

## **Chapter 366 - Deliberately Acting Eccentric**

A robed illusion appears from the center of the torn fog. The eye sockets peeking out at the low-hanging hood are sharp. And the illusion has a unique, white goatee. It's a grandpa with a long and narrow goatee.

That robed grandpa is floating while setting a golden and indigo blue fog loose at his feet. I can't see any eyeballs in the sockets, but...faint, beam-like light rays are being emitted from the sockets.

Judging from the shape of his lips, he seems to be some kind of dignitary.

『One who shelters bright light and at the same time deep darkness, I can smell a holy spear from you who devoured the heart of Ancient Dragon Baldok』

Holy spears have a scent? Well, I did certainly eat the Evil Dragon King's heart. I've possessed <Torrent of Light Evil> for a long time now though...

『...You with the keen sense of smell, who might you be? I devoured the heart of the Evil Dragon King. And I was entrusted with the Holy Spear Arost by a certain elf』

In an instant, I activate <Magic Hand guided by Thought>. The crooked mana hand is clasping Arost. I manipulate it to show the spear to the robed illusion.

The second Kisara sees the glimmering of the cross-shaped spearhead of Arost, she yells, "Shuuya-sama, you possess a holy spear...", and genuflects.

『Superb. This is certainly Arost! I'm a hermit called Xtrin』

『My name is Shuuya Kagarin』

Grandpa Xtrin, huh? The upper part of his face is hidden by the hood. Thus I can't grasp his expression, but I still bow towards Xtrin.

He's a senior. I've spent quite some time with my grandpa, so for this reason as well, I offer proper respect and use the 『Ra Kelada』 salutation for Xtrin who seems to be a being close to the god of light.

『...Hero Shuuya-dono who has inherited the will of Ygir Fortona who assisted the holy war, the human war of independence, I am well aware that it is a sudden request, but please hear me out』

『I don't mind listening to it for the time being』

『...Would you be willing to grant the wish of the spirits here to return them to the sacred ground of Hardelende? I would like you to save their wandering souls...』

That's his wish, but I'm not an obedient tool either. I'll gladly show him respect, but...

『Does that mean you want me to head into a mysterious underground ruin located deep

underground while clearing all obstacles on the way as I protect the spirits?』

『Indeed. Despite the existence of the golden path...it'll also be a long journey riddled with many obstacles. And I believe that you'll have to brave many dangers to recover the holy ground stolen by Humltrolls and Hardelende which was taken by Goddess Rolga's forces』

Humltrolls? It looks like there exist all kinds of troll species. I wonder whether the trolls that kept roaring were those humltrolls or whatever. Though I haven't heard any of those troll cries after I came back and defeated the semi-transparent orc...

Anyway, I feel sorry for the grandpa and the ghosts, but I'll refuse here.

『...I must decline if it's urgent』

『...Whuuuaat!?!』

Xtrin removes his hood out of surprise over my reply. A divine light emanates from his azure, cross-shaped Demonic Eyes which are dwelling in his eye sockets. His eyebrows are thick, long, and narrow. His nose bridge is high and finely-chiseled. However, he's still a grandpa with a peculiar hair crown as the hair on top is coiled up like a snake.

『...If I'm asked by my friend, I think I'd investigate, even if it might be hidden deep in the underground』

『For you to listen to your friend's request while not paying any heed to my words...』

『I might reconsider if I'm directly asked by those pretty ghosts over there. But, I'm a busy man. So I'd postpone dealing with this either way』 I explain honestly.

It's true that I'm busy. The revival of Cydale is only at its beginning. I have to renew the wall, including the main gate. I'm also planning to build a water wheel and repair the waterways.

Moreover, I need to report through blood messaging to Viine who's in the middle of training in the Whirlpool Forest of Demonic Mist. I also have to ask Mysty about her progress in investigating Sol's inheritance.

