. However, it's not all play and fun either.

Magic source responses are approaching from all directions. Shelled, ammonite-shaped monsters are approaching while whirling around as if to repel and seer the surfaces of the thick barks.

"Incoming. All of you get ready to inte——" I turn around to the right, delivering a single flash with Baldok.

At the same time of crushing the tire-shaped carapaces of two ammonites with the red ax blade, several ammonites with different shapes have drawn close from 2 o'clock. In a hurry I pull the left

hand holding the violet, metallic handle of Baldok above my head while lowering the handle's lower part in my right hand. With the two-handed hold on Baldok, I repel several ammonites with a swing motion imitating a full moon while thrusting the Magic Dragon Gem out, using it to penetrate the shell of an ammonite, and thus destroying it.

With this defensive stance, I block, crush, and repel the charges of several ammonites a few times. A hard, metallic screech resounds on many occasions, and black fragments are scattered as well.

But now it's time for a counterattack.

I thrust out my left arm as it holds Baldok with the image of delivering a straight punch, causing the red spear's head to pierce through the back of an ammonite that bounced back just a moment ago. And then, within milliseconds, I switch back to a two-handed grip while drawing back my arm.

Then I thrust out my right arm, just like I did with the left a second ago. Baldok's spearhead, now turned into a combined spear with the right arm, stabs through the inner belly of an ammonite where multiple legs are growing out. Immediately following, I erase Baldok while drawing back my right arm, and unleash a <Thrust> while summoning it back into my hand, destroying the ammonite.

Right after that swift two-thrust combo, an ammonite approaches from behind as well.

"Master!" Mysty cries out worried while firing her rainbow-colored metal stakes with <Throwing>.

But, I parry the shell attack with Baldok after thrusting it behind my head. It's the Scarecrow Style.

"——That was a move as if you've got eyes on your back."

"This is a Wind Spear Style technique called 『Scarecrow Draw』——" I look at my friends while blocking the ammonite ramming attacks.

"...Unlike with your ax skill, your spearmanship has reached an unimaginable level of proficiency."

I can return Hankay's praises back to him just like that.

Currently he's throwing his ax, using it like a boomerang. No sooner than catching the returning ax with his glowing hand, he wields the ax in his other hand, easily bisecting the ammonite in front of him, and getting showered by its blood in the process.

Fragments of its carapace graze his cheek, making him look like The Immovable (a manifestation of Mahavairocana) with his bloody face.

While admiring his appearance, I place the metallic staff part of Baldok behind my neck, adopting a stance like a scarecrow, and jump up like a rising dragon. I make use of the Wind Spear Style's 『Scarecrow Pass』.

After leaping while making my body rotate vertically, I move Baldok from the lower right to the upper left, swinging Baldok's spearhead just like that. The red ax blade, which cuts through the air as if drawing a folding fan in empty space, hits the ammonite closing in from the right, and cuts it apart.

It's a timing as if I'm invincible after having shouted, 『Shoryuken——』. From a spiraling, rising dragon movement to a fall.

While I move the shortly-held hilt to the left side as an ammonite is approaching from there as I drop, I draw back half my body, and make the protrusion on the back of Baldok's ax blade clash against the ammonite as I land.

On this occasion, I powerfully kick off the ground, charging at an ammonite drawing closer while rolling across the ground. At the same time as that ammonite enters the range of my spear, I twist my waist. While also twisting the hand holding Baldok, I treat the arm like a monkey arm, unleashing <Fang Stab>. The low stab of Baldok's spear stabs into the ground while crushing the shell and intestines of the ammonite on its path.

Without erasing Baldok, aka leaving it stabbed in the soil, I summon Ganghis into my now free left hand.

In the meantime, more groups of ammonites are incoming. Using Baldok as jump starter, I escape into the sky, dodging the approaching ammonites.

While airborne, I rotate Ganghis sideways, fill my body with power while delaying it by one beat, and while transmitting the accumulated power in my spine to Ganghis, I activate <Powerful Slash> as I swing Ganghis with the image of pulling off an iai slash.

Filled with mana, Ganghis' vibrating spearhead bisects an ammonite. Divine Spear Ganghis has a power resembling that of fāngtiān huàjǐ. [efn_note]The weapon carried by Lü Bu.[/efn_note]

At the same time, Ganghis' blue-haired tuft flutters. I keep swinging Ganghis while letting the tuft fly, annihilating several ammonites as if cutting through butter.

I perform a half turn on my toes, and while grasping the situation around me, I step forward with my left foot...taking a deep breath. I stop moving after finishing my Wind Spear Style motions.

Looking around me, I see that all the ammonite monsters, which had been approaching me, are gone.

"Boss...that was terrific, but there sure are a lot of these things."

"Master, there are still more around us."

As we advance while slaughtering all the monsters getting involved with us, elephant-like monsters appear over at Rollo's who's been fighting on the right side.

"The tiger ones are monster you see often. But, it's my first time to see those elephant-scorpion hybrid monsters..." Misty stares at the chimeras.

