



只今異

世界
お出掛け
中

骸骨騎士
十様

Script: 秤猿鬼
Illustration: KAG

*Skeleton Knight,
going out to
the parallel universe*

Skeleton Knight

(骸骨騎士様、只今異世界へお出掛け)

Volume 03

Humans and Elves

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Story Description:

The protagonist fell asleep while playing an online game. However, he awoke in a strange world with his game character's appearance. In a state of shock, he noticed that he was equipped with nothing but his strongest weapon and armor. To make matters worse, our hero's appearance was changed by the special avatar skin『Skeleton』when he enter this new world. The protagonist wanted to live without drawing attention, but he got acquainted with the dark elf Ariana and received her request.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Prologue

The Great Leburan Empire of the northern continent's western region.

The capital of the Empire was called Vittelvare. It was a metropolis that had acted as the capital of the Leburan Empire even before it split into its eastern and western half, yet it still retained its dignified appearance.

A giant wall, erected out of polished stone, was built around the city. When a person left or entered the city they would see impeccably maintained streets and parks, as well as a multitude of pleasant looking people chatting about.

At the center of the capital was the emperor's palace, that was the size of a small town, dubbed Dionborg.

In a certain section of the palace, the rulers of the Great Leburan Empire were gathering in a hall. The current emperor, Garba Leburan Sergio Phoebus, sat on a luxurious throne at the apex of the national assembly.

His long white hair and beard were carefully combed back. Though the wrinkles on his forehead were thick, his eyes still carried the sharp glint of a bird of prey. Atop his head sat a gold and jewel encrusted crown, that acted as the symbol of imperial authority, and his body was adorned in extravagant clothes and a luxurious mantle. The gorgeous scepter in his hand was proof of the emperor's power.

Directly beside the sullen emperor sat a handsome young man and the country's five chancellors. In the emperor's line of sight sat the empire's fifty senators who were in the middle of arguing amongst themselves.

"Wetorias and the surrounding areas have been isolated by the frequent monster attacks! We request the national army to be dispatched immediately! The East is eyeing the land from across the Shiari river. With things as they are now, we have to prevent the East from crossing over."

"What did you say?! Wetorias already has one of the army's battalions stationed there! With those numbers, it should be easy to wipe out mere

monsters!”

“That’s right! If the East discovered that two thousand honorable soldiers of the border territory asked for aid, we would become a laughing stock! Not to mention the fact that moving the army would be a heavy financial burden! Is the north territory willing to take on that burden?”

“Huh, the southern territories can handle it! Didn’t the Urato and Shiana Mountain ranges have military forts at their bases for the sole purpose of slaying monsters? This is an opportunity to show their power and importance to everyone!”

Each senator was elected from their respective territories and thus this shouting match was nothing more than them trying to reap the most benefits for their territory.

The Great Leburan Empire was divided into four regions that were then broken up into territories ruled over by feudal lords. As a result, there were often skirmishes between the nobles of each region.

The emperor lowered his head at their unsightly bickering before looking at the man to his side. The handsome man, who was boasting a wide smile, was Saruwisu De Osto. He was the emperor’s official aide and as such rarely expressed any emotion beyond the smile stuck on his face.

Emperor Garba started speaking at a low enough volume so that the chancellors couldn’t hear him.

“What are your thoughts about the recent monster attacks?”

The senators were too busy arguing amongst themselves to look in this direction. Saruwisu turned away from the senators and looked at the emperor before he started to speak.

“With all due respect, according to our spies, it seems that the East has finally succeeded in their attempts to control monsters..... If that’s the case, then their main goal could be Burugo Bay south of Wetorias.”

Emperor Garba’s expression soured when he heard Saruwisu answer.

“I’ve heard there have been frequent sightings of Giant Basilisks and

Ogres around Wetorias. If these beings can be controlled as the report says, then they could really pose a threat.”

“However, since no soldiers have been spotted so far, couldn’t it be possible that the East is just testing the effectiveness of the monsters at Wetorias?”

The Emperor glanced out into the distance as he sunk back into his throne.

“Hmph, if that eastern brat had such shallow thinking we would have devoured them a long time ago. The monsters probably aren’t tamed enough to be used alongside regular soldiers. The question is if they could be used in an ambush.....”

“Should we take control of the northern army due to the recent raids?”

“No, if we make unnecessary moves in Wetorias, we would leave ourselves open for an attack across the river from Jerina. We should avoid being wedged between a northern and southern assault.”

The Emperor rested his elbow on his throne and stroked his chin as he expressed his concern.

“The East’s plans will surely be affected by what has transpired in Rhoden though.”

The emperor’s eyebrow raised upon hearing Saruwisu remake.

“Certainly. However, that Rhoden boy needs to gain control of the kingdom immediately.”

Emperor Garba stood up after saying that and furiously banged his scepter against the floor. The senators that had been arguing till now went completely silent as they focused on the emperor.

“Be quiet—”

Garba glared at all of the senators and told them to cease their arguments with a sonorous voice.

“If we leave things in Wetorias as they are now, we’d only be inviting those eastern rebels to cross the river. This situation will be handled by

the army immediately, the southern army stationed at the northern edge of Tabor shall be dispatched as support.”

Something like a groan escaped the mouths of the senators at the emperor’s declaration. One of the older members stepped up and raised his hand. The emperor allowed the man to speak with a jerk of his chin.

“With all due respect, Tabor is located between the Urato mountains and the Bayonne mountains, an area prone to monster attacks. If the southern army patrolling that area is dispatched to Wetorias, wouldn’t that cause the trade and travel along the highway to stagnate?”

One after another, other members of the senate started to voice their opinions to the Emperor.

“The troops under the command of general Keling stationed at Harutobarak should be sent instead of those at Tabor. The Tabor soldiers can continue their duty while everything is underway.

“But in that situation the defenses at Harutobarak will be undermanned if-”

“The area doesn’t require such heavy protection since there are divisions located east of the Urato mountains and west of the Shiana mountains respectively.”

The older members of the senate write off of any potential problems, making quite a few other senators to sneer at them. A chuckle even escaped the lips of the observing senators.

“Are there any other opinions? Please remain standing if you are opposed to the suggestion.”

The senators simultaneously glanced at one another after the Emperor spoke, before rapidly taking their seats. Only a small number of senators remained standing.

Saruwisu looked around the hall for a moment before declaring the matter settled and moving on to the next point on the agenda.

Chapter 1: 「To the West」 Part 1

Two people were walking down the highway at dusk. The sky was proceeding to turn a pale blue as dawn slowly approached.

A cool mist was coming off the Calcutta mountains in the north that obscured the vision of anyone trying to traverse the highway.

In the middle of this mist, there was a tall woman dressed in a gray cloak walking next to me. Visible through a gap in her cloak were a protective leather corset and the hem of a shirt that was easy to move in. Despite her humble attire, her large chest, thin waist, and round buttocks made her womanly charms known to all who saw her.

However, one look at her face revealed that she wasn't a human.

Her skin was smooth and lilac tinted, her hair long and snow-white, her eyes that stared straight ahead were golden and the ears at the side of her head were pointed.

She was one of this world's dark elves and currently my employer for the job I had taken on.

This woman was Ariane Glenys Maple. The majority of the elves lived in the Great Canada Forest and she was one of the forest's elite soldiers.

At her waist hung a sword with a guard in the form of a lion's head, which she could wield with enough proficiency to outclass skilled adventures. In this age, the main assets of the elves were their in-depth magical knowledge and their ability to use spirit magic that humans were unable to replicate.

As for myself, my body was the one of my game avatar that I had been playing as before I had been transferred into this world.

Underneath my black cloak was a set of full body armor fitting for a mythical knight, that had fine details etched into every piece along with white and blue undertones.

A jet black mantle, that was inlaid with a pattern seemingly cut from the starry night sky, hung off my shoulders.

A large, elaborately decorated shield and a two-handed broadsword were tied on my back, covering the luggage sack I have carried since the start of my travels.

The only problem was that inside this armor was nothing but a walking skeleton.

Underneath my helmet I was lacking a nose and the light of the dead filled my eye sockets.

Ariane had been the first person to see my true self without raising her sword against me. Since the number of people who would do that could be counted with the fingers on my hands, I couldn't take off my helmet in public.

However, I've had the good fortune to come across a small number of people that have been willing to except me.

Though I always had terrible luck at lotteries in my previous world, my luck seems to have improved since I've come here.

While I was absorbed in my thoughts, Ariane suddenly called out to me.

"Arc, what did you think of Chiome's magic the other day?"

Arc was the name of my game character whose body I now possessed, and I had decided to act the same way I always did when I played the game. No, i am still not quite accustomed to this character's way of living, but it became natural enough to not feel uncomfortable.

I looked at Ariane as I thought for a moment before breaking eye contact and looked straight ahead.

Chiome was the name of the girl we had helped freeing her enslaved brethren from a slave trading company in Rhoden Kingdom's capital the other day. She had been a member of the People of the Plains and Mountains, the so-called beastmen that grew animal ears and tails.

Her ancestors had been led by another person from my world who appeared in this world six hundred years ago. Thanks to his influence, Chiome's people formed the ninja-like Blade Heart Clan, whose purpose

was to liberate their enslaved brethren scattered across the continent.

The elves and the people of the Plains and Mountains were persecuted by the humans of the northern continent, and thus they were exposed to the threat of slavery. Even in this strange world, prejudice among the races, similar to the history of Africans and Europeans, still existed.

My modern sensibilities as an Asian man saw neither Africans nor Europeans as superior to the other. That reminded me, when I had skin it was rather sensitive and would easily tan, though it wasn't like I could be mistaken for a—

I had this strange feeling that I was missing something, but I didn't know what.

Shaking the unrelated thoughts from my head I returned my gaze to Ariane.

Anyway, the reason Ariane and I were walking down this path was because it led to the next destination in our quest to free the enslaved elves.

In the Kingdom's capital, Ariane, Chiome and I worked as a team in cooperation with the other agents of the Blade Heart Clan.

Ariane was probably talking about Chiome's occasional use of ninjutsu. It seemed that ninjutsu could pass for magic in this fantasy world.

“Hum, is it possible that it was ninjutsu? You could be confusing the two Ariane-dono.”

“What she called ninjutsu seemed like a form of spirit magic to me.....’

I let out a surprised cry at her comment.

“Huh? I thought that only the elves were capable of using spirit magic, but is it different?”

Ariane shook her head at my question.

“No, there were never any real restrictions on which races could use spirit magic. Even a human would be capable of using spirit magic if they make a proper contractHowever, it's said that communicating with

spirits is extremely difficult and potentially fatal for humans.”

Apparently, it was possible in theory, but synonymous with impossible in practice. I thought about some of the characteristics of the People of the Plains and Mountains as I walked.

“Now that you mention it, aren’t the People of the Plains and Mountains capable of bonding with spirit beasts?”

Spirit beast was the general name for creatures that housed the power of a spirit in their body, and they were extremely wary of humans. The elves and the People of the Plains and Mountains seemed to be the only ones that could tame spirit beasts.

“That’s right, however, most of the People of the Plains and Mountains have low magical power, so it’s rare for a contract to be established. Still, a few of them should at least be capable of performing spirit magic, however...”

Ariane lowered her eyes as if she was remembering what she saw in the capital the other day.

“When it comes to spirit beasts.....”

She lifted her gaze to the spot atop of my head. She was looking at the place where the spirit beast Ponta currently and usually sat.

Ponta was a fox-like creature that was roughly sixty centimeters long. Her tail made up half of her body length and was puffed out like a dandelion. Despite her fox head, there were patches between her forelegs and hind legs that were similar to the legs of a flying squirrel. Her rather soft fur was green on the top and white on her underbelly.

The popular name for this kind of spirit beast was ‘Fluffy Fox’ and she had been with me ever since I freed her from a group of bandits.

Ponta was capable of using spirit magic to manipulate the wind and fly freely in the sky.

When she noticed Ariane’s stare, Ponta tilted her head.

“Kyun?”

I wonder if there was some kind of connection between Chiome's people and spirit beasts like Ponta.

"What are you trying to say?"

I asked her about my honest concerns.

Ariane looked back at me before she began to slowly give her response.

"The spirit magic we elves use and the magic of the spirit beasts are different from each other. Based on the contract we've made, we have to offer a set amount of our own mana to the elemental spirits, who then convert it into magic. Spirit beasts don't need to form contracts since they are one with the spirits. They can simply convert their mana into magic directly.

"Hoo? So you're saying that Chiome-dono not only managed to form a contract with a spirit but they also achieved a type of unification in order to use her brand of magic?"

"That's right."

Ponta suddenly loudly yawned before laying down on my helmet.

I raised my hand as asked Ariane another question I had

"Ariane-dono, are the elves capable of seeing spirits?"

"Yes. Elves can perceive magical entities that humans can not. We are able to see spirits and that allows us to facilitate communication with them. Do you remember the time we entered Great Canada Forest?"

She looked back as she asked about the time we visited the elven village of Raratoia a while ago. I nodded as I thought about the large forest

"The reason we avoided encounters with powerful monsters is because we only traversed paths with thin layers of mana. Dark elves are superior to normal elves in many physical aspects and one of those areas happens to be our perception capabilities."

I came to a realization at her comment. When we entered the forest we didn't go straight to the village, instead taking a complex path that I thought was meant to prevent me from knowing the way.

“I thought that was to prevent me from learning the way to the village.....”

Hearing my muttering, Ariane looked a little surprised before shrugging her shoulders.

“Arc, you have transfer magic. What purpose would that have served?”

I realized she was right about that. I had a form of magic for both long-range and short-range transportation. It was a convenient spell that allowed me to transfer to any location that I could visualize, so it wasn't really necessary for me to learn the way to any place. I suppose my directionally challenged self would be in a tough situation without transfer magic.

However, 【Transfer Gate】required me to have visited the location I wanted to transfer to at least once. On the other hand, 【Dimensional step】 could only be used at short distances and was unusable if my line of sight was greatly impaired.

“Hum, so the reason the elves can live in a monster-filled forest is because of that ability.....”

“There are differences between individuals. They say that the magic power of the first chief, Evangeline-sama, was so great that she could detect almost every monster..”

The first elven chief of the elves was the one who had built the capital Maple and is someone I suspected of crossing into this world the same way I did. Maybe that person came to this world in the body of an elf, and that ability was something exclusive to the elves?

However, she had said “most” and not “all” monsters, so there might have been limits to that ability..... A shame there was no way to question the deceased about this.

Dawn gradually started to break as I continued to ruminate on what I'd learned and walked down the highway. The mist coming off the mountain began to clear as daylight approached, and a cool wind blew across the area

The sound of the wind stroking the trees and plants welcomed the new day. The view of the highway opened up and I started to see a village in the distance.

We hadn't really traveled far from the capital since I could still make out its vague outline in the distance.

"The surroundings have cleared up a bit. Let's distance ourselves from here before anyone else comes by."

When I nodded at her suggestion, Ariane placed her hand on my shoulder.

“【Dimensional Step】”

When I invoked the short range transfer magic we had moved to the farthest point of the highway I had been able to see.

I repeat to use the transfer magic on the highway that led to Lanbaltic, our next destination.

Chapter 2: 「To the West」 Part 2

It was early morning and I was currently using transfer magic to travel down the highway with Ariane holding onto my shoulder and Ponta on my head. Though I called it a highway, it lacked any sort of pavement, or even laid brick, and was really only a stretch of flatted soil without any trees along it. Before long we came to a fork in the road.

“Ariane-dono, which path leads to Lanbaltic?”

I lacked confidence in my own sense of direction, so I turned to Ariane and asked her what she thought.

However, she only glared at me and questioned me in a blunt tone.

“Arc, I’ve never heard of the city before, why do you think I would know the roads of a human country?”

She was right of course. Though Lanbaltic was the next town keeping enslaved elves, I had only learned about it back in the capital.

Maps of countries weren’t sold in this world, in fact, I’ve haven’t even seen a map since I’ve come here. I’ve only found my way around by asking other people for directions.

The information I got in the capital told me to head west until I reached the coastal city of Lanbaltic.

But, in front of me were two paths separated by a group of large boulders. Both paths went in a western direction, but the right one veered northwest while the left one slightly went in the southwestern direction.

Either of the paths carried on towards the west. Because these paths weren’t as straight as modern roads I couldn’t see far down them. If the one we took led to a steep cliff, then we’d have taken a detour. A detour that would be time-consuming, considering the length of the roads in this era.

Although it’d be preferable to avoid such a detour I could always use transfer magic to return to this spot.

I casually looked around the highway until I found a sturdy looking tree branch on the ground. I picked up the branch, went back to the middle of the road, balanced it on one end and removed the hand keeping it balanced.

Gravity took over immediately as soon as the branch left my hand. When the branch hit the ground it pointed at the northwestern path.



“Well, to the right it is.”

I nodded to myself when a doubtful voice spoke up. It goes without

saying that the voice belonged to Ariane. Her eyes stared at me in protest as her cheeks puffed out.

“Wait a minute, is that really a suitable way to pick our path? Are you sure you heard the directions to Lanbaltic correctly back in the capital?”

“I’m sure I heard everything correctly, but I wasn’t told anything about a fork in the road.”

Ariane held her temple as she loudly sighed.

“Don’t you know a more suitable method to decide our path?”

“No, I’m entrusting my fate to the heavens!”

“Hey don’t just entrust my fate to anyone without my permission.....”

She bent down to pick up the fallen branch as she protested before she closed her eyes and prepared to speak a prayer.

“Let us ask the spirits to decide on our way...”

After saying a prayer she let the branch fall out of her hands until it hit the ground with a dull sound. The branch was pointing in the same direction it did previously.

“.....”

“Hum, so it was the right path after all.”

Ariane seemed dissatisfied with the results but she put her faith in the spirits. She silently placed her hand on my shoulder.

“Well, we can always come back here if it turns out to be the wrong way.”

I started down the right path a little happier than before. I continued to invoke **【Dimensional Step】** down the not-quite highway in the early morning.

As we advanced I began to notice that the landscape gradually started to change.

The green plains up till now gave way to reddish rocks as the air became dry, and clouds of dust started to be kicked up by the wind.

The forest was soon replaced with a mountain range as a desolate stretch of land opening up on my left side. Vegetation has become sparse and it was getting harder to keep track of the road as it began to mix into the surroundings. I started to look for a village as I began to feel that we've gone the wrong way.

My sight was blocked by a sudden gust of wind picking up another cloud of dust.

Ponta tightened her grip on my helmet and let out a cry 「Kyun!」 Ariane's and my cloaks were noisily blown around by the gust of wind.

When the wind subdued, I tried to look for the next place to transfer to, but I stopped when I noticed Ariane and Ponta simultaneously reacting to something.

“What's wrong?”

When I called out to Ariane, she placed her index finger over her lips as her golden eyes scanned the area. I became restless when I felt Ponta move from atop my head to the back of my neck.

I shut my mouth and began to search the area. I glanced over the mountains and the reddish barren land, but I didn't come across anything to be cautious of.

I thought so until I heard some kind of flapping being carried on the wind.

When I looked in the direction it was coming from, I saw dozens of shadows leaping into the air. Though it was hard to get a clear look from here, I could tell that the shadows were the size of very large birds.

“Wyverns!?”

Ariane glared at the sky and scowled as she saw the shadows leaping into the sky. There were around twenty of the so-called Wyverns in the sky and they were heading right towards us.

Ponta lowered her head and quickly wrapped herself around my neck as if she was a scarf.

“Wyverns huh.....”

As they approached I started to get a clear view of them. Although their reptilian bodies were rather small, they had four-meter long wingspans. They also had long necks and bird-like heads. Their skin had the color of yellow ocher with a striped pattern. Their three-meter long tails were used like a rudder to change direction as they flow.

In other words, they were completely different from the Wyverns in the game.

“These Wyverns are different from those I’m used to, I never seem them before..... So Wyverns are active during the day and they fly in flocks.....”

Ariane turned her head and groaned.

It seems she knew about these strange Wyverns, and now that I thought about it, it’s not all that weird for animals to have different appearances based on the habitat they lived in. It’s highly likely that these were a sub-species of Wyvern.

There is something I needed to know first.....

“Are these Wyverns strong?”

I looked up at the sky as I asked Ariane that question.

The Wyverns in the game weren’t considered all that strong. They were around level 100 and lacked any special attacks.

“Alone, they’re nothing much, but when in large groups like this one..... Arc, it’s better if we avoid the hassle and just escape with transfer magic.”

Certainly, in a game you’d never be attacked by a horde of this size nor would you be targeted from this far beyond the reach of your sword. In the game, flying enemies like Wyverns only floated a meter above the ground and could be reached even with a short sword.

However, considering the future, I think now is the perfect time to test the extent of my power. I’ve held out on using some of the flashier skills because they would attract unwanted attention and inconvenience me in a

number of ways. But the only ones here were Ariane, Ponta and the flock of Wyverns. It should be alright to be a little flashy here.

“There are a few things I want to try. Ariane-dono, please stay back for a bit.”

I took a step forward as I said that and glared at the approaching Wyverns. Ariane started to say something but immediately closed her mouth.

I let go of my luggage sack and prepared for battle.

“【Rock Bullet】!”

I used a basic magic spell for a preliminary test. I began firing fist-sized rock projectiles from the palms of my hands straight into the flock of Wyverns. However the Wyverns, still dozens of meters in the sky, were able to avoid the rocks flying at them easily.

I repeatedly fired the same spell into the sky, but I didn't even graze a single Wyvern. A spell that flew in a straight line was easily evaded by the agile flying Wyverns.

The Wyverns were now flying directly overhead and circled us like vultures waiting for their chance to strike. The only reason they haven't attacked yet was because they were cautious of my constant magic bombardment.

“Well then, can you dodge this? 【Lightning Storm】!!”

The atmospheric pressure above the Wyverns rapidly shifted. In the next moment, the air trembled as a deafening roar tore through the area. Blinding flashes of light filled the area as lightning rained down on the Wyverns.

Though it was only a ranged lightning attribute magic of the intermediate wizard class, it was still impressive to see. It was truly a large and flashy magic spell.

When the lightning crossed with the flying Wyverns a few of them started to fall from the sky. However, a little over half of them hadn't

been hit.

“Hum, the accuracy isn’t all that high.....”

The hit ratio of the flashy lightning magic wasn’t that high despite the resulting fanfare. As a comparison. if a modern weapon has an accuracy of less than 50%, it is considered defective.

The spell seemed to run on a one-shot system, only offering one or two shots before having to reload slowly. This is a little troubling as the magic indiscriminately attacked anything within a certain range.

However, the Wyverns were frightened by the sudden lightning strikes and scattered.

As I gazed up at the empty sky, Ariane screamed in protest.

“Hey, if you have such powerful magic say so! You scared me half to death!”

When I looked back at Ariane, I saw she was covering her ears and there were tears in the corner of her eyes. I suppose that anyone would be surprised by a sudden and flashy lightning show. Though I didn’t expect it to be so loud, I obediently apologized.

Ponta, who was originally wrapped around my neck, was now licking her forepaws to pat down her fur. Did the spell charge it statically?

“.....With such powerful magic, you could do just about anything.”

Ariane sighed half in amazement and half in exhaustion as she looked around. Several of the Wyverns I struck down were all around us.

“I can’t do everything, I just do what I do.”

I spoke a certain phrase I’d heard somewhere else as I approached one of the Wyverns. It was relatively clean, with only a few scorch marks from the lightning strikes.

“Is there any value in these Wyverns?”

I asked Ariane that as I rolled the Wyvern over.

“Yes, the skin can be used to make training armor. The meat is no good,

but the magic stone should be usable.”

I understood what she was talking about immediately. In the latter half of the game, Wyvern materials were used in a similar manner.

“Now that you mention it, what kind of leather is your armor made of, Ariane-dono?”

If Wyvern leather was made for trainees, it’s obvious that her equipment would be better than that. I asked her about it out of curiosity.

“It’s a Grand Dragon Leather Armor.”

“Oh, that’s some high-quality material!”

I responded in surprise to her answer. I don’t know if Grand Dragons are the same as the ones in the game, but their high-quality material drops remain the same.

“It’s still nothing compared to your armor.”

Ariane shrugged her shoulders and sighed yet again.

I grabbed a dagger from my luggage sack and inspected the Wyvern on the ground while we chatted.

“Ariane-dono, where is the magic stone located?”

“It should be in the same location as the Wyverns you’re familiar with.”

She pointed her finger a little below the center of the chest. When I cut into the section she pointed at I found a small, purple magic stone.

I cut out the eight remaining stone from the other ones I shot down and placed them in my sack.

“What should we do with the rest of it?”

“Even if we leave them here, won’t the people who want them take them?”

When I pondered on what to do about the Wyverns, Ariane responded to me in a low tone.

Certainly, if the materials could be turned into armor, even if it was just

training armor, people would take the Wyverns if they're just left on the side of the road. Maybe more than one person will want the material.

“You're right. Let's get a move on.....”

I put my luggage sack over my shoulder as I spoke to Ariane and after a little bit, we continued our trek down the highway with **【Dimensional Step】**.

Chapter 3: 「The wasteland town Buranbeina」

Before long, a town built atop a small hill next to the highway came into view. A stone wall surrounded the town and I could see the roofs of several box-shaped buildings peeking over the wall from here. Unlike other cities I've been to there was almost no decoration to the city, but the impression it gave off was more sturdy than impoverished.

I'd say the town looked more like a fort than anything.

The only patch of greenery in the reddish landscape was around the hill. There was an area of farmland around the town and there were barely any people maintaining it. Compared to the size of the fields, there weren't enough human silhouettes around to properly maintain them.

“Let's stop for a bit and ask for some directions.”

“Well, it looks like the road started to lead north before we noticed.....”

I didn't really notice until now, but the direction of the road had changed substantially. It was easy to lose sight of your direction when you follow a meandering road without a compass.

Without expressing a bit of my impatience, I turned off the road and headed towards the town.

The town walls were five meters high and made of clean stone, and atop the wall were the figures of guards.

The large front gate was wide open with only a single guard standing watch. When he noticed us the guard straightened his shoulders and stared in our direction.

When we reached the guard I extended my hand to him and began speaking.

“I know it sudden, but there's something I need to ask you. We're trying to get to a city called Lanbaltic, does the highway lead there?”

The guard looked puzzled at my question before turning to Ariane and

looking her up and down. Ariane's true form couldn't be seen since she had hidden her face with her cloak's hood.

When he was finished, the guard looked back at me and answered the question.

“No, I've never heard of a place called Lanbaltic around here. Of course, I've never left this town so I only know of nearby villages.....”

The guard looked embarrassed by this and started scratch his head.

Even in the modern era, you couldn't simply go to a foreign country and expect to immediately get directions a remote town.

“Hum, we'll have to ask for directions in town then. How much is the entrance tax?”

I asked the guard that question as I reached for the leather pouch tied to my waist, however, the man just moved aside and urged us to pass.

“There is no entry tax for this town. Not enough people visit such a remote town to make an entrance tax profitable. Oh, but there a small fee for leaving.”