I want to talk about Kulbul Boxing with Rebecca who looks so charming in her Muntomi clothes. I'm pretty sure she's going to complain to me about her clerk job at Betty-san's tea shop.

I want to have a relaxed chat about juggling with Eva. She must be worried about Tanaka Confectionery, which looks like it's going to become a business rival, or her ingredient gathering for the restaurant.

Besides...

I must share the anti-Valmask war information about Hoffmann with Veronica. And I also want to meet my Master again.

There's also Tsuan's wish of wanting to see his wife who might live in the holy city or be dead for

all we know. After arriving at the Great Desert Goldix, Kisara's homeland, and moreover the Religious State Hesliphat, I'll have to head to some hill, and ram Arost into the ground atop that hill.

It's been a while since I was last in the Holy Kingdom, and I really wanna see that pink-haired princess again.

Furthermore, I have something that needs to be delivered to Hellrhone by using the Score of the Demon King and the Highcellcone Horn. Although I'm worried whether I'll actually be able to perform the music. For better or worse, I've got the Lute of Justice which I can treat like a guitar, but...even when I asked Kazane about the score, she only told me, 『The score seems to be restricted to those who can play the music written on the score. I've also heard that you need specific instruments to play it』.

As I'm remembering all that,

『...The saint's words...』

『H-How could this be...?』

The ghosts have started to...noisily chatter.

『N-No way...even though our honored ancestor has lamented...』

『...Even though he stared at our breasts』

『But, he said he'd reconsider if we asked him』

『...What an indecent man』

The beautiful ghost twins glare at me.

『The hymn was insufficient!』

『Extol...』

With those words, the ghosts begin to sing again.

Even though I feel bad for the ghosts, somehow, something is irking me about all this. In the first place, I'm not some hero or anything like that.

『Shuuya-dono! You can hear the screams of these souls, can't you? Won't you grant them their wish...?』

Hmm. Speaking of the underground world, there's Amu of the Religious Organization Halfmalida and Independent Underground Volcano City Devil's Mountain, but...down there I'd probably run into many other enemies besides Rolga or the Demonoid Empire.

It's foreseeable that it'd be a very challenging trip. The ghosts' wish, and Xtrin's request...they might pinning their hopes on me as their hero, but...for me they're elves who are no more than Quiche's

ancestors. I don't feel any obligation towards them.

『...Xtrin-san, it's impossible for now. It's too suspicious as well』

Xtrin reacts by twitching with his eyebrows. I continue while glaring at that, 『...It smells fishy, or rather, I can strongly sense ulterior motives of the divine domain or light faction behind this. ...I don't have any intention to become a simple sacrificial pawn for either. Besides, I'm also no hero or saint who's reached enlightenment...where would you find a saint, who slaughters enemies without hesitation? Seeing how you're well aware of that, you, who saw my power of light, might be trying to use the desires of these souls or ghosts to incite me into killing Underground Goddess Rolga by appealing to my conscience』

At that moment, Xtrin suddenly widens his Demonic Eyes as if they're splitting open.

『...Fuhahaha, what a magnificent ability of deduction! You're right, I'm using them. I'm not of a race that merely acts on a sense of justice after all...』

『Uh-oh, your tone has completely changed all of a sudden』

『...Shuuya-dono, your intuition is correct. But, it's likewise true that these souls are grieving』

『I know. But, I'm someone connected to the world of darkness, you know? Are you still going to ask for my help despite knowing that?』

Once again, I'm straight honest with him.

『...That's the very proof of you embracing the light. Have you realized that you're unconsciously dealing with me using a fair and square attitude? The ability to meet everyone, no matter what their affiliation, with an open and broad-minded approach is what you call the path of a ruler. I believe in that nature of yours, Shuuya-dono. That's why I'm saying that you can take these ghosts all the way to the holy ground said to possess a flower garden of a thousand purple and ten thousand crimson flowers after following the path of light...』

Such a heavy responsibility...

