

## **Chapter 344 - Spell Me Surprised**

T/N: Changing <Beginning of Dusk> to <Dusk of Origin>



Tremors seemingly teeming with malice roared and echoed within the cave belonging to the vampire's den. This place might look like a grotto which had been dug out by the ocean over decades, but currently it was the blood test site run by <Head Servant> Hoffmann, a direct servant of Empress Familia Ravahl Valmask Lugnad.

Blood frescos, appearing to invite their viewers into ancient times, decorated the rock walls which resembled peridotite with a cold color temperature.

However, the walls had traces of having been shaved off, making the frescos look somewhat distorted. The blood wriggling through the grooves of the central mural bordered a huge depiction of Vampire God Lugnad. It also bordered small paintings of the pair of moon gods, Uraniri and Uryou, with a big and small moon as background. Lugnad and the two moon gods belonged to opposite poles.

And there was a tiny painting of God Wolf Hurley to be found as well.

Vampire God Lugnad's depiction was majestic and beautiful as it dazzlingly shone in crimson. The painting showed him extending one hand to the sky, a flock of weapons with pink designs such as arrows, swords, axes, and spears was being fired at the twin moon gods from its tip.

Uraniri's entire body was hit by those blood weapons, crucifying her to a bloodstained cross. Her face was filled with anguish and mortification. Sprays of blood told a story how she tried to pull out the many weapons stuck in her bloody body with her own slender hands. As proof of that, a great number of bloody weapons already lay at her feet. In addition, the big moon behind her had been smashed into smithereens.

On another wall you could see how vampires fought the god wolf and his ilk, the werewolves, amidst gorgeous houses, futuristic underground facilities, and throngs of blood vials. Every once in a while gravediggers searching for crimson weapons made an appearance on the frescos.

A pale light streamed down on those walls from the ceiling's dome. However, because this here was a vampire's den, that light didn't stem from the sun. It was a faint twilight emanated by thorny tree branches similar to crystals which circulated liquid. Those thorny crystal shrubs had crawled their way all over the dome, covering it thickly. The pale lighting gave birth to an atmosphere of mysterious profundity.

Completely contradicting the fairy-tale-like walls and lighting, loud clattering and noises thundered throughout the cave.

The main reason for the tumult would be found with the Death Butterfly people. They had swooped down on the vampire's den as if to hunt down every last one of them.

And on top of that, a group used that turmoil to make their escape. They were the prisoners around Moga and Nemus. They had been able to escape their jail thanks to the whimsical rampage perpetrated by the Death Butterfly people.

As for the details of how this exactly played out, we need to go back in time a bit.



Ciel and Jody swung their big scythes, easily bisecting the steel cages. Those two were Death Butterfly people - adorned with beautiful smiles on their lips.

While these two women acted like gods, they playfully gaggled away.

"Let's wreck this play here as well~♪"

"Wonderful idea, let's save all these captured, pitiful people of low mana."

"Yep, all of you, run away as fast as you can~"

"We slaughtered lots of those pesky vampires, but there's still many of them lurking around, so be careful!"

Moga, Nemus and the other prisoners were taken aback by what the two women told them. The blood threads binding their bodies had come undone and vanished.

Meanwhile the Death Butterfly people played around by chopping up the jails and the corridors with their scythes. The cheerful duo was quite fickle. But, without robbing the lives of those imprisoned here, they quickly disappeared.

Thus, the many prisoners were rescued thanks to the Death Butterfly people.



The prisoners advanced through the fantastic cave while fighting off vampires. Even at this very moment, Moga had killed a vampire by bisecting him with a series of <Parrot Slash>, resulting in a short lull in the fighting.

"We must go on while bearing a will of iron in our hearts."

Everyone nodded at the words of the old man. Though not everyone understood the meaning behind them. However, they could tell what he wanted to say from the desperation reflected on his face.

"Come on, you lazy bums, we need to get out of here." Moga urged on the others.

The lively children each squealed cheerful replies at that. Meanwhile Moga and Nemus ran ahead, just to encounter another batch of vampires, which then resulted in yet another fierce battle.

Moga freely used his Moga-Style swordsmanship to cut down the legs of the vampires as if dancing.