The man chuckled a little and welcomed us inside.

“Welcome to Buranbeina.”

We thanked the guard and set foot inside the town.

Despite being so early in the morning, there were a lot of people inside the city walls, completely different from outside. All the buildings were box-shaped and crowded together. The narrow gaps between the buildings created a complex maze of backstreets and alleyways. Thanks to the pieces of cloth hanging on the multiple clotheslines it was difficult to peer into the depths of the maze.

In the midst of this bustling town, multiple armed men with sleepy looking faces were walking around. Adventures were filtering into their respective inns while people with farming tools were coming out of private residents and heading towards the gate.

After walking against the flow of the crowd for a bit we came across an

open marketplace. “Kyun!” After weaving through a group of housewives, Ponta caught the scent of something good and cried out, starting to wag her tail.

Ponta was staring at a street stall that was emitting the savory smell of roasted beans. Though not all that large, the beans looked similar to lentil, which needed to be roasted before eating.

She was probably hungry because she didn’t eat much in the capital. Because Ponta was crying out from atop my head the stall vendor noticed us in the middle of the noisy market and started to laugh.

“Hey, mister. How about it?”

“I’ll take two servings.”

The vendor said “Anytime!” in a booming voice as he took a wooden cup in his hand and scooped the beans into the leather pouch.

When I was about to ask for directions to Lanbaltic the stall owner chimed brought up a topic of his own first.

“Mister, are you here to hunt the Sand Wyverns?”

The question caused me to remember the Wyvern attack for before.

“No, are Sand Wyverns appearing frequently in this area?”

“Oh yes. Recently they’ve started to stray from the wastelands in large numbers and carry off a number of cattle.”

That must have been the Wyverns from before. Though their number must have been nearly halved..... However, instead of an atmosphere of crisis, there were many people walking around the town with smiles on their faces.

“The situation sounds serious, but it doesn’t seem that way.....”

When I looked at the surrounding shoppers while speaking, the vendor started to laugh.

“They are sensitive to sunlight, so they usually don’t fly around that much around this time of day. It’s rare for them to attack between

daybreak and sundown. Groups of adventurers have come here in pursuit of Sand Wyvern leather.....”

“Ho, for a shopkeeper you seem well informed about monsters.”

When I offered him a compliment, the vendor waved it off and handed over two pouches of beans while laughing.

“A monster researcher just happens to live in this town, that’s all. Thanks to his guidance the damage done to the town has been minimized. Ah, that’ll be three sok.”

“Such a talented person live here-, oh, I only have silver coins.”

I handed over a silver coin. The vendor handed me seven copper coins as change before resuming the conversation in a lower tone.

“Furthermore, the researcher is one of those rarely seen elves.”

Ariane stepped forward when she heard that.

“There’s an elf living in a human town!?”

Even she was surprised by her outburst as she had to hold down her hood and look down to prevent her eyes and mouth from being exposed.

“Y-Yes. The feudal lord prepared a special house for him and he’s been living here for ten years or so.”

The vendor had been surprised by the seemingly calm person’s sudden shout, but he managed to answer the question.

“Where would the elf researcher’s residence happen to be?”

Since that was what Ariane wanted to know the most I asked the vendor about it.

“Well, it’s right beside the lord’s mansion and is heavily guarded, so you can’t carelessly go there, you know?”

“What, I was just asking out of curiosity. Anyway, you wouldn’t happen to know the way to Lanbaltic, would you?”

The vendor looked doubtful when I asked about our original purpose, but after thinking it over for a bit he and called out to the older vendor.

“Old man, you said that you were a peddler in your youth right? You know anything?”

The old man with a stubby beard looked in our direction as he smoked a pipe.

“To get to Lanbaltic from here you need to head west from the Hibotto wastelands. The Leving mountains should come into view west of the wasteland.”

The man spoke in a leisurely manner while he puffed smoke into the air. If he was telling the truth, then we’ve taken the wrong path. The southwestern path at the fork in the road was probably the correct one.

We thanked the two vendors and left. I poured some of the roasted beans in my hand, causing Ponta to smoothly leap from my head and start stuffing her face.

“What do you want to do, Ariane-dono?”

When I looked back into Ariane’s eyes I saw that she hesitated for a moment. She looked up to reply..... but I already know what she would say.

“I would like to meet with this elf researcher.”

I nodded at the expected response.

It was said that the researcher was living under the protection of the lord, but elves were often the target of slavery in human society. So this situation seemed a little unbelievable.

Based on what the vendor said, it seems that the researcher was being held captive in this town.

Since the elf’s house was located right beside the lord’s mansion and that the people know of its existence we began to ask around a bit as we slowly approached the mansion

I heard that whenever the elf came to town for a bite to eat, he would be surrounded by a team of guards. They were probably a protective measure against outlandish individuals.

However, there were also stories of the elf researcher pacifying drunken adventures that acted violently.

At the center of the town, I was able to catch a glimpse of a spectacular rectangular building that was surrounded by a large wall.

The researcher was said to be living in a house on the feudal lord's property. There was a portcullis attached to the gate and four guards were standing outside to keep watch.

I doubted that we could easily break through the front, but I was also hesitating about trying to sneak in. This was a little different from our usual situation.

For the time being, let's just walk up to the gate.

The four guards were instantly alarmed when they saw us heading straight towards them. The guards moved into a semicircle formation and raised their spears against us to block our path. It would be impossible to not be suspicious of a knight that stood over two meters tall with a green fox on his head and a cloaked woman whose face was completely covered.

"Excuses me, we'd like to have a word with the elf that is said to live here....."

The guards' tension rose another notch when they heard me speak.

"No one is allowed to meet with Casey-dono without an appointment. You should leave right now."

The blunt response of the guard could be considered normal given the circumstances. I looked over my shoulder to Ariane to see what she'd do.

She apparently thought that talking would be a waste of time considering the way the discussion was going, and stepped in front of the guards placing her hands on her hood.

"I am a messenger from the Great Canada Forest and I wish to see Casey-dono!"

She threw off her hood and revealed her pointed ears, snow white hair and lilac skin. As she stared them down with her golden eyes framed by

her sharp lashes, the four guards silently stood there with gaping mouths.

Another guard appeared from inside the building. His equipment was a bit better and he was in good shape considering his apparently advanced age. Raising his voice he started yelling at the guards to get them moving again.

“Oiii, you stupid lot! Go report this to the lord and Casey-dono!”

The guards finally regained their motor functions and two of them quickly set off to deliver the message, even tripping along the way.

“Please follow me while the lord is informed of your arrival.”

The elderly man, who seemed to be the captain of the guard, led us inside the walls and offered us a seat on the guard station’s sofa as we waited.

To pass the time while we wait I began to pour the lentils I bought into my hand for Ponta to eat with great relish.

Soon the messenger returned and offered the guard captain a salute before speaking.

“Casey-dono is willing to meet with them!”

The captain nodded in response and the guard immediately left.

Somehow we were able to gain a meeting with the rumored elf researcher. But I couldn’t help but feel a little depressed seeing as I might have to interact with a feudal lord.

“I’ll lead the way.”

At the captain’s words, Ariane and I, along with two other guards, followed his lead.

Chapter 4: 「Monster Researcher」 Part 1

There was a building located on the side of the mansion's courtyard. After leaving the guard station, we entered a corridor that connected the buildings to one another. We were now in front of the two-story tall, box-shaped building. Though it looked small compared to the surrounding buildings, it was still slightly larger than the houses in town.

There was an elegantly designed door knocker attached to the simple wooden door, and when the captain knocked on it a man's voice was heard from within.

“It's open~”

In contrast to Ariane's and my tension, the voice was rather relaxed and the captain paid it no mind as he opened the door.

“Excuse me.”

The captain opened the door and stepped aside after accepting the invite, allowing Ariane to enter first. I followed suit and the two guards were right behind me.

Thick wooden pillars lined the sides of the first floor, the centerpiece of the room being a large table. There were chaise lounges and armchairs on both sides of the room. The fact that they were rarely used, coupled with the bare stone floor, resulted in a slightly bleak atmosphere.

Once he entered, the captain walked in front of the group and led us to a back room that was on the other side of the table.

The back room was an utter mess.

Multiple books, parchments, and rolled up scrolls were hastily piled atop the table in the center of the room. There were many bookshelves arranged along the wall, but they were already filled to the brim with more scrolls and books. The room's carpet was woven with beautiful patterns, but they were mostly covered by rocks and the fangs and tusk of various types of animals.

There was a large glass window at the back of the room and a man was

sitting with his back to us at a crooked work desk.

“We’ve brought the messenger from Canada.”

“Ahh, thank you.”

The captain offered his salute to the man’s back before turning around and leaving the room.

“I never imaged that a messenger from Canada would come for me~, welcome to my humble abode.”

The man stood up as he voiced his greeting.

His unkempt blonde hair was tinged green, he had the characteristic long ears of the elves, and his emerald green eyes could be seen from behind a pair of round glasses.

Instead of the traditional clothing of the elves, he had opted to wear similar clothes as the general public, but they were in shabby condition.



“I’m Ariane Glenys Maple. Nice to meet you……, Casey?”

“A warrior from Maple? Wonderful, I’m Casey Held, you can just call me Casey Ariane-kun. How about you mister knight……Ohh!! A vento vulpix!!”

Casey’s eyes bulged in surprise when he heard Ariane’s name and he turned to ask me my name. However, when he saw Ponta sitting on my head, he rushed towards me and uttered an excited cry.

“My name is Arc, something of Ariane-done’s companion. This fluffy fox here is Ponta.”

“Ky~un……”

With how much Casey honed in on her, I understood why Ponta edged

back on my helmet.

“A travelling companion? Since elves never walk around in such armor, are you by any chance a human?”

I nodded in affirmation to the puzzled Casey. His puzzlement quickly changed to astonishment as he began to give all of us a proper once over.

“I have to say that this is a rare combination of individuals. Especially seeing a human that managed to tame a spirit beast.”

Casey extended his hand to Ponta with a smile on his face, however, she wrapped herself around my neck to escape. When he saw this Casey lowered his head in regret and forced out a feeble laugh.

“How nostalgic to see a tamed spirit beast..... Oh, where are my manners, please take a seat.”

When he noticed that we were still standing, Casey cleared a pile of items from a chair and urged us to sit. However, since there was only one chair, I let Ariane take it while I simply stood behind her.

“So is there really a message from my village?”

Casey sat in his own chair and pushed up his glasses with his middle finger as he asked his question. Judging from his tone he must have already grasp the situation to some extent.

“No, we are in the middle of rescuing our enslaved brethren from the humans. We were just passing through on our way to Lanbaltic when.....”

“You heard that there was an elf living in this town and decided to check it out. Also, you two are heading the wrong way if you’re trying to reach Lanbaltic.”

When she nodded at his assessment Casey started to laugh, causing Ariane to look back at me. I didn’t really have anything to say, but I had to do something.

“Casey-dono, you seem to be doing well for yourself in this human town.”

Ariane’s gaze returned to the glasses wearing elf in front of her. Casey

took a look around the room before he started speaking in a hearty tone.

“Has it already been ten years since I settled here? I left my village about forty years ago and I wandered from place to place concealing my identity. I think that this country is far better than the others I’ve been to.”

“Ten years, huh... that’s quite a long time to live here.”

“It may seem that way to human, but for us it about the same as a year or two. I won’t say that it’s been that long..... also this is a convenient place to live in for my research, a variety of monsters appear around the Calcutta mountains in the east and beyond the Hiboto wastelands in the west.”

He followed up his explanation by saying “Those areas aren’t suitable to live in” while laughing a pushing up his glasses.

“Why do you live in a human town though?”

Ariane probably asked Casey the question she most wanted answered.

Even I could tell that she didn’t have a lot of faith in humans, her contract with me was only for the sake of her mission. It wasn’t hard to imagine her shock at finding an elf openly living under the protection of the humans in this town.

“I obviously hid my identity when I first came here. However, this town’s feudal lord took an interest in my monster research..... My identity as an elf was revealed after I was invited the mansion and I’ve been allowed to live here as a special guest since. I offered them my findings on the ecology of this area’s monsters and allowed them to publish a book based on it. Well I pretty much did the same thing back in my village.”

When I looked around the room, I noticed the abundant amount of monster sketches, catalogs, and memos scattered about.

The books and documents that were packed into the book shelves were probably all related to monsters as while.

I also noticed that Ariane was making a complicated expression.

“Currently I’m investigating Sandworms that live in Hiboto, but since they live mostly underground it’s hard to get a good view of them. Moreover, they are quite formidable enemies.....”

As he was going on about his research Casey suddenly stopped talking and took a step towards Ariane before shouting.

“That’s right! I was thinking of capturing a live Sandworm, how about you help me? Surely a warrior from Maple will have enough skill to accompany me.....”

“Umm, we still have our own mission to complete.....”

Ariane quickly offered a vague refusal to Casey’s enthusiastic request to help in monster hunting. Since it was a request from another elf, I’d thought that Ariane would hear him out, but I was left staring at her in surprise.

“.....Warriors not only train their magic and swordsmanship, they also study monster ecology for the sake of the village. Your books and research on monsters only teach humans how to fight them off.”

Her golden eyes were focused on Casey as she said that.

I could understand what she was trying to say with that comment. She was calling him an elf that valued humans above his own kind.

Casey smiled bitterly as he sunk back into his chair.

“The books on monster ecology that you studied were most likely made by me before I left my village.

“In that case, that’s all the more-”

“Sooner or later, someone will have to research the ecology of monsters. I believe it is my duty as an elf to fulfill this important role.”

Just as she was about to continue her argument, Casey looked Ariane in the eye and shot her down.

But I could understand his argument as well. Thanks to his research,

the damage monsters inflicted on this town had been reduced, a feat that could only benefit the elves. If the human's view on elves changed then it could only benefit the elves.

However, it was a long road ahead, considering that he had to live next to the feudal lord's mansion and was constantly surrounded by guards.

“Like I said before, this country is better than other ones. The feudal lord's treatment of me is proof of that. Canada and Rhoden are neighbors. In the future, we can either feud with one another or make peace with each other, and I for one choose to make peace.”

Casey paused for a moment to push his glasses before he started speaking again.

“The person behind you is a human right?”

Ariane's face had a complicated expression as she looked at me over her shoulder.

I had told them I was human myself, so she couldn't deny it. However, my current appearance was that of an undead, a person who is considered cursed in this world.

Once more I had this feeling that I had forgotten something important—

As I tried to think about this, I suddenly felt someone's gaze on my face. Ariane's beautiful golden eyes were prompting me to say something.

“Call it a form of divine guidance if you will. I will simply trust Ariane-dono's judgment for now.”

We were only here because of my poor sense of direction, and Ariane had muttered something about ‘Spirit Divination’ and invited an unseen force to direct us... so I was able to ignore my own faults.

“You will be rewarded for your help. I don't have much money, but maybe I can offer you some of my research instead? I can pay you with these two volumes of my monster research from when I left my village. I believe that those of my village should learn of the world beyond it, after

all.”

Casey pulled out two thick books from his collection as he spoke. The books were bound in leather and had the illustration of a dragon etched into their covers. Below said illustrations, the name「Casey Held」was written.

When he opened one of the books it revealed an abundance of carefully drawn monster illustrations, followed by things such as living habitats and the species' characteristics. I've loved picture books since I was a kid, so I was a little excited seeing these books.

“I can also offer you something not intended for human eyes, an encyclopedia of the various spirit beasts I've encountered. Unfortunately it isn't as detailed as my research on monsters. The difficulties in approaching spirit beasts has hindered any in-depth investigation.....”

Casey smiled bitterly as he scratched head and held out another book. It wasn't as thick as the books on monsters and it was bound rather roughly.

Since he was concerned about the spirit beast, he probably choose to not share this with humans. There was a chance more cases like Ponta's might occur after all.

But as he said, it was bound to happen sooner or later.

“I understand, but we can't afford to waste too much time.....”

Ariane looked directly at Casey as she said that in a firm tone.

Chapter 5: 「Monster Researcher」 Part 2

Casey lead us through the corridor that connected to the mansion. He nodded at the feudal lord's guards and servants as we passed them by. Occasionally a gaze would linger on the dark elf Ariane but they wouldn't stay long enough for it to be considered rude.

The large central building we found ourselves at was probably feudal lord's residence. When Casey said hello to the guards that stationed in front of the large main door, they silently opened the door.◦

Casey thanked them as he passed through the door, but when I tried to follow him one of the guards blocked my way.

“I'm sorry, you have to leave your weapons here.”

The 『Sword of the Lion King』and the two-handed 『Holy Thunder Sword』hung on Ariane's and my waist respectively. Seem like we wouldn't be able to carry our weapons into the feudal lord's residence.

I would feel a little uneasy with my weapon out of reach, but it wouldn't help even if I complained. I silently nodded and held my sheathed sword out to the guard. Ariane also offered her sword in the same manner.

The guard's admiration of my sword lasted until he tried to take it. When I let go of the sword, the guard immediately lost his balance and staggered.

“Ku! H-Heavy.....”

The guard struggled to lift the sword that I could easily wield.

“Are you alright?”

“S-Sorry.”

The sword lacked any feeling of weight when I used it, but it would be difficult for normal people to swing. I was able to relax a little when I had that thought. Even if someone had such a powerful weapon, they weren't much of a threat if they couldn't use it.

Since we had the guards' permission, we passed through the same door

that Casey had. Ahead, we saw him talking to a female servant in the main hall.

“Casey-dono? How can I help you today?”

“Ah, is Sukitosu-kun in the usual room? I could use a good guide.”

The woman briskly started walking up the main stairway to the second floor. When Ariane and I tried to keep pace as we followed, the woman's eyes bulged in surprise.

“Huh!? Casey-dono you have to say so beforehand when you have guests!”

Right before we followed Casey up the stairs, in her haste to greet us the woman tripped on and started to fall right in front of us.

Ariane moved immediately. Without a sound, she approached the falling woman as caught her.

“Are you alright?”

“S-Sorry, honorable guest.”

When Ariane looked at the woman with her golden eyes, she blushed and quickly separated herself from Ariane.

“Casey-dono! Please wait!!”

In order to hide her embarrassment, the woman quickly ran up the stairs and called out for Casey.

“Brita-kun don't be so mad.”

“Do you wanna take my scolding!?”

“Is Sukitosu-kun really gonna be upset over such a thing?”

“I'm gonna be scolded by the head maid!”

When we reached to top of the stairs, the woman name Brita caught up with Casey and was arguing with him. She was still blushing as she led the laughing Casey to his destination.

This scene must have been a common occurrence since the guards and

servants they passed by wryly smiled at the two.

Ariane was slightly amused by the exchange as we followed behind the two of them.

“Hey, I’m coming in. Sukitosu-kun.”

In the depths of the mansion, Casey opened a remarkably beautiful door without knocking. It was the maid Brita that stepped in, while at her wits end, who said “Excuse us.” to the person inside.

Ariane and I share a look between each other and then back at those two before entering the room.

“You, I thought that you were entertaining an elven guest? Did you decide to come here when your talk was over.....”

In this small rectangular room, there were bookcases displayed on both sides while the furniture was neatly arranged throughout the room. There was large glass window in the back with an ebony-colored worked carefully centered in front of it.

A man that was in the prime of his life was sitting at that desk and had been going over a document in his hand before he looked up at Casey and Brita’s entrance.

Casey had called the man in the prime of his life “Sukitosu-kun.” He was about 40 years old, his dark hair was cut short, and although he was dressed in fine clothing from what I could see, his upper body was highly toned. That combined with the stubble on his chin made the man look more like a veteran adventurer than a noble.

Lord Sukitosu looked surprised when he saw Ariane and I enter the room before shaking his head and looking back at Casey.

“Actually, we have agreed upon securing the Sandworm sample I’ve been talking about.”

Sukitosu turned his head at the relaxed Casey’s laid back explanation.

“Didn’t you give up on that? Haven’t I already said that you’re trying to take the soldier too far from the town? Though the fields were expanded

thanks to you, there aren't enough people to spare. Even if you only need a few people I can only offer you three or four at most.”

Sukitosu signed and massaged the wrinkles on his forehead, but Casey simply called out to Ariane and me with a joyous expression.

“It all right! These two are willing to cooperate this time. The messenger from my village Ariane-dono and the one wearing the armor—”

“This is my personal guard, Arc.”

Ariane glanced in my direction after cutting into Casey's introduction. I offered the two a small nod in response with that short introduction.

I wonder if she used that as an excuse for me to keep my helmet own. After all, there was little that could be said about the personal guard of an important elven messenger. I don't know if the concept of diplomatic immunity existed in this world, but I'm not foolish enough to point that out.

However, the man in front of us didn't seem to mind the small things.

“You're not being coerced into this are you, Messenger-san?”

Sukitosu leaned back in his chair to look up at the ceiling and sighed, before turning his sympathetic eyes on us and asked that question.

“I didn't coerce anybody, we performed a fair trade, didn't we?”

While Casey was pleading his case, Brita deeply bowed her head in apology behind him.

“Well Sukitosu-kun, could you please loan me four people that can manage the bait?”

“You mean those goblins you've been saving..... I'll lend you the men if you dispose of them. I've been getting complaints about the foul odor they give off for the last five days.”

Sukitosu made a dismissive gesture to Casey before looking in our direction and standing up.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Ariane-dono. I am Sukitosu Du Buranbeina, this town’s feudal lord, but you can just call me Sukitosu. Since this is such an out of the way place, I ask that you excuse my bad manners.”

“I am Ariane Glenys Maple, and I don’t really mind.”

When Sukitosu offered his right hand, Ariane took it. There must have been something special about Ariane’s skin as Sukitosu looked down at their combined hand in surprise before quickly looking away.

“Then..... I’ll prepare a seat at the table for tonig—”

“No thank you, since we don’t have a lot of time to spare, we’ll be leaving once we are done helping with this matter.....”

Just as Sukitosu was offering us a seat at dinner, Ariane immediately declined the offer. Again, thanks to my condition, even if we attended the meal I would have had to stand behind Ariane the entire time.

“That so? There is no need for you to refuse..... but I suppose that a messenger is always busy. Thank you in advance for helping Casey-dono.”

Sukitosu tried not to scowl as he said that and put on a false smile while turning in Casey’s direction.

“Ah? Where did he go?”

When Sukitosu couldn’t find Casey he frantically started to look around for him.

“He left some time ago in high spirits.”

“Again.....”

Brita resigned herself to go looking for him, while Sukitosu apologetically looked towards Ariane.

As she stared at the feudal lord, Ariane slowly opened her mouth.

“Why would a feudal lord such as yourself take in an elf?”

For a moment, Sukitosu looked as if he didn’t know how to respond, but he immediately started to smile.

“He is a truly talented researcher. About ten years ago, the constant

monster attacks had put this land on the brink of collapse. After he came and taught my guards the various characteristics of the monsters that inhabited the area, the town was able to become livable again. My territory's people and I are truly grateful to him.....”

I see, Casey had appeared in this place's time of need and the two of them built up mutual trust from that point on.

Ariane must have realized that fact herself as she listened to the story without interruption.

When Ariane prepared to leave the room Sukitosu said “Come by anytime.” with a smile and a chuckle. Though the town wasn't that large, its feudal lord left the impression of a good mayor in my mind.

When we retrieved our weapons at the entrance, we were told that Casey had asked us to be brought to a warehouse on the propriety.

There wasn't anything particularly special about the building, it being nothing more than a bow with a small window. However, a horrid smell was spewing from the warehouse's opened double door.

The smell became even worse as I looked inside and Ariane's face unconsciously distorted into a scowl. Ponta must not have minded the smell that much because she was wagging her tail as usual. There was only one wagon in this deserted warehouse, so naturally, the person looking over its contents noticed its use.

There were ten green-skinned dwarves laying in the wagon and they were all giving off the strong scent of decay.

“A horde of goblins were recently chased out of their territory by wyverns, so they tried to raid the city. I intend to use these corpses as bait for the Sandworm.

“Casey-dono, when will we hunt the Sandworm?”

Ariane had tears in her eyes and was holding her nose beside me as she asked her question.

“Sand Worms are nocturnal monsters, so I assume we can set off after

lunch. Oh, do you guys have something to eat for lunch? There's a pretty good place in town called Oak."

When I turned back to Ariane I saw that she was holding her noses as she shook her head no. Since I couldn't eat in the open and I really didn't feel like standing around that Oak place watching other people eat.

Casey looked a little disappointed at her answer before turning to me.

"No, I'll decline as well."

"Is that so? That's too bad, the food is really delicious."

Casey pouted a bit before looking back at the decomposing goblins and starting to put together as scheduled in his head.

"Well then, how about you guys return here a little bit after noon? You can explore the town till then."

We parted ways with Casey at that and headed back into town.

Chapter 6: 「The ones you're with」

All the townspeople were watching us as we walked by. Ariane was currently walking down the street without her hood on and her face completely exposed. Her well arranged features, golden eyes, and the lilac skin peeking through her cloak would naturally catch everyone's eye.

“It's so strange, for an elf to live openly in a town of untrustworthy humans.....”

She looked at the town's residents while saying that. Once she put her gray hood on, the number of eyes watching us began to decrease.

“Ariane-dono, we should book a room at an inn for the night.”

“Why? We can set out for Lanbaltic once we capture the Sandworm, right?”

Ariane looked puzzled as she said that.

“Let's say that it takes until midnight to capture the Sandworm, then we'd have to stay overnight, wouldn't we?”

“I see what you mean..... Also, sorry for my selfishness.....”

She must have remembered our talk with Casey because she abruptly apologized.

“Ariane-dono, since you're my employer I have the duty to comply with your wishes as much as possible. Besides, the best part of a journey are the detours.”

“.....Thank you.”

She offered me a small thanks as she turned away and headed towards the inn district at a brisk pace. I widened my stride to keep pace with her.

There weren't many inns to begin with, and most of the larger ones were occupied by the adventurers, so the two of us had to book a double room in a small inn for the night.

According to the owner of the inn the highway that passed this town didn't see much traffic, so it was rare for anyone other than adventurers

who were searching for monster materials to visit.

After booking our room, Ariane and I toured the city until the sun rose to the middle of the sky.

This time, when Ariane and I were approaching the guards, they quietly allowed us to carry on. However, before we reached the gate, Casey opened it and immediately came out.

A large four-horse wagon was behind him, with one person in the coachman's seat and three other men in light armor following it. Everyone but Casey was covering their faces with a cloth which made them look like robbers out of a western.

Dried grass had been piled atop the decomposing goblin corpses in an attempt to block their foul smell, but the smell was still leaking out and the guards scowled whenever it reached them.

“Yaa, let's depart.”

Casey was the only one unaffected by the smell as he cheerfully started to lead the wagon along. After a brief talk with two city guards we left the town and headed towards the highway.

After reaching the highway, we turned north. After a bit of traveling, we turned west and headed into the wasteland.

Casey had been teaching us about Sandworms throughout the entire journey. Sandworms apparently burrowed deep underground during the day and searched for food during the night. The reason we brought the goblin-corpse along was that they mostly ate dead flesh.

