

Chapter 337 - Vampire vs. Temporary Party?

Wyverns and drakes are soaring in the sky. At the end of the line, I spot a large dragon I've never seen before.

A new species?

The head of that big dragon has a cockscomb like the Evil Dragon King with showy horns protruding on its sides. The surface from the thick neck and torso all the way to the wings looks unique.

Semi-transparent, skeleton scales?

Blood vessels are visible underneath, pounding. Since its skin looks like morning glory covered by black charcoal, it looks mysterious.

That big dragon chases after a flock of duck-like birds. Its length is at the level of the Evil Dragon King...and it's flying pretty fast.

The red-haired dwarf, old man Mubed, mentioned dragons and ants still being at war.

Speaking of dragons...I wonder whether Balmint is keeping at it. There was a training area on the hill behind Sazihali's refuge. Over there Balmint did his best in practicing to fly by jumping off the steep slope while spreading his small wings.

At a glance, it looked like a harsh training regimen, though...

I remember the cute wings on Bal's back.

『No need to worry, Shuuya Kagari』

I feel like I can still hear Granny Sazihali's encouraging voice reverberating in my ears. No, rather than a granny...it might be more fitting to call her a mother. Sazihali's rejuvenated appearance...was adorable with her costume that looks totally like a dragon with its reddish colors.

I wanna hug her once we meet again. After all's said and done, she's got big boobs. I want to Poincare conjecture her with my palms, no, I want to make them wobble. [efn_note]A really stupid wordplay. The Poincare conjecture is about forming balls out of geometrical objects as long as they don't possess a hole... it's similar to the wobble sfx in spelling.[/efn_note]

As I'm indulging in weird imaginations like the difficult problems of space and the idea of wrapping up big boobs with strings to reel them in, the horse lion Rollodeen meows, "Nn, nya~"

It's not a retort. It's just that a big branch is approaching in front of us. It looks like she's warning me that I'm going to bump into it at this rate.

I've thought about perverted stuff, but I definitely won't do anything as stupid as I did when running across the sandy beach with my bloodkin.

I lower my head while manipulating <Blood Chain Search> which indicates the direction. We pass underneath the long and thin, iron-like branch. My hair is torn off after getting caught in the branch, but I don't care. It's a nice substitute for a barber.

Still, it's the movement speed of a divine beast. If my head got directly struck by that branch...it might have been sent flying.

Speaking of branches...would it have been better if I had reinforced the fence around Quiche's village before heading out to search for the children? If I had added a light-based tree at every key point in the fence, it might have proven effective against vampires.

Well, I guess that can wait for later. It'd consume my mana, and it'd take time to surround all of the village with trees of the Evil Domain Hellrhone. Besides, the village is inside the mountains. There's a cliff, and the front gate is at a ravine-like place between two rocks. It's a simple setup, but works rather well as defense. The left side is a slope with many sections adjoining to the woodland of the sea of trees, but...the Burning Knights, Catiza, and Helme are protecting the village anyway.

Although it depends on the circumstances, those special subordinates of mine are unlikely to get defeated so easily. The enemy would require troops with a certain level of quality.

...Well, if the Burning Knights heard my thoughts just now, they'd likely vanish within billows of smoke as it'd gush out of their armors because of their excessive happiness.

At the point when I conclude my thinking, believing that the Burning Knights are going to properly do the task assigned to them, while riding Rollodeen, I draw Murasame's steel hilt with my left hand. I turn the hilt around on my left palm as if treating it like a rifle. Then I bring it up to my mouth and hold it with my teeth. Next I focus on my shoulder dragon. My dark green attire is instantly sucked into the dragon's muzzle, even including the dirt on it. The shoulder dragon disappears into my shoulder.

I won't activate the Kaleidoscope. I'm going to use what Yui had shown me in combat...that triple-wielding sword style where she held a katana in both hands and one in her mouth. But, right now I'm stark naked.

I'm sitting with a naked butt on my partner's black fur. Well, she doesn't need to worry about me having any accidents there. Lucival have special bowels.