"Moga-san, we'll help out too!"

"Sure."

"Gooooo!"

"Uaaaah."

Muscled men swarmed the vampires who had fallen to the ground from Moga's slashes, ganging up on them and beating them to death.

At the same time, the gigantic steel tree Nemus made full use of the narrow width of the corridor. As if burying the small corridor with his large arms, blocking the way, he slammed down his hands while yelling, "Ne~~~mus!"

Several vampires were squashed flat like flies by a fly swatter.

Nemus and Moga led the rescued people while slaughtering vampires at a good pace. At some point they reached a dead end, but Nemus simply crushed the wall, breaking open a hole and pushing his way through.

And yet, the vampires didn't relent on their savage pursuit.

Moga and Nemus frantically fought on, but gradually the people, who escaped with them, dwindled in number as they kept getting assaulted by vampires.

Arry and Taack tried to also attack the vampires with weapons they had picked up along the way, but as predictable, those were meaningless when taking on vampires.

And then, a single ray of hope appeared. At least, the single, red flash unleashed on their adversaries made them feel like that. Moga and the others watched how the body of a vampire was gruesomely bisected.



I activate <Blood Chain Banquet> instead of <Dusk of Origin>. Should I also use the Ring of Mist Mirage for an instant? No wait, since it'll very likely confuse the survivors, I'll hold back on that.

I brandish my bloodstained Magic Halberd.

"——Rollo, Higlia, I'll annihilate the enemies in this area. Don't get in my way!" I inform the two

while absorbing the delicious blood clinging to my body.

"Nya."

"Okay."

Within milliseconds I erase Baldok from my right hand after using it to reap a vampire. Following that, I summon Ganghis into my left hand, and swing it at the vampire bastard entering my field of view on the left.

The vampire tries to bite a karamnian through a gap between Moga and Nemus. That karamnian must be one of the people who escaped together with the two. I guess I'll save him while I'm at it anyway.

Unconsciously adopting a forward-bent posture, I dash forward like a gust. At the same time, as I suggest I'd use <Blood Chain Banquet> as a weapon, I close the distance to the vampire snapping at the neck of the middle-aged karamnian. Following the flow of the Wind Spear Style's 『Wind Grind』 which consists of unleashing a spear attack from a forward-bent posture, I aim at the vampire's back.

As if my left hand has become one with Ganghis, I lunge out a <Thrust> straight ahead, driving the spearhead made up out of two symmetrical, crescent-moon-shaped blades through the flesh of the vampire. The vampire's back is cleaved open, bones and all, as if crushing it like tofu. The faintly vibrating spearhead of Ganghis stabs all the way out of his chest.

"Gyaaa——"

I can sense the vampire's weight through the handle of Ganghis. And at the same time as Ganghis sucks up my mana, its blue tassel right beneath the spearhead transforms into a gale of blades. Those blades chaotically chop the vampire's lower half apart as if he had been tossed into a mixer. Patterns similar to crooked Indus scripts appear on the blue blades' surfaces.

Do they look like that because of the Ganges?

The vampire's screaming becomes even more miserable, turning into a scream of death agony, but I don't give a damn.

The vampire's bloody spine has been exposed. I lift Ganghis with my left hand, raising the vampire's lower body high up into the air.

At that point, I extend blood chains from the fingers of my left and right hand, following the image I've come up with in advance. The chains form a shape I've seen before.

Yep, I'm imitating the ten black claw blades Hoffman had used. Of course I can't reproduce their stylish kanji, but the blood chains marvelously copy the shapes of swords.

One of the blood chain blades extending from a finger of my left hand pierces through the vampire's back. Immediately following, the vampire bursts open like a ripe tomato.

My visual field gets crammed with dazzlingly shining, blue and silver specks of dust. The faintly glowing clusters of color created in midair disperse like a fleeting dream. It's hot due to a scorching wind, and the dust seems to also carry a heat thanks to the effect of my special attack. The weight of the vampire vanishes from Ganghis after he explodes.

In the meantime, I've extended my blood chain swords with blades as broad as those of longswords into the air. All of them head for the vampires attacking Moga's group while illuminating the corridor with vivid, vermilion trails. They accurately stab the vampires while spiraling.