The instant I decide to refuse Xtrin, the forest, which Rollo and the other two tigers are currently exploring, starts to stir.

A thick, green fog begins to overflow at the roots of the beech-like trees. The instant the birds sense the abnormal air, they all fly off at once in panic. The green fog, illuminated by the moonlight, is about to swallow the forest.

That ain't no normal fog, I'm sure.

It's the exact opposite of the fog created by the ghosts. I can immediately tell that it's a suspicious fog, and its effect immediately shows, too.

Huge numbers of maggots and earthworms gush out, seemingly crawling across the trees' bark. A moment later, a monster appears which widens its huge muzzle and eats the trees alongside the

bugs. It's very broad, like a fusion between a weasel and rat.

And then deer monsters and wolves also show up as clouds of dust billow up from the falling trees.

The wolves are werewolves. Maybe ancient wolfmen like Higlia? The wolfmen wield their claws that have turned into flamberges as they're fighting the army of deer monsters. Just like Higlia, the wolfmen have transformed their claws into armor.

The deer monsters come in all kinds of sizes. Just like there are bipedal deer monsters with huge horns that have conspicuous, dream catcher-like ornaments...there are also gorilla-like deer monsters with four big arms that are crying just like gorillas.

The gorilla deer look strong.

In addition, I can also see deer monsters with deer heads, three legs, a chubby lower body, an upper body with thick fat at the chest, and two long, narrow arms. The heads of those three-legged deer are moving swiftly.

One of them transforms their darkish arms into cylinder shapes with lightning-speed-like movements that don't suit its body build, and uses those to blow away a wolfman. The cylinder-shaped arms make it look a bit like a spear user, but there's another deer monster with a spear-using head.

The forehead of the deer...is the same for all of them. The narrow and long chin widely cleaves open to the left and right. Countless tentacle hairs are growing out from the tear.

Also, the deer monster with the spear head holds a bamboo spear in its left hand. It's made out of bamboo, but since it contains mana, I'm sure it's pretty powerful. On top of that, it's grasping a bone spear in its right hand.

I'm curious about that spear user, but...there's another abnormal deer-type monster that draws my attention. It possesses a deer head, but its neck is that of a snake, and its torso and limbs resemble a lion.

That chimera deer kicks off a tree trunk with a piercing shriek, attacking a part of the wolfmen by utilizing the recoil from its kick.

Within those rampaging deer monsters...stands a monster with a tremendous amount of mana. It's flanked by two huge wolves on either side.

Is that the boss leading the deer-like monster force?

Without much of a surprise, the boss also has deer antlers on its head. Its upper body resembles that of a human woman. But, the lower body is squid-like. Yep, the kind of squid swimming around in the ocean. An aquatic creature similar to a planarian with many tentacles, no kidding.

The tentacles extending from its lower body are connected to the chokers of its wolves. Is it keeping huge wolves by turning its squid tentacles into chokers?

A thick, green mana pours out of the wolves' eyes. This Sea of trees has river branches all over the place, so is that boss-like being the lord of such a branch? [efn\_note]I think a reference to Princess Mononoke[/efn\_note]

"Whoaaaaa, monsters have arrived from the western forest——" The lumberjack Ebe is running away towards us from the direction of that forest.

The ax he's holding has darkish blood clinging to it. Ebe is also injured with his right side bleeding.

"Are you alright?" I ask and immediately cast 《Water Cure》.

The cluster of water disperses, raining down on Ebe and thus healing him through magic.

"Ebe-san, get behind us." Kisara instructs while looking at the forest and taking several steps forward.

"——Nn, nyagoa."

Oh, Rollo!

Rollodeen in her panther form holds a big deer head in her muzzle. Its head resembles that of a human, but...ah, she crushed it. She shakes her head sideways while crunching down on the skull with her molars. It's a way of eating that declares a wild, black panther being in the house, rather than that of a divine beast.

And as she eats, four elastic tentacles are extending from her neck, each having a monster corpse dangling from its tip like a blood-stained accessory.