Their upper bodies resemble elephants, but their bodies quickly narrow down from the protrusion part on their rhinoceros-like spines, ending in a long, scorpion-like tail. They're quite irregular monsters.

However, Rollo and the Burning Knights kill those chimeras as if it's nothing. Even now, a series of tentacle attacks riddles a chimera with holes in the blink of an eye, and Zemetas' magnificent sword thrust and head-butt, as well as Adomos's shield bash and bone sword thrust finish it off. Their strength is overwhelming.

Well, rather than the Burning Knights, it's Rollodeen who freely enjoys the hunt, being the one responsible for most of the kills, but...the strange chimeras are great playmates for Rollodeen.

While holding one of a chimera's huge legs in her muzzle, she energetically shakes her head around, wielding that leg as a weapon. At a glance it looks like she's wildly messing around in her game, but she properly assists the Burning Knights in their nearby fights by protecting them with her tentacles.

I guess my partner feels like protecting her subordinates as their boss.

"It looks like there's still monster I haven't seen yet..." Mysty looks pale.

Certainly, it's been an ongoing hunt, so...even though she's a Lucival, she might be perceiving herself more as a teacher and researcher than an adventurer. This all might be a mental strain for her.

At that point, Viine comes back from her tiger hunt which also served as training and reconnaissance.

"Master, I've hunted a big number, but since there was no end to them, I came back for the moment."

"Sure, let's advance together."

Rollodeen, who's been fighting on the right side while commanding the Burning Knights, also joins up with us. Leaving the Burning Knights all alone on the right, we walk through the Whirlpool Forest for several hours while continuously defeating monsters.

While listening to the tweeting of small birds perching on the tips of branches, we nimbly climb the stairs of a huge, light brown root at a good rhythm.

"So there are such stairway-like places as well in here, huh?"

"It resembles the one built by elves, but I think this one is natural. Let's keep climbing it."

"..."

I can immediately read Hankay's expression after he heard the word 'elves', so I go ahead with climbing the natural stairs without saying anything further.

After a while, we reached a place with a high ramp. As I stand between two big trees, reminding me of the pillars in the Parthenon Temple, I gaze out at the scenery of the fog and forest forming the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog. The faint light breaking through the trees illuminates the ground and trees, creating beautiful colors.

This is the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog. Since it's far off from any highways, no wide paths exist here. No caravans are to be found either, of course. It's truly the very definition of being deep in the woods.

I visited this forest once in the past, but it felt different back then. Because I've also experienced the Great Forest of Demonic Haunts, I think I'm not all that unfamiliar with forests, but the sceneries created by this forest are very unique.

And, as if normal, it's still winter...my skin prickles because of the chilly air. I'm wearing my dark green protective clothing, but the area around my chest is open.

But, if I fill my lungs with this cold fog teeming with mana...although it's no magic cigarette...I feel like mana naturally seeps into all my organs. I take another deep breath...and exhale.

"...The scenery up here is quite neat." Hankay also looks like he enjoys the scenery created by fog and forest, even though he occasionally looks to the left side where monsters are clamoring around after having reacted to our magic sources.

『...It's a forest filled with mana, but it does look different depending on the diffusion of light. The spirits are delighted, too』

『The sun is also doing a fine job』

"Boss, I'd have loved to show this place to my wife."

His wife, huh...? I can't find any proper words to return to him...

"...I guess you're right. She was called Vivian, wasn't she?"

"Oh, boss, you remembered."

"Well of course. It's a pretty name after all. I wouldn't forget it."

"...Family, eh?"

Oh shit, Hankay looks like he's about to cry. Let's change the topic.

"This here is the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog, but...it does have its beautiful parts."

"Yes, it might be the same with people as well."

"True, all kinds of races are crowding this world. Something like being able to research all of them for eternity...I'm blessed to be a Lucival. It also allows me to go to my brother's home like this. I can't thank the gods enough for having met master." Mysty leans an arm against a tall tree as she seriously says this with tenderness reflected in her eyes.

Her eyes allow me to feel her deep intelligence. I naturally smile back at her, but since she's slightly embarrassed, she averts her eyes upwards.

At that moment a chilly gust of wind passes through from deep in the forest. The mist, which is just like her name, swirls because of the wind, and strikes against the trees that are growing into the sky. Since the countless brambles of branches decorating the many trees are swaying likewise, they look like dancing, naked bodies of women for just an instant.

I've ended up imagining something weird. I'm pretty sure because of the peculiarly-shaped leaves growing all the way down from the treetops. If Eva had been here, she might have muttered, 『Pervert Shuuya』.

And since the leaves are swaying as if fused with the mist, they also appear like different plants that are hanging down from the clouds. It's a dense mist, but the fairytale-like scenery of plenty of trees full of nature overlapping with each other might be what's defining its name as Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog.

"...Alright, let's move on."

"Nnn, nyaaa~" Rollodeen dashes ahead as if to show off the pads on her hind legs.

