

## **Chapter 341 - Death Butterfly People vs. Head Servant Hoffmann**

Even with Higlia on her back, Divine Beast Rollodeen doesn't ease on the speed. Is she perceiving Higlia as being above average when it comes to mana and physical abilities as an ancient wolfwoman?

Well, we're talking about Rollo here, so it's probably just because she likes Higlia's smell. Or otherwise...

...it might be simple thoughts like 『It's fun ~nya』 or 『Let's play ~nya』.

Her limbs move powerfully as you'd expect from a divine beast. As if matching up with my pulse, her paws move rhythmically. Her sharp claws scratch big rocks as they tread on them. Then her hind legs kick off those rocks, pulverizing them like sand castles.

She plunges ahead while keeping up such a momentum.

Moreover, her forepaws land on a thick tree, looking similar to a protruding surfboard, diagonally above us, and her hind legs, which follow milliseconds later, then powerfully leap into the direction indicated by the blood chain while breaking the tree.

The impacts and maneuvers are terrific. Higlia cutely whispers quiet screams. At the same time, her hands, as they wrap around my waist, tremble slightly.

I place my palm atop her hand, filled with the intent to give her relief. Her silver fur has a fluffy feel.

"...Thanks."

I don't reply.

We continue lightly passing through even the hardest courses and terrains. In the middle of our journey, Rollodeen suddenly stops. She's found an insect she appears to like. Breathing rough through her nose, my partner...lowers her head while advancing along a tree with her body tilted leftwards.

Unintentionally, I recall the famous soundtrack from The Pink Panther. Getting carried away, I lightly tap the flank of my partner.

At the same time, while stroking the skin beneath her fur on the back of her head, "Rollo, now's not the time to play around."

"Nn," Rollodeen ignores the bug, and advances onward by kicking off the tree.

Before long, a cave looking like a dragon caw protruding out between two big cliffs comes into sight. Rollodeen shakes her head left and right. While grandly letting the majestic lion mane sway sideways, she abruptly stops moving.

The <Blood Chain Search> points towards the cave. The dripping blood also vanishes as if to indicate this direction to be the correct one.

The cave is huge... This must be our destination.

A village is situated above the cave. I guess they built it using the whole structure as a natural stronghold. I can also see huts and wooden watch towers erected alongside the steep cliffs. No people are visible, though. It's kinda eerie.

Well, it's probably the place where Hoffmann's gang is hanging out, so I guess it's only reasonable. It might rather be an unexplored region than a remote village.

It's obvious that the people have come down using narrow stairways carved into the cliffs, but it looks like a fairly inconvenient construct.

Come to think of it, the Goldiba village is atop a cliff, too.

At that moment, Higlia asks from behind, "Is this our destination?"

"It seems so..."

While feeling her hot breath on my nape, I look at the entrance area beneath the cliffs.

Huh? Is a battle going on right now?

"A vampire is fighting butterfly women, or rather some mysterious race."

"T-...Those are..." Higlia becomes startled, however not from the vampire, but instead the butterfly women.

Is she scared? She mutters, "Death...", with a trembling voice. I don't hear any articles being used though...

Going by her expression, I suppose she means to say that those mysterious butterfly women are dangerous enough to wake a feeling of impending death in her.

The vampire fighting them is wearing a cloak with a high, laced collar. In short, a guy with a very stereotypical vampire outfit. But, the hands of the old-fashioned vampire are slightly different. He's wearing fingerless gloves made out of modern fabrics, despite being made in the style of medieval ages.

Moreover, several, small, oblong and transparent vials are affixed to the bones forming his fists. The tips of those vials have assimilated with his hand while buried in the carpals. Rather than vials, they look more like test tubes, I guess.

Those tubes are not only filled with liquid, but also countless tiny bugs which release phosphorescent light. Those mini bugs look kinda cute. But at the same time, they contain lots of magic elements. The small, silver particles spat out from their tiny mouths are pretty. Looking at it from here, it's beautiful since they seem like snowflakes swirling around inside a snow-dome.