Their weak point was fire, but their skin was able to resist fire to a certain point. However, since we would risk burning the body of the specimen we were trying to collect, it had been decided to avoid using fire magic.

“I know of Soilworms, can't you simply cut off their heads to kill them?”

“Soilworms that live in the forest are about three meters long, but Sandworms are twenty meters long. Their girth is so big that a fully

grown adult can barely wrap his arms around them, and their elasticity makes it near impossible to decapitate them, even with a good sword. On top of possessing amazing strength, they retreat into the ground the moment they detect danger, which makes it difficult to defeat them..”

Casey answered Ariane’s question with a troubled expression.

Still, a twenty-meter long worm is quite the monster. However, if they’re only as wide as an adult’s arm-span, I should be able to cut them with the 『Holy Thunder Sword』. I wonder if it’d be possible to test it out with another Sandworm after this.

After a while, the ground began to soften and Casey soon looked back and signaled for the wagon to stop advancing.

“Okay, this place is good enough. Let’s scatter the bait around the area, then hide the wagon in the shadow of a rock formation and wait in it until nightfall.

As he showed the men where to place the bait, I spotted a large rock formation bursting from the red colored, barren wasteland. No one would notice if a wagon and a group of people were hidden behind that large rock formation.

Following Casey’s instructions the guards used their spears to stab the goblins before carrying them to the designated locations. It was a task that made everybody scowl.

Once the bait was set, we moved behind the rocks and started to chat while waiting for nightfall. Ponta curled up on Ariane’s knees and it wasn’t long before I could hear her light snoring.

The guards took turns poking their heads out from behind the rocks while Casey was writing down the description of a nearby growing plant on a piece of parchment

As the sun started to set, the shrubs that managed to grow in the discolored soil were dyed in an orange hue as far as the eye could see. The shadows of the rock formations began to stretch along the wasteland. While the temperature was gradually falling, Casey’s tension only seem

to rise. Even the guards were smiling wryly while Casey repeatedly poked his head out from behind the rock as he became more and more restless.

Eventually, a pair of flying monsters that we weren't here for started flying in our direction with the sun at their backs. They had figures that I recognized. With their bird-like head and four-meter-long wing span, there was no doubt these monsters were Sand Wyverns like those from this morning.

When the sound of their flapping wings could be heard, Ponta leaped from Ariane's knees and wrapped herself around Ariane's neck, who simply grinned in delight at the situation.

"Sand Wyverns have arrived. They don't usually consume corpses."

Casey was muttering something as he peeked from behind the rock to stare at the Wyverns that had landed in the area with the bait.

The two Sand Wyverns slowly approached the unattended goblins and began to peck at it like birds. However, one of them quickly lifted its head and cautiously looked around before taking to the skies. The other one must have been crazy about the goblin as it tried to take another peck when something suddenly shot out of the ground. The Wyvern shouted as it was dragged underground.

As if that were the signal, other large figures began to burst from the ground one after another. Their skin was a mossy green with a darkish yellow mixed in, and four flaps pulled back to reveal their mouths, each lined with an uncountable amount of fangs. Wiggling around in search of their prey, we could see some sand blowing out of gill-like organs that were a short distance under their mouth and a myriad of centipede-like legs were lining their stomachs.

Though only a section of their bodies was above ground, they easily exceeded five meters as they approached the rotten goblins we had set as bait. There were five of them in total.

"Arya~, I never imaged that so many of them would come out..... It would be completely suicidal to try challenging this many Sandworms.

Casey's voice was tinged with a hint of disappointment as he looked upon this spectacle.

"Aren't Sandworms only suppose to eat corpses? They had no hesitations preying on the Wyvern."

"I said they usually ate corpses, I never said they didn't eat living beings."

Casey focused on the Sandworms as he answered one of the guard's question. If that's the case then couldn't humans be their prey as well?

I could probably kill this many if I used magic, but I wondered if it was alright to take such conspicuous actions here.

Since there were five large Sandworms, there obviously weren't enough goblins to go around, so one of them was driven away from the bait.

The one that had been driven away suddenly noticed something and turned it's head in our direction. It drove its head back underground before the earth began to part, indicating that it was heading towards us.

"Uhyua!!"

One of the guards screamed in terror as he saw the approaching worm and started to run toward the highway.

As if it had a periscope underground, the worm changed direction and started to chase after the guard that ran.

"Che, as if!"

I shot out from behind the formation in the same way and recklessly chased after the guard with my strong legs. By the time I caught up to him, the Sandworm had emerged from the ground with its fangs out, ready to consume its prey. Without enough time to draw my sword, I tackled the large Sandworm head on.

I grabbed hold of the Sandworm around its gills and stopped its charge with pure strength. It immediately started trying to wiggle out of my hold while it's mouth hung open like an alien egg. I could hear a harsh "GICHICHI" as the beast twisted its large body in an attempt to break

free of my hold, forcing me to increase the strength I used accordingly.

“Haaaaa!!”

The guard was unable to stand and quickly started to scuttle back on his butt. I could see traces of wetness between his crotch. I wonder if this monster has some kind of heightened sense of smell.

The Sandworm arched its body in an attempt to sink back underground and once again writhed in my arms. This twenty-meter long monster had a considerable amount of power, I had to crouch down in a desperate attempt to keep the worm's head above ground.

“Hahhhhhh!!!”

If the Sandworm dove underground then it would be in its home-field. I took the initiative and started to pull the worm out of the ground like a radish. However, the opponent desperately tried to avoid certain death and engaged me in tug-a-war. However, the large body of the Sandworm gradually started to pile into a wiggling mass as I pulled it out of the ground.

The Sandworm flailed about as opened its mouth in an attempt to bite at my chest. I immobilized its body by holding it down with my foot and tightened my grip into a sleeper hold.

“Arc!”

Ariane rushed towards Sandworm and was waiting for her chance to strike with her sword in hand.

“It's alright, Ariane-dono! Everything's going great!”

I informed Ariane of my safety to prevent her from dealing a fatal blow to the Sandworm while applying more pressure to the hold. Before long the Sandworm began to feebly convulse as I applied a sleeper hold from a better posture.

The movements of the struggling upper and lower halves dimmed just like the remaining light in the wastelands as the chokehold started to take effect.

“No way, no way, no way... it’s impossible for a person to strangle a Sandworm with their bare hands.....”

Casey said that as he and the rest of the guards approached. While keeping an eye on the behemoth on the ground, the group walked towards me. As the remaining guards ran up and were at a loss for words as they stared at me in a wide circle.

A pointless discussion began in my head about how counterproductive it was to avoid using flashy magic in an attempt to be inconspicuous, only to defeat a monster with superhuman strength. No, it was already too late for being inconspicuous.

I stood up while brushing off the dust from my cloak and armor, trying to act as if nothing happened.

Looking back at the area we had placed the bait, I saw that the Sand Worms and goblins were already gone, leaving only a barren wasteland behind.

“Casey-dono, I assume that the sample collection is complete?”

When I looked back at the worm at my feet, Casey was already moving around and prodding the large creature.

“It’s sufficient! I never expected to be able to collect such a beautiful specimen.”

Casey was brimming with joy as he spoke in a slightly exciting tone.

“Casey-dono, the sun will be setting soon. If we don’t move the specimen immediately will run the risk of being attacked by Sand Wyverns.”

One of the guards was voicing their concerns to Casey after looking at the sky. The guard who had been chased was being helped by another guard.

The sun was already hidden behind the mountain range in the distance and the sky was already a dark indigo color.

“Is that so, I had assumed that we would have to camp out, but things

were wrapped up rather quickly.”

Following Casey’s instructions, the Sandworm was loaded onto the wagon. Once the worm’s large body was loaded up we set off immediately.

“Recently a group of Sand Wyverns has been appearing around town.”

On the way back to Buranbeina, Casey informed us of that fact as the guards walking beside the wagon nervously surveyed the sky.

“We encountered a few of them on our way to Buranbeina. They flew off after we struck a couple of them down.”

“Is that true!? Could you tell me where they are, so that Sukitosu-kun can send a team to recover them?”

Since Ariane and I had no particular use for them, we nodded and gave him the location of the bodies.

Before long we neared the hill that Buranbeina was built upon. The guards’ tension began to ease once we were in the reach of the city lights. The town gates had already been closed, but when Casey walked in front of the guards on duty they were opened once again.

“Casey-done, we’ll take our leave here.”

After entering the town, I called out to him in the town square. Casey looked back at us before grabbing a cloth bundle from the wagon and walked back to us.

“Today was a wonderful day. Here are the books I promised as a reward. I’m grateful that they will be useful to those of my village. Hopefully, these will inspire some of our brethren to look beyond the village.”

He handed Ariane the bundle and held out his right hand. She stretched out her own hand and shook his.

“Thank you very much. You should be more selective of the people you allow to read these.”

Hearing Ariane’s words, Casey just smiled and waved a friendly farewell before following the wagon to the feudal lord’s mansion.

“I guess we should get some rest.....”

“.....Alright.”

After watching Casey’s back disappear, we turned around and headed towards our inn.

Chapter 7: 「Harbor City Lanbaltic」 Part 1

Making full use of 【Dimensional Step】, Ariane and I left Buranbeina early the next morning and returned to the fork in the road.

Under the sunny sky, Ponta was chasing butterflies around the rocks at the center of the fork in the road.

Ariane was sitting on a boulder of to the side and drinking water from her canteen.

I was sitting on the ground waving a foxtail grass blade around, failing to catch Ponta's attention as she wagged her tail and avoided eye contact.

Unable to heal my loneliness, I turned my eyes to the gentle hills that opened up before me.

Far west of the hilly landscape, the ridgeline of the Leving mountains continued from the northern and southern horizons.

Our next destination, Lanbaltic, was just beyond that mountain range. Based off of what we heard in Buranbeina, we'd have to travel around the southernmost tip of the mountains to reach the city. From this vantage point, I should easily be able to cover the distance with transfer magic, but the problem was that the monsters roaming the area, the high amount of pedestrian traffic, and the villages along the way made doing so rather difficult. I sighed unintentionally as I stared out at the surrounding area.

“We should set off soon.”

“Yeah.”

Ariane agreed with my opinion as she stood up. Ponta, seeming to realize what was happening and used her magic to fly from the rock she was on to the top of my head. Facing forward I put my luggage sack over my shoulder and began to walk.

I headed down the southwestern path this time. Confirming that there was no one around, I invoked 【Dimensional Step】. Occasionally we would come across some people on the highway so I had to transfer to another

location. We traveled like this for quite some time and it wasn't long before night fell.

Silence had fallen over the hilly landscape and the Leving mountains looked larger at their base than when I gazed at them from our previous vantage point. I couldn't even see the setting sun since it was blocked by the northern region of the mountain range.

We decided to rest for the night and visited the inn of a small town that was built next to a forest.

Unfortunately, the next day the sky was full of dark clouds.

After leaving the town and following the western highway early in the morning, the hilly surroundings were eventually replaced by an ocean view. Although it had taken a rather gloomy appearance thanks to the cloudy sky, my feelings brightened up a little.

“We've finally reached the ocean.”

I put my hands on my waist and took a deep breath. Ponta used her magic to fly from the top of my head to a hill that overlooked the sea.

“This is the first time I've seen the ocean from this side.”

Ariane smiled as she removed her hood, letting her silver hair blow in the wind, and spoke in an emotional tone.

“We have to head north along the coast from here.”

I turned away from the sea to look in the northern direction.

Even though I didn't know how much further north we had to go, at our pace we should've been able to reach Lanbaltic by the afternoon. The problem was that because of the people and the coastal villages and towns along the highway, I couldn't recklessly use **【Dimensional Step】** here.

Moving away from the highway, I began to use **【Dimensional Step】**, checking to make sure the coast was clear each time. Our speed fell as a result, but it was still faster than walking would have been.

Apparently by trying to avoid being seen, you increase the probability of

encountering those you didn't want to see you.

At one point the northern highway dipped into a slight incline in between a set of hills, and at the center of the incline, a group of people was gathered. Wait, it was a handful of people surrounded by another group of people and every one of them had their weapons drawn.

The ones surrounded were a group of five seemingly young adventurers, who were all wearing cheap leather armor and carrying a sword and shield.

On the other hand, the ten men that surrounded them were dressed in various garbs from leather armor and cloaks to old rags and they held their weapons as if they were waiting for the right moment to attack. They were looking like mercenaries or thieves, but it was hard to tell.

Based on their demeanor and attitude, the five adventurers were novices and the group that surrounded them were veterans. One of the bandits had a slight smile on his face as he appraised the equipment.

Ariane's golden eyes peeked out from beneath her hood and asked me a question with her gaze.

We could completely ignore this situation or get involved.

We could transfer to the next hill from here and carry on, and I'm certain I'd feel very little about this situation as we continued on. Why is it that I leap in to help women and children who are under attack, but consider the prospect of helping shabby men a hassle? Silver:(Because you are a Japanese WN protagonist Arc.)

Thinking it over a bit, I came to the conclusion that we should avoid getting too deeply involved with the situation since we had no idea what the circumstances were. I gently grabbed Ponta by the scruff of her neck and handed her to Ariane.

When Ariane caught Ponta in her arms she twirled before happily stroking the smiling Ponta's head and throat.

I put down my luggage and cleared my throat before speaking in a relatively calm tone.

“Harrumph, a~~. I’ll be back in a bit.”

After saying so I ran down the hill and lightly called out to both of the groups that had yet to notice me.

“Hey, I’m sorry but could you give me directions~?”

My careless and inappropriate comment caused the tension to rise even further. Everyone eye focused on me before one of the members of the larger group shouted.

“Damn! Looks like these bastards got reinforcements!!”

Apparently they’ve decided to count us as one of their targets because we cut into a rather tense situation.

At the man’s shout, two people from the surrounding group brandished their weapons as they rushed me. The swords they had seemed to be mediocre and blunt versions of the those sold in a weapon shop.

To prove my assumption, I caught their attacks without drawing my sword or shield and I didn’t even feel an itch. As expected of the mythical grade 『Belen’s Saint Armor』, weapons of this level wouldn’t be able to put a scratch in it.

“What the...!? This guy is wearing full body armor!”

The men with the swords were surprised that their attacks were brushed off and one of them angrily shouted when he saw my armor peeking through my cloak.

Hearing that, the other man sneaked up to my outstretched arm in an attempt to lunge at the gap in my armor. I caught the blade of the sword with my outstretched hand and used pure strength to shatter it.

“Aa—!! My sword—!!”

The man had a grim expression on his face as he cried about his broken sword, but his eyes rolled back into his head after I hammered a punch to his jaw and he started to fall.

“Shit!!”

The other man cursed as he took a leap forward and lunged his sword towards the gap between the helmet and chest section of my armor. I simply took the attack before grabbing the man by the collar and head-butted him, helmet and all.

There was a dull sound as the man's nose broke and started to bleed. He dropped his sword and fell to the ground groaning.

"I wanted to settle this a little bit more gently....."

I muttered that as I looked upon the two fallen men.

When I looked at the surrounded adventures, I saw that they were in a circular formation with their backs to one another as they managed to fend off their attackers, even though they were under constant assault.

Even though they were rather young, they seemed quite capable.

The men from the larger group were starting to show signs of impatience as the fight was more difficult than they anticipated. In the midst of this chicken race, I called out in an attempt to shake things up again.

"Excuse me, my opponents appear to be tired, can I have some new ones?"

Once again everyone's attention was focused on me

My question caused the members of the bandit group to hesitate and look around. As if we were under some kind of agreement, the young adventurers used the opening to go on the offensive.

One bandit dropped his sword after his fingers were sliced off while another was rendered unconscious by a shield bash to the face. One was even forced to step back after one of his eyes was cut out.

Out of the remaining eight people, two were unable to continue and one had lost the will to fight. Once they lost their numerical advantage the bandits started to disperse.

However, the young adventures didn't waste their chance and immediately targeted their opponents to strike them down. After the five

of them were done, there was still one man who was running away with his tail between his legs. Apparently he had been lucky enough to have not been marked by anyone.

“However, someone has already snuck around.”¹

I stood in front of the man with my knees slightly bent and my arms stretched out as I repeated a certain line I’d heard somewhere before.

The man stopped in his tracks as he looked up in irritation at the two-meter tall knight, me, that had suddenly appeared in front of him.

The man didn’t give up and tried to flee in another direction, but I quickly moved in front of him again.

“However, someone has already snuck around.”

I repeated the line mechanically after blocking his path.

The man’s expression shifted from irritation to grim determination. It was understandable considering the circumstances of facing an enemy one couldn’t run away from.

When faced with a situation like this, one had to make a decision: you either resign yourself to your fate, or you choose to fight the enemy.

The man in front of me choose to fight.

“Dokeeeeeeyooooo!!”

He recklessly swung his weapon straight at me. It was a desperate sink or swim move. However, I simply dodged the attack and knocked the man out with a quick jab to the chin.

When I turned back to the area with the young adventurers I saw that the last bandit had already thrown down his weapon.

The young adventurers began tying up the defeated bandits with some ropes they had, while the last bandit stared at me with enmity. One of the youths approached me and knelt before me with his head down.

“Knight-sama we appreciate your help. Thanks to you, we were able to safely capture these bandits.”

The youth offered me his gratitude in that position. So the group from before really had been bandits.

“I’m just an adventurer. There’s no need to humble yourself.”

When I said that, the young man looked like he couldn’t believe it as he slid his eyes over the armor that managed to peek out from under my cloak before he looked back at Ariane standing at the top of the hill. Having gained some sort of understanding the man nodded before standing up.

“That was rude of me, I apologize. Sorry for the late introduction, but my name is Axel and I’m the leader of this party. I appreciate your help.”

He must have thought we were nobles traveling incognito or something, since he was speaking in an exaggerated tone. Nevertheless, he was still polite. He may have been young, but he was rather educated.

“Once again, we’re grateful for your help, but would you be willing to leave the ones you caught with us? I’ll properly compensate you, of course.”

The man looked back at his friends who were in the middle of tying up the other bandits after he bowed his head to me.

“We just happened to come along by chance, there’s no need to go out of your way.”

“Are you sure about that? If we take these bandits to Lanbaltic, the Nozan slave traders will pay a reasonable price for them, you know?”

Axel tilts his head in puzzlement of my answer.

It appears that apart from elves and beastmen, criminals were the next highest candidates for enslavement. Were the next ones on the block those with outstanding debts?

When we had assaulted the Etsuato company in Rhoden’s capital I had freed some human slaves to distract the guards, but there could have been brutal criminals among them.

Reflecting on my actions, I may have been a little impulsive with my

actions back then.

“Hum, will this Nozan slave dealer buy all of the bandits?”

“No, Nozan is the name of the country on the other side of the Burugo gulf. Slave dealers from that country come to Lanbaltic to buy criminals by the shipload.”

Axel pointed to the sea as he explained the situation with the Nozan kingdom.

Even if criminal slaves are brought in large quantities, I doubted they would be working in the homes of people. After all, they wouldn't hesitate baring their fangs at their owners, so they'll most likely be put to work for the community as forced labors for a feudal lord's land development.

“In that case, we'll have to decline then.”

I declined Alex's offer again and offered my goodbyes.

“Thank you very much!”

I waved my hand back at them for a while before climbing the hill back to where Ariane was playing with Ponta.

*

[1] 「しかし、回り込まれてしまった」 Based on research (aka. google) we concluded that this was a meme in Japan.

Chapter 8: 「Harbor City Lanbaltic」 Part 2

“Sorry for the wait, Ariane-dono. Let us resume our journey.”

When Ariane noticed me coming towards her, she immediately stopped rubbing her face against Ponta's.

“Bandits?”

“That was the case.”

Picking my luggage sack off the ground, I gave Ariane a brief answer as we continued to Lanbaltic.

Looking at the sky, I saw that it had been growing dimmer and cloudier than it had been a while ago.

“It might rain soon.....”

“Yeah, we'd better look for an inn when we reach Lanbaltic.”

When I expressed my concerns about the sky, Ariane looked up as well and agreed.

After moving quickly for a while, I invoked 【Dimensional Step】 until we advanced beyond several hills and came across one that overlooked a large city.

The city was spread along the coastal shore and surrounded by a large double canal waterway that led into the sea. The canal's width varied in places and anything from rowboats to fishing ships could be seen traveling along it. The five-meter-high city wall built around the city wasn't that tall compared to those of other cities, though.

From here, I could see several ships that were anchored in the large harbor that had been built on the coast. I could tell that the sea trade was the lifeblood of this city, but there wasn't any sight of any large ships, only small-and medium-sized ones.

Sandwiched between the green fields and blue ocean were the contrasting chestnut brown rooftops of Lanbaltic's cityscape. Unfortunately, the bad weather had drained the cityscape and scenery of

its initial vitality.

We passed by a multitude of people and goods entering and leaving the city as we approached.

We soon stood in line for the city's northern gate. The passage over the stone bridge was rather slow as we had to cross the great canal before we could pay the entrance tax.

The noise of people going about their business rose as a strong wind blew more clouds over the sky. The city was still relatively bright beyond the wall, although it was a little chaotic. Multiple alleyways were set up within close proximity of each other and many people dressed in rags could be seen sitting in on the ground of those alleys. The atmosphere here wasn't that great despite the peace and order, as the extreme gap between rich and the poor could be seen everywhere.

As we walked along the main road, a large structure at the center of the town came into view. Many street stalls lined the interior of the structure and there were people constantly entering and leaving through the large door. I could even see customers buying and comparing goods at the stalls that lined the building.

This kind of permanent establishment reminded me of a department store. It was a type of open market I haven't come across before, one that was easier for me to deal with.

The smell of various foods blended into one another, making Ponta struggle in Ariane's arms when she caught a whiff of it.

"How about we grab something from over there."

Ariane nodded in agreement after I made the suggestion and pointed out a nearby shop.

There was a stout middle-aged man that ran the shop while acting as a barker. He seemed to be selling a juice squeezed from an orange-like fruit. However, the juice was a red color.

"Excuse me, two please."

“Thank you for your patronage! That’d be two sek.”

The shopkeeper floated a smile as he picked up a sack of fruit and took out a juicer.

“Two silvers? That’s really expensive.”

“No, Knight-sama. The price is halved if you return the cup.”

After slicing the fruit and putting the halves through the juicer, he poured the juice into a wooden cup.

It appears that the container was included in the price.

“I have a small question, would you happen to know where the lord’s residence is?”

“The Lord’s? If you take the street in front of this market, it should be across the first channel.”

The vendor put straws in the cups of juice and held them out. I paid the two silvers and took the drinks.

“Does your business at the feudal lord’s mansion have anything to do with his rumored bride?”

“Rumored bride?”

When I tilted my head after receiving the drinks the vendor was shocked.

“Eh? I thought you came to meet the elven princess that the feudal lord married.....”

Ariane and I simultaneously glanced at each other when we heard the vendor’s answer. As expected, her eyes bulged in surprise. Her movement almost caused her hood to fall off but she quickly fixed it.

“Vendor, we’d like to hear the full details.”

“Eh, yes. About a month ago, the feudal lord announced the ceremony to the neighboring lords. I caught a glimpse of her riding a carriage at the event in question, she was rather beautiful.”

The vendor folded his arms and looked out in the distance as if he were

seeing that day unfold all the while vigorously nodding his head.

“Was there anything around her neck? Something metal.....”

Ariane stepped forward and question the vendor absorbed in his own emotions. She was asking about the 『Magic-Eating Collar』. It was a magic tool that made it impossible for the wearer to use magic. It was an essential device used to enslave elves as it greatly hinders the combat abilities of the magically gifted elves.

“No, she didn’t wear such a thing, did she? She did wear a luxurious hair ornament, though.”

The vendor twisted his head as he tried to remember the details as he talked. Ariane started at the vendor in wide-eyed disbelief, as if what she heard was impossible, but it wasn’t that strange to me.

If she had worn such a boorish metal collar in front of the neighboring lords and townspeople, it would have drawn too much suspicion during the whole event. Either the lord had other means of threatening her, or the elf woman agreed to the marriage out of her own volition.

“Would the name of the feudal lord that married her happen to be Londes De Lanbaltic?”

That was the name that was listed on the elf slave contracts taken from the slaving after all.

However, the vendor gave an unexpected answer.

“No, that was the former lord’s name. It is his son Petros that she married.”

“The lord changed?”

“Yes, about a month ago.”

Ariane and I shared another look with each other when we heard that answer.

A short time later, in a small corner of the marketplace.

I handed Ariane one of the cups of juice that I had been holding. She

remained silent as she took it and brought the straw to her lips.

I copied her actions and drank the juice after putting the straw through one of the slits in my visor. Although it was lukewarm, the juice's acidity and taste closely resembled orange juice, even though the juice was a bright red color and the acidity was rather high.

The fact that I could drink it through a straw with my armor on was convenient.

“Do you think that story was true?”

Ariane was the first to stop drinking her juice and started to talk. In her arms, Ponta was desperately trying to reach Ariane's cup, but she was completely stuck in Ariane's tight hug.

We had gone around asking people about the marriage the vendor had talked about, but everyone we asked had given us a similar story.

“The one that seemed to have bought the elf was the previous lord, and said elf is the current lord's wife.”

I muttered a summarized version of the story and what we know.

The question was if the marriage was a forced one or a willing one. That was our current dilemma.

“It is illegal to enslave elves in this country, so I doubt anyone would have a wedding in plain view of the neighboring lords and townspeople if they were breaking that law.....”

If we assume the possibility of coercion...

“Can the 『Magic-Eating Collar』 be attached to the ankle and still have the same effect?”

Even if it's a collar, if it can function like that there'd be no need to place it around the neck. If an anklet version of the collar could be made, then it could be worn without drawing any attention. Doing so would allow the lord to officially take the woman as his wife and there wouldn't be anything the country could say about it.

However, Ariane's next statement denied that possibility.

“When the collar is attached to the ankle it doesn’t work.”

“H~um, then the possibility of coercion decreases.”

Ariane looked like she wanted to respond to my statement but she silently took another sip of juice. Confusion was visible in her eyes, but that couldn’t be helped.

Anyone would be confused if they were chasing a kidnapper, only to discover that the person kidnapped was marrying her captor’s son.

Even if the two of us were to sit here and try to figure it out, it’d only be a waste of time. In the end, we needed to hear the story directly from the people involved.

That left us with two options.

We could use the regular method of sneaking into the lord’s residence and speak with the captured elf directly. Or we could take the direct approach and ask for a meeting with the wife.

Just like before, if the marriage had been properly initiated, there would be no way for the lord to turn away a messenger from an elf village. Whichever option we choose would be mutually exclusive with the other one.

“What should we do, Ariane-done?”

I outlined the two options to Ariane and asked for her to choose.

She closed her eyes and contemplated our future actions. I am sure that not so long ago she would’ve chosen the former option without any care for the consequences, but right now she was actually considering the latter option. Maybe meeting Casey the other day left an impression on her.

Despite being an elf, Casey lived in a human town and many humans had accepted him there. That had given her a rather large shock.