I suppose Rollodeen has already saved the ancient wolfmen. Looking once more at the corpses on her tentacles, one has a deer head, a bulky chest, three arms growing out to the side from its back, and four long and narrow legs like that of a wild goat. It's a monster type that has its whole body covered by a thin layer of light brown fur.

It looks like Rollodeen has butchered those strong-looking monsters with a huge number of tentacle bone swords.

"Nyao."

"Nyao."

These voices don't belong to Rollodeen. It's the big tigers Hueremy and Alray who are behind Rollodeen. Both of them are also holding deer heads in their muzzles. The Rollo Squad sure is a mighty force...

Just like that, the Rollo Squad, led by Rollodeen, begins to fight in order to save Higlia's brethren.

Next, a big bear monster with reddish brown fur shows up. Its body is densely covered by the fur, but it's obvious that it's tough. It roars thunderously while gouging out the trees' roots with its claws.

More and more monsters keep appearing.

A demonic ape beast that manipulates glittering light threads? No, that's wrong. It's a monster that seems to combine a monkey and locust. It's spitting light threads from its mouth and torso. Except for a part of its torso and the face being monkeyish, it's a huge locust. The wings with their warped, wrinkled skin are strangely realistic and scary. But, the light threads are pretty.

The monkey locust skillfully handles those threads. They keep shooting out from in-between the trees as if cutting through the dark night. Going by its appearance, its mobility is understandable. It might require special attention.

The aim of the swift monkey locust is...what seems to be a huge, hairy caterpillar monster that's advancing from the opposite side while knocking down the trees. The monkey locust entwines the threads around a tree branch, and reels them back into its mouth, heading straight forward with its body curled up.

I can see it heading for the area beneath the caterpillar monster with its dark brown bristle. The big caterpillar is broad. It doesn't resemble Catiza's golden caterpillar mode.

The caterpillar monster keeps extending hedgehog-like, bristled feelers. It seems like it wants to counter the light threads with those. The caterpillar accurately stabs the approaching threads with its bristle needles, and energetically carries them over to the base of a nearby tree. It's coped with the threads by pinning them to a tree in reverse.

During that monster vs. monster fight rages on, the bear monster approaches the open space in front of my home. The battle between deer monsters and ancient wolfmen is going on. The Rollo Squad has been assisting the wolfmen, but there's still many deer monsters around.

The deer boss makes a bunch of tentacles fly to the sides. It's moving sideways with a calm attitude while producing wet squishy sounds. It's gently stroking the head of a wolf with one of the tentacles.

I suppose the temporary peace is over with this.

Even other monsters have started to gather, coming out of the thickets and shades of rocks. Right after the orcs, a battle royal against a swarm of monsters, eh?

And the noise clamoring through the forest seems to have reached Cydale, too. I can see Quiche, and also Catiza as well as the Burning Knights. Higlia is running over as well.

The one reaching the plaza first is Higlia.

"——Those are the forces of the Tree King of Wonders. In addition, Ryoclyne! And even Daon and his men! I had expected for them to show up sooner or later after following my scent, but..."

She's clearly agitated as she keeps extending and retracting her silver claws on both hands. I guess she knows the wolfmen fighting over there.

So these guys are the forces of the Tree King of Wonders. Assuming that the wolfmen have

followed her scent trail all the way here, Higlia might have been raised with tender care...as their princess.

According to Schmihazar, Higlia seems to be a divine princess who has received the divine protection of God Wolf Hurley.

"Ryoclyne! Daon! I'm coming to rescue you right away! Shuuya, I'm going ahead to Divine Beast-sama!"

"Sure, be careful."

Higlia nods, and uses Magic Combat Style to make her lower body swell up. As soon as she adopts a fierce, forward-bent posture, she dashes away like a gale. Her running as if lightly cutting through the grass with her legs is the very definition of lightning speed. Higlia moves like a silver gust of wind.