Just like the vampire who has exploded after getting stabbed by Ganghis, they crumble to dust while emitting geometrical patterns of blue-striped and silver light.

<Blood Chain Banquet> also contains my light-attributed blood. It's a super dangerous, special anti-vampire attack. Resisting it is next to impossible for vampires of <Servant> class.

After eradicating the vampires, <Blood Chain Banquet> stretches out diagonally above as if to demarcate the cave's interior. Eventually their pointed ends pierce into the walls which have cracks all over, probably thanks to Nemus.

Great amounts of blood circulate on the surface of the blood chain swords as if pulsating. Of course, the blood trickles down after losing out to gravity. It's the birth of bloody anchors.

I won't move around the upper parts of the wall like Tarzan while reeling <Blood Chain Banquet>, or in other words the blood chain swords, back into my body. I pull them back in with the intention to return the chains into my fingers normally.

And then, in order to create new options for Ganghis, I make just the chains from the fingers of my left hand coil themselves around the white handle in spirals. As I do, it looks like the hue of Ganghis' square blade crests gains in color intensity, but it must be my imagination.

I'd love to research those crests in my own way like Baldok's, but...basically you can say, the power and speed of the basic <Thrust> will naturally go up the more I do it. And, as the Magic Combat Style and <Blood Mana> heavily rely on experience, they'll develop further the more I use them in actual combat.

Daily training is important... Spearmanship is truly deep. Let me thank <Demonic Cerebral Spine Revolution> and Master Achilles who gave me spearmanship, no, the strength to survive.

While swinging Ganghis sideways, which is now covered by blood chains, making it look like a new spear type, I confirm that all vampires in the area have been eradicated.

However, the appearance of this new spear is... I'm sure if Master Achilles saw it, he'd scold me with 『...You moron! What's with those flashy blood chains! Do another 500 basic <Thrusts>!』...

"Nn, nya~" Rollodeen meows after having watched the spear's movements.

Mmh, it feels ticklish.

『Play』, 『Play』, 『Love』, 『Blood』, 『Love』, 『Want to play』

She passes on her feelings to me. She's pressed the tip of her bean sprout-like tentacle against the back of my neck. The touch of her pad on my nape feels lovely.

It seems she believes took all her prey. Then again, I did announce that I'll handle it myself in the beginning. It appears she controlled herself despite wanting to play.

I turn around to Rollodeen who's trotting briskly over from behind. Thereupon she leaps into my chest with a meow. I put my hands around her back, embracing her.

While we have such a relaxed atmosphere going...our surroundings have become as deadly silent as the coloring of the cave. The rescued people likewise quiet down.

Even though they're safe now, they don't really appear to be overly happy. I suppose it's because I've used <Blood Mana> just like the other vampires. Spear users using chains soaked in blood hardly exist in the first place. There might have been spear users, who used <Blood Mana>, among the other vampires as well.

Going by that reasoning, it's only natural for them to be wary of me. I can't help it though since my blood is strong.

Releasing Rollodeen out of my embrace, I scratch my head with a finger while trying to explain so as to resolve the misunderstanding. But, at that moment, "...Terrifying. Sure, they were <Servants> or inferior vampires, but for you to kill them this easily..." Higlia addresses me while looking baffled.

"I told you I'm of a different race, with this the misunderstanding——"

I attempt to explain to her, but without listening to me, she continues while shaking in terror, "...Do those crimson chains possess the power of Uraniri-sama and Uryou-sama? But...there was the crimson chain with a sickle-like tip that guided us here, the steel blue chain that protected me, and your raw strength as well as your spear arts which repelled the death butterfly woman..."

I can see in her eyes that she's frightened. Well, it's because she watched me annihilate the vampires here in an instant in addition to the battle against Ciel. It looks like I ended up planting a seed of dread in Higlia, despite herself being strong against vampires as a proud ancient wolfwoman with her awe-inspiring silver fur.

"It's simply owed to me having the light attribute." I explain with a few words, but it doesn't have much of an effect on the look in her eyes.

I believe that her ancient wolfman race counts as nonhuman as well, but...I guess it's inevitable for her to be scared like the rescued people after watching an abnormality like me.