Eventually, her eyes opened and she started to speak in a steady voice.

“We will act as messengers and ask for a meeting at the feudal lord’s residence.”

“Then I will assume the role of Ariane-dono’s bodyguard like before.”

The corners of her mouth lifted a little after I said that.

When she finished her drink I took her cup so we could return them to the stall. However, a loud shout managed to be heard over the hustle and bustle of the market.

Turning in that direction I saw a middle-aged man arguing with a pair of parents and children. As if to avoid the unnecessary trouble, the people in the area briskly walked away from the situation.

“You dare to try and steal from me!”

“You’re wrong! My daughter was only trying to return something that fell down, she would never steal……!”

“Annoying! That’s nothing but a refugee’s excuse!!”

The middle-aged vegetable vendor’s spit flew everywhere as he yelled at the family. A woman, who I assumed to be the mother, was holding a small boy as she grabbed the girl who was being yelled at.

The parent and children were a little on the thin side and looking somewhat grimy. As the vendor continued to shout, the boy and girl cried, while she lowered her head in apology. The swollen red cheek of the little girl made it obvious that she had been slapped.

I was unable to remain silent after seeing that.

“Was it necessary to hit the girl that hard?”

“Annoying! Whoever said that step forward—!?”

The vendor’s face had been a deep crimson when he’d been yelling, but he turned pale and started trembling when he saw me. If I had to compare it to anything, his complexion was like litmus paper.

My hands were on my waist so that my armor was on full display as I approached the arguing people. Ariane let out an audible sigh behind me.

“N-No it’s not what it looks like…… Knight-sama. That kid stole some of my goods—”

His eyes swam in confusion before he glared at the girl at the edge of his vision.

“How much was the thing she stole?”

I deliberately asked him that question in a threatening tone so that he would focus on me.

“Hu-Hum.....”

“How much was it?”

I asked the question again in a lower more menacing tone causing the vendor to be at a loss for words.

“.....No-nothing was stolen.....”

When the truth was squeezed out of him, the vendor quickly went to hide behind his stall. When I reflected on the coercive exchange, I realized I didn't regret it.

I squatted down to match the crying girl's line of sight and held out my hand as I prepared to cast magic.

“【Heal】”

Soft lights flew from my hand and burst when they made contact with the girl's swollen cheek. The girl stopped crying as she stared blankly at the magic lights.

“Th-Tha-Thank you, knight-sama.”

The girl's mother offered her thanks and apology while the boy just seemed amused. I offered the mother a brief nod before turning back to the girl and offering a cup to each of them “I'm giving these to you and your daughter personally. The vendor over there will pay for them if you take them to him.”

I pointed to the vendor we got the juice from, who I saw giving me a wry smile.

The girl looked at the cup in her hand and her mother in confusion, while mother offered her thanks yet again before she took the girl and the

cups over the juice stall.

“Arc, I think we’d better find ourselves a good inn.”

Ariane spoke up from behind me as I saw the family off. I saw that the cobblestone road was getting wet and I noticed the raindrops falling when I looked up.

Rain started to fall from the low hanging thick clouds. The people were also walking by at a quick pace.

I sighed at the fact that we would have to put off going to the feudal lord’s residence in favor of finding an inn, despite the fact that we spent all that time trying to reach Lanbaltic.

“You’re right, I guess we need to find an inn before the rain gets any worse.”

Ariane and I walked to the inn district in the light rain and finally managed to find an inn right before nightfall.

Chapter 9: 「The Elven Bride」 Part 1

When the new day arrived, the dim clouds from yesterday had been completely blown away. The smell of the tide and the peculiar scent of the harbor were carried along the wind.

Opening the inn's window shutters, I could hear the sounds of the city outside. The sun had been up for a while now.

After doing a bit of calisthenics to loosen up my stiff body, I folded up my black cloak and placed it into my luggage sack. Since this job required me to act as Ariane's guardian I decided not to wear it. I'd be attracting more attention but there was no help for it.

Ponta had already woken up and was looking at me in confusion.

“Well, let's see if we can get a proper meeting. Ready to go, Ponta?”

“Kyun!”

Ponta replied as she used wind magic to lightly to leap from the bed and fly to her usual spot on my helmet.

I had intended to call out for Ariane, who was in the room next door, but we managed to step into the hall simultaneously.

“Good morning, Arc. You're a little more noticeable than usual.”

“That's because today, I'm Ariane-dono's guard.”

After exchanging our morning greetings the two of us left the inn.

Since I asked around yesterday, our inn was located closer to the center of town rather than the southern gate we came through. I wasn't long after we left the inn that we reached the first waterway. The road continued south parallel to the waterway, and after crossing the bridge we entered the old town district.

Unlike the newer districts sandwiched between the first and second waterways, the houses of the old town district had been weathered by decades of history. The houses were also larger than those of the other districts and the streets were more spacious as well.

Eventually, the street we walked on went on an uphill incline, a large rampart, and gate could be seen at the end of the road. Behind the wall and rampart, a tall castle spread out before my eyes. In front of the gate stood a row of seasoned guards that were glaring at anyone in the area.

As we approached the gate, I began walking in front of Ariane as the guards corrected their posture and shifted to high alert.

“Excuse me, but I’d like to request a meeting with the woman that became lord Petro’s wife.”

One of the guards stepped forward and evaluated us from top to bottom before his eye stopped on my helmet. Seeing the doubt in his eyes reminded me of who was openly sitting on my head. While I had a passing thought of taking Ponta off my head, the guard gave us a dubious look as he asked for our identities.

“Sorry, but who are you people?”

“We are messengers from the Great Canada Forest. Again, I request a meeting with the lord’s bride.”

The guard we’d been talking to tilted his head in confusion at our introduction and raised an eyebrow as he opened his mouth to speak. However, before he could say anything, another guard ran up from beside the gate and whispered something in his ear.

“If you’re an elf as you say, remove your helmet and prove it.”

The person that had whispered into the guard’s ear glared at me. Ariane, who had been watching this exchange from the rear stepped forward and lowered her cloak’s hood.

Her silver hair shined under the sun’s rays and a stray gust of wind caused it to dance in the breeze. The guards held their breath as they gazed at her smooth lilac skin, golden eyes, and pointed ears. It wasn’t only the guards that were shocked, because those who had been watching the exchange voiced a simultaneous gasp.

“I am Ariane Glenys Maple, a messenger from the Great Canada Forest. I request a meeting with the lord’s wife.”

Her blunt self-introduction left the entire street in a state of shock. The guards stared at one another, wondering what they should do, before one of them rebooted their brain and started giving out orders.

“Report this to the lord!”

“Y-Yes!”

One of the guards acted as the messenger and ran through a small door next to the gate. I could only shrug my shoulders as I watched the series of exchanges unfold.

Ariane looked at the state of the guards for a bit before putting her hood back on and stepping back.

While the messenger ran to the lord, I turned back to the guards and wondered if they'd have us wait in front of the gate. Even though we were called ourselves messengers, it was true that we came unannounced, so all I could do was sigh in my heart and wait.

After a while, a command was given on the other side of the gate and soon after the sound of the rampart rising could be heard. The guard that had acted as messenger saluted us when he returned and presented the reply.

“Lord Petro is willing to meet with you!”

The guards moved to the left and right sides of the gate to open the way.

Though I was the one that proposed the idea, I never expected we'd get a meeting with the feudal lord so easily. Perhaps Ariane's presence alone held great persuasive power, considering that elves rarely appeared in human cities.

An older gentleman came from within the gate and offered us a respectful bow. When he raised his head he looked both of us over before politely asking me a question.

“Are you the guard perhaps?”

When I nodded at this, the gentlemen nodded in return and urged us to enter. I turned to Ariane and signaled for her to pass through the gate

first while I brought up the rear.

We followed the gentlemen through a large courtyard and entered the towering castle's atrium. The floors were made of polished marble and a mural was etched into the walls. A large decorative chandelier hung in the center of the room that was lined with gorgeously sculpted pillars.

There were stairways to the second floor on both sides of the room.

Smaller versions of the courtyard we had passed through could be viewed from the second-floor windows before the hall continued farther into the castle. We were led to an absurdly large room and told by the gentlemen to wait here while he brought his master.

The furniture was rather luxurious and arranged in an elegant way that reflected the owner's social status. The gap in financial standing between Buranbeina's mansion and this castle is palpable.

I moved to stand behind a sitting Ariane with my arms folded over my chest. I always had the image of diplomats being rather bossy, but could I be wrong?

While I thought about fixing my posture, a man and woman came through a back door and rigidly stood in front of us. The older gentleman was back as well.

The man who entered was probably the feudal lord. He had a European appearance and was laughing wryly as he brushed his blonde bangs away from his blue eyes. He had a strangely white smile that gleamed in the light and the slightly pretentious aura he gave off made him seem more like an actor than a feudal lord.

When the man tried to walk forward, he stopped and flashily turned around.

Why did he turn around?

While doubts began running through my mind, he turned back around and managed to choke out an introduction.

"Did you have to wait long? I'm this region's feudal lord, Petros De

Lanbaltic. I'm twenty years old and recently married!"

The man who introduced himself as Lord Petros opened up like a blooming flower, smiling brilliantly and spreading out his arms. He had an atmosphere like a prince from a shoujo manga. Basically everything about him made the introduction rather strange.

When Petros stepped in front of the dumbfounded Ariane, he kneeled before her and took her hand.

"Well well, to think that the messenger would be this beautiful. Welcome to our castle....."

The women who had entered alongside Petros interrupted our warm welcome with a dry cough. She wore a long, light green evening dress and she had the elven characteristics of long ears, blonde hair with a green tint, and green eyes. Her tall but slender figure and fair skin were complimented by her dress.

As far as I could tell she didn't seem to be forced into anything. She walked up to lord Petros with a hauntingly calm smile on her face.

When Petros noticed her interruption, he slowly stood up and offered her his most dazzling smile yet.

"Sorry, Teresa. Your beauty is unmatched of course! But all women in the world are beautiful and I ask that you forgive me for my need to praise every gorgeous flower I see."

While using some exaggerated mannerisms in his apology, Petros lightly grasped Teresa's hand and kissed the back of it. This guy is quite the eccentric person.

As if she was used to his strange behavior, Teresa simply shrugged her shoulders and turned back to us.

"Thank you for coming, I never expected a messenger from Maple to come to this far off place. I am Teresa. Now Teresa Darine Lanbaltic."

She took a seat in the chair opposite to Ariane as she spoke. Like a diligent husband Petros happily pulled Teresa's chair out before taking a

seat himself.

I tried to imitate his actions and moved to pull out Ariane's seat, but she quickly sat down by herself. The person in question acted as if it didn't matter and proceeded to introduce ourselves to the two of them.

"I am Ariane Glenys Maple, nice to meet you. The one behind me is my guard, Arc."

"Arc, you say. A pleasure to make your acquaintance."

After offering us a polite head bow, Teresa looked at me with curiosity. Ponta was currently beneath my mantle so she shouldn't be visible. I wonder if something else caught her attention.

"Well, well, an elven knight. A knight whose beauty overshadows all others."

Petros smiled and chuckled as he looked at me. I see, they had been captivated by the extravagance of 『Belenus' Holy Armor』. That is, until they caught sight of Ponta popping up on my shoulder.

Teresa looked as if she wanted to say something, but Ariane stepped in to take control of the conversation.

"I'll get straight to the point, from what I understand you married the feudal lord....."

Her golden eyes were directly on Teresa. Understanding the hidden meaning in the statement, Teresa lightly chuckled before looking at Petros.

"Yes, that's the truth. We married each other about a month ago. Though there were various circumstances involved....."

Teresa and Petros naturally held hands on the table. While the two of them dove into their own little world, Ariane stared at the sight in utter confusion.

It seemed like the two could stay forever in that world of theirs.

"We are in pursuit of elf slave traders. Correct me if I'm wrong, but you were brought here as a captive, weren't you?"

Ariane's question managed to break through the pair's lovey-dovey atmosphere.

At her inquiry, the pair released each other's hands and corrected their posture.

"So you weren't messengers after all. You're warriors sent out on a rescue mission."

Instead of being shocked at that revelation, Teresa was nodding in understanding.

"That is correct..... I was indeed captured by slave traders and brought to Lanbaltic after I had been sold."

Her eyebrows drooped as her mind wandered back to those days.

"My father, the previous lord, was the one who bought her. I could hardly believe that he could violate the kingdom's hard-won treaty with such ease."

Petros must have heard the distress in Teresa as he feebly lowered his head along with making a self-mocking sneer. Teresa looked at him with a worried expression.

"Wait. What became of the former lord that bought you, Londes De Lanbaltic?"

Ariane shook her head in confusion as she demanded an explanation. However, Petros was the one that answered.

"Father is currently confined within the castle..... I seized control of the domain when I learned of his treachery. This is a scandal that can't be discussed carelessly, so when I heard that a messenger from the elven country arrived I wondered whether or not to cover everything up."

Petros' expression became troubled as he told the story of the pair's marriage.

According to him, Teresa was brought to this territory about a year ago, it seemed the former lord Londes bought her from a group of slave dealers from the capital. A certain person that witnessed this told Petros about it,

and on the grounds of treason against the kingdom Petros fought with his father to gain control of the household.

They had wanted to prevent the entire affair from leaking into rest of the kingdom, but there was still the elf Teresa to deal with.

“If that’s what happened, why’d you marry him?”

Ariane was frequently turning her head as she tried to connect the dots of the story , even I was trying to make sense of the pair’s story and the current situation.

Petros suddenly leaped from his seat and began to talk about the situation like a song.

“It’s simple! I fell in love with her the moment I laid eyes upon her! My pitiful heart will forever be a prisoner of lo—”

“giggling Petros.....”

Petros made exaggerated hand gestures as he whispered sweet words into the blushing Teresa’s ear before they gazed into each other’s eye’s and held hands again. It was like we’re watching a soap opera..... is someone around here gonna burst into spontaneous singing?

The old gentlemen in the back seemed glad about something as he looked at the pair with a slight smile on his face.

He seemed to be used to scenes like this, but constantly having to watch them drift off into their own little world was giving me a case of heartburn.

After seeing such a situation unfold in front of her in wide-eyed shock, Ariane was shaking her head in amazement.

“.....Are you going to be all right here?”

Ariane’s question somehow managed to reach Teresa. Only pure concern for Teresa could be seen on Ariane’s face.

She was most likely worried about an elf and human living together. It’s likely she would had protested it more had it not been for the precedent Casey set.

Could she also be worried about the difference in life expectancy? Elves live an average of four hundred years, but a human like Petros could only live a hundred years at best. No, with this world's poor medical care it'd be closer to sixty years. It's all but ensured that Petros would die first. However, Teresa and the person in question must have understood that.

The pair shared another look before she gave a predictable answer.

"Yes. This is what I've decided."

"If you say that you are okay with this, then I have nothing else to say..... I will inform your parents about this. What village are you from?"

Ariane had a slightly thoughtful expression as she understandingly offered to relieve Teresa's parents and village of their worry.

"I'm from Milresto village. It's a rather small village."

"Milresto.....huh."

Ariane seemed to have remembered something when she heard the name of the village. Teresa looked suspicious as she asked a question with her eyes.

"Recently a group of small villages, including that one, were combined into a single large village. It no longer exists."

Teresa was shocked for a moment before she turned away in an attempt to hide a lonely expression.

Ariane's mother Glenys had mentioned that the small villages near human dwellings had been absorbed into Raratoia.

Noticing Teresa's distress Ariane quickly asked another question in order to change the topic.

"You said that the former lord is confined in this castle, but what happened to the slave traders?"

However, it was Petros who calmly answered the question instead of Teresa.

"Ah, the leader of the slave traders has already been executed.But it

seems that the group held quite some sway thanks to my father's backing and the stragglers managed to escape the city to become bandits once they realized their main source of income had been lost."

Petros folded his arms and smiled wryly as he said that.

"Dealing with the underground market, the power struggle in the capital, as well as bandits outside the gate..... I have a headache."

Hearing Petros's story of bandits immediately reminded me of the group that had attacked the young adventures before we reached the town. Ariane looked back me and I nodded in confirmation.

"Hum, I don't know if they're the same bandits, but yesterday we helped some young adventures capture a group of bandits outside of town....."

Petros nodded as he listened to the story.

"There was a report about that. Ten more members of the group had been arrested yesterday, and even through more than half of the group has been captured....."

Pietro sighed deeply as he sunk back into his seat. Teresa got up to whisper something in his ear. Whatever she said shocked Pietro for a moment and he nodded before the pair looked in our direction.

"There's something related to this, I would like to personally request something of the two of—"

"Please wait."

Pietro had started to talk about something but Teresa stepped forward and interrupted him.

"Since this is my request, I'll be the one to speak it."

With a determined look on her face, Teresa looked at us and calmly opened her mouth.

"There is someone I'd like the two of you to find."

Chapter 10: 「The Elven Bride」 Part 2

At Teresa's words, Ariane and I glanced at each other before turning back to her.

“I know that this is an unreasonable thing to ask, but I was wondering if I could trust you two to find the person who accompanied me when I was first brought here.....”

Teresa had a sullen expression when she looked up to stare at Ariane. Her misty green eyes and trembling made her appear vulnerable.

“Who is this person you want us to find?”

Although Ariane seemed skeptical about this, she looked Teresa in the eyes and asked her to elaborate.

“When I was first brought here, it was a maid that informed Petros of the situation. Her name is Furani Markham, she disappeared three days ago and we've been unable to find her.”

Teresa replied to Ariane with an earnest expression.

“Would this Furani woman happen to be your benefactor?”

Teresa looked confused for a moment before closing her eyes and nodding in response to Ariane's question.

“Yes, she is certainly my benefactor, but she is also the first friend I made in this human city..... While Petros and his father battled for control of the household, she helped shelter me. Every day she took care of my needs and talked with me.”

“Is it possible that she was captured by the bandits we were talking about?”

Ariane brought up a possibility, but Petros denied it.

“No, the probability of that is low since she never leaves the city. Currently, merchants are visiting this city to buy enslaved criminals to sell them in a neighboring country, but among them there are those that kidnap citizens and ship them away.”

The minstrel who had been whispering sweet words into Teresa's ear had been replaced by Petros the feudal lord.

"I just can't understand how you humans think..... You even try to enslave your own kind."

Teresa, the only other elf in the room, seem to have agreed with Ariane's throwaway statement.

"Lord Petros, do you believe that this maid was kidnapped by those people?"

When asked for his opinion, he looked tired as he nodded.

"Most likely. With the slave traders who controlled the underworld gone and the capital still in the midst of a power struggle, things are falling into anarchy. This is the result of my over eagerness, even with father defeated my power base has yet to stabilize. It'd be difficult and time-consuming to find Furani..... Teresa would like to search by herself, but I could never agree to that with the current level of public order."

Petros was probably cautious of retaliation from the previous lord's underworld contacts.

However, if the maid Furani was really kidnapped to be sold in another country, then they should be using the sea route. There should be a limited number of places we'd have to search then.

"Shouldn't ships that are illegally transporting people to foreign countries be easy to find with harbor inspections?"

I really thought that thorough inspections would be able to catch the perpetrator so I suggested them, but things weren't that simple.

"It might be possible if on-the-spot inspections could be conducted. If the ship has the backing of foreign nobles then I can't carelessly interfere without decisive evidence. Not to mention that the guards conducting the inspection could be bribed for their silence..... Currently, I'm using my authority as feudal lord to restrict any ship from leaving the harbor, by that won't last past tomorrow."

Teresa expression became clouded at Petros words. Petros took both her hands in an attempt to cheer her up.

Even though he is a lord, if the ships were for the official use of foreign nobles then he couldn't recklessly impose inspections. He couldn't have the ships in the harbor monitored to prevent illegal cargo from being loaded either because he currently lacked complete control over his vassals.

Still, even though criminals are sent to neighboring countries as slaves, why are they abducting even more people? Is there a major development project or war going on?

“Why is the neighboring country so intent on gathering slaves?”

Even if the country isn't directly involved in the kidnapping, it wouldn't hurt to learn the details.

“Nozan is not the ones gathering the slaves. It appears that the country gathering them is the next country over, the Hiruku Theocracy. Supposedly it to help the criminals attain atonement for their sins, but I think they're just using them as laborers in the country's mithril mines.

“Mithril mines, huh.”

Mithril was a familiar fantasy metal in the game. It was a material used in intermediate and advanced level items, so it should be a considerably valuable material in this world.

Even if we assume that the slaves were needed to mine the precious ore, there was still something about the situation that was hard to swallow.

It was the criminals. In order to attain them, they had to cross another country to purchase them from Rhoden. The transportation cost on the return trip should skyrocket.

I don't know much about slave trading on earth, but it couldn't be cheap to transport them through a country. I couldn't see much profit on the merchant's' side.

When I asked Petros about this he said “Certainly.” before explaining

how things were confounded by Hiruku's masterful manipulation.

“Currently, Hiruku's chivalrous knights can be seen throughout Nozan. Also, the amount of mithril ore exchanged for the slaves exceeds their actual value. Western Nozan territories have been heavily damaged by the recent monsters attacks, and the weapons made from the mithril ore are essential in the monster subjugations.”

I see, the merchants paid no heed to the transportation cost considering that they could obtain the highly valuable mithril. No wonder there was frenzied slave gathering going on.

However, that still left the theocracy with the majority of the costs.

“In addition, the people that have been chased out of Nozan by the monster attacks crossed the sea and flooded into the city, making it even more difficult to enforce public order.”

It seems that the refugees from Nozan were frequently the targets of the abductors and if one of them managed to escape they would be sent back to the Hiruku Theocracy as slaves.

“I've heard that dark elves had better sight and hearing than regular elves. Could you please help me find my friend?”

Teresa bowed to Ariane and begged her for help.

“I'll ask you as well. I heard that elven warriors are quite powerful, if you offer us your services I'll be willing to pay.”

Although Petros was a feudal lord he lowered his head to Ariane, a fake messenger. When we saw the appearance of the pair Ariane and I shared a look. Her golden eyes were asking me if I wanted to become involved with this.

“I will follow whatever decision you make, Ariane-dono.”

I didn't really mind offering my assistance. Based on the determined look in her eyes it was clear what she was gonna do in regards to the request.

“..... I don't know how much of a difference it'll make, but we'll lend you

our strength.”

Teresa and Petros had a joyous expression when they heard our answer.

They said that the maid Furani went missing three days ago, and while we don't know how many ships had anchored in the harbor during that time period, we had to quickly find out.

We had Teresa and Petros describe Furani's appearance to us before we tried to set off, but Petros raised his hand to stop us.

“Since you're unfamiliar with this city I'll assign you a guide.”

When he said that the old gentleman that had been standing in the back of the room offered a slight bow before leaving. A short time later, he returned and was accompanied by a man adorned in an impressive set of armor.

The new person took a stand right beside Petros. His eyes bulged when he saw Ariane sitting in front of him, but he managed to regain his composure immediately.

“This is Gio Clintuso. He is the vice-captain of our territory's knights, and he shall act as your guide.”

The vice-captain that Petros introduced quickly lowered his head in a soldier-like manner and offered us a gentle smile.

He looked to be in his early thirties, but his short-cut chestnut colored hair and meek smile contradicted the image of grizzled knight captain I had in my mind if anything he looked like a civil servant. However, his body was considerably tall and toned.

“I am Gio Clintos, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

After greeting us with the smooth tongue of a veteran office worker, he stepped behind Petros.

“With him along there shouldn't be many places in town that you can't enter. Thanks in advance for helping find Furani.”

Petros and Teresa offered Ariane sincere glances as they thanked her. Ariane faintly nodded upon receiving their gratitude.

Once everything was settled and we were far enough away from the castle, Ariane adjusted her paces so that she was walking beside me.

“What’s the matter, Ariane-dono.”

When I tried to look her in the eye she would turn away from me for some reason.

“I’m sorry for dragging you along because of my own selfishness.....”

After a bit of reflection, Ariane looked back at me and muttered that.

Although this was a requested from the elf Teresa, it could help humans as well. Ariane might actually be thinking about the betterment of the elf and human relationship. It wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

Of course, that was merely my own assumption. It wouldn’t take a detective to see that I was a little biased in my assessment.

“Our objective has simply changed from rescuing Teresa to finding her friend Furani.”

She didn’t say anything in response to my remark, only looking away in apparent embarrassment and the edges of her mouth slightly rose.

“.....Thank you, Arc.”

Receiving her small thanks caused my heart to faintly pound. I’m starting to understand the mindset of the famous third generation master thief, there must have been an animalistic instinct buried in the hearts of men, wanting to fulfill a beautiful woman’s request.

Chapter 11: 「Disturbance in Lanbaltic」 Part 1

The western section of Lanbaltic was referred to as Burugo gulf on account of the harbor, the closest structure to the Nozan kingdom, being built in the center of the area. Beyond the harbor lied a small island named Bis that was apparently a popular trade port of the Nozan kingdom in the past.

I was currently staring offshore from the harbor and could slightly make out the island in the distance. According to Gio, the island wasn't that far away, not even taking two hours to reach by ship.

Two large piers were built along the port and both large and small ships alike were anchored at them. There weren't many ships leaving thanks to Petros's restrictions. The occasional guard could be seen patrolling the area and keeping watch over the ships, but their work ethic varied, and many of the guards panicked when they saw Gio heading their way.

Since two days had already passed since the restrictions were implemented, it would be unreasonable to keep this number of ships from leaving.

The harbor was crowded with people and the air was writhing with tension and insecurity. A lot of scruffy looking people were hanging around the harbor and the gentle atmosphere of the city was lost here.

Seeming to have sensed the danger of the area, Ponta had forgone her usual spot atop my head and was wrapped around my neck like a scarf with her head tucked in.

“The refugees from the western regions of Nozan congregate here, making the area quite dangerous..... Although the number of incoming refugees has decreased thanks to the restrictions, they're bound to rise once they are lifted. Quite the troubling situation. The anxiety and frustration of the residents has also increased thanks to rumors of ghost ship sightings.”

Vice-captain Gio's voice took on a slightly bitter tone as he explained the city's current situation while guiding Ariane and me through the harbor.

“Hasn't the Nozan Kingdom done anything to handle the situation in their western territory?”

If refugees were flowing in from across the gulf, the incident had to be a serious one. A kingdom couldn't maintain its rule for long if its normal response to situations like this was to sit around with their thumbs in their mouth.

“From what the refugees say, the holy knights of the Hiruku Theocracy have been sent in as first respondents and Army support is on the way.”

The Hiruku Theocracy was just west of the Norzan Kingdom, so it couldn't simply overlook an incident this close to their own border. However, was the Hiruku Theocracy the only neighboring country that had sent aid.

I asked Gio about it but he just looked confused and said he didn't know the details.

Unlike the information-oriented modern age of my old world, information seemed to be a rare commodity here. It must take a great deal of labor to amass reliable information, as few people even had a grasp on the conditions in neighboring countries. There could also be a simple gag order on information.

Petros had said that the Hiruku Theocracy had recently been purchasing a lot of slaves. Even if it was really for the purpose of mining mithril...