Then she powerfully stomps down on the ground with her right leg, and jumps while twisting her waist sideways, causing her body to rotate several times like a spintop.

At the end of her rotation, a claw straightly extending out of her toe sinks into the forehead of a deer monster. The monster's forehead is cleanly cut apart as if sliced by a sharp blade. The severed upper part flies off into the sky. The remaining lower half of the head and its body remain standing stock still for a short moment, just before pitching forward without Higlia doing anything else, and collapsing to the ground while splattering brain fluid from the lower half of the head.

After landing, Higlia kicks off the ground again. Advancing with an acceleration like a rocket, she unleashes a thrust without any preparatory motions. Her sharp fist stabs into the belly of a deer with an inflated abdomen, causing its belly to explode in the next moment.

She grabs a scattering chunk of meat with the other hand while howling as if to declare this piece of flesh as trash, and tears it apart, just to let it quickly fly onwards to the right side. At that moment, a cluster of mana, which leaks out of her Magic Combat Style that covers her fur as it stands on end, turns into a huge wolf with its body clad in beautiful, white fur.

A big, white wolf with distinct contours. Not to mention whiskers, it also has two tentacles that resemble Rollo's at the base of its neck. Is that possibly God Wolf Hurley?

Thereupon, "——Shuuya, I've started to order the children and beastmen to gather in the meeting room. I've asked Moga and Nemus to protect them, so this side is going to be okay!"

Quiche, Cydale's commander-in-chief, dons the gallant appearance of a heavy knight. I gotta admit, she has an aura that would allow to call her Minister of Defense.

"Gotcha."

"It looks like those are no orc reinforcements, huh?"

I nod at Quiche's observation.

"Your Excellency, give us your orders! We shall deal with the big bear!"

"The bear is targeting this place! Your Excellency, your loyal servant Zemetas shall exhibit to you how he brings the foe down with his newly obtained sword technique!"

"Your Excellency, give me your orders! Chief Gatekeeper Catiza shall sally forth!"

Catiza and the Burning Knights run up to me after Quiche.

"Catiza, you hurry back to your job as chief gatekeeper. It's important that our front remains protected. Also, make sure to take a look at the state of the villagers on the way."

"Okaaay♪"

Catiza stabs several nails into the ground, and leaps into midair. Just like that, she wobbles her butt in the air. It looks like it's evolved from a Helme pose to a midair Catiza pose.

Moreover, she quickly draws small magic crests with her mana-laden finger. Spinning the magic crest with that finger, she summons a <Demonic Bonefish>. After sitting down on it, she heads towards the location of the village's gate.

It's this kind of situation, but...the ghosts are still continuing to sing their hymn. Above them floats Xtrin who's acting in concert with my <Granted Seal of Light>. He's as quiet as you'd expect from a hermit.

However, the others can't see neither him nor the other ghosts. You could say that it's a situation where monsters are attacking with the ghosts' hymn as background music.

I face the others, and say, "——Quiche, Zemetas, Adomos, I'll explain later. Let's go! Kisara, Rotalz, you two as well."

""Yes——""

"Leave it to me! My horn is out of commission, but I'll blow 'em away with my <Red Fart>." Rotalz thunders as he follows everyone else.

Is this the kind of attack where he blows away his enemies with the pixelated farts released out of his ass?

"It's been really a long time since we last fought monsters together——" Quiche moves next to me while swinging her longsword with refined movements.

A smile adorns her face.

I summon Baldok into my right hand, and thrust it out above Quiche's sword which she extended to diagonally below. At the moment when a metallic clang reverberates from me lightly touching her sword with the red ax blade, I reply, "Indeed," with a smile.

Quiche nods. A strong resolve to fight and defend her village gleams in her jade green eyes.

"Your Excellency, leave the right side to me! I shall take the head of that big bear——"

"Adomos, don't steal a march. I'll come with you as well!"

The Burning Knights dash ahead.