Ten black sword claws, as big as longswords, are extending from his fingertips. The blade pattern on the longswords looks pretty nifty. On the blade surface...ten words similar to kanji have surfaced: Sky Bird, Heaven's Stab, Moon Blow, Heaven's Blade, Pain Gate, Heaven's Pillar, Violet Gate, Mysterious Gate, Double Black, and Snake Sword.

Those are weapons contradicting his Western outfit.

In addition to the special, variant characters similar to ominous, ancient writing found on charms, a membrane of mana spreads across the surface of several swords like an oil film, and in an instant, the sword blades go up in flames as if having that oil film ignited.

His grim eyes are cool as they peek out in-between the burning blades.

Is Hoffmann possibly a reincarnator? Did he use a skill of his subordinate <Servant Leaders>? Or is this his own skill? Or maybe it's the result of him adopting the power of the small bugs into his body?

The black sword claws with the kanji inscriptions acutely remind me of Catiza. But, they're thicker and shorter than Catiza's. Watching the movements of each of the swords, I momentarily remember the protagonist of Edward Scissorhands. I really wanna watch that movie once more. In the past I enjoyed it while munching on popcorn with one hand. But, although I didn't have the mental state of the protagonist, I felt miserable.

Anyway, the vampire manipulates such claws with his eyes gleaming crimson as if expressing his fury. The quality of his movements as he wields those blades is abnormally high and calm. The motions as he switches between sweeps and stabs are fluent. He unleashes many, special, iron-cutting slashes with his burning blade claws.

The whole has a might that makes it appear like a tempest of peerless longsword techniques.

But, it's not just his handling of the blade claws. His footwork is superb as well. No sooner than charging in a forward-bent posture while creating illusions of crimson spots at his feet - seemingly using a <Blood Mana>-based acceleration skill, he launches a chain of kicks while jumping into the air.

It's a kicking technique capitalizing on the swords growing out of his fingers. Moreover, following the kicking chain, he launches blood bullets from his cloak after performing some elbow blows and knee strikes.

He's quickly and powerfully moving around while laughing. He unleashes sword techniques, interweaving techniques of the Peerless Sword Style, the Flying Sword Style, and a self-taught sword style.

But even so, the mysterious woman consisting of white butterflies or moths is laughing as well. She displays a nimble dance as it'd befit a butterfly, magnificently dodging the vampire's super sword techniques.

Precisely because she's a moth, it's not necessary for her to stay on the ground. Alongside her big

scythe, she uses a rotation technique of tilting and twisting her body as if tumbling through the air at a low altitude. While evading the approaching claw attacks, she uses the handle and blade of her scythe to easily repel the blade claws.

Each time she repels a blade with its gleaming kanji characters, a dissonant, metallic ringing reverberates.

Suddenly, the other reddish purple butterfly woman, who wields a big sickle, vanishes as if being spirally sucked into space. Just to reappear behind the vampire in the next instant.

A teleportation skill while scattering her purple butterflies, huh?

The butterfly woman artlessly brandishes her sickle as if exhilarated and overjoyed. The blade of her sickle, swung in a fan shape, seizes the vampire's back, and readily cuts his torso up alongside his cloak, separating his body into upper and lower parts.

His expression not betraying any pain is just another sign how dangerous he is.

Great amounts of blood gush out of the cut sections. But, just as one could expect, the blood is immediately pulled back. His upper and lower body parts combine like powerful magnets of opposite poles, restoring his previous figure in but a moment.

The cloak, which has been severed by the sickle, crumbles into dust as soon as it hits the ground, and vanishes, but...that's a vampire for you; the speed of regeneration is abnormally high. And on top of that, he looks rather composed.

His face tells one that all of what happened just now was very natural.

Is he possibly <Head Servant> Hoffmann of the Valmask family?"

Rather than him, the two butterfly women seem to be much more of a problem? They're like apparitions of butterflies and moths... Their faces closely resemble those of humans, and they're transcendental beauties. I suppose it'd be more fitting to call them an idol group cosplaying as butterflies.

Their expressions right now...are dyed with an obvious cruelty as I've never seen in my entire life. I immediately look at Higlia.

She's completely scared as she looks at the two women.

"Do you know these two butterfly people," I ask her while confirming the direction of the blood chain.