Even though I've got a weird relationship with her just because I asked for her name, I think it's now gone with this?

However, Rollodeen likes Higlia. Even right now she's carefreely 'entwining' (wrestling) her long tail around Higlia's small tail in a weird way. It looks like Rollodeen's casual behavior gives Higlia

a peace of mind. After all, she's smiling again.

Seeing that, I reflexively feel warm and fluffy. Or rather, Higlia had a tail as well, huh? I noticed just now.

At that moment, I realize that the chain of <Blood Chain Search> is floating close to Arry.

『Thanks for guiding us all the way here』. After bowing at the chain while voicing out my gratitude in my mind, I make it disappear.

"...The enemies were burned away...or?"

Moga seems dumbstruck by the phenomenon of the vampires he had been fighting suddenly having vanished in front of his eyes...

"Still, aren't you Shuuya?" He runs up to me after confirming Rollodeen and me once again.

"...I am, Nemus!"

With a slight delay, Nemus approaches as well. As usual, he's a special life-form combining steel and tree. No wait, am I going too far with calling him special? His race might be a very common sight in some areas of this huge planet.

More importantly, he's as damn huge as ever... However, he did well to get all the way here... This cave has a high ceiling...I think there were even some places along the way where Nemus wouldn't be able to pass through, though...

At that point, I see the path they took with its gently-sloping descent. Okay, that makes sense.

There's a huge hole in the wall with broken rocks scattered around it. I guess Nemus has been advancing while punching holes in the walls. That's a dangerous thing to do...but rather than that, his lumbering footsteps are quite loud.

I believe the ground is made out of hard bedrock, but Nemus' feet still leave footprints in it.

"Nemus, don't break any walls anymore." Moga Günther advises his partner Nemus.

His appearance is similar to that of an emperor penguin. His attire is slightly different from our last meeting. It appears his activities as adventurer in the labyrinth city where he calls himself Sword King have been going well. As a result of hunting in rooms with guardian monsters that spawn treasure chests upon death other than the Black Sweetwater Snake, he apparently got rich.

However, the longsword at his waist is still the same as before. And just like in the past, his cute hands got ten fingers.

His feet are those of a penguin. But, his mana manipulation technique, which I consider to be Magic Combat Style, looks a lot smoother than before. His combat abilities appear to have reached a new level as well.

Still, seeing his figure sure feels nostalgic...

『That penguin ain't as simple as he looks』, while those words of the past echo within my mind, I focus on smiling.

"...Yo, long time no see, Moga and Nemus."

"Nn, nya~" Rollodeen greets Nemus, and then bumps her head against the shin of his huge leg.

"Aye. It looks like you're using a different kind of spear nowadays." Moga points at Ganghis.

Apparently he has memorized my spear to be Baldok.

"I, am, Nemus."

"Nyaa."

"I...am Nemus."

"Nn, nyao."

"I'm Nemus."

Nemus moves the small branches similar to eyelashes bit by bit.

"Nyaa~ nya."

As I'm about to answer Moga's question, Rollodeen begins some strange conversation with Nemus. I'm sure the mysterious BGM playing must be my imagination.

For some reason, Nemus flaunts his tough shoulder. Is he trying to tell Rollodeen "I am Nemus (Get on my shoulder)?"

Either way, she hasn't reverted into her black cat form. That's why the meaning behind Nemus' shoulder emphasizing doesn't get through to her, I think. The eyes of my partner, interweaving black and red colors, stare at Nemus' mystical, glowing, crystalline eyes.

"Nn, nyano."

Does she regard Nemus' eyes as candy? She might be thinking that those look tasty.

Unintentionally, a smile forms on my lips. Then I look away from that mysterious space created by Nemus and Rollodeen.

Let's answer Moga's question about the spear.

"...The Wind Spear Style I inherited from my Master basically relies on one spear, but...I'm continuously striving to improve myself in my own way by using two or three spears." With a grin I summon Baldok into my right hand.

"Oohh, so it's a weapon summoning, just as I thought!"

It seems Moga knows some summoning-based skills.

"A rare skill, eh? And a dual-spear style! I've heard that there's a Divine King ranker using a quad-spear style. I guess I'll also aim for a dual-wield sword style befitting a Sword King by capitalizing on my Hidden Sword Style."