At that moment I felt the wind. Logically it feels unpleasantly cold. But, I don't care! I'm going to keep riding on Rollodeen like a member of some naked barbarian tribe. A tribe that races through forests...I might evolve into superman [efn_note]Another pun as the superman is spelled in JP in a way that could also be regarded as naked man[/efn_note] ...well, if you're going to nitpick, it's not like I'm completely nude since I've still got the item box on my right wrist.

Anyway, I finished this joke within milliseconds. I focus on the wearable computer-like bracelet on my right arm, and silently chant, 『Gatrance-form ON』.

In the next moment, a special, black fiber net comes out from the edge of the round, wristwatch-like glass like an encroaching electronic circuit. That net crawls across my whole body in waves, covering it. My skin finishes dyeing in black fiber within the blink of an eye. In other words, the

construction at the atomic level was completed in an instant.

If someone else had watched this, they might be thinking now that I've been eroded by the black intelligent life-form 『Venom』. [efn_note]A reference to the marvel comic character, I think. [/efn_note]

Right now I'm clad in a jet-black, futuristic combat uniform of refined grace. There's also black fibers on the palms and backs of my hands. The palms are equipped with holes that seem like they could generate propulsion force through the kinetic energy of the plasma particles emitted by Murasame's hilt.

I totally felt like taking a pose, but I held back on it.

The gorgeous, round crystals looking like injection nozzles are the same as the last time. The crystals on my palms are linked with Murasame. It woke the urge in me to fly through the air while holding out both hands evenly to the sides.

I take Murasame's hilt out of my mouth, and return it to its place at my waist. Then I check the badge with its faintly indigo-colored patterns on the uniform's surface at my left chest. I enjoy the sensation of the clasps, buttons, and cool metal. Next I play around by meaninglessly extending the black belt.

No red mantle like that of a certain Spawn has been created on my back, but many black-chain-styled belts have been added. I trace the surface of the trenches continuing from my sides to the back with a finger. Going by the touch, it gives me the image of having been made out of nano fiber plastics.

And then a laser is emitted through the item box's panel. A simple, tiny screen is displayed in the air right above my right wrist.

—— Voice recognition confirmed
—— <<Fold One Gatrance System>> booting up
—— Confirming Inherited Nerves
—— Confirming Link with Kaleidoscope
—— Confirming Hull Link System ... ERROR – Unable to confirm
—— Confirming Satellite Link with Na Palm Integrated Planetary Military Alliance ... ERROR – Unable to confirm
—— Confirming Response of Hostile Galactic Imperial Army Satellite ... ERROR – Unable to confirm

Na Palm Integrated Planetary Military Alliance, eh? It's highly likely that this advanced civilization is watching this planet from space.

I erase the screen. I'm satisfied with the nice feel of the Gafrance-form. We continue our travel through the sea of trees while I feel the gentle breeze caressing my body.

"Nn——"

Rollodeen is high-spirited. Is she a black horse, or a huge panther? Either way, she's my partner with an appearance resembling a black lion. She keeps running while I gently stroke her torso.

But, I wonder, just what are those mana particles she's releasing from her body as a divine beast...? Is it actually dark matter with a trace of gravitons? Maybe mana particles are connected to gauge bosons that act as force carriers in some way.

While thinking about all this space stuff, I spread my arms to the sides...and sense an intense smell of blood.

——Wait, blood?

This is a <Inhalation of Odor Technique> territory. It's a scent coming from a different direction than the one indicated by the blood chain, but...I'm curious about it.

I'll go and take a look.

Rollodeen immediately alters her route towards the source of the blood smell. My partner's feelings stream into me through the flat tentacle clinging to my neck, and since she also understands my feelings, she can act quickly on them.

Moreover, it's the blood scent of some kind of vampire. Rollodeen must be curious about it as well. She jumps to the left with a powerful movement that gouges out the ground. And then she reels the tentacles, which she had used as anchors so as to pull herself towards distant trees, into her neck, and moves on a thick branch in no time after storing the tentacles away.

The branch snaps diagonally off after under my partner's weight, but without minding that, she jumps once more, as if to break the tree, and no sooner than using the trunk of another tree as foothold, she leaps high up in the air while pushing down the new tree with her limbs, and uses a hard rock as her next scaffold.