Mithril weapons were effective anti-monster weapons, so I'd understand using slave labor to mine the ore, but couldn't imagine their current methods being cost-effective.

While I was in the middle of considering all this, Ariane suddenly poked her eyes from beneath her hood and stared at me.

“Is something wrong Ariane-dono?”

When I looked back at her, Ariane placed her forefinger over her lips and did a quick scan of the area.

“A number of people have been following us for a while now.”

Without moving my head I looked around the area from within my helmet and caught a suspicious looking man turning away from us. However, I couldn't find anyone else that Ariane had mentioned.

Elven warriors must've honed their senses to the point where they could perceive the actions of multiple people at once, or maybe it was something she could do because she was a dark elf. Either way, her perception abilities were beyond normal.

However, what exactly were the intentions of the people following us? Even though the two of us stood out a bit, this was the first time that either of us has been to this city.

Were they related to disappearance of the maid Furani? I couldn't think of any other reason for someone to follow us, so maybe they were spies sent by the kidnappers.

However, no one should know that Ariane and I have been asked by Petros to search for the missing maid.

But in that case.....

I looked at Gio who was walking in front of us.

If the vice-captain of the territory's knights was in the area, it was only obvious that members of the underworld market would be worried. They might not be following Ariane and me, they could've been ordered to shadow Gio.

“Could those guys be following vice-captain Gio?”

When I asked her, Ariane stopped walking and faintly shook her head.

“Their attention seems to be focused on us.....”

I was getting more confused by the second. Ariane and I looked at each other while trying to make sense of this. Gio had walked ahead a bit before he noticed we had stopped walking and came back to us.

“Is something wrong?”

Gio looked worried as he came back to talk to us.

After looking at Ariane for a moment, I answered Go’s question direction.

“Apparently, a group of people have been watching us for a while.....”

Gio’s eyes bulged when he heard my reply took a look around with only his eyes.

“.....Is that true?”

Ariane lowered her voice before she answered Gio’s latest question.

“Though I don’t know why, they’ve been following us since we entered the harbor.”

“Could they be the involved with Furani’s kidnapping.....”

When Gio said that a doubt entered my mind.

“Wait a second. Gio-dono. Do you know how Furani was captured in the first place?”

Gio’s eye shifted from the left to right at my question before lowering his head.

A maid that worked for the lord should spend most of her time in the castle. While I didn’t know the details, I doubted it’d be easy to kidnap a live-in-maid without anyone seeing anything. On the contrary, various statements describing the perpetrators should would exist.

“.....It was my fault.”

Gio eyes remained downcast as he answered my question in a strained voice.

“I asked her to run an errand outside of the castle. I should have gotten one of my subordinates to accompany her on that errand..... So when Petros asked for a guide I volunteered, believing that I could at least make up for my mistake.

“Why don’t we separate from Gio here?”

When he heard that question, Gio raised his head and rapidly looked back and forth between Ariane and I.

“Why!? I can still help with the sear—”

Ariane raised her hand to cut Gio off before she started to speak again.

“Don’t you think it’d be better if we acted as decoys and drew them out?”

I chipped in to explained her plan to him.

“Hmm. Gio, you’re a well known figure in this city. If we want to lure these guys out, it’d be better if you aren’t with us.”

“B-But.....”

Gio tried to say something but, Ariane simply asked for his agreement in a calm tone.

“We don’t have much time, do we? We need even the tiniest of clues.”

Eventually, Gio lowered his eyes and hesitantly nodded before speaking in a lifeless tone.

“I understand..... I’ll head towards the harbor’s guard station.”

“Let’s meet up back here In about an hour.”

After everyone was in agreement, Gio went off on his own.

While waving at Gio’s retreating back, I asked Ariane a question.

“Will they take the bait?”

“In the worst case, we’ll split up if they don’t come after the two of us.”

Ariane casually laughed after she replied to me.

I think we’d fall behind if Ariane and I had to go off on our own, but I couldn’t be too careless. I could only pray that the stalkers would take the bait of two people.

I accompany Ariane through the harbor while we occasionally describe the maid Furani’s appearance to a couple sailors and asked them for information. As we asked around, people who seemed to know something

would all give vague answers to our questions or refused to speak to us. They probably didn't want to be involved with the underworld power struggle that Petros mentioned.

Without much in terms of results, we cautiously entered the warehouse district on the south side of the harbor.

While there was a lot of foot traffic on the main roads, the number of people decreased the moment we stepped into the back alleys. It seemed like the warehouses far away from the piers weren't used much.

Vagabond-like people that were crouching in the alleyways looked at us with suspicion, but they didn't do anything as their gazes drifted off.

"How's it going, Ariane-dono?"

When I asked Ariane about our surroundings, her golden eyes took a strange shine to them when they peeked from under her hood and started to smile. Apparently we caught something.

"There are six men behind us and five more closing in from each side."

We arrived at a large open area between the warehouses as she spoke and ten men were waiting there with large grins on their faces.

When I looked back I saw that the men behind us had blocked off our escape route. The few uninvolved people in the area noticed something was up and quickly left in order to avoid any trouble.

A quick look around revealed that we were surrounded by more than twenty men.

Chapter 12: 「Disturbance in Lanbaltic」

Part 2

“This is a rather grand welcoming committee we got here...”

“Even if they got quite a few people, it doesn’t feel that way to me.”

Standing in the middle of the open space, Ariane shrugged her shoulders in response to my little joke, as the men surrounding us started to sneer.

“Don’t think you have a lot of leeway, you blockhead! Did you hit your head or something?”

When one of the men, who was holding a large war hammer in his hands, insulted us the other men simultaneously started to laugh.

“Oioi, there could be another elf inside that armor, ya know? Handle that one carefully! Well, our target is the woman, so make sure you don’t leave any scars!!”

The one saying this was apparently the person in charge, a man with short hair who stared at us with a mocking smile on his face as he licking his lips. However, he didn’t give off the feeling of being the slave traders’ boss and felt more like an underling instead.

Their objective seemed to be the capture of Ariane.

“Hehehe, we’re lucky a dark elf came to a human town! I can’t contain my excitement at how much we can sell her for!”

“Oh yeah, my little Johnny is getting all excited as well!!”

When Ariane irritatedly lowered her cloak’s hood to look around, the men who surrounded us grew even more excited.

That reminded me, Ariane was a dark elf, a rarity among the elven race. Elves were like money trees to humans, so it was inevitable that people like this would come along and attempt to sell her. Due to the way Petros and the people of Buranbeina acted, I had completely forgotten about that.

When we went to gain an audience with Petros, one of these guys must have seen Ariane reveal her face and decided to follow her here.

“Humans are humans after all. You’ll regret targeting me.....”

Her eyes were filled with anger as she spoke and unsheathed the 『Sword of the Lion King』. The surrounding men only let out more cheers as they watched her.

It seems like those guys didn’t know that elves were excellent warriors, if they believe that their numerical advantage was more than enough, then their attitude had gone beyond reckless.

I could only sigh as I looked at all of them before I grabbed hold of my shield and gave Ariane a brief reminder.

“We need to get information and they can’t talk if they’re all dead. Also, killing them in broad daylight while we’re in a human city would cause more trouble than it’s worth.”

“Alright!”

Ariane had barely agreed before she ran off at breakneck speed towards the nearest man. A moment later a man’s scream echoed through the area.

The ground at the feet of the three men she targeted suddenly rose up and stuck them in place. By the time the other men noticed the screams of their companions, Ariane had already slashed the three with her sword. The speed of her swing had increased from before. I wasn’t sure if it was because she was serious, if the 『Sword of the Lion King』 was showing its effect, or if her natural strength and skills were simply greater than those of these men.

Two of the men were crouching in pain with slashes on their arms and chests, while the last had been hit so hard in the head by the sword hilt that his eyes rolled back as he fell. The surrounding men scowled at her as they took a fighting stance and drew their weapons, but she was already approaching her next targets.

When I heard a shout from behind me, I took the shield in my left hand

turned it on the charging tough-looking man. The space between the two of us had vanished and the man was already pulling his weapon back to gain momentum for his swing.

“【Shield Bash】!!”

It was one of the warrior class' basic skills, meant to push enemies back. However, the mythical class shield combined with this body's strength resulted in the simple skill carrying an overwhelming amount of power.

The shield gave off a slight glow as I thrust it towards the attacking man. The end result was that two men further away lost hold of their weapons, while five others were flung against a wall. The arms of the men that lost their weapons were mangled and the necks of those who had been blown away were twisted in the wrong direction.

“Uhh... that was an unexpected accident. Therefore, it's totally not my fault!”

While I was trying to make excuses for myself, the remaining men finally noticed the overwhelming difference in power and were already running away in fear. As for Ariane, they had already seen how she brought down six men.

Among the people who were running away, I spotted the back of the energetic, short-haired underling.

“As if I would allow you to escape!”

I quickly caught up to the underling and firmly struck his back with my shield with the correct amount of power.

“GYAAHHHHHHH!!!”

The short-haired underling screamed in pain as he was badly bruised after he hit the ground. It wasn't necessary to use skills on regular humans.

When I bent down and grabbed the man by the neck, he started begging for his life.

“Hiii!! W-Wait!! Just my life, please just spare my life!!”

“Such a noisy man, you should learn to be quiet for a bit.”

I offered the man some frank advice as I dragged him to Ariane while she was looking at the bodies scattered about the area.

“Ariane-dono, things are finished on my end and I found someone that can talk.”

“Arc, some actually managed to survived that?”

When Ariane said that, she had a regretful expression as she looked between the groaning men with slashes across their arms and legs at her feet, and the bodies that were still embedded in the side of the wall.

“Well, stuff like that tends to happen. Besides, I was able to secure someone who’s guaranteed to talk.”

Saying so, I lifted the grim-faced underling, who had been quiet until now, up by the scruff of his neck. Ariane’s golden eyes narrowed as she glared at the man. The blood stained sword with the lion-shaped hilt in her hands made the look in her eyes all the more frightening.

The underling let out a wretched scream as a stain appeared in the crotch of his pants. Apparently, he had lost his nerve in front of her.

This was the perfect opportunity to try out some interrogation methods of cop dramas. If I’m not mistaken, we should play good cop and bad cop for the interrogation, right?

“There’s no need to be afraid if you just answer two or three of our questions. Ahh, but your answers better not upset her. Your chances to answer equals the number of your limbs, if your answers aren’t satisfactory, she’ll start to cut them off one by one.”

I had yet to release the man’s neck, as he turned pale after I finished whispering the ultimatum into his ear. Wasn’t the good cop supposed to act like this? Ariane did stare at me in protest, but she’ll be playing the bad cop here.

“The first question is for your right arm. Are your bosses selling people

to Nozan slaves traders? Well?”

While I was calmly asking the question, I took the underling’s right arm and held it out in front of Ariane. Her eyes seemed to say there was no helping it as she placed her sword on the man’s arm.

“Hiiiiii, t-that’s right! We sell slaves to Nozan merchants!”

The man answered with a cramped expression as he struggled to pull back his arm. I gave an exaggerated nod to show that his answer was satisfactory before patting his cheek of the cheek and moved on to the next question.

“The next question is for your left arm. You’ll answer correctly, won’t you? Have you been kidnapping people from this city? Well?”

Strongly grabbing hold of the man’s shoulder, I politely asked the question. The tip of Ariane’s sword was quickly moved to his left arm.

“Y-Yes! B-But we mainly target refugees that wander around the city! You have to believe me!! We were tempted by the devil when we learned that a valuable elf appeared in the city!!”

“I see, I see. Does your group also kidnap proper citizens as well?”

The underling’s eyes were rapidly looking back and forth while I was asking for a confirmation while smiling beneath my helmet. Since my smile couldn’t be seen from under my helmet, I began tightening my grip on his shoulder more and more.

“J-Just sometimes! If we only targeted citizens we’d be too easy to track! It’s the truth!!”

“Is that so, on to the next question then. Among the citizens you sometimes capture, was there a maid? I’m sure her name was..... Furani Markham. Do you have information about the women called Furani?”

I spoke slowly so the man could process what I was saying while slowly relaxing my grip on his shoulder. The man must have been a heavy sweater because his entire back was covered in sweat.

“I don’t know!! I don’t know anything about such a woman, I swear!! You

said the woman was a maid!? That's totally unreasonable! Why would we kidnap someone so easy to identify!!"

The man was on the verge of tears as he looked up at Ariane and me.

"I'm gonna ask about your boss now. Where are they holding all the kidnapped people?"

"B-Because they plan to leave the harbor at one in the morning..... everything should already be loaded on the ship!"

"Then can you guide us to the ship?"

"Please forgive me! I'll be killed if I did that!!"

Completely ignoring the man's pleas I grabbed him by the neck again and dragged him towards the harbor, Ariane following behind after she sheathed her sword.

Our little uproar was attracting the stares of the fishermen in the harbor, when we reached a wharf where all the ships were visible, the area had taken a solemn atmosphere.

"That ship over there!! You haven't been given permission to depart yet! Stop!!"

There were several guards yelling at a ship that was setting sail. At one of the piers filled with ships, I could see a ship slowly advancing towards the offing.

The ship was apparently leaving without having permission to depart.

However, the underling lowered his head when he saw the departing ship and he went pale as he started to shout.

"Fuck! What is this?! I was hired to sail!! You shitty bastards were the ones that sent us to capture the elf, and then you leave me behind when things get dangerous?!"

Like a puppet with its strings cut, the man fell to the ground before he started to scream curses at the departing ship and punched the ground, ignoring his own shortcomings.

Those who managed to escape must have reported what had happened to their boss and prompted the crew to make the hasty escape.

After all, capturing and selling elves was a serious offense in Rhoden. If the planned capture had failed, then those involved would be labeled criminals.

It was necessary for them to run..... but I had no intention of letting them get away.

“Ariane-dono, look after this guy!”

Saying only that, I dashed towards the pier.

Since it had to travel slower in order to swerve around the other ships docked at the harbor, the slave traders’ ship hadn’t made it that far away.

If it weren’t so crowded, I could have used **【Dimensional Step】** to transfer to the ship’s deck, but there were simply too many witnesses.

I leaped onto one of the ships docked at the pier and started to jump from ship to ship. The rocking my landings created caused some of the those ships’ crew members to yell at me, but I paid them no mind as I closed in on my target.

The captain of the slave ship looked my way when he heard the commotion, but it was too late. Reaching the ship that was docked the closest to the slave traders’ ship, I took a giant leap and managed to land on the vessel’s starboard bow. ◦

One of the crewmen immediately drew his weapon and attacked, but I caught his arm and threw him with all my strength, sending him flying at an impressive arc before he hit the water.

After that, I climbed onto the ship’s deck.

“T-T-That’s the guy!! He followed us here!!”

When I surveyed the ship I noticed the sound of approaching footsteps from below while a man was shrieking at me. He must have been present in the warehouse district, considering that his eyes were bulging and he had broken into a cold sweat.

“Kill that intruder immediately!!”

A large, hairy man dressed like a traditional pirate, who was most likely the captain, stepped forward and started yelling orders at the crew.

Having been revitalized by the command, the entire crew drew their weapons and rushed me. As the surge of people closed in, I grabbed my shield off my back.

“【Shield Bash】!!”

The force generated by the collision blew many crew members off of the ship and into the sea. The blow also caused waves to appear across the sea’s surface while screams could be heard all over the ship.

When they realized that they were no match for me, the remaining crew members jumped into the sea, leaving only the captain on the deck.

“W-Who are you !? Don’t think that you can just get away with this, bastard!!”

The captain screamed at me despite the fact that the sword in his hand was trembling. When I silently took a step forward, the captain expression turned solemn as he took a frightened step back.

The captain closed his eyes as I made a large swing with my shield and directed a 【Shield Bash】at one of the ship’s twin masts.

The sonic boom that struck the mast caused it to bend and sent wood chips flying everywhere. The mast tittered there until it’s last fastenings gave way, letting it fall into the sea with a grand splash.

Suddenly, shouts of admiration burst forth from all the people in the harbor who had been watching.

As I watched the large bodied captain sniveling at my feet like a small animal, I wondered if I had gone overboard.

Chapter 13: 「Disturbance in Lanbaltic」

Part 3

A crowd had gathered at the harbor.

The slave trader ship with the broken mast was towed to the pier and quite a few people had been found locked up inside the cargo hold. The majority of the captured people were refugees, but there were also young women from the city mixed in with them. As for the captain and the crew, they were taken away by the guards.

“You’ll only cause trouble if you do this sort of thing without consulting with me first.”

Ariane was staring at me when Gio admonished me by saying that line with a wry smile and a troubled look in his eyes. I could even see wrinkles forming on his forehead.

He was quite angry. Since arresting criminals is the duty of the territory’s knights and guards, it was only natural that outsiders like us would receive this rebuke.

However, for some reason Ariane was giving Gio a questioning look.

“They’re all criminals, right? What’s wrong with capturing them?”

“It’s the role of humans to police humans!No, for your assistance in capturing these criminals I thank you on behalf of the Knight corps.”

After his outburst, Gio looked a little embarrassed and stopped speaking, then lowered his head and thanked us before walking off.

Ariane narrowed her eyes at this before moving closer to whisper into my ear without Gio noticing.

『Arc, something’s off about that man. When we split from him before, the number of trackers increased by one. He could have been following us in secret.』

I immediately turned towards Gio.

That was weird, wasn't it? Though he was appointed as the guide to an enigmatic duo, he was quick to separate from us and act on his own. It was possible that he had someone keeping an eye on us from the shadows.

However, if he had been tailing us, then a knight like him should have been able to rush in when we were attacked in the warehouse district. It might be reasonable to assume that the additional tracker had been a subordinate, but if that person was under Gio's command it would mean that he knew about the attack beforehand.

However, this was mere speculation and it wouldn't amount to anything if there was no definitive evidence.

I quickly looked away from Gio and looked over the slave trader crew that was being hauled away by the guards.

"Although the illegal slave traders have been captured, the person we're searching for has yet to be found."

I spoke in a level tone while folding my arms, Ariane's golden eyes squinted beneath her hood as she nodded and scouted the area.

"Arc, I found another suspicious ship."

Ariane pulls on my arm as she said and started to walk away, I followed along as my interest had peaked.

"Is there really a suspicious ship?"

"Yes, some men near it have been watching the situation unfold for a while now."

"However, we have no evidence or testimony this time, and I'm hesitant to draw as much attention as before....."

"There should be conclusive evidence from the people being held captive, right? It'll be alright."

She was expressing a strange amount of confidence as we made our way through the harbor and approached a black ship at the end of the pier. The merchant ship was larger than the slave trader's and I could see

many sailors aboard the ship who all showed open wariness when they saw us approaching.

By the time we reached the merchant ship, a wall of ten crewmen was already blocking our path.

“Do you have any business on our ship?”

A half-naked, burly man made the mistake of demanding our purpose here. The man had a multitude of sword scars on his arms and snorted as he seemed to look down at us.

However, Ariane didn't bother to answer him. Instead, she sighed before whispering something into her hand, creating a light that disappeared just as instantly as it had appeared. Only after that did Ariane turn towards the burly man and addressed him.

“This ship is suspicious, so we're checking it out. We have no business with you.”

“If you have no purpose, then get out of here! Don't interfere with our work!! You too, Mr. Knight.”

Faced with Ariane's nonchalant behavior in the face of his intimidating manner, the burly man's eyebrows rose and he was about to raise his voice for another threat when the sudden appearance of a flashily dressed merchant parted the human wall.

“Let's see, let's see... Is there anything this humble vessel of the Deoin Company can help you with?”

The flashy man's smile and slimy glaze focused on us as he asked why we were here.

“We have no business yet.”

Ariane's comment from beneath her hood caused the merchant to narrow his eyes in confusion and he gave us a questioning smile.

It was a familiar voice that broke the tension.

“Please wait a moment! Ariane-sama, Arc-dono.”

Looking back, I saw a single man approaching us. It was none other than the Lanbaltic territory's knight vice-captain Gio.

“Vitsio-dono, is something wrong?”

“Ah, Gio-sama, nothing's wrong, it's just that these two seem to have some business on our ship.”

The merchant Gio called Vitsio, made a nonchalant gesture and shrugged his shoulders, now flaunting a vulgar smile.

“Ariane-sama, this ship belongs to the Deoin trading company, the firm headed by Earl Orunato of the Nozan Kingdom. It's impossible for this ship to be related to the case as it has already undergone proper inspection.”

There was a hint of criticism in Gio's voice, but Ariane paid him no mind as she focused in on something else.

Gio took that chance to step between her and Vitsio.

Apparently we wouldn't be able to just meddle with this ship. If it was working under a foreign noble, then we couldn't act without evidence.

While the two of them glared at one another, the light that had disappeared suddenly returned to Ariane's side. While I had been directly staring at the light, the people around us suddenly grimaced and covered their eyes as if it were brighter than I thought.

When the light vanished, Ariane ignored the flow of the previous conversation and called out to the merchant all of the sudden.

“Can you explain why there are people held captive on the ship?”

“What are you talking about? As it's already been said, this ship belongs to Nozan Kingdom's—”

The merchant gave us a wry smile at her question and tried to repeat the name of his backer, however, he was cut off when Ariane removed the hood hanging in front of her eyes.

Her lilac skin and pointy ears must have clued everyone in on her race as her reveal caused many of the people around us to stir.

“I am Ariane Glenys Maple, an elf of Great Canada Forest. Is this Earl Orunato of the Nozan Kingdom willing to cause strife with the elves because of your actions here?”

Her golden eyes narrowed as she stared down the merchant Vitsio. Her tone was so provocative it upset the man to the point where he was scowling and twitched uncontrollably.

“If you have nothing to hide, there should be no problem with letting us on board.”

Ariane’s constant provocations caused Vitsio’s face to turn deep red as well as loosing up his lips.

“A lowly barbaric elf has the audacity to insult a human such as I!?”

The men surrounding us started to emit a dangerous aura at Vitsio’s shout. Normally, it was the unknown people that would be driven away in this scene.

However, Ariane wasn’t in any state of mind to do that. She faintly smiled before running towards the man with the scars and lightly jumped on his head and over the human wall.

“Huh! Bitch!!”

The person showed a bit of surprise that quickly turned into anger as Ariane ran towards the ship. Vitsio was dumbfounded for a moment before he started shrieking.

“Catch that elf!! Quickly!! This is not what was agreed upon!! What’s going on, Gio!! Our ship shouldn’t be required to undergo an on-the-spot inspection!!”

Faint blue veins appeared on Vitsio’s temple and vice-captain Gio’s face had turned pale at the sudden change.

Gio started to panic as he recovered and unintentionally stepped back while looking around.

“Hoo, Gio-dono you’re aware of some unknown circumstances?”

When I questioned him, Gio grew impatient and started fast-talking.

“A-Arc-dono you have to stop her!! This could lead to problems between the Nozan Kingdom and our territory!! We have to avoid that situation at all cost!!”

Hearing Vitsio’s words and looking at Gio’s reaction revealed everything to me. However, it may be interesting to see them trip over themselves.

“Understood! I’ll stop Ariane-dono!”

I started running towards the ship after saying that. The crew was already chasing after her and the guards stationed at the harbor began to gather as they noticed the uproar.

Ariane was prancing around like an acrobat aboard the ship while her pursuers roared in irritation. There were already people who had passed out in exhaustion and even a few of them had been knocked into the water.

I stepped into the middle of the hectic chase on the ship’s deck under the pretext of trying to catch Ariane.

“♪Uoooh~ Ariane-dono~ You have to behave yourself~♪!”

When I pretended to pounce at Ariane while speaking in a singsong manner, she lightly jumped onto the anchor’s capstan to avoid the telegraphed strike.

With the momentum of my pounce, I hammered my fist into the floor board with everything I had.

The supposedly thick upper deck was easily split open and the force from the blow didn’t stop until penetrating the cargo hold.

“OMy ur shipp~ ~ ~!!”

I heard Vitsio’s feeble scream as I fell into the large hole I had opened up.

“Ky~un.....”

After landing, Ponta uncoiled herself from my neck and seemingly rolled her eyes and shook her head before jumping to the floor.

I fixed my helmet that had started to slip off and looked around the dim interior of the ship. There were bundles of thick rope laying around that seemed to be used as some sort of foothold. There was a relatively large cabin as well.

Since Ariane believed that there were people captive inside the ship, I will believe her and start searching the ship to find them.

“I came to help! If there’s any kidnapped people down here, speak up!!”

The air stirred when I shouted down the hole before several of the crew members drew their weapons and attacked.

Even if I suddenly yelled that I was here to help, the ones held captive would probably think it’s a trap and were too scared to speak up. I looked around for the captives while simultaneously knocking away the attacking crew members and called out again.

“Lady Teresa sent us to help! Furani Markham, answer if you’re here!!”

Just as I started to consider seizing the ship and searching every nook and cranny someone replied.

“Lady Teresa really sent help?! I’m over here! I’m Furani Markham!!”

When I looked in the back of the cabin I saw an entrance to the cargo hold that was covered by a metal grating. Fingers seeped through gaps as a sole woman’s voice rose from behind it. The other captives must have been convinced that help was coming since I could hear them talk amongst themselves.

Anyway, it seems I found our target. Brushing aside the two that were standing watch, an avalanche of people poured out of the hold once I cut the padlock off the door.

Among the freed people, I immediately spotted the maid Furani Markham.

I singled her out thanks to the maid uniform I saw in the castle and because her brunette hair was held in a chignon with a hairpin. Her large black eyes reflected fear when she looked up at me.

“I’m Furani Markham..... Are you the knight Lady Teresa sent to rescue me?”

“My name is Arc. I’m an adventurer responding to Lady Teresa’s request, not a knight.”

I give a self-introduction in an attempt to ease her noh mask, but she looked like she didn’t believe me when I said I was an adventurer.

“It’s unnecessary to stay here any longer. Everyone follow me.”

I said so while placing Furani behind me for safety, before I kicked the door down and led us outside. Occasionally, when some of the remaining crew members tried to attack us, I’d either lightly punch them through the wall, or stick their ass in a barrel so they were no longer an obstacle.

When our group finally made it above deck we found the crew members sprawled along the ground and Ariane standing tall amongst their bodies.

Many of the people behind me looked at the scene in a state of shock.

“That was impressive, Arc, creating such a large hole in the ship without magic. Did you find who we were looking for?”

There wasn’t a single wound on Ariane’s lilac skin and she was attracting a lot of attention as she started to laugh while her white hair was blown by the sea breeze.

I could hear drunk-like sighs of admiration coming from behind me.

“Ah, this is Furani the woman that Teresa sent us to find.”

When I stepped aside to reveal Furani to Ariane, Furani rushed to lower her head and offer a proper greeting.

“So, we were able to safely fulfill her the request.”

Ariane looked pleased and breathe a sigh of relief.

After Ariane explained the situation to the city guards gathered on the ship’s deck, they quickly arrested the crew while Ariane and I simply looked on from the sidelines.

Chapter 14: 「To the Eastern Empire」

“Lady Teresa!”