"I don't know anything about Hidden Sword styles, but I'm a spearmaster, you know? What's the point in you getting influenced by me, Mr. Sword King?"

Well, I can understand his feeling since I've been influenced by swordsmanship in the past as well. While making sure to smile, I cross Baldok and Ganghis in front of my chest.

"That makes sense. But, could you show me that dual-spear style of yours?"

I reply to Moga with a nod. It's going to be a commemoration for the reunion with the funny duo of Moga and Nemus. I'll show them, who I've met in Pelneet, how I evolved during my time in Pelneet.

After preparing to go with my original dual-spear style after psyching myself up like that...

『Know that there are martial arts principles to be found on the path of using your spear』

Recalling those words of Master Achilles, I take half a step forward with my left foot. I begin with a light dance performance while demonstrating a way of walking where I deliberately create gaps in my movements by shifting my trunk's axis.

As a final move, I handle the two spears as if drawing an arc in the air, and stab Ganghis' spearhead into the ground with my left hand, and extend Baldok diagonally upwards by bending my right elbow inwards.

It's the conclusion after exhibiting my 『Eight Revised Stances of the Dual-Spear Style』.

In response, all the former prisoners break out in cheers. I hope it's because they've approved of my skill as a dual-spear user...

"...Hmm, new spearmanship principles, huh? I can sense various martial arts from it." Some unknown grandpa draws the attention of his surroundings with nothing more than those words.

Thereupon, Moga and Nemus yell, seemingly excited. The children cheerfully draw close while loudly chattering about my spears.

It appears the former prisoners trust Moga and Nemus. Since both of them are adventurers, they've bravely fought off the vampires.

Well, I think most of it is owed to the rampage by the Death Butterfly women, though...

As a side effect of that, the people probably feel relieved after watching us having a friendly chat with Moga and Nemus.

"...Bro, you're awesome! Dual-Spear Style! You also killed the vampires as if erasing them from existence!"

"...Mmh, everyone got fired up by it!"

Arry and Taack are fully of energy. They lure me into naturally laughing.

"But Bro, I feel like I've seen you somewhere before."

"Did he appear in the hero book we had Quiche and Sherry-neechn read to us? Hohatos or something?"

"The Seven Spear Heroes of Twilight Who Used to Be Arena Slaves?"

"Yeah, but, Bro is much cooler than them."

"Right? His spears are neat as well! I wonder whether I should try to become a spear user?"

"Eehh? Even though you've always said, "Quiche! Quiche! Your skill with the sword and shield is amazing," or called her your master, Taack."

"I mean, spears are friggin' awesome, aren't they?"

"That's true, but..." Arry admits while gazing at Ganghis.

"Quiche always says that it's good to learn various things."

"Still, I'm fine with the swordsmanship and shield techniques Quiche-oneechan taught me..."

"Humph. You're saying all that, but you've been staring at the white spear for a while now."

"Ahaha, you found out~ Those red snake-like thingies coiled around the long, white spear are really interesting!"

"The weird cluster of blue hairs right below the two moons seems rather delicate, but the hair also seems fluffy and bushy."

The tassel based on the blue hair of Ancient God Girimekara, huh? Arry and Taack seem to be quite interested in Ganghis.

"Haha, you guys sure know how to praise my spear, don't you...? But what matters most is your safety. I'm really happy to find you still alive."

I look at the rabbit tail dangling at Arry's waist...and then gaze at the children while recalling Quiche's beautiful face.

"...I'm Quiche's friend. She asked me to rescue you guys. The name is Shuuya."

"Eh! Ooh, I remember! You're the spearmaster and the black cat who saved us in the past! But, isn't your cat bigger than in the past? She looks just like a black panther now..."

When I rescued Arry and the others in Vahraydus's Bewitching Palace, they should have seen Rollo's black panther form...her size might be slightly different now.

"Ah!! During the ant subjugation! It's me - Arry!" Arry excitedly tells me while hopping up and down on the spot and raising her hands cheerfully.

"I know."

She's a karamnian girl, but still very cute.

"Shuuya, are you Quiche's important person?"

"...Quiche-oneechan has been calling you a precious friend."

