

Chapter 327 - Golden Powder and Sol's Grave

I boot up the Dimensional Scan of my item box, causing a 3-D image to appear from the glass panel. A mini map.

I expand the map of the futuristic gadget in preparation for any assaults. Well, mostly it's just because I felt like using the Dimensional Scan for the first time in a while, though.

With that futuristic connection...if I spot a beautiful place somewhere at the horizon someday...I'll race there on my Tiny Orbital. That thing also got that nifty ceramic, twin-rotor-styled, dual-wheel propulsion. [efn_note]Sounds like an Akira ref.[/efn_note]

Yep, a kamikaze attack that feels like legendary gale while loudly cheering with the feel of a healthy, courageous delinquent boy. That'd even pass in a desolate wasteland requiring a huge awakening...

I check the Dimensional Scan of the Na Palm Integrated Planetary Military Alliance. The center of the item box has a crystalline panel that's now risen a bit. The mini map projected right above it...shows no enemy responses. Just us.

Grasping Perception has a wide detection range, but I'm using the mini map for caution's sake.

There's hardly any magic source responses either. But, unknown monsters lurking around here is still a possibility.

Suddenly Tsuan's body trembles. A reaction to some unknown monster? Or did he feel cold from the wind of the chilly fog blowing through the trees of the Whirlpool Forest of the Demonic Fog?

"Shapshirs are scary. I feel the moisture in this dense fog, but most of them have weak magic source responses anyway. Getting possessed without noticing it..." He croaks while puckering his face.

Is he recalling his time as a templar?

"You pulled out something weird again... Is it connected to that Spirit World 493 Books or whatever it's called?"

"Nn, nya."

Hankay and Rollo react, looking at the 3-D image.

"The Spirit World 493 Books!? If this thing is the real deal, it'd be the highest among the top taboo items. The single digits (Elites) would swoop down on us with fervent roars..."

"If you're talking about taboo, you mean them?" Hankay scrutinizes the Burning Knights with a sharp glint in his eyes.

Hankay-san who's wearing a bear hat on his head. That thing looks like it'd also work as a charm for lumberjacks. But, although his appearance looks kinda surreal, Hankay's look feels harsh.

...It's scary.

The magic gems embedded on the backs of his hands are glowing, too. He's wearing an expression as if he wants to warn us that he can throw those axes of his at any time.

Previously he helped them, but it's obvious that he doesn't think well of them.

"...Master, wait a moment. I'm going to examine the loot, including the arms of those big mantises." Mysty says while standing on one of the lotuses floating on her metallic lake.

"Sure."

Her figure as she stands there...reminds me of the proverb: 『A lotus flower in the mud』. A lotus flower is pure and beautiful even when blooming in mud.

Mysty is a woman following the path of a researcher while trying to not get stained by other things...

"Thanks, then let me start at once. This, and this...they look like they'll work with my tuned Silver Demonic Steel..."

Her speed of picking up the materials is fast.

"...Oh, the elephant monsters over here have bumpy stomachs, looking like cow rumens, which might be quite delicious if cooked. The other monsters are also stuffed full with intestines and stomachs."

Her hands are glowing. They've become completely black except for the nails. She's rummaging through the intestines with those hands, but apparently doesn't mind that work.

Her ability that allows her to dye her skin black and melt metals might also have a function to counter offensive stenches. The micro holes in carbonic materials...no, Mysty's fingers would dry out, so that's not likely.

"...The liquid accumulated in the outer layer behind this retina...it's reacting to the magic test slip! If I dissolve it in alkali at a high temperature after soaking it inside the Ryumug Magic Pressure Bin's Anti-Purification Liquid which I've been keeping stored in a magic bottle..."

Mysty's researcher switch has been flipped. She's started to mumble under her breath while jotting down notes.

"It might be possible to transform this into a material applicable for <Stare Ore Minting (Star Massive Pull)>. The intestines of these bats are mysterious, too. A hard stone? It contains mana like a magic stone, but it's slightly different. Another life-form? Maybe some form of parasitism? After shaving off some of the stone with the portable Kinkiri blade and analyzing the material in detail, I'll continue the experiments by asking Viine to give it an impetus through the use of a lightning beast stone..."