“Furani!”

Maid Furani and Teresa were embracing one another in front of Petros after we arrived at the castle.

“Though I was only heeding my wife’s request, I am also glad Furani is safe.”

Petros held out his hand to Ariane as he said that. Ariane looked between Petros’s outstretched hand and his face before she took his hand.

“I really..... didn’t do anything all that impressive.”

Ariane looked away as she bluntly responded, leading Petros to flaunt a brilliant smile and urging everyone to sit down.

Adorned in my luxurious full body armor I couldn’t sit down on a sofa, so I stood behind Ariane as you’d expect from a guard.

Just like me, there was an unfamiliar older gentlemen who stood rigidly behind Petros and Teresa.

“I understand that she had been held captive in that ship. However, that ship was certified by one of the companies of Earl Orunatto of Nozan Kingdom, and it’d be no small matter if he was connected to the kidnapping of citizens..... May I ask how you came across your evidence?”

Petros wore a wry smile as he questioned Ariane, but it was Furani that came forward and answered him.

“That reminds me, when I was still in the cargo hold, I heard a woman’s voice call out to me. I unconsciously replied, but those around me said that they didn’t hear anyone call out for me..... thinking about it, the voice was similar to lady Ariane’s.”

Teresa’s expression said that she had understood what had happened when she heard that.

“Ah, did you use wind spirit magic?”

Ariane offered a small nod before she explained herself.

“Since I don’t have a contract with wind spirits, I’m only able to project my voice several meters away at most.”

“Wind spirits are rather fickle, it’s amazing enough that you can do that even without a contract.”

Ariane turned away and scratched her cheek in embarrassment when she heard Teresa’s praise.

She probably summoned a wind spirit when I saw her speaking into her hand before having it fly off. Apparently spirit magic was usable as wireless communication.

Petros nodded in admiration as he listened to the two’s conversation.

“Nevertheless, it’s still hard to believe that Gio was behind Furani’s kidnapping.....”

When Petros sighed and expressed his disbelief, the man behind him stepped forward and lowered his head.

“This incident was the result of my lack of oversight, I’m not even worthy of asking those harmed for forgiveness. As the captain of the knight order, I Herido Gankona am to blame—”

The man who introduced himself as Herido had a Kaiser mustache and slicked-back, gray hair. He was vehemently trying to claim responsibility for this whole affair, but Petros cut him off with a light wave of his hand.

“Herido, there is no one to blame but me. I was the one that usurped father’s position as feudal lord without gaining complete control first.....”

It seems that Gio tried to run away amongst the confusion our actions caused, but he was quickly arrested by a squad led by captain Herido himself.

“Did he do it for the money?”

“That seems to have been part of it, but his main goal was to restore public order by ridding the city of refugees. However, he was willing to turn a blind eye to the kidnapping of citizens as well. That fellow even

overlooked some of that trader's other shadier practices.”

Herido had a sour look on his face as he answered my question about Gio's motives.

I did notice that Gio didn't really care for the refugees when we were with him.

The reason Furani had been captured was because she had come across the company's goons capturing refugees and delivering them to Vitsio's ship. Gio had her kidnapped and set to be sold in order to silence her.

One could say that the reason for Furani's safety and well-being was the greed of these two men, since Gio wanted to put her up for sale and Vitsio was more than happy at the opportunity to sell an educated slave.

“Since this barbaric act was commissioned by one of the holdings of a foreign noble, are you planning to investigate them?”

Petros wore a bitter smile as he shook his head no.

“If I confront Earl Orunatto about the members of the Deoin firm, he could easily claim that they were using forged licenses. I don't want to thoughtlessly aggravate a foreign noble, not to mention the fact that we forcibly boarded the ship. Considering that the opposition suffered serious injuries and lost a ship, I believe that they will remain silent to preserve their honor.”

That'd be natural considering the fact that our evidence was obtained by Ariane's magic and we didn't even bother going through proper channels. However, if we tried to follow protocol, it would have been impossible to conduct an on-the-spot ship inspection.

“Though it won't make up for the disturbance we caused, I think I have an idea about what to do with the overflow of refugees.”

Both Herido and Petros stared at me in interest when I made that comment.

I took a step in front of Ariane and informed them about our stop in Buranbeina on our journey here and about a piece of information I just

remembered.

Specifically, I told them about how Sukitosu's farmlands had recently been expanded and that he was understaffed. Although the project may not require a lot of workers, it should be a viable refugee management method.

"I thought that that area couldn't support that many people..... nor could I imagine that an elf would be living there. Perhaps while I'm negotiating with that other lord about the refugees I can talk about joining the faction of her highness princess Juliana, since we both seem to promote a friendly relationship with the elves."

After hearing my suggestion, Petros thought it over. However, something he said caused Ariane to lean forward in curiosity.

"Is this princess Juliana a member of Rhoden Kingdom's royal family?"

"Yes, of those involved in the fight for succession, her highness is the only one trying to promote friendship with the elves. When my father was the acting feudal lord, we were part of prince Douglass' faction, but I've decided to join the princess' faction considering my lovely wife's circumstance."

Ariane's interest grew as she listened to Petros's story. A member of this country's royal family was taking an interest in diplomatic relationships with the elves, after all.

While Ariane had been continuing her discussion about princess Juliana with Petros, I was suddenly hit with a sense of déjà vu at the princess's name. If I couldn't remember it immediately, then it must not have been all that important, so I decided to move on.

For the matter at hand, Petros penned a letter he sealed with wax and gave us two copper passes for the Lanbaltic territory to expedite our travels.

If you thought about the future of elves and humans, then these things would be important. I suppose the protection they offered would be useful if we came back here often. Though our actions here were quite the

spectacle, in 49 days or so the rumors should die out. Wait, wasn't 49 days the schedule of a Buddhist memorial?

While I was lost in thought, Ariane's tapping on my shoulder made me realize that she had finished her talk.

After parting ways with Teresa, Petros and Furani, we quickly left Lanbaltic. Once we were sure we were out of sight, I invoked 【Transfer Gate】 to return us to the elven village Raratoia.

The monster-filled Great Canada Forest was where the majority of elves lived, and the towering tree that stood at the center of this village clued me into the fact that we arrived at Ariane's childhood home.

When I invoked【Transfer Gate】, the scenery that overlooked the Burugo gulf was replaced by a mansion and it was later in the day.

Though it looked like a large tree at first glance, this was actually a mansion built into a tree using elven techniques. This fusion of the natural and unnatural was the home of Raratoia's elder, who was also Ariane's father.

Normally, a human like myself wouldn't have been able to enter an elven village so easily, but transfer magic made entering the village directly no problem.

Besides, Ariane's father had already given me permission to come and go as I pleased... Furthermore this mansion had left a strong impression in my mind, something I needed in order to use transfer magic correctly.

Although the sunlight was blocked by the branches and leaves, looking at the surroundings revealed it to be dusk. The lights created from the magic tools and the smell of dinner wafted from the mansion's windows.

The tempting smell of food made Ponta raise her nose and let out a soft "Ky~un".

I followed Ariane as she opened the large wooden doors and headed towards the dining room.

After entering the spacious hall and standing between the giant pillars

inside the atrium, a male elf descended from the second floor using the staircase that passed the periphery of the room..

He appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties, had long green tinged blonde hair and was wearing clothes similar to those of a Shinto priest.

He was none other than Ariane's father and village elder of Raratoia, Dylan Targ Raratoia.

When Dylan saw his daughter he beamed with joy as he made his way over.

"You're back earlier than expected, were there any problems with the other rescues?"

After Dylan gave Ariane a look-over, Ariane told him the details of our encounter with Teresa in Lanbaltic.

"I see..... I guess we have no right to interfere if she decided to stay of her own will. That information about princess Juliana is also interesting. If we're able to get in contact with someone from the other side, then the matter of the lord Ariane killed can be resolved peacefully."

As Dylan was saying this, he was holding the letter Ariane had been given by Lord Petros in his hands, looking at it with great interest.

"By the way, when we stopped by a town called Buranbeina on our way to Lanbaltic, we came across an elf called Casey Held."

"Casey Held..... Ah yes, he was the person who wrote the encyclopedia of forest monsters.. There was a rumor that he left the forest a long time ago, but I never imagined he'd be in such a place. I'll be sure to inform the great elders of this."

Dylan showed a brief smile before his look turned serious.

"The only one left is the man called Drusus De Barishimon..... According to what the person of the Plains and Mountains Chiome claimed, he is part of the Eastern Empire, right?"

Seeing Ariane nod at this caused Dylan's eyebrow to rise.

“The territories of the Eastern and Western Empire are vast, and it’s unknown what’d happen if you, an elf, were to be discovered in either of them. We elves were originally scattered throughout the entire northern continent before we were driven out of the original Leburan Empire. Ariane, while I don’t doubt your strength, please don’t do anything reckless.”

“I know, but with Arc along I’m sure we can handle almost everything.”

Hearing Ariane’s statement, Dylan’s eyes were filled with even more worry as she lightly knocked on my armor and looked up at me. She somehow developed a high opinion of my abilities.

It didn’t feel bad, so I stuck out my chest and started speaking.

“Dylan-dono, Ariane-dono’s safety is my top priority.”

When I said that, Ariane’s half-opened eyes seemed liked they were trying to stare into the depths of my helmet.

“If you’re saying such things, does that mean that you won’t get lost next time?”

Now that she mentioned it, how did one get to the empire in the first place? While I pondered, Ariane gave me the cold shoulder.

Chapter 15: 「Meeting in Rinburuto」

In the center of the Great Canada forest. Next to the huge lake that was christened Great Slave stood the forest capital of elven society, the city Maple.

The metropolis that was home to over one-hundred thousand people was entirely constructed of fused tree buildings, surrounded by two city walls.

At the center of this metropolis was a structure taller than all others, a tower built within a large tree.

This place, referred to as the Institute, was where the power of the villages that dotted the Great Canada forest was consolidated, and where the ten great elders and the current chieftain gathered.

On the Institute's top floor, on the balcony of one of the rooms where the Great Slave Lake could be looked down upon, two men were sitting at a table across from each other.

One of the men was Dylan, who was calmly lifting a cup of tea to his lips as his slightly long, green tinged blonde hair blew in the wind.

Across from Dylan sat a male dark elf with short-trimmed white hair. He had a large scar on his face and his body was robust and rugged. His name was Fangas Furan Maple and he stroked his beard as he stared at his friend Dylan.

Not only was he one of the ten great elders, he was also the father of Dylan's wife Glenys.

“Please forgive me. I know that the transfer from Raratoia requires quite an amount of magic stones, but I still called for you.”

Fangas' low and thick voice, combined with his face and large body, made him difficult to approach, even among dark elves.

However, after knowing him for many years, Dylan was able to put on his usual smile as he shook his head, lowered his cup of tea, and answered his father-in-law.

“It’s no burden at all, I received eight Wyvern magic stones from my house guest, so I had no trouble transferring here.”

“That adventurer my granddaughter hired..... do you trust him?”

Fangas’ tone carried quite a bit of animosity when he slightly raised his eyebrow and stared his son-in-law down. However, Dylan simply shrugged his shoulders and looked back at Fangas.

“Yes. He’s a bit odd, but I’d say I trust him. He seems to help and look after Ariane a lot.”

“.....I see, if that’s your judgment then I won’t say anything about it.”

After he said that, Fangas crossed his arms and snorted.

Ariane was his precious granddaughter after all. Of course he’d be a little anxious at the idea of an unknown human hanging around her.

However, a great elder such as Fangas wouldn’t call the elder of Raratoia to Maple just for that. With a wry smile, Dylan asked his father-in-law why he had been called here.

“Father-in-law, what is it that you really wanted to discuss?”

“Ah, I was getting to that. A messenger from Rhoden recently brought up the incident in Diento at our Rinburuto embassy. Tomorrow we’ll leave the Institute and head to Rinburuto in order to attend the meeting about it.”

Dylan wasn’t all that surprised at what he had just been told since he had already guessed as much on his way over, so he simply nodded.

“That was quicker than I thought it’d be.”

Fangas sighed as he looked at his son-in-law with dull eyes.

“The person that visited wasn’t a simple messenger..... It was none other than Rhoden Kingdom’s second princess Juliana.”

Dylan was shocked for a moment when he heard that name, but he soon calmed down and smiled as he reached into his breast pocket and handed Fangas a sealed letter.

“This is truly a coincidence. I had wanted to get into contact with princess Juliana, so I suppose this saves me the trouble.”

After Fangas took the letter and examined it, he looked back at Dylan and asked him what it was about.

Dylan proceeded to summarize everything Ariane had told him yesterday.

“I see. In that case we would still have a way to salvage the meeting if the talks were to take a turn for the worse.....”

Fangas had a large grin on his face while he stroked his beard.

The next day, Dylan and Fangas went to the heavily guarded transfer hub in Maple and transferred to the small shrine in Sasukatun, the closest village to Rinburuto Archdukedom.

Sasukatun was separated from the Rinburuto Archdukedom by the Sagune river, which was flowing into the gulf of Arudoria.

Though it would take a while to reach Sasukatun from Maple via normal means, the trip could be completed instantly by using large quantities of magic stones as an energy source.

Adjacent to the sprawling capital of Rinburuto was a huge harbor that sat on the opposite shore of the Great Canada Forest.

Currently, the Rinburuto Archdukedom was the only official trading partner of the elves, so other human nations had to come here if they wanted to obtain the superior magic tools of the elves.

As a result, the Rinburuto Archdukedom became a relatively wealthy country and the leader in technological advancement.

Dylan and Fangas sailed from Sasukatun into the gulf of Arudoria before docking at Rinburuto’s harbor.

They tied the boat down in a section of the harbor reserved for elves. A carriage and a group of soldiers were already waiting for them at the port, so they boarded the carriage and waited for it to set off.

Normally, escorts would surround the carriage on horseback, but elves

weren't really competent horse riders since they normally traverse the forest on foot.

However, Fangas had objected to bodyguards, having confidence in his toned body and skills he amassed as a former soldier. The war mace hanging on his waist wasn't a decoration, but his dwarven-crafted, personal weapon. If he were to get serious, he would be able to crush the skull of a Ground Dragon since most of the elders were excellent combatants, therefore any guards would've been just for show.

After the soldiers of Rinburuto completed their formation surrounding the carriage, it started to move.

The carriage that picked them up headed straight for the castle located in the center of the archdukedom's capital.

Crossing the stone bridge across the moat that surrounded the castle walls, the carriage drove through the gate and entered the castle grounds, arriving at the white walls of the towering palace in which the Archduke ruling Riburuto lived. Its untold number of spires and elegantly carved walls gave the palace a dignified atmosphere.

Thought its appearance differed from the Institute's in Maple, this building also drew the attention of those who saw it. Since it was Dylan's first time setting foot into Rinburuto, he was rather interested in the scenery that passed by the carriage window.

When the carriage stopped at the foot of the palace's main stairway entrance, several servants promptly stepped up to receive Dylan and Fangas. The two of them were then lead to a palace room where a woman was waiting for them, "It's been a long time, Fangas-sama."

The woman with beautifully combed blonde hair turned her gentle brown eyes towards Fangas and smiled as she slightly lifted her pale blue dress in a curtsy.

Fangas smiled at her welcome and returned a slightly exaggerated bow in return.

"It's an honor to meet with grand duchess Serena directly."

The woman Fangas returned a greeting to was none other than Serena Melia De Olav Tishiento, the archduchess of Rinburuto “Even though this is an impromptu meeting, I thank you for coming.”

“We’re here because we’re a little interested in meeting the messenger from Rhoden Kingdom.”

While Serena smiled thinly at his statement, Fangas simply smiled back until she began speaking again.

“Princess Juliana is my littler sister, all I ask is that you don’t be too hard on her.”

“Oh, we’re really just looking forward to meeting her.”

Serena then led the two of them to a back room. Although the room they entered wasn’t that large, there was a large round table in the center of the room and the sunlight that filtered in from the window brightened the tasteful decor.

Sitting in the room were a young lady and her maid, along with three young knights who were standing behind them.

The young lady rose from her seat and offered a greeting when she saw Dylan and Fangas enter.

Her beautiful brown eyes and lovely blonde hair were similar to Serena’s, though hers was longer. There was also visible tension on her face. She lacked Serena’s mature atmosphere and looked more like a girl, but no one could deny the strong will that dwelled in her eyes.

“This is our first meeting. I am Rhoden Kingdom’s second princess Juliana Marill Melissa Rhoden Olav.”

As she was speaking, she lifted her dress and offered them a humble curtsy.

“I am Fangas Furan Maple, a great elder and ambassador of Great Canada Forest. I’m a little old-fashioned, so I appreciate it when people show a little common courtesy.”

Fangas had a menacing smile on his face when he said that. The young

knights that stood beside Juliana became a little stiff when they saw that, but Fangas paid them no mind and turned to Dylan.

“This here is—”

“I am the elder of Raratoia, a village of the Great Canada Forest. My name is Dylan Targ Raratoia. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

Seeing Dylan’s more relaxed greeting, compared to Fangas’s, the tension left the knights’ faces and they breathed a relieved sigh. They weren’t the only ones, since Juliana and the maid beside her both felt the tense atmosphere in the room relax a little.

Dylan quietly smiled after looking around before he started speaking as the go-between.

“Please be at ease, despite his appearance my father-in-law means no harm.”

Fangas and Juliana took at seat after Dylan urged them to sit at the table. Dylan sat down beside Fangas while the grand duchess Serena sat in between both parties.

After exchanging greetings once again, princess Juliana began to tell her tale.

“The reason I approached the elves for this meeting is due to an event that recently occurred in Rhoden Kingdom’s territory of Diento.”

Fangas crossed his arms and remained silent as he listened to princess Juliana. Dylan remained focused on what the princess was saying but he didn’t react to anything in particular.

“I’m ashamed to admit it, but Diento’s feudal lord was suspected of breaking the treaty and kidnapping elves. Shortly after the royal family began to investigate, the lord was assassinated.”

Juliana stopped talking at that point and turned to the silent Fangas. However, Fangas didn’t move an inch and simply raised an eyebrow at Juliana.

“I intend to investigate the details of this case and would personally like

to apologize for what happened. However, this matter involves the dignity of the royal family. I believe it to be suitable for the royal family to seek consultation on how to handle this matter, no?”

Juliana seems to have concluded that the elves were involved with marquis Diento’s assassination, and was offering a pardon for it.

This seemed to catch Fangas’s attention as he sported a toothy grin when he heard it.

“Hum, what do you want from us then?”

The kingdom was the one the broke the treaty in the first place and the elves merely retaliated in kind, so this wasn’t a situation where either side could make demands since both sides had already suffered losses.

“Well, I would like to make a simple request..... for the elves of the Great Canada Forest to become my supporters for the throne of Rhoden.”

Juliana lowered her head as she spoke. Fangas nodded at her proposal and urged her to continue.

So Juliana explained the turmoil over the succession rights that was currently plaguing the royal family.

“Juliana-dono what would we stand to gain from supporting you?”

“My older brother Sect is receiving support from the Western Leburan Empire. It was the old Leburan Empire that was responsible for the tragedy of the dwarfs in the past. While we are separated by the wind dragon mountain range, if my brother takes the throne the empire’s influence will naturally increase. This is unconfirmed information, but there is a rumor that the empire is developing new magic tool at the elves’ expense.”

The 『Dwarven Tragedy』she spoke of was when the dwarves of the Northern continent were hunted for their metallurgic knowledge. It was the old/previous/former Leburan Empire that led the hunts, and as a result of their severe and cruel acts human history now stated that the dwarves, along with their knowledge, have disappeared from the continent.

However, unbeknownst to the humans was that during those days the dwarves had formed an alliance with the elves and were currently living secluded in the forest capital Maple.

“Juliana-dono do you intend to stand against the empire if you obtain the throne?”

Dylan, who had been mostly quiet till now, asked the question, while Fangas looked the princess in the eyes to verify her true intentions.

Juliana’s response was a silent nod.

“We elves are rather ignorant of human politics, so would our support really help you all that much?”

Fangas’s large arms remained crossed as he sighed.

“Frankly speaking, I do believe so. I hope to arrange trade negotiations between my followers and the elves.”

“However that’s.....”

In response to Juliana’s statement Dylan turned to Serena, who had been calmly sitting off to the side.

“The Grand Duke is already aware of this and has approved the sale of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』. Rinburuto is currently the only country dealing in 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 and if I’m able to obtain the trading right, my influence within the royal family would increase, thus drawing a multitude of nobles to my side.”

“I see. Juliana-dono, you’re trying to promote a positive relationship with the elves.’

Fangas actually moved his large body and began to stroke his white beard. However, a large smile soon appeared on his face.

“I recently learned that one of my brethren married your country’s feudal lord of Lanbaltic. If mutual understanding between elves and your countrymen continues, then that partnership may be possible. I can’t make any promises about trade negotiations yet, but I will have a response for you after the next meeting of the great elders .”

At that response, Juliana's turned towards the knights and the maid that stood beside her, but they were simply nodding their heads with a surprised look on their faces.

Seemingly pleased with their reaction, Fangas stood up and offered his hand. Juliana quickly rushed to grasp his hand and sighed as a relieved expression appeared on her face.

Chapter 16: 「Border Town Gurado」 Part 1

The Leibnitz territory of the Holy Leburan Empire.

To the west was the Shiana mountain range which ran from north to south. West of the mountain range it was hemmed in by the borders of the Great Leburan Empire and in the east were the steep volcanic peaks of the Fire Dragon Mountains.

The fertile soil and warmer climate between the eastern and western mountains resulted in the territory becoming rather wealthy due to the ease in which crops could be grown.

In a certain room in the mansion of the Leibnitz territory's feudal lord, the sound of a man and woman merrily drinking and exchanging pillow talk could be heard.

The interior was luxuriously decorated and sitting untidily on one of the expensive embroidered sofas was a tall man.

His black hair was twisted into dreadlocks, his face was unshaven and a peculiar tattoo could be seen on his exposed muscular chest.

The man with the exposed chest had a vulgar smile on his face as his hands traced over the curves of a female servant. The woman in question blushed fiercely when the man took a swig from the bottle in his hand and forced her to drink it with a kiss while starting to rub her large breasts.

Along with the sweet aroma of expensive liquor, a breathless moan escaped the woman's mouth.

“Funoba-sama~, me too~♪”

Another woman, who had been watching until now, uttered that cry before she clung to the man called Funoba and licked her lips.

“Nuhahah, it's alright, it's alright. I'll let you enjoy a taste of this high-class liquor.”

Just as Funoba was about to take another swig, the room's door was

forced open and a single man stepped in.

“Funoba-sama, do you plan to drown in the pleasures of women and liquor all day!? Have you forgotten the task his majesty gave you!?”

He had a thin looking face and blue veins were visible under his copper colored hair that had been tightly woven into seven braids. Although his tight-fitting clothes weren't all that glamorous, they were finely tailored.

Funoba felt as if something troublesome had appeared when he looked up at the man.

“Old man Dorassos, I just returned from a monster capturing expedition, okay? I'm sure his majesty Domitianus will understand if I take a little down time.”

While chuckling a little, Funoba began playing around with the women, causing them to moan in unison.

“.....Youuu!!!”

In a fit of blind rage, the middle-aged man called Dorassos took a step forward to grab Funoba, but Dorassos stopped in his tracks when Funoba suddenly whistled and large figures entered his sight.

Two huge wolves, about two meters tall, crept out of the sofa's shadow. Their fur was entirely white and the tips of their tail gave off a phosphorescent blue light. Around the wolves' forepaws was a dark gray ring, engraved with a complex pattern, that didn't seem to be connected to any chain.

When the wolves standing in front of Dorassos snarled, he started to tremble and scream.

“Ahh!”

Dorassos quickly backed away from the ferocious beasts and glared at Funoba, who was still fooling around with the women.

“Don't make such a scary face, old man. These Haunting Wolves are rather clever monsters. If it weren't for my ability to use the 『Ring of Submission』, they wouldn't be so obedient, you know? Since I exerted

myself for his majesty's sake, I need to replenish my energy, hehe.”

After having mocked Dorassos, Funoba took another gulp from the bottle of alcohol in his hand and gave the women another mouth-to-mouth drink.

After gnashing his teeth at Funoba's behavior, Dorassos turned heel, storming out of the room and slamming the door shut.

He paced through his own castle with long strides and slumped shoulders. The surrounding servants trembled in fear when they saw their master's appearance.

“Fuck!! This uncultured barbarian!! Just because you carry his majesty's favor you think you can selfishly invade my mansion? You'll regret this, you savage!!”

On that day, the repeated resentful shouts of viscount Dorassos De Barishimon could be heard throughout the mansion, creating a gloomy atmosphere for all the servants.

Arc POV

Under a cloudy sky early in the morning, a city spread out before my eyes. The three-meter wide moat was filled with water from the Spirit river that ran close to the city. Around the moat was a wheat field that was currently blowing in the wind.

This is the first town I visited when I came to this world, Rubierute. Though it hasn't been that long since I last stayed here, I was still feeling a bit nostalgic.

Ponta was in her usual spot atop my head and Ariane was looking down at the city beside me.

The reason we came to this town was because there was no other way for us to get to the empire. The city closest to the empire that I could travel to with 【Transfer Gate】 was Rubierute.

However, we still needed to ask someone in the city for directions to the empire from Rubierute. Though we'd received a crude map of the

Northern continent in Raratoia, there were no locations of human towns marked on it, and no one in the elf village was knowledgeable about highways.

Apparently, we'd reach the Holy Leburan Empire if we headed straight north and crossed over the volcanic area called the Fire Dragon Mountain. Given what happened with Buranbeina, it was necessary for us to get accurate directions.

When we reached the gate, I showed the guards the copper pass I received after saving the feudal lord's daughter and asked them if they knew the way to the empire, but they were only able to shake their heads.

The majority of this world's people don't seem to travel far from their birthplace, since there weren't many people that knew the distance to far-away locations. Most people we asked only knew the way to nearest town from their home village.

Just as I was about to give up and go ask some peddlers traveling the highway about it, a voice suddenly called out to me.

"Arc-sama!?"

When I looked back I saw a woman I recognized.

Her curly red hair was cut in a short style, barely reaching the nape of her neck and her deep brown eyes were opened wide in shock. She was dressed in a maid's uniform and seemed to be in her early twenties. She was also the first person I ever talked to in this world.

"Ah, Rita-dono. I never imagined meeting you in such a place."

Ariane was wearing her gray cloak beside me and from underneath her hood she was sending me a questioning gaze, so I whispered an abridged version of how I helped Rita with the bandit situation to her.

"Yes, Arc-sama. Have your travels been going well since you left?"

"Hmm, I've been here and there, I even managed to visit the capital....."

"Huh, you've been to the capital? I still haven't been there."

Seeing how happy Rita looked when she talked, I began to stroke my

chin.

A maid in direct service to Lauren, the daughter of this territory's feudal lord, was right in front of me. She was surely brighter than commoners, with that in mind I looked straight at Rita.