The tip of <Blood Chain Search> is moving. Maybe the children are still alive. Or maybe their corpses are being transported on a wagon? I'd prefer them to be alive, if I could choose...

Time to stop playing spectator. I'm extremely...curious...about the pair of butterfly women, but I'll ignore them for now.

"Higlia, we have no business with the vampire and butterfly women fighting over there. I'm worried about the children, so we'll head inside the cave."

"Y-Yeah, but, I don't want to get close to that place...still...Shuuya, you're heading over there, right?"

"Did you forget what I told you earlier? I'm going to leave you behind if you hesitate." I remind her while focusing on looking at her sternly.

I forcibly remove Higlia's arms, lift a leg, and jump off my partner's back.

"Ah, please wait. I-I know, I know," she stutters towards me while nervously dismounting as well.

Immediately after both of us have gotten off her, Rollodeen transforms into her black panther form. Then she starts to mess around. \*abbreviated\*

——In the meantime, I summon Baldok into my right hand.

"——You ready, Rollo?"

Stopping to scratch her neck, she looks into my eyes, and nods alongside a throaty growl. Then she nods at me in her typical manner, and runs ahead.

"Wai-!"

She's fast! While assessing so, I catch up with my partner. Then we continued running next to each other.

Many cracks can be seen running across the wall of the cave's entrance. Rubble is scattered on the ground...and, blood, huh?

I can't tell whether this blood originally belonged to a vampire, but...it's ghastly and bizarre. Blood pools are all over the place. Those remind me of the scenes of hell supposed to etch eternal torture into the minds of the sinners.

I really can't stand this place.

But, the blood is something like a reward to me. Feeling like killing one bird with two stones, I draw plenty of blood to my feet, and quickly absorb it. Arzen's Boots become bright red.

"——Ah, it's the spearmaster and black panther-chan!"

"They've finally come here~"

"What the hell's wrong with you butterfly women!?! Destroying our facilities and stealing our precious materials...for you to even suck out the life of my <Servant Leaders>...you should have simply stayed in your damn territory..."

I can hear the voices of those fighting from behind, but I ignore them. Rollodeen and I trespass into

the cave.

—However, I feel bloodlust from behind. I react swiftly by jumping to the left. Immediately following a sound of wind being cut, a small butterfly is stabbed into the direction I was heading for.

Rollodeen has dodged by twisting her body and jumping to the left. Higlia, who's been running behind us two, has stopped, obviously scared.

A <Throw> by the butterfly woman, huh? After confirming the bracelet-shaped butterfly stabbed in the ground, I can see how a transparent, strangely twisted mana chain extends from the end of that butterfly bracelet. That mysterious spell or mana chain is connected to the arm of the butterfly woman.

Or rather than an arm, you could call it a lump of butterflies forming an arm, huh...? Does that magic chain possess the same power as my chains?

The reddish purple, extremely beautiful butterfly woman exclaims, "Whoaaa, he dodged it! The spearmaster is a remarkably strong fighter, after all."

She praises me while reeling back the mana chain into her arm. But, then she stops doing so midway. The woman lovingly checks the tip of the chain as if stroking a snake. After finishing that, she sends an ominous look my way as if trying to read my face. It's a stare full of pheromones as beauty.

...Argh, no good. I almost got charmed. But, I don't answer her look.

I focus on the moth woman. She's having a fierce battle with the vampire. The mysterious woman, or rather, Higlia told me earlier that they are Death Butterfly people, so I guess I should call them that. Anyway, both work.

But, that vampire is strong. I thought that he might only have those black blade claws of his...but, he's also created a swarm of blood swords and spear which look like a black cloud as they hang in midair.

He uses that swarm of black blood swords and spears alongside his own claws. His swords are fast, overwhelming the moth woman. He keeps precisely slashing down the white moths which flutter around the moth woman. He slays them with a verve as if not allowing a single moth to get away.

He's damn powerful, that vampire.

Moreover, he scatters the hat of the moth woman away. He's pushing. That vampire seems to have no bottom in the depth of his skills.