Another stone, eh? There's not only bundles of parchments to be found in the pouches of Mysty's waist belt. She also got a tool set of chisels, scissors, and rulers, which makes her totally look like a furniture maker or a beautician, with them being positioned in a place that wouldn't obstruct her movements.

Maybe the kunoichi pose she demonstrated in the battle against Hogbar's group...the metallic stakes, which she held between her fingers like throwing knives...are inspired by those tools.

Come to think of it, she had also used the Kinkiri blade before. It's something similar to a chisel like Zaga would possess.

Watching Mysty in her researcher mode, Hankay and Tsuan comment,

"Is she always like that while doing research? Mana like a martial artist, no, maybe I just couldn't sense it in the previous battle, but I did feel a warrior's dignity with a honed bloodlust."

"...Hankay-san, boss' family are kin of his blood. All of them seem to have their own specializations, you know?"

"I see..."

As Hankay hears the taboo word 'family'...his expression becomes pained. Then he shifts his eyes to Viine and Rollo, ignoring the Burning Knights who train by clashing their shields against each other between the trees.

Man, Tsuan, read the mood...is something I couldn't say.

After gazing at Mysty doing her collecting and simple experimenting with a concentrated expression...he wipes the filth off his axes, using a big leaf.

I cast a glance at the Burning Knights, and then look at them once more.

A double take - one with a grand, flash reaction. To the extent that it causes Rollo to react as well.

It's because the Burning Knights are doing such a weird training regimen. Their movements are accompanied by roars full of fighting spirits...it looks more like the courting dance of male animals using peculiar movements to appeal to the other sex than training.

...

Since I feel that it'd decrease my Spirit value, I avert my eyes.

On the other hand, Mysty selects parts that seem usable for her experiments from all the monsters such as the mantises' sickle arms, the bats' intestines, the bears' paws, the elephants' eyes, and the scorpion stingers. It's a huge amount of material. They'd rake in a good amount of cash if sold.

I suppose it'd also be possible to boost the completed request number if there are items required for adventurer requests among those.

But, at this point she's fully focused on being a researcher. Probably because she's earning money as an individual...she doesn't try to rely on my funds as much as possible.

Even in the past, Mysty told me, 『...Well, even as temporary lecturer I'm still a teacher. The materials I use for normal experiments and my students aren't that expensive. I want to procure them myself. Of course, when it comes to exclusive furnaces used at military arsenals such as the White Command Furnace Workshop (Kiriano Halz), the price range is on a completely different level, so I've got no choice but to rely on you as guildmaster of Remains of the Moon, master, but...if I were to rely for everything on a dark guild, I'd disqualify as teacher, don't you think?』

It was a conversation we held back at home in the living room while drinking tea in a relaxed atmosphere. I remember backing her up on that. Her words reminded me of the saying, 『Look at profits, think of morality』.

Mysty originally comes from Osberian nobility. I haven't asked her whether they possessed territory in the vicinity of Hekatrail, but she lived inside fortress City Hekatrail.

Her words carry a righteousness you wouldn't expect from a woman who descended into robbery at one point. Maybe it comes from her having the foundation of a higher education.

Now she's also a blood-sucking Lucival, but at the same time she's a magnificent teacher...

That's why she won't take those materials to the adventurer guild, I think. The capacity is limited to a certain extent, but she's also got an item box. She's probably going to use the materials for her experiments at the Magic Academy Ronberge.

And speaking for the adventurer's guild, I'm going to become Rank A soon, too. One of the conditions for a rank up is the reclamation of undeveloped land. Another condition is to succeed in a limited request such as the Evil Dragon King subjugation. If I meet those, I can rise to A-Rank. It's something where I want to aim for Master's rank.

At that point, Mysty finishes her looting and sorting. She adopts a triumphant pose, thrusting out a V-sign. Her gestures have been changing recently.

The nails of those fingers are pretty. They shine in a mysterious color. A broad smile naturally forms on her lips - an intellectual, bespectacled beauty.

I feel like I hear her asking me, 『Do you like young professors?』. Of course it wakes the urge in me to confess, 『I adore them』.