"I actually need to go to the Eastern Leburan Empire for a business trip, so I wondered if you could help me with the directions."

Rita raised her eyebrow at my statement and turned towards Ariane with a weird expression on her face.

Rita seemed troubled by something as she opened her mouth and started speaking.

"I do know the way there, but the roads around the border have been overrun by monsters recently, and I've heard commercial travel to the area has decreased.It would be quite dangerous to travel those roads with a female companion."

Ariane and I shared a look after she said that.

"I don't think that will be a problem. Will your legs be okay, Arc?"

Ariane's large chest bounced a little as she chuckled and showed off the 『Sword of the Lion King』 that had been covered by her cloak.

If we did run into a large group of monsters, I could use 【Dimensional Step】 to escape, or it would be easily with Ariane and my power to annihilate the threat if retreat was impossible.

"Well, it shouldn't be much of a problem."

When I nodded and agreed with Ariane, Rita reluctantly told us the exact directions to the empire.

After another minute or two of chatting, we said our goodbyes to Rita and then left Rubierute along the western highway.

The road rose at a gentle incline and soon we could see the gorgeous scenery from atop a hill. While the Spirit river flew in the southwestern direction on my left, I was more focused on the highway in front of me.

At the bottom of the hill, the highway split into two paths, with one path traveling along the river and the other heading northwest. The border town Gurado was along the northwestern path.

Although Rita didn't know the way to the empire, she did know the way to the nearest border town Gurado, and she mentioned that the Holy Leburan Empire's territory was just beyond it.

She said that it'd be a half-day journey from Rubierute to Gurado by carriage, but it shouldn't take more than an hour using 【Dimensional Step】.

Since monsters appeared all along the northwestern path, our main objective was to remain undetected. Thought it was a common scene for people to hang around monster spawn sites in a game, hanging around a monster's habitat was quite dangerous.

While it would seem like some type of safari for someone like me, who could use short range teleportation, the ones who were only able to walk would only be a stone's throw away from a vicious monster attack.

As we quickly made our way down the highway with transfers, we didn't pass a single person or carriage. Since there were usually other people traversing the highways, I had to limit my use of transfer magic, but with no one around I could use it without holding back.

It wasn't long before Gurado came into view. Since it was called a border town, I thought it would be large, but even from this distance I could tell it was smaller than Rubierute. If anything else, it was more like a large village in size.

Since Gurado was surrounded on two sides by a forest, and monster attacks must have been frequent, the residents had built a large stone wall that was suitable for a city.

The town was in a distorted oval shape and there was a field outside the wall, just like the other places I've been. However, I couldn't see the shadows of those who should be tending the field despite it being early in the morning.

Though I suppose that they could have been hidden by the crops' shadow. As we walked the rest of the way to the town, I suddenly heard a child's scream.

“Whaaaaa!!”

Ariane and I shared a look while Ponta's ear stood up as she started to look around.

All of a sudden, two boys burst out of the field a short distance away. Chasing after them was a monster I hadn't seen since I visited Rata village some time ago.

Chapter 17: 「Border Town Gurado」 Part 2

The monster was covered in black and gray fur and four tusks were sticking out of both sides of its mouth. It was a Fanged Boar, similar to the one I had killed before. However, it wasn't two meters long as the one before, this one was maybe one and a half meters at best.

One of the fleeing boys, who was carrying a simple wooden shield with a thin iron plate riveted to it, turned around to confront the Fanged Boar with his short sword. When I focused on the boar, I noticed that there was a bleeding cut on its body and it was scratching the ground as it stared down the kid with the sword.

The boys must have angered the boar when they tried to slay it and now the boys would meet their end by impalement.

My black cloak fluttered as I ran towards the kids and drew my sword. Ariane had already sent out a flying mound of rocks that hit the ground in-between the Fanged Boar and the children, throwing up a cloud of dust.

When the Fanged Boar tried to leap back and groaned, I aimed for its neck. The monster tried to reorient itself when it recognized a new enemy, but its movements were too slow.

By the time the Fanged Boar started to turn, my sword was already in mid-swing. With a booming shout, I brought the 『Holy Thunder Sword』 down on the crown of the monster's head. The sword easily cut the Fanged Boar's head in half and the remaining momentum caused the blade to hit the ground and create a large fissure.

The two boys stared at me with their mouths wide open, wearing dumbfounded expressions.

“I am a priest, are either of you injured?”

After I swung my sword to remove the blood and sheathed it, the boy with the sword quickly stepped forward to answer me.

“W-We're alright! I was just about to slay the beast myself!!”

The boy's small brown eyes, which complimented his short brown hair,

glared at me in annoyance. When he thrust his sword in my direction, the boy's trembling arms threw off his aim.

Suddenly the pale boy with similar gear that had remained silent till now, tackled the other boy that had been in the middle of his sloppy thrust and knocked him to the ground.

“Onii-chan what are you doing?! What do you think you're saying to our savior?!”

Apparently the two of them were siblings.

The younger one's hair was lighter and slightly longer than his brothers, and he seems to have a more reserved personality compared to his overactive older brother. He had the same brown eyes as his brother, but he had more common sense.

After hitting his brother on the head as he stood up, the younger one lowered his head to me.

“Sorry, I apologize for my brother's actions! My name is Levitto and this is my brother—”

“I am Raiatto Dalsen De Gurado! I am the rising star of the next generation's feudal lords!”

While he did cut off his brother Levitto, Raiatto's arrogant introduction with his arms crossed over his chest and puffed out cheeks was rather heartwarming. Well, it was a rather interesting thing to do in front of a mysterious knight clad in a black cloak and woman clad in a gray cloak at least.

“Quite the interesting child.”

Ariane started to chuckle at the boys' antics as she slowly made her way over.

Still, these boys were apparently the sons of the feudal lord. That begged the question as to why they were outside the town, trying to fight monsters with weapons. Confused, I decided to ask the boys about it.

“By the way, what are you boys doing in a place like this?”

It wasn't Levitto that answered like I expected, but the older brother Raiatto that spoke up.

"I'm not a boy! Since there have been recent monster attacks in the Gurado territory, I've taken it upon myself to pacify the land!"

He was definitely at the stage between child and teenager.

"Isn't that a reckless thing to do? Nothing would be accomplished if you died."

"I-I can do it! I am not being reckless! I can do it!!"

When I gave some frank advice, Raiatto's face turned a deep red and he stomped on the ground like a child. Since I couldn't deal with him forever I turned towards the younger brother who'd been standing off to the side.

"I have a small question Levitto-dono, do you know the closest town in the the empire from here?"

"The closest town in the empire? I don't know, but I bet father does."

As he spoke, Levitto apologetically shook his head in response to my question. There was no need to ask the feudal lord, but it seemed that we wouldn't be changing our destination from Gurado. However, Raiatto soon leaped up and started to shout in protest.

"Hey! Hey! Don't ignore me! Ignore me and I—"

"Kyun!"

All of a sudden a gust of wind blew up and smacked Raiatto in the face as Ponta cried out from the top of my head.

"What!?"

After being hit by the gust Raiatto began to wildly swing his sword around until he fell on his butt.

"What just happened!? That green fur ba— ah!!"

"Kyun! Kyun!"

Ponta jumped from my head to the ground when Raiatto started to glare daggers at her and puffed out her fur while baring her fangs at him.

“How about we all just head to town and decide what to do from there. Let’s get there quickly.”

“T-Thank you very much.”

After I broke up the fight, Levitto and Raiatto led the way to town while Ariane was following them with Ponta in her arms. After quickly picking something up I brought up the rear.

There was a deep trench dug around Gurado’s walls and there was a drop bridge at the entrance. There were several guards at the front gate and all of them rushed forward when they noticed our group approaching.

“Levitto! Raiatto! Where did the two of you run off!? Dalson-sama has been worried sick about you!!”

One of the guards rushed forward to check on the two brothers, who looked a little embarrassed when they heard that this Dalson person was worried about them.

Even the hyperactive Raiatto was quiet when he heard this. It was Levitto who told them how Ariane and I came across the two of them and safely brought them back to town.

When the guards took us to the center of the town, we encountered a gathering of many people, who were all wearing heavy equipment. There were twenty knights adorned with excellent armor, while the remaining ten men were dressed in leather armor, all holding different weapons.

When one of the guards that had been leading us ran up to the group he saluted to the person standing in the center.

“Dalson-sama, your sons have been found!”

The man called Dalson was wearing armor like the people around him and his physique was slightly larger than the rest. He appeared to be in his early thirties, had a stubby beard, short hair and the same brown eyes as the boys.

Although he carried the atmosphere of bandit leader or veteran

adventurer, I couldn't deny that he was the boys' father and thus Gurado's feudal lord.

A vein was visibly throbbing on Dalson's forehead and he wore a strained smile on his face as he approached us with long strides before striking both Raiatto and Levitto on the top of their heads.

"Ouch ~ ~!!"

Raiatto started rolling on the ground, holding his head, while Levitto crouched on the ground in pain.

"Shut up!! Fools, you've made me worry for nothing with this crap!!"

Dalson rubbed his fist as he shouted at the two, before he turned to me.

"A stranger? At such an unusual time?"

"My name is Arc, a traveling adventurer. This is my current traveling companion, Ariana."

"Kyun!"

There was doubt on Dalson's face when I introduced Ariane and myself, only Ponta's cry when she jumped on my head broke the silence. Dalson gave us a look over before he moved his eyes back to my face and asked me another question.

"What's that on your shoulder?"

"Oh, on our way here we ran into your sons while they were attacked by this monster. In order to prevent its death from being unnecessary, we brought it here for processing."

As I said that, I threw the Fanged Boar I had been carrying around with one hand at the feudal lord's feet, making everyone around us shout in surprise.

When Raiatto saw that, he quickly hid behind the nearest knight's back.

While more veins appeared on Dalson's temple, he simply snorted and looked back at me.

“You said you were an adventurer, right? If you have the power to slay that damned beast in a single blow, then you are a considerable fighting force. Would you consider being employed by me for a while? What’s your price?”

Dalson kicked the head of the Fanged Boar corpse as he stared at me.

“While I am grateful for the offer, I’m currently employed by another party.....”

I glanced in Ariane’s direction as I spoke.

Dalson looked disappointed at my answer as he sighed and scratched the back of his head.

“I see..... To come to Gurado at such a time, do you have an errand here?”

“No, we’re trying to reach the nearest city in the empire. Do you happen to know the way, Dalson-dono?”

When I asked about reaching a city in the empire, Dalson widely smiled and turned towards Ariana.

“Regrettably, a group of Ogres has holed near the highway up ahead, so it’s currently quite dangerous to travel to the empire.”

I often encountered Ogres in the game, they were a demonic looking monster. Their most notable traits were their high physical strength and offensive power. Basically, a troublesome enemy at the beginning but a suitable grinding monster for the mid-game.

Ariane and I should easily be able to deal with them ourselves or we could just use **【Dimensional Step】** to avoid the trouble.

However, judging from Dalson’s aura, he wouldn’t allow two people to attempt a dangerous trek to the empire by themselves.

“I have a suggestion for you, we’re preparing to subjugate the Ogres right now, so how about you lend him to us? Adventurers rarely visit the border, and one with the strength to kill a Fanged Boar with a single blow is one I’d like to work with.”

His proposal for leasing my contract was directed at Ariane since she had been presented as my employer.

Ariane's golden eyes looked towards me from beneath her hood so I gave her a simple nod.

It was my way of telling her that I didn't think exterminating the Ogres would take too much time to accomplish.

"I don't particularly mind."

When Ariane accepted his proposal Dalson's smile widened even more.

"Is that so. Well, thank you for that. Of course, you two will be handsomely rewarded for your contribution. You said your name was Arc, you are in agreement with this, right?"

"I don't really have any objections. How big is this group of Ogres?"

"According to our scouts, there are about ten of them."

If there were that few, then this could probably be settled before noon.

"Though this promising fellow has joined us, but don't think you can be careless. You lot, don't be too reckless!"

"OHH!!"

A battle cry rang out at Dalson's exclamation. The knights shared promises of returning safely with their friends and families as they gathered to make their final equipment checks.

I looked to Ariane as the spectacle unfolded, but she simply shrugged and shook her head.

This situation seemed more serious than I initially thought it to be.

Given Dalson's not too serious attitude as a feudal lord, I'd thought that it would be something similar to a hunting trip in the mountains, but maybe I was wrong.

There would be no chance of victory if the commander had a hopeless expression. Nevertheless, he was a rather brave man to lead the subjugation himself.

Though this town wasn't very large, judging by the small number of knights present, they were also short-handed.

"I assume we'll depart after everything is put in order."

Dalson's eyes bulged when Ariana spoke up.

"Well, I thought that you could wait here in town for our retur—"

"Wouldn't my magic and skills with the sword also count as a great war potential?"

She created a fireball in her hand as she spoke, before extinguishing it the next instant.

"Oh! Lady luck is truly smiling down on us! Every last one of you better come back alive!!"

"Oooou!!"

Following Dalson's energetic jab came the ecstatic shouts of the men around us.

Chapter 18: 「That which brings blessings and tragedy」 Part 1

Our group left Gurado and advanced along the northern highway.

Dalson led the thirty-man unit which consisted of twenty knights and ten other combatants gathered from the town, all marching with weapons and other subjugation tools in hand while Ariane and I followed behind with Ponta atop my head.

After leaving the town and traveling for about an hour, the landscape around us started to rise slightly to form a hill. That's when our group left the highway and approached a forest on the western side.

From the top of the hill, I could see that the trees in the forest were sparsely placed. Dalson gestured for everyone to be quiet before he started to crouch, everyone following his example as we advanced towards the forest.

Eventually, we came to a stop when the hill ended in a small cliff and Dalson silently urged us to have a look.

A group of ogres was standing around at the bottom of the cliff. Their height ranged between two and two-and-a-half meters, their rust-colored bodies consisted of steel-like muscles and tusks were protruding from the corners of their lower jaws. They seemed to have a degree of intelligence given the animal pelts around their waist and the ivy bound stone axes and large clubs they carried.

There were ten ogres in total and a quick glance revealed that everyone in the unit was holding their breath.

“We begin the ambush here, so I'll lend you this.”

When Dalson said that, a knight pushed a quiver of arrows and bow to both Ariane and me.

While I remained confused about what they were for, Dalson nudged his chin towards the cliff.

“We’ll fire arrows from here and lure them towards the highway. Since we’re on top of the hill, it’d be difficult for them to climb up as they chase us.”

Just as Dalson had said, when I took another look, the valley the Ogres were in was surrounded by hills on all sides.

“The arrows have been dipped in poison, but it’s only strong enough to slow the ogres’ movements. Since it isn’t wise to face them inside the forest, we’ll draw them out with these arrows.”

The greatest strengths humans possessed was their ability to form groups and strategize. Though I couldn’t tell if there were enough people here to go through with the plan, it was true that it’d be disadvantageous to fight in the forest.

Since there were only ten of them, Ariane and I could go down and take care of them ourselves, leaving Dalson and the rest here safe and out of sight.

However, I wasn’t the main force here, I was just meant to support them. When I looked to Ariane, it appeared that she reached the same conclusion as she only nodded back at me.

Since I never used a bow before I watched the others to learn how to do so. Besides, I only need to provoke the ogres, not hit them.

“Everyone, ready your bows.”

At Dalson’s command, everyone aimed their bows off of the cliff’s edge.

A second later, the thirty men let their arrows rain upon the unsuspecting ogres.

I drew my bow with all my might in preparation to shoot at the ogres.

However, just as I was about to fire I heard a cracking sound and the bow in my hand snapped in two.

“Huh?”

I’d heard that amateurs would have a hard time fully drawing a bow, so I held and drew it with all my might, but that was apparently a mistake.

Both Ariane and Dalson had amazed looks on their faces while the others were in a state of shock. Everyone's stares were starting to make me feel a little uncomfortable.

"Well, seem that this bow's maintenance has been neglected."

While quietly tossing the broken bow to the side I blamed its breakage on the one in charge of weapon maintenance.

Unlike me, Ariane managed to draw her bow and shoot it at the ogres at the bottom of the cliff. However, her ability with the bow wasn't as high as you'd expect of an elf. Her arrow struck the ground close to the ogres.

But seeing Ariane fire the bow I understood why. Her large chest seemed to throw off her aim when she fired.

While everyone readied themselves to fire another volley, roars rose up from the bottom of the cliff and angry glares focused on our group.

Several of the ogres had arrows stuck in their bodies, but they managed to avoid fatal injuries thanks to their thick muscles.

In order to contribute something, I looked around for something to throw. I could help reduce their numbers if I threw rocks at them from this height, but unfortunately there were no fist-sized rocks around.

Well, these pebbles should be enough to provoke the ogres, so I picked up a few of them and started to throw them down the cliff.

When the stone I threw hit one of the ogres in the head, there was a dull sound as a hole appeared in his head and it fell down unmoving.

Cheers arose from the men shooting arrows around me.

Dalson nodded approvingly before he bent down, gathered more stones, and handed them to me. Although I had been just trying to find something to do, I managed to reduce their numbers.

I took aim at another ogre with the stones I received. However, that first one seems to have been due to luck. Stones thrown at fastball speeds could certainly be fatal, but it's hard to aim at fast-moving objects and trying to hit the ogres at a vertical incline on top of that made the task

even more difficult.

Above all else, I knew for a fact that I lacked honed throwing skills.

At the ogres' second angry roar Dalson confirmed that they were making their way up the cliff, and I finally managed to take another one out, leaving eight of them.

“Kyun!”

Ponta suddenly made a tense cry from atop my head.

Just as Dalson had given the order to fall back to the highway, two more ogres appeared from the forest behind us, shocking everyone.

Ariane couldn't even hide the shock on her face at being ambushed. Somehow, both she and I had become so absorbed in shooting arrows and throwing stones that we had neglected to cover the rear.

One of the newly arrived ogres raised its stone axe to take a swing at Dalson, but, Ariane quickly grasped the situation and blocked the strike.

The moment she saw the ogre move, Ariane wasted no time tossing her bow aside and drew her sword as she stepped in-between the ogre and Dalson at lightning speed.

Ariane managed to avoid taking the blow delivered by the ogre's log-like arms by deflecting it with the flat side of her sword. However, the force generated by the axe hitting the ground was enough to blow her hood off.

When that happened her lilac skin and golden eyes were revealed. Without paying attention to that, Ariane quickly raked her sword over the ogre's arm that held the axe.

The ogre screamed as it let go of its axe and tried to step back, but Ariane wasn't having it and closed the distance.

The ogre tried to knock her away with its large arms but it was unable to raise the arm Ariane had injured. Capitalizing the opportunity, she slashed the ogre's thick neck.

The ogre grasped at its neck as blood started to spray from it, an act that proved to be futile as it collapsed and writhed on the ground.

While Ariane's battle had played out I had faced off with the other ogre that had snuck up on us.

Had Ponta not cried out when she did, I might have received the ogre's blow. Though it's unlikely that I would have received much damage thanks to 『Belenus' Holy Armor』, Ponta would've been in harm's way if I handled the situation poorly, sitting on my head as she way.

Thanks to her warning, I was now facing the ogre and Ponta had already coiled herself around my neck.

When I caught both of the ogre's arms and squeezed them, the ogre glared at me while trying to free itself. The ogre initially tried to swing its club at me, but as my hold tightened, agony seeped into its expression and its escape attempts started to become desperate.

“Hehehe, I'm not letting you get away!”

I put enough strength in my hold to break the Ogre's wrists. The instant they snapped, the ogre roared as if it was dying. My follow-up head-butt shattered the ogre's skull and broke its neck.

When the ogre became silent I tossed the corpse aside and checked up on Ariane. We made eye contact just after she pulled her sword from the neck of her kill and she was starting to put her hood back on.

We somehow managed to kill the two from the ambush.

When we looked towards the others, we were greeted by their dumbfounded expressions. The ogres at the bottom of the cliff had already split into two groups and they were closing in on this location.

“The rest of them are heading this way.”

Dalson returned to his senses when he heard me say that.

“Everyone, fall back to the highway!!”

At his command, everyone simultaneously retreated towards the highway.

When we reached the highway, a group of four ogres broke out of the forest and started their assault.

As the enraged ogres ran out of the forest, hell-bent on killing us, Dalson issued another set of commands.

“Throw your oil bottles!! Ariane-dono, if you’d please!!”

Everyone then threw small containers of oil at the ogres, coating them in the stuff before Ariane used her spirit magic to send multiple fireballs flying at the ogres.

When the fireballs hit them, the ogres were engulfed by the flames. As the flames consumed them, the ogres dropped to the ground and rolled around to extinguish them, stopping right at our feet when they were done.

The soldiers quickly formed separate groups and stood on the sides of the wounded ogres before they started to stab the ogres with their spears and swords. In each group, there was a knight standing in front of the ogres with a large shield, whose purpose was keeping the ogre’s attention focused on them while the others stabbed the ogre. I decided to use the way they handled their shields as a reference.

I cross-referenced the trained movements of the corps members with the way I usually fought and noted that they were almost identical.

Ariane, Dalson, and I were located in the center group where two of the ogres rose to their feet and screamed in anger.

I took my shield off of my back and unsheathed my sword before stepping forward.

I deflected a giant club using the shield in my left hand. The ogre’s balance had been thrown off because it was pulled along by its weapon, and after cutting into it with my great sword the ogre ended up being bisected.

The second ogre was done in with a single thrust, after I hit it in the face with my shield I used the opportunity to ram my sword into its stomach.

My thrust had managed to cut the ogre’s spine, and with a final moan, the ogre fell down like a puppet with its strings cut.

Looking around I saw that the other groups had been able to overwhelm the other two ogres. When the remaining ogres showed up, Ariane and I split up to support the groups under attack. The battle was over in an instant and not a single ogre was left alive.

“Considering that you’re an elf, Ariane-dono, I’m truly grateful for your help.”

While we were busy removing the magic stones from the ogres’ bodies, Dalson approached us and started speaking to Ariane with a smile on his face.

At his comment, Ariane lowered the hood of her cloak and stared back at him with her arms crossed.

Without paying attention to her shift in attitude, Dalson continued to speak to Ariane in a more blunt manner.

“Though this is the first time I’ve met one, I heard stories that elves occasionally appeared in the neighboring forest during my great-grandfather’s time.”

Dalson’s eyes didn’t hold the same gleam as one that desired to capture elves. If anything, there was only a hint of curiosity.

“This is your first time meeting an elf?”

Since Ariane was maintaining her vigilance and silence, I decided to urge Dalson to continue. Dalson seemed a little happy about it, instead of being displeased as I thought he’d be.

“Since my great-grandfather’s time, our family’s tenet has been 『Help elves whenever they’re in need』..... When he was young, an elf saved his life when he’d been exploring the forest, I never imagined I’d be saved in a similar fashion.”

As Dalson spoke, he focused on Ariane, whose arms were still crossed.

“.....Even if we didn’t help, you’d have managed somehow.”

Dalson shook his head at Ariane’s curtly reply.

“If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be able to return to my sons today.”

“Technically, we only completed the task you requested of us. So, are you going to give us the directions now?”

Ariane simply brushed it off and said it was nothing.

“Ah, that’s right. When we return to town, we’ll need to prepare a proper reward for Arc-dono and Ariane-do—”

Ariane and I simultaneously spoke up.

“No.” “No.”

Sharing a quick look, the two of us nod in agreement before she continued speaking.

“No, we’re heading to the empire from here. It’ll save us the trouble if you tell us what we need.”

“However, I don’t have much with me at the moment, so how can I reward you here?”

Dalson took out a few gold and silver coins from a leather wallet he’d been carrying as he spoke.

“That, along with the bow I broke, is enough of a reward.”

I shrugged my shoulders as I made that joke.

Dalson looked at me and opened his mouth to say something, but Ariana managed to beat him to it.

“As an additional reward, how about you ensure that that family tenet of yours is passed down to your great-grandchildren.”

Ariane’s large chest rose and fell while being supported by her arms as she started to chuckle. That precept of 『Help elves whenever they’re in need』 was a good one to pass down in my opinion.

Dalson turned a questioning gaze in my direction. Since I didn’t really mind the reward that she had suggested, I nodded at him.

As compensation for the subjugation, he told us that this road would lead to a large city in the empire and bade us farewell together with all the members of the subjugation party.

Chapter 19: 「That which brings blessings and tragedy」 Part 2

When we were out of sight of the subjugation party, Ariane suddenly muttered something as we walked.

“There are a variety of humans.....”

“Yeah.”

I contemplated what she said and took a quick look back. There was a gradual bend along the highway, and their figures were already obstructed by the trees.

Once we entered the empire’s territory, I began using 【Dimensional Step】in short, frequent bursts.

Since I’ve heard that the number of monsters increased along the border between Rhoden and Leburan, I shortened the distance of the transfers to lessen the chance of encounters.

To avoid heading the wrong way or arriving at another city, Ariane would check our progress every few transfers.

We were currently traveling northwest, following the highway towards Kesseck, the largest border town in the area. Once there, we could begin our search for clues about Dorassos Du Barishimon. After all I’ve heard, the empire was about five times the size of Rhoden Kingdom. Given the size of the empire, it’s unlikely that we’d be able to keep up the quick pace at which we’ve been able to rescue the captured elves. Well, unless they’re being held close to the border... but it wasn’t pessimistic of me to doubt that that’d be the case.

While I was caught in the whirlpool of my thoughts as we traveled, Ariane suddenly placed a hand on my shoulder and urged me to stop.

“Hold on a second, Arc.”

I looked back at her when she said that.

“What’s the matter?”

Currently, there was only an ordinary, grassy plain running along the highway. The forest had disappeared some time ago and I couldn't see any monsters around that we should be cautious about.

However, Ariane narrowed her eyes and surveyed the surroundings.

Since there wasn't any serious danger present, the constantly hungry Ponta began tapping on my helmet with her forepaw while wagging her tail.

"The mana is abnormally dense here....."

Ariane's brow knitted while I was confused on whether there was any danger or not. It was easier for strong monsters to settle in areas of high mana concentrations..... Case in point, elves lived in the Great Canada Forest, which was inhabited by a multitude of monsters.

Ariane seemed to notice my confusion and tried to answer my question.

"Normally, specific types of trees, located in certain forests, naturally store mana or miasma, which gathers in deep hollows and caves where it can be condensed."

Apparently, mana was circulated like a haze or fog. Taking what she said into consideration, I took another look at the plains we were standing in. It didn't seem to be a place for mana to accumulate.

Although I couldn't detect mana all that well, even I started to notice the same faint, skin crawling sensation I felt when I first entered Great Canada Forest.....

Ariane lowered her cloak's hood and carefully combed the surrounding area with a gloomy expression.

She walked a short distance away from the road and crouched down for a bit before slowly standing up while holding something in her hand.

"Fragments of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』....."

As she muttered that, she was holding the fragment of a purple crystal up into the sunlight. Ariane proceeded to pick up more of the fragments scattered around her while I was, once again, left confused.

“What’s an 『Abundant Harvest Stone』?”