It sounds like Arry and Taack have heard about me.

"Correct. I hurried to this place because my "precious friend" Quiche asked me to. So, were you able to survive because Moga and Nemus were here?"

"Hmm? Some pretty butterfly people destroyed the jail for us, so we simply have been escaping together, I'd say?"

"What was that! And yet you called me cool some time ago!" Moga rebukes.

It's funny because his face is just like that of a penguin.

"...I am, Nemus."

Nemus joins our conversation as well after finishing the strange conversation with Rollodeen. But, since he's using the same old word, I don't understand him at all.

His partner Moga seems to understand his feelings, though.

Now then, let's bring this harmonious get-together to an end. It's about time to get out of this place.

"...Moga and Nemus, Arry and Taack as well, let's leave this cave for the time being, okay? You people in the back are alright with this as well, right?"

"We'll follow you."

"Thanks~"

The rescued people thank me while smiling.

"Everyone, thanking onii-chan has to wait for now! Escaping takes priority!"

"Let's get out~"

Taack talks proudly, befitting of an adventurer, and Arry follows up on him while nodding.

"You're right. I want to leave this bloody place as fast as possible. Let's go, Nemus."

"I'm Ne~~~mus!"

Hearing Moga and Taack's encouragement, Nemus starts to run ahead.

"Higlia, Rollo, you okay with this, right?"

"Yeah."

"Nn, nya——"

And thus we ran back through the cave, safely escaping. As soon as we leave the cave, everyone raises their voices in surprise.

Though that's only natural since the terrain has completely changed thanks to the battle against the Death Butterfly women.

"...All that matters currently is to get away from this place. It's possible that Hoffmann is going to return. Let's go." I warn all of them as they're standing around, staring in mute amazement.

And then I continue leading everyone in the direction of the village protected by Quiche, Helme, the Burning Knights, and Catiza.

Well, although I say so, we're in the Sea of Trees, so...it's difficult to walk across all the leafy mold. We're ten people, but since we have some ordinary people with us, the walking pace naturally becomes slow.

Higlia hasn't told the others that she's an ancient wolfman. And going by her appearance, it looks like they consider her to be a beastman.

Nevertheless, she's been enjoying chatting with them. I can understand her popularity, seeing how she's got a pretty face, a cute canine, a rather big chest, and a tail...in other words, she looks adorable.

If it's wrestling in another meaning... (T/N: A cross reference to the wrestling of tails above)

No, lewd thoughts are no good in front of the frolicking children. I pull myself together, and advance through the Sea of Trees while watching the children.

Arry and Taack seem to be fond of the unbalanced duo of Moga and Nemus. Taack strokes Moga's pelt, apparently liking it, and Arry has Nemus give her a shoulder ride. It's a fun time.

"What's this mark on your shoulder?"

"I am Nemus!"

Nemus' voice is awfully deep, but...what mark on the shoulder?

Arry points her small finger inside her legs. Since I'm curious, I stare at Nemus' shoulder. Hmm? The kanji for maple? Kaede? Why Japanese?

"Maple, huh? Why has a Japanese character been carved on your shoulder, Nemus?"

I pronounce it in Japanese.

"I-I-I AM Ne~~~~~mus!!"

At that instant, Nemus shows a big reaction with both his shoulders shaking. Stars twinkle within his crystalline eyes as if they're dilating. Or rather...crystal drops are trickling down from his eyes?

Are those possibly tears?

Nemus stamps his huge steel feet, and beats the ground with his huge hands. Arry tumbles off his shoulder out of surprise, but Rollodeen timely saves her with her tentacles.

"——Wha-!? Nemus?"

Moga is also shocked by Nemus' odd voice. I'm completely surprised as well. [efn\_note]The last sentence can't be localized since it's a Japanese word game. The title of this chapter and the "completely surprised" here are represented by the proverb 驚き桃の木山椒の木 (Odoroki momo no ki sanshou no ki). Ki stands for tree. And Shuuya says as last sentence: 木は鋼木だが (ki ha hagane ki da ga...) which I'd loosely translate as "Tree stands for steel tree in this case though..." So you can see, it refers to the proverb, but can't be localized at all.[/efn\_note]