Thanks to the demonic fog, the sky has turned into something like a dome, but her oil-based lipstick still gives her lips a glossy finish.

Beautiful...the color of her nails and the other cosmetics coming from the labyrinth. She's become quite expert at using those. Nothing less of an adult woman. It adds an extra to her existing beauty.

And then she approaches me while waving her hand in a way that would charm any man.

Oh shit, she makes my heart throb.

Still, I'd love to occasionally see her without the bandana, albeit it suits her. We aren't in Pelneet right now, so she could have taken it off...

As she walks, she causes ripples on the lake as it gathers at her feet. Just as if sucking blood, her long legs absorb the metal. A recovery of the metal, huh?

The patterns of blood and metal gathering at her boots with her also being the origin is also lovely, but...her boots draw my eyes.

They're literally stunning for an adult woman. Their overall coloring is a combination of different red shades. The material of the reddish brown monster hide, the thin, carbon-like, black iron coating, and the low-heeled thick sole fuse into arched boots with an outer sole. The instep around the opening is black, but it uses a gradation. The upper part of her shoes is made with a streamlined design that becomes thinner toward the tip. They also possess protrusions that would hurt a lot if hit with an instep kick. Metal fittings connected like puzzle rings have been added to the outer sole and heels. The zipper as it's used for boots looks like it allows her to quickly take off the shoes.

...They're highly fashionable. But then again, Mysty also made boots with a high aesthetic appeal for Rebecca and Eva. I think she might actually be able to make a career as a shoemaker.

Should I have her make a pair for me as well...? Wondering about that, I glance at my Arzen Boots with their classy design.

But, somehow I feel like I hear those Arzen Boots crying? Thus, let's desist from getting new footwear.

I check out Mysty, the pretty young lady, and her vicinity. The way the metal, which is a blend of crimson and rainbow color, keeps flowing while amassing at her feet is a sight for sore eyes. The fine flow lines, similar to the ripples on metals, gently stream along the lake. This here is the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Fog, but...the current scenery makes me remember the traditional Japanese dry landscape gardens. A garden expressing one's life with rocks and sand, following the concept of Zen. The withered trees, the towering trees, and their roots have become rocks dotting the garden like obstacles. The blood and metal are serenely flowing while creating flow lines like the trenches in a garden's gravel.

...It's absolutely gorgeous.

『...It wakes the urge in me to dive into that lake』

『Though I think it'd be better to give up on that idea』

『Yes, it's metal after all...』

Helme is a water spirit, so yeah.

I get that it's metal, but it looks just like a rainbow-colored lake. I can fully understand Helme's wish to swim in it.

"Nyaa." Rollo meows after returning on my shoulder.

My partner doesn't look at what's happening at Mysty's feet. Resting in a catloaf, she is...curiously staring at Tsuan.

Tsuan also looks back into her red eyes...

Seemingly not displeased altogether, he faintly asks, "Hmm?" While staring into my partner's gentle eyes with a broad grin...he scratches the beard sparsely growing underneath his jaw.

"Divine Beast-sama, this beard is no cat teaser, okay?"

"Nn, nya."

Hearing his words, Rollo tilts her head with her ears twitching. *censored cat porn*

After Rollo and Tsuan mess around a bit, I announce, "...Okay, Sol's house is just ahead of the chapel. Let's go."

Everyone, including the Burning Knights, starts walking across the dead leaves carpeting the ground behind the chapel. It's an animal trail I still remember. The broken branches become a guidepost in this forest. The same can be said for the chilly air.

There are also some places with many branches that have completely changed, but...I still remember having walked this path in the past.

The voices of the various creatures living in this forest feel like Popobumu's trumpeting.

Popobumu... I've left him back in Pelneet, but if I had taken him along, he might have reacted to them by trumpeting. Sorry, Popobumu.

But, I think it's impossible because Mimi would feel lonely. Popobumu has also become attached to the kind Mimi...

As Popobumu's trumpeting resounds in my mind while I check the way ahead of us, Mysty speaks up, "Viine, the spirits dancing on the surface of your bracelet are tiny and cute, you know?"