The woman, who instantly recreates her hat, is also amazing. Her body is made out of moths. Huge lips, like those of apparitions, manifest between the moths. Her ears becoming big is no magic trick either.

The big mouths release mana waves and frightening screams that would whittle away the spirit of

any ordinary person. Are those cursed voices? The sound waves, which are obviously curses as visible from their shapes, and waves of mana completely dye form a cursed space around her with a force as if pulling space itself into the dark world of the dead.

But, the vampire deals with it in a relaxed manner. His blade claws and the swarm of spears and swords cut the curse-like attack apart. A crooked, discordant sound mixing heavy and shrill noises reverberates.

Neither of them bests the other, huh...?

"...Are you interested in Jody? But, I wonder, has there ever been an opponent who could evade my <Alrune> by intuition?" The butterfly woman addresses me.

The name of the moth woman seems to be Jody.

The butterfly woman completely pulls back the magic chain, and makes its tip coil around her finger as if twirling her hair into a roll. The movements of her finger feel lewd as if she's playing around with a dick.

Ah, it's not a dick. The name of the magic chain is Alrune, isn't it? It might be the item's name.

But, her distorted face as if she's smiling like a fool while placing a finger on her chin goes on my nerves. It looks like she's gloating with self-satisfaction.

Moreover, she repeatedly lets her eyes wander as if checking Baldok, and...as if licking my body all over. Even though I'd like to save Arry and Taack... I don't intend to lead on the gaze of the butterfly woman, but...

"...It looks like you're planning to get in my way." I say while shouldering the metallic staff part of Baldok.

At the same time, I use Magic Perception, and stare at the swarm of butterflies forming her body. There's countless butterflies, and I can sense dense mana from each and every single of the small butterflies. The mana winds like a whirlpool.

That butterfly woman might actually be an outlandish opponent. The scale of the size is different, but the quality of her dense mana reminds me of Evil God Steertop.

I reflexively and naturally swallow my spit. Would it have been better if I had brought Helme with me?

It's not just her <Spirit Ball Conception>...I feel sad over not having her cheerfulness with me right now.

Before I realized it, Helme had become a part of me. Around now she might be chasing Quiche's butt, but...but, she's a good distraction. Thanks for always, Helme.

Now then, as for fighting that butterfly woman...first a surprise attack with <Chain>? Next, a screen of ice magic after boosting my speed with <Blood Mana>, huh? Or should I immediately seal her

movements with <Chain Spear of the Ray System>? Afterwards, I'm going to close the distance, launch a <Thrust> with Baldok and then a <Darkness Drill>, and lastly, it might be a good idea to cut apart the butterflies with the blue spear tassel of Ganghis in my left hand.

Just like that, I simulate the combat in my head within an instant.

Then I clad my feet in Magic Combat Step, followed by a slow 『Wind Reading』 of the Wind Spear Style's way of walking. I turn sideways, looking at the butterfly woman. While placing my body's weight on my toes... I walk to the left.

"...Fufu, a look that makes me feel an immense darkness, and a way of walking that allows me to see a tremendous amount of experience. Just looking at that special magic spear makes me shudder♪"

"——Hey, Ciel!? It's unfair for you to play around with the spearmaster!"

"——Don't fuck with me, Death Butterfly woman! Don't underestimate the Valmask family! Let me carve into your mind why I've become a <Head Servant> and why I'm allowed to work outside! These "Ten Evil Stars - Ranuen" aren't the only special weapon I've got on me."

The vampire seems to have his pride hurt by his opponent looking away in the middle of their battle. But more importantly, it looks like he's <Head Servant> Hoffmann after all.

Hoffmann proudly screams the name of his ten, black blade claws.

"——I'll show you the height of the blood paths..."

He's amassed ridiculous amounts of mana?

"Hahahaha! Blood Path - Third Gate —— eat my <Walpurgis Night>——" He yells with a tone full of dignity while invoking his skill.

Still, for "Faust" to appear here... Was Hoffmann born on April the 30th? If he's a reincarnator, he should be from Germany or France. Melchior Hofman, who advocated eschatology... He's the guy who predicted that the world would be destroyed by the conflagration unleashed by Elijah and Henoch, eh...? The 『Ethiopic Henoch Writings』 were famous for their teaching in sorcery.