A single ray of light shines on her through the mist, making her black fur look like glittering velvet. As the light is reflected into the vicinity, this also creates a beautiful scenery.

We start walking to chase after Rollodeen.



While a light drizzle fills the air, a small stone chapel comes into sight. It's the same chapel as last time - the weatherbeaten chapel.

Spontaneously feeling nostalgic, I rush over to it.

A lone, little goddess statue holds the line beneath the party crumbled stone roof. Its head is whittled down at parts, and it lacks the arms, but somehow it still emits a presence - that statue that has apparently been forgotten by history.

It's eerie, but since it's an idol nonetheless, I'm going to offer something, and pray.

I put foodstuffs similar to kasojique and Rollo's dried meat at the statue's feet. And then I naturally bend down, and pray while placing one hand against my nose as done during Buddhist prayers.

"Huh? The goddess statue is shining weakly."

"Eh?"

When I open my eyes, the statue has already stopped glowing.

"It's gone. I wonder, maybe it reacted to your prayer, master?"

"Who knows. I don't feel any mana from it... But, previously Goddess of Magic Poison Misea looked at me while saying, 『I can strongly sense the stench of the divine domain from the thick mana emanated by you, Shuuya. And I can also feel a strong connection with the Spirit World. It's just faintly, but I can further feel other Abranahm deities and divinities of cursed gods from you... What does that mean?』 when we encountered her in the dark elf city. That's why, this nameless idol might actually be an Abranahm wild goddess or an ancient cursed goddess. It might be a premature conclusion, but it's possible that she's been affected by me."

"...The gods..are truly myths. Master, you also have connections to the gods of the Spirit World, don't you? ...And, this place is the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog...an ancient sealed goddess...the reason why brother chose this place for his research...it looks like this place is hiding quite a few secrets..."

Mysty's intuition might be on the spot. After all, he was her blood-related brother. There was also a fragmented magic crest on the floor of the place where I was put to sleep by Yui, and the laboratory-like place was stuffed with all kinds of utensils. It was an array of items I didn't understand at all, but Mysty might know those tools. I think this place also holds many books Viine would find interesting. At least we should find here ancient magic books desired by professors at the Ernst University as they can't be bought on the magic street of a labyrinth city. It might also possess other, hidden rooms.

Come to think of it, there was a transfer crest inside Kuna's store in Hekatrail, wasn't there? Back then I ignored it, but...I wonder what's happened to it after all this time...

I'll take a look at it when I get to visit Quiche and Sherry. It might also be a great idea to take Rollo along to go hunting around the demonic labyrinth. Though, Sabeed's boss might not be all that happy about it.

Ah, right. I think I'll drop by the adventurer's guild as well. I gotta do a request every now and then. I think I'll also go greet that old Gilmas geezer, Kalban, and his daughter Eris. Oh, I might be able to meet the members of Red Tiger's Storm. However, those girls are adventurers, so they could have traveled elsewhere.

Besides, there's also Mrs. Boobs, right? As a gentleman, I must properly ask for her name the next time I see her. It's rude to not behave properly towards a beautiful woman.

But, first my friend Quiche. I really wanna meet her.

"...Being obliged to a Spirit World goddess...is that the reason why you bought the Score of the Demon King at the auction?" Hankay, who's come up next to me, asks as I'm nostalgically remembering Hekatrail.

"Indeed. It might result in me heading to the Spirit World sooner or later. Since there exist many things I don't know as of yet, it's a goal for a distant future, though."

"It's possible for you, Master. Not only a spirit, but even Misea-sama, a being similar to the chief god of the dark elves, has taken a liking to you. And a palace of the Holy Lucival Empire in an area connecting the surface with the Spirit World..."

『...Viine has reached a wonderful stage where she reads your intention, Your Excellency. Nothing less of a <Head Servant Leader>. Is it an effect of you sharing your blood with her? It's mortifying, but...you could also say that she has inherited my teachings. That's why I shall grant her a special butt bonus present next time』

Once Viine talks in a composed manner, more like a strategist than a secretary, the butt-loving spirit dwelling in my left gets carried away.

As for me, I'm happy as long as my bloodkin look at me affectionately, but I do hate looks that make me sense some kind of religious faith.

While focusing on making a weird face as if to deliberately make Rollo react, I ward Viine off, "...Stuff like empires and whatsoever don't matter. Boobs are justice. Right, Rollo?"

"Nya." Rollo with her triumphant look understands me. I don't know what she understands, but...who cares...

"...Master, you've changed the topic on purpose, haven't you?"

Viine is sharp. But, I honestly don't aim for an empire or some such.

Hankay reacted to the boob comment, laughing.

『Your Excellency, it's not like I, a member of the butt faction, am retorting here, but I shall pass on "boob" related stories. There's something important to be said about this idol...』

A tiny Helme appears in my visual field. As usual, she looks like a nurse. However, her tone is serious, and her eyes beneath her long cuticle eyelashes are perceptive.

『What is it?』

『Do you want me to try get in touch with the goddess statue by using <Spirit Ball Concept>?』

What was that!?