"Yes, Master told me that they're small, old men, and strange old man fairies from urban legends, but they also look like midgets, don't they?" Viine proudly holds up her bracelet with a smile in response to Mysty's question.

The bracelet shines on her bluish-white dark elf arm. The coloring of the accessory combines black and red vertical stripes. Moreover, it looks like ancient letter-like patterns are moving around on its surface.

Mysty enviously gazes at that Legendary bracelet.

Next, Viine points at the small brooch matching the outfit on Mysty's chest.

Neither of us men and cat join the woman talk.

"Boss, sorry."

"It's the smart thing to do."

"Don't mind it. I think Viine has procured a big amount of spare magic cigarettes. Isn't this the perfect chance to smoke them?"

"That's a great idea."

"Still, Viine-san is definitely superb..."

"That's only natural. She's a wise woman after all."

"Nn, nyaon."

While smoking magic cigarettes, us men continue our manly chat.

Afterwards...also because all of us are wearing classy overcoats...we silently walk on while emanating an atmosphere, as if belonging to some kind of mafia, clearing a path through the overgrowing grasses.

Rollo coils her tail around a branch and makes one revolution. She's developed a new, monkey-like game. Thereupon, Hankay begins to sing a song.

"Is that a dwarven song?"

"Yeah, it was popular...just as songs are the world, the world is a song." Hankay puffs out the smoke of his cigarette while explaining so with a cool look.

I receive eye contact from Hankay, asking whether he should go ahead. I nod and keep going while looking at my partner who's walking in front.

Just when I wondered whether I should prank my partner by pulling on her long tail...we should be there any second now, huh?

Shrouded in fog, the forest hasn't changed at all, only allowing for a limited sight...

I look at Tsuan who's walking diagonally in front of me. Let's have him turn back into a finger, seeing how no monsters have been approaching us for a while now.

As he nimbly whirls his khukri blades around, I tell him, "Tsuan, it's going to be alright now. Turn back into a finger."

"Sure thing. Please use me again whenever you need me." Tsuan had a sharp glint in his eyes as he watched our vicinity, but now he reveals a smile as if feeling relieved.

He bows in a way appropriate to a templar. Then his body crumbles apart as if melting into a goo.

The meat-like mass that has dropped on the floor wriggles around while transforming into a golden caterpillar - Ca-chan.

She meanders forward while repeatedly squeaking as if announcing, 『Oh, it's finally my turn~ It's the hairy caterpillar version~』

I'm also somewhat curious about her lower, creeper-like legs, but what's even more interesting is how the violet spots dotting her golden skin change their shape each time she moves, vividly reminding me of a family crest in the Warring States Era.

It might also be cute, if she were to put on a helmet and yell, "Catiza departing to the front!" Moreover, the way she undulates when meandering makes me recall a toy spring. She's approaching me at quite the speed, with a feel of 『I'm doing my very best!』.

But, in the end, for me it's gotta be those pink tentacles of hers. Tentacle horns exist at the flanks and on top of her torso like tiny acorn barnacles. While the small peaks open and close, glittering, steam-like gold dust and particles are emitted.

Catiza draws close to my foot, repeating those unique, caterpillar movements. She jerks up her head, allowing her many compound eyes to fully take me in. Many reflections of me dance across the surfaces of her perfectly round, crystalline eyes.

It's adorable how she does her very best to stare at me. While lightly opening and closing the part that seems to be her mouth, she faintly releases a "Pyui pyui."

"...Yet another mysterious life-form that makes you want to touch them."

"Don't hold back."

Viine, who's come next to me, smiles after blinking her eyes.

"Okay!" A cheerful response.

Then she bends her long, smooth legs, stooping down, and touches the golden skin of Ca-chan with her fingertips.

"Fufu!"

"Chyui chyui♪"

"Nn, nya, nyao~"

I guess Rollo couldn't resist. While maintaining her catloaf posture on my shoulder, she seems to waver whether to rest or touch, but in the end she decides to get off my shoulder and walk up to Viine's feet.

After bumping her head against Viine's shin, she approaches Ca-chan. And then the cat and caterpillar stand facing each other.

"Nya~"

"Chyui!"

Catiza answers, but seemingly thinking that she's going to get eaten, she quickly contracts her body.