Rollodeen crosses through the forest at lightning speed, invading the blood territory.

I can see a place from the distance where the trees are being felled and broken unnaturally. The blood scent originates from over there.

Rollodeen drops her speed. With a slow behavior similar to a horse taking a break...she advances towards the place where the trees have been felled.

Soon we can hear the sounds of weapons clashing. A battle appears to be going on. As if to prove that...another tree collapses with a thick, cracking sound. The forest's noise grows in intensity.

My Grasping Perception picks up two, no, three humanoid responses. While riding Rollo...I approach those magic sources.

As soon as we arrive there, I see a vampire and a beastman fighting. And further down from where the vampire and the beastman have their showdown...I confirm another suspicious person whose magic source is weak because they have assimilated with the forest as background.

Eh? Rather than a suspicious person, isn't that Nora over there!?

So she had such a concealment technique at hand, huh...? I just found her by chance because of my Grasping Perception. Her concealment technique, which exceeds <Hide>, is probably one of the reasons for Nora having survived as a solo hunter for a long time.

When our eyes meet while I'm admiring her finesse, she yelps in surprise. Hey, hey, that's sloppy. Even though I praised you so much just now.

At that moment, the vampire and the beastman stop their battle, and take some distance. The two are currently standing in-between Nora and me.

Oh? The beastman fighting the vampire was a woman? Her silver hair looks silky. Her bluish-white eyes have a sharp glint in them as you'd expect from a wolf. Her head is relatively small. Her face is kinda like that of a wolf or Siberian husky. I think it's cute. Also, unlike Mamani, she's closer in appearance to humans. She resembles Sarah of Red Tiger Tempest.

Her chest is bulging, and covered by a black and silver half-plate. It's an armor with a high level of design that has two moons imprinted into it at the spot where her heart would be. Is it related to her claws? And, beautiful silver fur, as typical for a beastman, protrudes out all over her body.

"...First an ancient wolfman, and now humans?" The vampire comments.

The beastwoman belongs to the race of ancient wolfmen I've heard about in rumors. It's my first time meeting one of them. To be honest, I don't want to fight her since she's cute.

The vampire nimbly rotates the magic swords in his hands as if to cut through my slightly perverted look, and starts walking sideways while adopting a peculiar stance. Despite being surrounded by us, he shows no signs of running away. That's not really typical for vampires.

He has changed his hold of one sword into a backhand grip similar to that used by Tsuan. Judging that he's not going to escape from his fighting style...I can expect him to be a battle maniac who loves close-combat. The traces of his ruffed collar having been cut stand out.

His scarlet eyes are bloodshot, and the blood vessels at the outer corners of his eyes throb as they've surfaced on the skin. It's an expression befitting a vampire.

As if combining a <Blood Mana> technique and a mana manipulation technique...he uses a Magic Combat Step that shines crimson. He's wearing jeans-like pants, but their red color stands out.

He walks sideways with a tempo that seems reminiscent of a swaying willow leaf. The vampire secures his combat distance as he adopts a unique stance with his magic swords. A peculiar walking style where hands and legs are synchronized based on a swordsmanship posture. I can feel a stagnation from him as if blood experience has accumulated at the bottom of the stream of times.

The wolfwoman imitates the vampire and also starts manipulating her mana. Her inner mana circulation is smooth. The movements of her legs and loins are powerful, too. They're wrapped up by silver fur, but I can see how the muscles from her buttocks to her calves are bulging as they work.

I think it's pretty obvious that she possesses a Magic Combat Style-based skill. It's a judgment from just what I've seen so far, but...her combat experience might not differ much with the vampire.

Suddenly Nora takes a step forward. She sticks her tongue out, and puts on a cute expression screaming 『Argh, I messed up』. And then she faintly shifts the hand grasping her sword.

"...Shuuya! What a coincidence to meet you here, isn't it? It caused me to scream out in happiness against my better judgment——" She starts to run in a forward-bent posture while talking to me with a smile.

The point of her two-handed, broad holy sword is pointing at the vampire.