"I will fight here together with you, Shuuya-sama. Rotalz, you launch precise attacks from the sky, okay?"

"Ayes——"

Kisara apparently wants to stay with me.

With Baldok and Quiche's sword crossed, I confirm with a sharp sidelong glance. After looking at Quiche's face, Kisara moves to my other side. Quiche takes on her blue eyes...and pulls her sword away from Baldok.

Then, while altering the angle of her shield she's readied at her chest, she matches her look with Kisara's, smiling pleasantly. Kisara answers in kind.

The world where the smiles of beauties interweave is lovely. But, something exists within that world. Yep, the determination of 『This here is a battle I can't lose no matter what』.

I feel like I could hear those words, which I've heard somewhere before, reach my ears from somewhere. Hmm, let's all stay chummy with each other, okay?

『Your Excellency, it looks like the ghosts are safe. Shall I come out and fight as well?』

『Numbers always help. So far as it goes, Rotalz is watching from the sky, but I'll leave everyone to you by checking the situation as well. You know the location of the meeting place, right?』

『Of course!』

Helme shoots out of my left eye, instantly turns into a woman, and gracefully flies up to the sky, while announcing, "——The shape of the flower that I bought at the Plant Festival isn't just for show!"

At the same time, she deploys her new skill <Lapis Lazuli Flower>.

——Blue and black strings extend from her hands. Those strings head for the bear monster that's in the middle of fighting the Burning Knights and has already carried away an injury from a shield bash, and twine themselves around one of its legs.

Her new skill appears to have a high utility value. I think it's also owed to Helme's clever timing for assisting.

Still, are those mana strings? They also look like water strings. Hmm, well, I guess it's also fine to call them simple, shining strings.

And watching small flowers bloom on Helme's fingertips...I recall a certain item. Let's challenge myself with something new as well.

Unlike <Saratens Secret Art>, I haven't tested it out once yet though...

While making up my mind like that, I exchange glances with Kisara and Quiche. Quiche nods on my left, and Kisara also nods on my right.

"It's not like I'm trying to deliberately act eccentric here, but I'm going to test out something for a bit——" While informing the two flowers on both my sides, I quickly operate my item box with fluent finger movements.

What I take out is——the item I received from the Time Pinyn. It's the Wave Gourd that seems to contain a part of the source from Cloud Rust – Tenge. It's shaped like a gourd, and looks like a big bell and huge censer. It appears to be made out of bronze, but has a dark red hue overall.

Still, the detailed silver and gold, artistic sculpturing from its surface to the form makes it a truly remarkable item. It's ornamented by embossed carving as if a Buddha statue, plants, and smoke have been unnaturally combining with each other.

"Here you go with something completely unexpected again. A huge gourd? It looks heavy."

Quiche is about to sheathe her sword to touch the gourd, but given the current situation, she stops herself, limiting to asking me.

Thereupon, Kisara comments, "...It does look like a big gourd or a big bell. With the golden ornaments it looks just like the Black Witch Church's Large Bell Tapir Demon."

It appears that her church had a huge bell called Tapir Demon installed in the center of its hall. It gives me the image of a Buddhist temple.

"It's definitely heavy, but that's why I'm going to use it. The name of this item is Wave Gourd. I received it from the Time Pinyn. He mentioned that actively participated in the great war between wild gods. He's riding a shady, gigantic turtle. Back then, he explained that a part of the source for his "Could Rust - Tenge" has been put into this Wave Gourd. Well, don't mind it. We're going to get rid of those mobs——"

"Ah, sure——"

"Okay."

The Wave Gourd in my left hand is heavy, but I can handle it. I begin to run while holding Baldok in my right hand.

Quiche follows on the left while Kisara keeps up on the right. Our aim is the military force supposedly belonging to the Tree King of Wonders.

I'm going to assist my partner and Higlia in their battle. I'm not obligated to do so, but if they're

Higlia's comrades, I can make an exception——