Those are, yet again, very amusing movements. They remind me of an African scops owl.

Without minding Ca-chan's fear, Rollo extends a paw towards her. Rollo's expression looks bouncy, like that of a happy child. *censored cat porn*

After some massaging and playing around, Ca-chan blows out some golden, fine particles from her tentacle horns. She apparently intended to bless Rollo.

The golden steam blends with Rollo's bushy fur. Like a squirrel, Rollo darts away from Ca-chan, escaping all the way to me. Her fur stands on end, obviously declaring her shock. While buckling her backbone up and sidestepping as if to perform a crab dance, she vehemently shakes her head, and sneezes several times. The golden powder is also sticking to her wet nostrils...but, it doesn't seem to be harmful.

However, Rollo twitches her nostrils, seemingly feeling uncomfortable from the golden dust.

"Nnn, nya~"

While being in such a state, she turns her eyes towards me. I don't know whether she's meowed to tell me to remove the powder or to inform me that she sprinkled her pheromones on Ca-chan, but she uses her forepaws and tongue to get rid of the powder around her nose.

『...Your Excellency, are you going to use <Spirit Ball Conception> to clean Rollo-sama's nose?』

『No, that's unnecessary』

『I see...』

It looks like Helme wanted to pew-pew her water.

"That golden powder shouldn't be harmful. Rather, it might have some beneficial effect, but...for the time being, I think you should stop, Rollo. Don't lick it anymore. I'll wipe it off."

"Nn, nya."

After Rollo returns on my shoulder, I grab her by the nape, and completely wipe away the golden powder around her nose with a leather cloth.

Alright, now her pink nostrils are sparkly clean again.

"Nya~ksshu——"

Ugh, I received the full brunt of her sneeze. Somehow I remember that this happened a while ago,

too.

Well, she's cute, so I'll forgive her.

『Is the gold powder Rollo-sama's weak point?』

『Strictly speaking I think it's wrong to call it weak point, but now that you mention it...she also sneezed around due to pollens back when we were in the labyrinth. She might dislike fine powder』

『...It might be best to remember this for the future』

『True. She might withdraw from a battle against someone with the ability to stimulate her nose through powder or particles while continuously sneezing』

『Yes. In such a case I'll immediately wash it off by pew-pew-ing my water at her』

As I thought, she wanted to pew-pew her water.

At that moment, Catiza wriggles her body and jumps on my right hand. She clings to the inner part of my hand, and then moves to her finger position while cutely crawling like a worm.

Since I've now obtained the sensation of the sixth finger, I snap my fingers, using the sixth finger and my thumb, and shift my eyes to the Burning Knights who have been training.

"Burning Knights, you guys go back, too."

"Nn, nya." Rollo reacts to my voice and finger snap.

After moving her head up and down while licking her forepaw, Rollo returns on my shoulder.

"...So my duty has come to an end as well, huh?"

"Please call me again. I shall always offer the techniques of my famous sword Black Bone Corruption to you, Your Excellency."

"You sure are lively. It'd be fine for you to continue hunting and training as is, but for the time being, return to the Spirit World."

"Yes, Your Excellency! I shall be off then!"

"Likewise, Your Excellencyyy——"

It wasn't a suicide this time, but they vanish with the smoke puffing out as typical for the Burning Knights. I feel like I heard roaring from Dark Hell Bone Knight for a moment there. This ring, which is connected to them, might know that it's approaching the land of its creation. It's a ring related to the Burning Knights, but it might be funny if it suddenly started to talk with another consciousness inhabiting it, like an intelligent item.

"Come, Sol's house is over there."

That bluish-white brightness prevents monsters from trespassing. Just like before, the stone monuments continue to gleam in this foggy forest, protecting Sol's house like the British soldiers Buckingham Palace.

"Nnn——"

Rollo runs ahead. Maybe she's recalling her feelings when we left here. While also feeling nostalgic, I yell, "Rollo——," chasing after her with my physical abilities as Lucival.

"Nn, nyaa."

I casually use <Demonic Brain Speed (Trump Card)>, ending up leaving Rollo in the lurch. When <Demonic Brain Speed (Trump Card)> automatically runs out after 20 seconds, I can see how Rollo and the others climb the slope after me with serious expressions.