That expression before jumping into combat! Without even the time for me to make that retort, Nora closes the distance to the vampire.

She tries to pierce the vampire's abdomen with a sharp thrust that could be called a holy sword <Thrust>, but the vampire deals with it by stepping back several steps. His expression looks relaxed as he leaves the reach of Nora's attack.

"...For human trash to turn its sword at me..."

It looks like Mr. Vampire got a bit angry. He's glaring at Nora.

"This raises the chance of winning! Let me make use of you, human——" The wolfwoman yells.

She dashes forward with the silver fur on her back standing on end. It looks like she's going to take advantage of Nora's attack. She extends silver claws from the middle bones of her fists. Those claws transform into thick swords. Then she prepares herself by lightly crossing the claws in front of her chest. From the flow of her claw swords it's clear that she's aiming at the vampire's head.

The wolfwoman's silver claws look like steel blades. But, the vampire deals with her claws by inclining the blade of his magic sword, causing the claws to slide off the blade. Sparks in shapes similar to fine white noodles scatter from the surface areas where both weapons touch.

The vampire's sword skill is quite high.

The wolfman's landing has been thrown slightly off-balance due to her claws' trajectory veering off. But, she tries to quickly fix her posture, obviously confident in the power of her own trunk.

Even though the vampire saw that small chance, he couldn't attack. It's because Nora's sword is approaching his head from above. Without a single change in his expression, the vampire rotates his body sideways while using one foot as an axis, making it look like the foot had taken root in the ground.

He evades Nora's slash with plenty of leeway. Nora readily retreats after hitting the ground with her sword. None of the foolhardiness she had back when she attacked me could be seen. From the way Nora took distance and her lovely, slightly bashful expression, I could immediately tell that she had aimed at trying to stop the vampire's movements. She's probably weighing the timing to <Throw> her silver thread.

Now then...I guess it's about high time. I've been observing the battle since it was the close combat I like so much, but it's enough of that. I'm going to assist Nora's side.

But, there's something I want to ask that vampire with the grim expression. That's why I won't use <Chain Spear of the Ray System>. They could possibly evaporate him in one shot. Then I wouldn't be able to interrogate him.

But, 2 vs. 1. If I join in, the situation will become a 3 vs. 1. Moreover, even if I fought while not using my light-based skills, it's quite possible that Nora or the wolfwoman would finish off the vampire in the middle of the battle.

Well, let's just accept that it can't be helped if that happens.

After making up my mind, I gently caress and tap the back of Rollodeen's head with my palm, and then jump off her while telling her, "...Rollo, the enemy is the vampire. Since I've got a plan, how about you watch for the time being?"

"Nn, nya~"

Rollodeen seemingly feels nice from having been stroked. She answers me by meowing while entwining a tentacle around the hand I used to caress her. After transforming into a black panther, my partner fawns upon me with growling, throaty sounds as if demanding from me to continue the massaging with that hand.

Good grief, what a carefree divine beast. Even though we're on a battlefield right now.

I laugh at her, nod with the words, 『I'll continue this later, okay?』, and pull my hand away from her.

And then I intensely stare at the vampire. At the same time I summon Baldok into my right hand, and draw Murasame's hilt with my left. Grasping the hilt in my left palm...I trace the hilt's rough surface with my fingers as if savoring the touch of the hard steel. Immediately following, I activate <Magic Hand guided by Thought>, and make it instantly move high above my head. I have it stay up there on standby as if flying a kite.

"Nyaa~ nya." Rollo reacts with an adorable meowing.

<Magic Hand guided by Thought> is filled with dense mana. Rollo, who looks at the magic line extending from its wrist like a string, seems to misinterpret the crooked mana hand as new cat teaser. She keeps staring up to it, following the movements of the magic line with her pupils dilating. Her head looks like that of a panther, but she restlessly moves it around as she follows the magic line, as if chasing after the dot of a laser pointer. That frantic chasing of the magic line is clearly the behavior of a cat.

Next she takes a few steps forward, tracking her prey, and climbs on high ground pursuing the magic line. Seemingly spotting something else, her head turns into another direction. Lured by her action, I stare in the same direction, but hmm? A fluctuation of magic elements in the air? Ah, it's gone.