As I indulged in all those impressions, his eyes shone in a bright red light, and half of his body suddenly went up in flames.

Eh? A suicide?

His ten claws also become only five. No, the other five only seem to burn. His burning body transforms into dark red blood...melting like a candle wrapped up in fire. Matching with the change of his blood, a part of his characteristic collar also transforms.

Black blood floats up into the air. The wings of a bat...? Or, it also looks like a new cloak. The black blood ripples towards midair. A small, fluttering curtain unfolds in front of Hoffmann in a fan form. But then, the billowing, swaying blood turns into a crow which loudly flaps its wings. It's not

just a crow either.

A huge sarcophagus? A coffin?

Moreover, the black blood transforms into all kinds of monsters such as gigantic arms, and legs. No wait, they appear from within the black waves. It's a hoard of evil spirits, starting with the deep black crow.

All of them swoop down on the moth woman who's looked away in the middle of their fight.

The lid of the big sarcophagus slides to the side, allowing me to take a look at the huge arm with scaly skin within. Next, skeleton arms grasping hatchets appear from within the coffin. Rotten, stinking flesh clings to the joints of the skeleton arms. Moreover, a black wing like that of a fallen angel is growing at the upper part of the arms?

There's around 200 in total of those skeleton arms. The swarm creepily crawls while clattering.

And then a headless knight enters the stage with an annoying horse neighing. It's no illusion of a knight either. While wielding its dark red flamberge and shield to the side, it rapidly beats down the white moths.

"Kyaaa——"

"——Jody!" The butterfly woman screams.

The other woman has fully taken on the onslaught by Hoffmann's unique army of evil apparitions. It's only natural for her to be worried.

But, I have no intention to let that opening pass.

——I use Magic Combat Step, running towards the butterfly woman in a forward-bent posture.

She reacts by shifting the handle of her scythe. After shortening the hold on the metallic handle, she traces its surface with a finger.

Instantly, magic letters surface on the handle's surface. While glaring at me with her slit eyes, she remains cautious of me.

She reacted to my movement, but I didn't care, and thrust Baldok's spear at her. I firmly step down with my left foot after stepping in with the image of creating a fissure, and while twisting my waist, I push out Baldok to the front with my right hand, unleashing a full power <Thrust> targeting the butterfly woman's chest.

But, "Kuuh! How fast!"

She receives the red flash which is my <Thrust> with the handle of her scythe, causing the metal to screech. At the same time, sparks filled with intense mana scatter between the red spear and the handle. The spot where they've met looks a little bit like a firework. Small butterflies get burned.

While seeing how the butterflies keep vanishing, the butterfly woman retreats backwards.

Thereupon, Rollodeen roars as if declaring that she won't let her get away, and releases tentacles from her neck at the woman.

However, the woman responds by slightly tapering her mouth and deploying a defense array of butterflies by allowing her gaudy clothes and her own body to fall apart.

For an instant, it's such a huge amount of butterflies that my sight is buried by them. The barrages of butterflies clash with Rollodeen's countless tentacle bone swords. All of the tentacles are offset in midair by the butterflies, stopping the advance of the tentacle bone swords.

"——Black panther-chan, you do have cute tentacles♪" She says, appearing to be composed.

It's her after having changed a part of her body that has lost its butterfly costume, but...the butterflies keep flying out from within that body of hers. The butterflies, which overflow while looking like flower petals, continue to tightly engulf her body, and thus recreate a new body and costume for her.

It looks like it's cost her mana though. The mana of the butterflies has decreased. Did the butterfly woman suffer damage by chance?

"Nya." Rollodeen meows dejectedly after seeing that her chain attack of tentacles didn't work.

She pulls the tentacles back into her neck. And then releases a beastly roar for the first time in a while. It looks like she's trying to intimidate the butterfly woman as much as possible.

Then she places both forepaws half a step to the front, and circumvents to the right while sidestepping. It's the threatening behavior of a carnivore hunter.

But, to me it looks adorable. It naturally calms me down, and it suppresses my hostility towards the butterfly woman...