『...What superb acceleration, Your Excellency』

The tiny Helme appears at the edge of my side while swimming in midair.

Oh wow, the outfit she's wearing is unusual. It's fantastic and pretty... Is it an effect of her having personally in contact with Kokbruuundozuu-sama? Or is it because she absorbed the mana from the Time Baku? Exactly because they were divine, she's grown after taking in their divinity? It might be a basic effect of the sage art <Spirit Ball Conception>.

『...Do you have the impression that something new is going to happen if I use my trump card while utilizing <Spirit Ball Conception>?』

『I wonder. I think it's possible if I can thinly clad your whole body with a part of me, but just like I got in contact with the idol of Kokbruuundozuu-sama, I would need to let a part of my body outside...I'm sure it would be snipped off on the way, unable to endure the speed, Your Excellency』

『Hmm, I guess we'll run some experiments later』

『Okay』

As the telepathic conversation with Helme unfolds,

"...Just when I thought there might be some enemy we couldn't detect as you ran up the slope all of a sudden, it's just you sprinting ahead, huh?"

"Correct. But rather than that, this is Sol's house."

I point a finger at a hut connected to an outhouse.

"Okay, so this is brother's..." Mysty looks at Sol's house.

As expected, she doesn't look overly well. She should have made up her resolve, but...

"Nn."

Rollo lost the competition against me, but she doesn't mind. Rather, she looks happy, probably feeling like we played together. She's bumping her head against my leg several times. She also becomes overenthusiastic, climbing up to my thighs. *censored cat porn*

"You're not going to enter? I'll go ahead." Hankay steps into the outhouse where Yui had been put to sleep.

"Ah..." Mysty leaks while watching Hankay rudely going ahead.

She's still feeling shaken.

"Me too then."

Next Viine, and then Rollo entered.

So as to give her a little push, I tell Mysty from behind, "...Mysty, do you want to go to the grave of your family before entering the room?"

That's what I say, but I was the one who killed her brother. I feel a strong, compelling feeling of atonement towards Mysty's fading back...

Once again, the events revive in my mind.

Sorry, okay? Although it was a fight to the death...it doesn't change the fact that I stole your sole brother, your irreplaceable family. The Lucivals being a family, me not knowing that he was her brother, or her wanting to kill him herself are all lame excuses.

"Ah, master, yep, sure...please."

I tried to gaze at her as she looked back, but I couldn't look her in the eyes.

"...Master, don't pull such a face. My brother tried to kill you and Yui, right?"

"I suppose you're right...it's this way."

"Sure." Mysty smiles tenderly.

I lead her to the grave of Sol and Theta. The grave hasn't changed from back then. The colors have faded to some extent, but it still has the same shape.

Mysty stands stock still, staring at the grave. After taking a moment to gaze at the pair of wilted flowers adorning the grave...Mysty cried.

"Bro, Theta-san...shit, shit, shit..."

A single tear runs down my cheek, too...

I can't quite voice some lame pun like having dust in my eye or any other words for that matter. I roughly wipe my cheek.

"Bro, stupid bro, shit, shit, shit..." Mysty crumbles down in front of the wilted flowers. "Theta-san loved these withered flowers..."

"Violets, huh?"

Mysty looks back over her shoulder, and explains while sobbing, "So you knew them, those violet, pretty flowers. Theta-san used them as hair ornaments. Back then I was flabbergasted by my research maniac of a brother for not understanding a woman's heart..."

Lured in by her tears, I nod while crying as well.

"Sheesh, master, what's the point in you crying?"

"Sorry, just when I saw you like this..."

"...Fufu, really — that's no face you'd expect from a vampire, you know?" Mysty stands up with a smile.

She adopts the pose of a beautiful professor lady. Though she merely fixed the positioning of her glasses.

"...Right back at you. Anyway, you've finished your greetings, right? Let's head inside the house where everyone else waits for us."

"Oki."

...At the moment Mysty passes in front of me, I could sense a faint wind from Sol and Theta's grave, but that must be my imagination.

I also start walking, feeling like having my back pushed by a gentle breeze.