Since there's no response from my Grasping Perception, it could be just my imagination. But, although I told her to watch the battle, she now plays around with <Magic Hand guided by Thought>...oh well, let's leave her to her own devices.

I focus on the vampire in front of me. Then I adopt a forward-bent posture, and charge at the vampire while adjusting the angle of Baldok.

I feel a faint shock from Baldok which I've lowered diagonally. The ax blade has clashed against the rocky ground, causing a shrill, metallic sound to assail my ears. Baldok hits against the rock once more. It feels like the rock is melting, but I don't pay any attention to it. I raise Baldok a bit, and while keeping the ax blade level, I dash.

As I feel the wind grazing past my bangs and ears, I barge into the 2 vs. 1 battle. Let's get on with the vampire vs. temporary party for a change!

The vampire has evaded the wolfwoman's shooting of fur from a kick motion by jumping. I aim at his torso as he's rotating in mid air. While running I shoot <Chain>.

"Wh——"

With the chain suddenly having appeared in front of his eyes, the vampire's refined, calm expression completely changes. He lifts his curving magic sword in a hurry, holding it diagonally in front of his face.

I make <Chain> clash against the magic sword's blade. It's moved at a speed people usually wouldn't be able to react to, but as expected, the vampire is strong. But, my <Chain> is a <Chain> in the end. Its trajectory has been diverted a bit, but it's impossible to stop it unless you trap it in some way.

"Guaaah——"

Obviously the chain breaks through a part of the vampire's magic sword, and then penetrates his shoulder. The vampire drops his sword, crying out in pain. The sword stabs the ground.

"...A chain projectile weapon. Some strange secret art, huh——"

Even while groaning in pain, the pain instantly turns the other magic sword at himself, cuts off the arm alongside the part of the shoulder stabbed by my chain, and withdraws to get some distance.

The old arm, which has fallen to the ground, disintegrates within moments, leaving flesh and bones behind. But, the blood remaining there is quickly sucked into the vampire's shoulder wound. The vampire's arm returns to normal as well. And then he uses the recreated arm to pull out the sword stuck in the ground.

He looks my way with a nonchalant air. The slow motion of the blood flowing back to him in fine detail was extremely beautiful, but...being glared at by a vampire who looks a bit like a handsome actor with a sharp glint in his eyes is slightly scary.

"...Humph, it's because he's a vampire at progenitor level. This will never end unless we find his weak spot." The wolfwoman says while squinting at the vampire, and then turns her attention at my <Chain>.

Her look is, to be frank, adorable. But, I don't know whether she's a friend or a foe. Right now we've got a united battlefield, but...she might suddenly attack Nora from behind.

I could further use <Chain> against the vampire, but for now I make it disappear.

The vampire, who's watched it happening, says with a grim look, "It looks like you're misunderstanding something. I don't possess such a great power as Hoffmann-sama."

Hoffmann-sama, eh? I've heard that name from Veronica.

"You're saying you're at the level of a <Servant Leader>?"

"...Indeed."

The blood chain following Arry's blood is still pointing in another direction. But going by probability, it's got to be him who kidnapped the children, no?

I guess I'll make sure, just in case.

"...You're from the Valmask family, right?"

"Correct. Are you an adventurer manipulating chains?"

"I'm a spearmaster. My name is Shuuya Kagari."

"Spearmaster, you say? No way...my name is Yuo."

He told me his name after I introduced myself. He's unexpectedly well-mannered? But, Yuo? If it was Judas, he'd be a betraying disciple, though.

But leaving that aside, I should ask about the children. I don't know whether he'll answer honestly though...

"Did you kidnap some human children?"

"Not only children. Gathering blood is the duty of a <Servant Leader>."

He answered honestly without hiding anything, but...

"Hey! I don't want to listen to some yapping of prey!"

The wolfwoman shouts after having kept her distance, and charges at the vampire. Looks like things won't go as conveniently as me getting some time to talk with the vampire.

Yuo moves the hilt of his magic sword as if drawing an eight in the air, easily repelling the wolfwoman's claws.