Still, it doesn't change the fact that the butterfly woman has attacked us. While checking her with Magic Perception, I ask, "You seem to know about me, but who are you?"

"They're Death Butterfly people. Opponents you mustn't meddle with in the Sea of Trees..." The one answering is Higlia who didn't participate in the attack out of fear.

Her silver fur is standing on end all over her body.

"Death Butterfly people?"

"Yep♪ That's what we've been called in the past. My name is Ciel♪"

"So, Ciel-san or whatever, do you wish to fight me?" I question her while pointing the tip of Baldok in her direction.

After muttering, "Looks delicious...", as she stares at Baldok with both eyes, she yells as if

laughing, "...Fight? No, I want to play!"

While switching the hold on her scythe, she whirls it around. Ciel herself rotates sideways as if practicing the evasive "Toe Half Turn" I trained at the Goldiba village in the past. At that moment, the color of the butterflies at her chest changes to blue. Two twin hill-like swellings are distinctly reproduced by butterflies. They're extremely fascinating boobs.

But, I've seen those butterflies once in the past... Morpho butterflies? There's a small, round mark shining in silver on her chest. The blue butterflies are blinking within that circle. I feel like I've seen those somewhere before...

Ah, I remember! It's the coin inside the belt I had Suloza's shopkeeper appraise for me. ...It's name, if I remember correctly, was 『Golgonshura's Key』. Its shape and color match perfectly.

"The color of those butterflies..." I mutter while remembering.

"Hmm? Spearmaster, do you possibly know about this mark?" Ciel asks after looking at her own chest.

"I might. That's the mark of Golgonshura, isn't it?"

"Eh? W-W-Why!?! You know..."

Ciel trembles across her whole body the instant I mention Golgonshura's name. Countless butterflies keep flying out of her body as if making their escape. The color of the blue butterflies crumbles apart, and she looks so disturbed that she actually drops her scythe over it. The scythe vanishes as soon as it hits the ground.

Is this possibly a chance allowing me to exterminate the butterfly woman? But, for the time being, I signal Rollodeen with my eyes to not attack. Of course, I also look at Higlia.

But she only shakes her head, indicating that she doesn't understand what I want to say. And after pointing a sharp look at Ciel and me, she repeatedly extends and withdraws small silver claws from her fingers.

"Higlia, fall back a bit, even if only for a short time."

"...Even though you're someone I told my name to, I cannot afford to withdraw here."

Hey, there's love in those eyes of yours!

As soon as I see those eyes, I avert mine.

"...Don't get in my way then."

"I know."

Is her name so important for her? I suppose it was wrong of me to have asked for it. Well, she's scared, so she likely won't start attacking anytime soon. If she does launch an attack, I'll have to

protect her. I guess I'll focus on a defensive form with <Chain> then...

I shift my eyes from Higlia to Ciel.

"...Are you curious about Golgonshura?"

"...Yep. I won't play around anymore, so tell me why you know that name..." Ciel pleads with her eyes moist.

Meanwhile, her butterfly body is gradually shrinking down. The butterflies around her have shrunken down to the minimum of their size as well.

Huh? What kind of trick is that?

"Why have you become small?" My voice sounds somewhat shrill out of surprise.

What's going on with the other woman? Asking myself, I check her, just to see that she's still fighting with Hoffmann.

The battle between Hoffmann and her...has developed into a furious storm. The ground has gotten depressed at many parts, and many straight cuts adorn one side of the cave.

Hoffmann makes his swaying, black blood expand like waves or an aura. All kinds of evil apparitions have come out from those blood waves until moments ago, but...currently, the waves have reverted to simply drifting in the air. Is it the kind of skill that heavily drains one's mana? Or it might consume a lot of mana? Or maybe it's a skill that can't be used consecutively?

But, that black blood winding around him looks quite eerie either way. Is it a skill close to my <Beginning of Dusk>?

I've thought so several times today, but the ability of <Head Servants> is the real deal. There's no comparison to the likes of <Servant Leaders>.

It makes me wonder whether a vampire hunter like Nora would be able to win against a <Head Servant>, even if they exploit the vampire's weakness.