"I'll join in as well, and I'll take the prey for myself."

"Shuuya, he's also my prey!" Nora butts in while closing the distance with her peculiar way of walking.

She draws a semi-circle towards the lower body of Yuo with her holy sword. She has apparently planned to hit Yuo's leg, but Yuo lifts one corner of his mouth into a smirk of joy, and releases blood from his feet. His blue pants immediately dye red.

The blood transforms into pointed blades, as if taking on a solid state, while heading for Nora and the wolfwoman. The blood blades change into something similar to sickles. They assail Nora as if creeping past her sword.

Is it a technique using Yui's <Blood Mana>? I cannot allow the blood attack to hit Nora. If it's blood I'll counter with blood, not dark stakes or light chains.

I focus on <Blood Path - Open First Gate>, releasing blood from my whole body.

I deploy my blood while thinking that this is certainly what Helme would have done. Yep, I'm imagining a simple curtain. The blood curtain engulfs the two women to protect them.

The blades unleashed by Yuo run into my blood curtain and evaporate.

"<Araul's Blood Blades> evaporated!?" Yuo screams out in panic.

Well, I'm sure he's never seen his prized technique go up in mist.

"Eh?"

"What the hell is this?"

Nora and the wolfwoman are surprised after seeing my crude blood curtain. In that moment, I close the distance to Yuo with my Magic Combat Step. After stepping in as if biting into the ground while twisting my waist, I thrust Baldok out in front of me, unleashing a <Thrust>.

Yuo looks dumbstruck after having his blood evaporate in front of his eyes. But, even in that state, he still responds to the <Thrust>. He moves his body back by half a step, but Baldok's red spear tears through Yuo's long coat, and the ax blade rips through his flank.

"Guaaah."

As if being gouged out by the Evil Dragon King's fangs, Yuo's flesh and bones are pried open. Yuo screams as accompaniment to the scraping of his bones, and escapes to the left.

But, I have no intention to allow him to regenerate that easily. I invoke a series of 《Ice Spheres》 and 《Ice Arrows》 from close proximity.

Yuo wields his magic swords, trying to block the spells with a defensive stance. But, he's too late.

The 《Ice Spheres》 and 《Ice Arrows》 heading for him while spiraling penetrate his surcoat, and open up many holes in his torso. Blood sprays out of those holes like from a shower head. It looks like he has no <Blood Mana>-based defense skill.

However, he's a vampire's <Servant Leader>. His wounds regenerate with the holes closing up. And his recovery rate is extremely high. Any magic-based attack will be almost meaningless, unless it's light-based. It's only going to let Yuo experience pain.

Well, I'm going to continue the onslaught, though.

I turn my eyes towards Nora. She silently nods. She's holding something that gleams in silver. It seems she's got ready to use <Throw>.

On the other hand, the wolfwoman is wary of the blood-spray-shaped curtain. She carefully moves her silver claws towards the blood curtain which looks like mist. But she looks uncertain whether she should touch the curtain with her claws. Either way, she doesn't try to move from the spot.

In the meantime, I continue showering Yuo with magic attacks. And, I gradually increase the instances where I use the powerful spell 《Frozen Snake Arrow》.

Yuo's body doesn't freeze, but as an outcome from me using 《Frozen Snake Arrow》, he keeps spouting blood.

At the moment when his recovery rate has dropped, Nora doesn't let the chance slip away, and throws her silver thread with a "Fufu——"

The threads clash against Yuo's torso.

"Guaaaa, silver, silver spider——" While raising the loudest scream in today's fight, Yuo tries to move his body.

With his body entwined by an excessive amount of threads, his skin melts, and he stops being able to move. It seems to be quite painful. His skin keeps changing into a coloring of festering and scalding. As I watch it happen in real-time, I unconsciously furrow my eyebrows.

But, he's an enemy. And, even in this state, I can still interrogate him. I'm going to question him about <Head Servant> Hoffmann, who's probably created Yuo, and the children.

...However, I've also got a blood chain skill allowing me to track the children, so I'm not that desperate. I suppose I'll give Nora the credit...

With those thoughts, I shift my eyes towards Nora.