“Well. It’s a magic tool created by the elves.”

“I see, and what does it do?”

I looked at Ariane as she rolled one of the semi-transparent, purple crystals in her hand.

“They’re crushed into a fine powder and spread thinly across fields in order to increase the vitality of the land and raising crop yields.”

“Hoo.”

After hearing her explanation, I looked at the fragments in her hand. It seemed to be a form of solid fertilizer, but that begged the question why they had been thrown into a plain next to the highway. Let alone a field, I couldn’t even see a house nearby.

When I returned my eyes to her face, Ariane began to speak before I could voice the question that was on my mind.

“There are certain precautions that need to be taken when handling them. If they are left unattended, in a roughly shattered state like this, then they start to release miasma that can attract monsters.”

I’ve heard of farmland becoming barren when too much fertilizer is used in short intervals, but this stuff came with the risk of attracting monster when used incorrectly.

“Do you remember? How Great Canada Forest is filled with huge trees and monsters?”

The scenery of the Great Canada Forest came to mind as I nodded at her question.

“Well, when the first chieftain descended upon the land, it was little more than a wasteland. The first chieftain used the 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 to revitalize the land and started cultivating the forest it is today.”

That was one heck of an amazing afforestation program. If I’m not mistaken, the first chief formed the precursor of the current elf society eight-hundred years ago, meaning that the vast forest had sprouted up in

that short amount of time. Though that would be an easier feat for the long-living elves, it was still a shocking fact to learn that the massive forest had once been a wasteland.

“When the elves were purged from the human countries, we needed a visible defense, so the forest was hastily planted by spreading roughly grounded 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 throughout the land. The trees began to absorb the excess mana, monsters started to appear, and humans fled from the land. Well, at least that was how I was told the great forest came about.”

I looked at the quantity of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 that dotted the area while listening to her explanation. It was more than likely that someone had scattered them here on purpose.

This seems to be the cause of the increased monster activity along the borders of Rhoden and Leburan. The only question remaining was who the perpetrator was.....

“Are the elves behind this?”

When I asked this simple question, Ariane gave me angry look.

“What would elves stand to gain from spreading 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 across a human country’s border?”

Her sharp reply was all I needed to hear in order to know that she didn’t even consider the elves to be the ones behind this.

However, it was possible for the elves to profit from items with the ability to summon monsters. If, for example, the elves decided to release the monsters to disturb the public order of a neighboring country, what’d happen to local trade?

Since I wasn’t that knowledgeable about the elves’ relationship with the neighboring nations I couldn’t be careless in what I said. Also, I’d only upset Ariane if continued down this train of thought.

“While we elves are the manufacturers of the item, we aren’t the only ones in possession of them. A multitude of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 have been traded to our sole human trading partner, the Rinburuto

Archdukedom, so that they could sell them to other countries.”

The ability of the 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 to increase crop production would be useful to any human country, so having the monopoly must have been quite lucrative for the Rinburuto Archdukedom.

Considering the scarcity of this item, there's no way these 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 have been spread in this area without some government's order.

“Still, it's quite the dangerous fertilizer. Trouble was bound to arise when placing it in the hands of humans.”

Ariane crushed the fragments of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 in her hand before letting the dust be carried off by the wind.

“They were originally created to cultivate a forest. The only risks my ancestors were concerned about were the monsters that could potentially be attracted.”

“Ho, are the humans unaware of the monster-luring side-effect?”

Ariane merely shook her head as she replied in a disgusted tone.

“Greedy people are everywhere.”

“.....I see.”

Knowing that crop yields rose by scattering a thin layer of dust over their fields, there were bound to be people that ignored the risks and instructions in an attempt to increase their own profits.

Discovering the side effects of the 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 wouldn't be that difficult.

However, the elves knowingly supplied the humans with these stones, meaning they considered it to be an acceptable risk if the human countries were overrun by monsters and trees, an environment they themselves were used to.

Well, this was only speculation on my part.....

“Is there a method to counter those side-effects?”

I asked Ariane that question under the assumption that the misused 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 were behind the increased monster activity and that the problem would be solved once the stones' effects were negated.

“The effects can be suppressed a little if the fragments get buried, but that would be ineffective unless you knew the size of the area they've been spread in.”

She did another scan of the area before shrugging her shoulders.

We had neither the manpower nor the time to deal with this problem. The only options we had would be to seek out and crush the large fragments of 『Abundant Harvest Stones』 and let the wind carry the dust away.

I was about to ask Ariane another question, but then I simply sighed and shrugged my shoulders.

Nine times out of ten, this was the work of a human nation and I could only guess on their reasons for doing it.

Chapter 20: 「Thanks Ninja Chiome」

The Holy Leburan Empire city of Kesseck was right in front of us.

With the mountain range extending towards the northwest, the straight and plain surface of the tall walls projected the impression of a rather sturdy citadel.

Since it stood in an important position near the border, the large town gave off an impressive atmosphere, with the small river that flew beside it and the impressive field that surrounded it.

We were coming from the eastern highway that connected Kesseck to Rhoden Kingdom, and under normal circumstances I imagine that the highway would be fairly busy, but the only other travelers were the few survivors of villages recently attacked by monsters.

As we approached the town, the peaceful scenery of the roads around Kesseck was disturbed by people who looked different from normal guards.

Each of them wore light armor in dull colors over long-sleeved uniforms and they carried an atmosphere similar to that of armed forces.

These strange individuals were keeping a close eye on everyone the guards let through the city gates. Since there weren't many people on our highway, we easily stood out.

Considering that we were a dark elf and a skeleton knight under our hood and helmet, it'd be very bad if they decided to question us or force us to show our faces.

“It'd be for the best if we avoid entering through the front.”

“Yeah.”

Ariane shared my concerns and nodded.

Ariane and I circled the city in order to find a place with fewer guards and soldiers. Ponta had dozed off a while ago and was lightly snoring atop my head.

The soldiers were mostly focused on the city's western side, and they would often go in and out of a small fort beside the city. It looked like the garrison had been built rather hastily, because it wasn't all that sturdy and the city's fortifications prevented them from seeing what was happening inside.

Avoiding that area, we walked towards the east of the city and used **【Dimensional step】** to first get on top of the wall and then inside the city.

While contemplating how familiar this way of entering places was becoming, I took a look around.

Contrary to the lack of people on the highway, the city was bursting with activity. Mixed among the common people were many soldiers out of armor.

Noticing that there were a lot of adventurers around, I breathed a sigh of relief. In this case I shouldn't attract too much attention.

“While it's good that we made it into the city, we still need to look for clues about Dorassos Du Barishimon's location.....”

Ariane gave me a look when I said that. Even if I said we should look for clues, the only thing we'd be doing was asking people around town about it and listening to merchants.

The Empire was different from Rhoden, and from what we've heard an elf would be captured immediately if discovered, so we have to avoid raising a ruckus here.

Since we couldn't be so bold in our search, it's best if we simply brought up viscount Barishimon's name to move around out of the guard's sight.

After stepping onto the main road, we made our way towards the open market.

It was an ideal place to gather information because we'd be able to stop and chat with merchants while still blending into the large crowd present.

Even as the smells of various foods drifted towards us, Ponta remained

asleep. After removing the sleeping Ponta from my head and handing her to Ariane, I approached one of the food merchants.

The man was selling walnut-like nuts as his main product. It seemed to be a suitable food for travel and the nuts were sold by the pound.

“One pound please.”

“Right away.”

The merchant had a friendly smile as he, in a practiced manner, scooped up some walnuts from a large sack full of them and placed them in a container.

“That’ll be 1 rie, mister.”

I had prepared to ask the merchant about viscount Barishimon when his words made me do a double-take. I couldn’t believe I failed to realize that the currency would change with the country.

I pulled out a gold coin from the pouch tied to my waist and handed it to the merchant.

“Sorry, but will this do?”

“Of course Rhoden gold coins are acceptable. 9 rie is your change.”

The merchant handed me nine silver coins with different engravings than the ones I’ve been using till now. The materials felt the same, but the engravings on the newer coins appeared to have been done with a more refined technique.

If the merchant was being honest, then the value of money wasn’t different from Rhoden, so I could feel a little bit relieved.

“Mister, is this your first time in Kesseck?”

“Ah, yes. In fact, I was wondering if you’ve heard of the Barishimon territory?”

While replying to the merchants, I brought up Barishimon’s name. In Rhoden, the feudal lords shared the name with their territories, so it shouldn’t be too suspicious to ask about the territory while really only

being concerned about the noble that ruled it.

However, the merchant looked confused about something as he thought it over.

“The Barishimon territory? Sorry, but I’ve never heard of it.”

“I see, sorry to bother you then.”

After that, I began to ask other merchants in the same manner about the Barishimon territory, but immediately hit a wall.

“Didn’t think that we wouldn’t find anything at all.....”

We were off to the side of the main road as I complained and cracked a walnut in my hand and gave it to Ariane. Ariane held the walnut in her hand, so Ponta could happily gnaw on it and she could blissfully pat Ponta’s head.

If you think about it, not every noble would have their own territory. It was also highly probable that the general public wouldn’t know a specific noble’s name, considering how un-communicative this world was.

I was at a loss, and just as I was struggling to find out what to do, someone called us out from behind.

“You seem to be having a bit of trouble.”

When I looked back I saw a familiar person calmly looking in our direction. I last saw this person in the Rhoden Kingdom’s capital.

Her head was covered by a large hat, she had short cut black hair and blue eyes and she was dressed in black clothes that allowed easy movement. Despite her being only 150cm tall, any notions of her being just a city girl were destroyed by her arm-and leg-guards and the dagger on her waist.

“Wha-, Chiome-dono!? What are you doing here?”

It was Chiome of the Blade Heart Clan, a companion in freeing the People of the Plains and Mountains from the capital.

Ariane looked a little surprised when she saw her.

“After parting with you, I returned to the hidden village and received a new mission from the head. I was ordered to find you Arc-dono, so I came here. I thought that this would be the first city you would visit to search for your target, and it seems my hunch was correct.”

Chiome spoke in a monotonous voice.

Although this city wasn't as large as Lanbaltic, it was still pretty big. I was half amazed and half jealous of her ability to find someone in this place.

“Hmm, do you have another request? Like I said before, my job with Ariane hasn't ended, so I'd appreciate it if you could wait for a little while.”

Chiome nodded as if she understood what I was saying before looking at Ariane.

“I will save my request until Arc-dono finishes your request, Ariane-dono. However, since time is of the essence I would like to offer my aid to you despite my poor ability.”

When the hand Ariane was feeding Ponta with stopped, Ponta tilted her head and looked up at her.

“I don't have any objections.....”

I turned to Ariane when she said that.

“With Chiome-chan's help we should be able to finish our mission faster than we would be on our own.....”

“No negotiations? Well, I've already inspected the territory of the person you're looking for.”

Chiome said so while boastfully sticking out her chest. Espionage was a ninja's expertise and she was able to show how useful she'd be right as our search hit a dead-end.

“Hoo, you already conducted an investigation? Where is he?”

When I asked Chiome about viscount Barishimon, she pointed in the northern direction.

“North from here, in the Leibnitz territory, in a city alongside the Shiana mountain range.”

“Leibnitz? That’s an entirely different name, it viscount Barishimon a retainer of the territory’s lord?”

“No, viscount Barishimon is the lord of the Leibnitz territory. In the Holy Leburan Empire, the emperor can have the feudal lord changed with a single order. Since the lord that governs the territory can change multiple times in an emperor’s life, the names of the territory and its lord don’t match often.”

In other words, this country was ruled by an absolute monarchy.

“Furthermore, the Leburan Empire which preceded the Western and Eastern variants was a rather large country, and the names of the territory has remained the same since before the split.”

Ariane and I were listening to Chiome as she gave her explanation when she pointed towards us as if she remembered something.

“That right. Arc-dono and Ariane-dono, you two can’t show your faces in public, can you?”

Ariane and I look at each other before nodding in response.

“Then let’s say I hired you two to be my personal bodyguards.”

I looked to Ariane to find that she was confused by Chiome’s offer.

“Only adventurers belonging to one of the sanctioned mercenary corporations are allowed in the empire. Thanks to that, adventurers only receive light questioning when traveling between cities.”

There’d be no way that we could undergo an interrogation with a helmet and hood on, so we’d be forced to flee and our future actions would be restricted.

It was only natural that plans change in different locations and I was more than grateful for Chiome’s presence, for neither Ariane nor I knew how things worked here.

“Should we depart for the Leibnitz territory right now?”

While patting Ponta's head, Ariane looked at us and waited, but Chiome shook her head no.

"No, even by carriage it'll take three or four days to reach the Leibnitz territory. If we left right now I'd only have enough money for half of the journey. Since we'd attract attention in small villages, we'll need to stick to the large cities."

Chiome wasn't necessarily wrong... and besides, the sky was beginning to give way to dusk. Since we spent so much effort getting into the city, we might as well stay for the night and set out for Leibnitz territory tomorrow.

The three or four-day journey should be reduced to half a day at most using **【Dimensional Step】**.

"Then, I guess we should look for an inn for the night? Since this is a rather beautiful neighborhood, we should be able to find a nice small inn."

As I said that, I was looking at the houses that lined the inn, but Chiome shook her head.

"There's a church of the Hiruku religion in the neighborhood, so it would be better if we didn't stay here. There's a decent inn near the slightly dangerous northeastern district. Please follow me."

She seemed quite familiar with the city's layout, so Ariane and I followed her since she hadn't given us any reason to doubt her.

As we made our way towards the northeastern district on the main road, a large solemn building came into view. There was a bell tower on both sides of the large entrance and murals etched into the walls. Above the entrance of the building was the symbol of a Buddhist-like vajra.

The building was better constructed and taller than those around it.

"Would that happen to be the Hiruku church?"

I asked Chiome that question as we walked past the church.

"That's right. The Hiruku religion is deeply rooted in both the Eastern

and Western empires, and it follows a doctrine of human supremacy. According to their teachings, the People of the Plains and Mountains, the elves, and the dwarves are wicked beings whose blood has been tainted by devils.”

That’s quite the violent doctrine. Any place following the Hiruku religion was bound to be unpleasant for Ariane and Chiome.

Ariane knitted her eyebrows under her hood in disgust as she looked back at the church.

“Does the Rhoden Kingdom also subscribe to the Hiruku religion?”

I asked that question in curiosity. The people of the plains and mountains like Chiome were persecuted in Rhoden Kingdom, while the elves were technically on equal footing with humans according to their treaty.

” Rhoden kingdom doesn’t adhere to the Hiruku religion. A polytheistic religion is tied into the country’s founding and the royal family bans Hiruku missionaries even to this day. However, there’s only a marginal difference between it and the Hiruku religion, my people are despised as beasts born from copulation with monsters, while elves are swindlers that deceived the gods to obtain a few blessings.”

“What!? That’s a lie!”

Ariane shouted in indignation at Chiome’s explanation. Chiome quickly pacified Ariane with a hand gesture. Ariane was so angry that she was slightly crushing Ponta against the twin peaks of her chest.

“That’s nothing but jealousy for our longevity and our better skill at handling magic.”

If people believed in blessings of gods, it wouldn’t be hard to imagine that elves had unjustly received some through sly trickery. An all too human view of the world, really.

Chiome did her best to pacify the angry Ariane and we ended our day finding an inn to stay in.

Chapter 21: 「Leibnitz Incident」 Part 1

Early morning the next day, we left Kesseck through its northern gate and traveled down the highway Chiome pointed out with 【Dimensional Step】.

Chiome was surprised at first, and her expression remained blank for a while, but after a few transfers, she started to look excited as the scenery changed with every step.

She had already seen 【Transfer Gate】, which allowed me to instantly travel to any place I could remember, so it might have been easier for her to accept 【Dimensional Step】. Well, I suppose magic like this would be quite useful to a ninja.

The mountains on the western side of the highway, with the forest at its base, were called the Shiana mountains.

We saw a lot of cultivated land around the outskirts of the forest.

Just before noon, our destination became visible from the highway.

The city and its walls were slightly larger than Kesseck and its walls. There was a large fort beside the city where carriages were constantly coming and going from.

“I never imaged we could make it here so quickly. I went from Calcutta directly to Kesseck, yet I’m amazed I managed to catch up to you.”

Chiome muttered such a thing while I was looking at Leibnitz’s cityscape.

Since we took a little side trip after parting with her, our meeting could have been due to her luck. It also could have been because of the guidance we received from the spirits, but Ariane looked down for some reason when I said that.

We entered Leibnitz through its southern gate.

Chiome simply walked up to the guards, showed them something, spoke a few word and then we were let in the city without much issue.

She must have prepared some passports before hand as part of her preparations.

After passing through the southern gate, the abundance of people on the main road immediately caught my attention. There was an elevated section of the city along the eastern side of the city walls that was gated off by its own wall. Perhaps that eastern district was the old town and everything beyond the wall was part of the new city. The wall was smaller than the new outer wall, maybe it served as the original city wall in the past, but now it was only used as the divide between the old and new town.

Chiome headed deeper into the city and went through the gate leading into the old city district.

“Since this might be a prolonged investigation, we should secure an inn first. Most of them are located in the old city district due to the relative safety over the new city district, and its easier for people like us to act in a place such as that.”

I nodded at Chiome’s explanation while looking at the crowded new city district. The streets were narrower in the old city district, but people naturally gave way for a two-meter tall knight wearing a cloak, so we weren’t that inconvenienced.

After walking the crowded streets of the old city district, we reserved a room in a small nearby inn.

“Let’s separate here to collect information.”

The moment after we reserved an inn room Chiome made that suggestion.

“Considering that this is my first time performing an infiltration in Leibnitz, I believe it’s best to be properly prepared. Even though I heard some stories from my village elders, let’s err on the side of caution.”

“I don’t have any objections to that. However, the two of us aren’t that great at intelligence gathering.”

While I approved of Chiome’s suggestion, I had to sigh and admit our

lack of ability.

“Wait, are you including me in that statement?”

Ariane stopped rubbing Ponta’s fur and protested at my statement.

“We need to accept the facts.”

Ariane scowled and puffed out her cheeks when I said that.

Everyone had their strong and their weak points and we were simply unsuited for this. I couldn’t remove my helmet or armor, my appearance scared away the rogues and thugs that could sell information, and caused the general populace to avoid making eye contact. All of which raised the difficulty of gathering information.

In Ariane’s case, she had to completely cover herself with her cloak in order to hide her pointed ears, lilac skin and golden eyes. As a result, anyone would be suspicious of her when she tried to gain information. She could potentially loosen the lips of horny men by taking advantage of her voluptuous body and womanly charms, but she seemed to lack any skill in seduction.

Since Chiome was basically indistinguishable from a regular human when she hid her tail and wore a hat over her ears, she didn’t intimidate or raise suspicion in people like the two of us did.

There was an obvious difference between the information gathering abilities of the three of us. If there’s an expert in a certain field around, there’s no shame in borrowing their strength.

“I understand.....”

When I painstakingly and exhaustively explained everything to Ariane, her ears reddened a little and she turned away from me.

“Shall we meet up in this inn tonight then?”

We nodded at Chiome’s suggestion and left the inn.

Once Chiome disappeared in the hustle and bustle of the crowd, I glanced at Ariane.

“Then what should we do now.....”

Ariane shrugged her shoulders and made a large nod when I asked her for suggestions.

“I just can’t sit back and leave everything to Chiome-chan.”

“Kyun!”

For some reason, Ponta was highly motivated as she wagged happily her tail while Ariane carried her. However, the familiar grumbling from her stomach indicated that she was expecting to find some delicious food in this city.

“Let’s pick up some snacks for Ponta while we look around the old city district.”

Chiome had gone to the new city district, so we should explore the old district. Leaving the dividing wall, we traveled the main road that connected to the city’s market.

Various stalls lined the streets and I took a quick look around as I waited for Ponta to react to something.

“People do avoid us, just as I thought.”

“Isn’t that because of how intimidating you are, Arc? Why don’t you try slouching as you walk?”

When I started to complain about the surrounding people, Ariane made a brusque suggestion. But even if I did that, a suspicious duo would still be suspicious.

However, I did come up with another idea.

“Ariane-dono can’t you eavesdrop on people using wind spirit magic? Something similar to what you did in Lanbaltic?”

“Ah, certainly. Just wait a second.....”

When Ariane nodded at my suggestion, I placed Ponta in her usual spot atop my head while she started whispering into her hand. Some lights immediately started to gather in her hand

The pale light began to flicker in her hand as she continued to whisper.

Ariane suddenly looked up and asked me a question.

“Can you see anyone talking around here?”

I scanned the surrounding area and focused in on a pair of middle-aged men talking at a stall on the opposite side of the street.

“Will they do?”

Ariane followed my line of sight and honed in on the pair as she whispered in her hand and waved her hand causing the lights to disappear without a sound.

After a while, a breeze surrounded Ariane before she called out to me.

“Arc, can you hear me?”

When I nodded yes, she brought her a glowing finger to her lips in the silence gesture and I returned the same gesture to her.

When the lights started to flicker in her hand, I began to hear a conversation out of nowhere.

“Haven’t the soldiers been really active at the fort recently?”

“The monster activity around the border has been on the rise, I even heard that the soldiers have been sent to Kesseck to deal with it.

“I know, but you know how these days, whenever someone approaches the fort, a soldier comes out and sends them away?”

“Ah, I heard that strange cries have been coming from the fort recently.”

“You do know that you live longer if you don’t stick your head where it doesn’t belong, right?”

Before long the conversation ended and the pale lights faded away.

If I heard it correctly, the security around the fort has become harsh recently. People were usually barred from entering military institutions, so I don’t know how useful that information would be.

“This method is ideal for collecting information in cities.”

“But it’s quite troublesome.....”

Ariane complained as she repeatedly invoked the spirit magic so we could listen in on the people walking the streets and hung around the back allies.

Whenever Ariane heard comments about someone wanting to grab her breasts or stroke her large ass from the men that checked her out, I had to struggle to soothe her anger and convince her to return to eavesdropping.

However, most of the residents’ chatter didn’t offer very useful information and there was a limit to how long she could keep the magic active.

To ensure that this trip wasn’t a complete waste, we decided to check out some of the stalls.

The town square was lined with a variety of stalls and it was connected to multiple roads of various sizes. A mansion wall was visible just west of the town square from here.

“The feudal is probably in there. How about we take a quick look.”

As we headed towards the feudal lord’s castle, we passed by a huge building that bore the Hiruku religion’s symbol along the main street.

It was larger than the church in Kesseck and the bell towers built in the four corners of the church were taller than the castle walls.

Many people were entering and leaving the church and I caught sight of a priest wearing clergy-like clothing that I could swear I’ve seen before.

Ariane and I quickly jogged past the place to avoid that group of people and walked into the southwestern section of the old city district where the castle was.

The nearly empty, paved streets were lined with large buildings and the small cobbled waterways contributed to the peaceful atmosphere with the sound of flowing water they produced.

It was a beautiful residential area, to say the least. However, the ambiance was ruined by the man who suddenly blocked our path.

He was rather tall, and coupled with his exotic clothing he looked different from everyone else we've seen so far in this town.

His black hair was twisted into dreadlocks and was complimented by a stubbly beard. A large tattoo could be seen peeking out from beneath his clothing.

The man had his lecherous eyes on Ariane, and it was clear from his unsteady walk and red cheeks that he was drunk.

“Hehehe, hey there pretty lady! You got a fine body don ‘cha? How ‘bout you keep me a little company.”

His appearance and manner of speech made him out to be a mere thug, but the clothes he wore seemed well made. Could he be a noble or one of their vassals maybe?

Even though he was wearing loose fitting pants he couldn't completely hide the bulge that had undoubtedly] drawn him to Ariane.

“Don't approach me.”

Ariane scowled at the man as she fanned away the smell of liquor that clung to him. However, the man paid no heed to her attitude and only proceeded to pursue her more forcefully.

“Hehe, A feisty one~ I like those too. How about we go get ourselves some good liquor!?”

When the man tried to wrap his arm around Ariane I grabbed it before she could knock it away and twisted it behind his back.

“AAAAH!! What are you doing bastard!? Do you know who I am!?”

“Sober up next time you try to hit on women.”

Spit flew everywhere as the man shouted and desperately struggled to free himself. Because I could snap bones by applying too much pressure in my holds, I tried to restrain him without using too much force, unfortunately, the drunkard continued to recklessly flail about.

The guards would immediately be summoned when commotion came up in the center of town.

“Hey, cut it out!”

“Koha!?”

When I lightly hit the man in the stomach he went stiff for a moment before vomiting and passing out on the spot.

I felt a little bit of relief that he hadn't coughed up blood and guts.

“Hum~, he finally quieted down.....”

I shrugged in relief before taking a quick look around.

“.....I guess I owe you one, thanks Arc. Well, what now?”

“Kyun? Kyun!”

Ariane asked that while looking down at the passed out man.

The man was laying in his own vomit with his eyes rolled over. Probably interested in his unique hairstyle, Ponta approached the man and started playing with one of the dreadlocks.

“Don't touch that nasty thing.”

Ariane shrieked as she picked Ponta up and moved away from the unconscious man.

“Ky~un~.....”

Apparently Ponta wanted to play with the dreadlocks some more.

Since the man was dressed in good attire, we would only court trouble if we stayed here, so it'd be for best if we left.

“We should leave before more trouble drops into our laps.”

“You're right.”

Ariane immediately agreed with my suggestion and we left the area, leaving the man in a pool of his own vomit.

Chapter 22: 「Leibnitz Incident」 Part 2

That evening, as the sky reddened with the setting sun and people went about their business, Ariane and I were waiting in the room we had rented.

I was sitting in the corner of the room waiting for time to pass.

Ariane was laying on top of the bed playing with Ponta.

When Chiome finally entered the room, she locked the door before removing her large hat to reveal her cat ears and looked around.

When she finished looking, Chiome turned to Ariane and me and asked about the results of our intelligence gathering attempt.

“How did it go?”

Ariane and I exchanged a silent look at her question.

“We weren’t able to find any useful information. Ariane and I got entangled with a drunkard in the middle of our investigation.”

Chiome’s cat ears twitched when I shrugged my shoulders and answered her. Though her expression didn’t change, her ears give away her true feelings.

It’s just a guess but her ears fidgeting probably meant she was happy about something. Since my parents owned a cat I learned how to read their moods, thought it’d be easier to do if her tail was out.

The fact that she was so happy to hear about Ariane’s and my failure probably meant that she managed to acquire some useful information. Since Chiome was trying to rush our mission, any contribution she made could only raise her standings with us.

Ariane didn’t seem all that worried about Chiome’s behavior. However, I did notice that Ariane tightened her hold on Ponta and quietly petted her head.....

“I managed to acquire a bit of information.”

After making eye-contact with Ariane, Chiome puffed out her chest as

she began to speak.

“Ah, that’s wonderful.”

At my slightly exaggerated praise, the ears on top of Chiome’s head began to twitch as she turned towards me.

I would’ve liked to stroke her under her chin, but she was a cat girl not a cat. Judging from Ariane’s cold stare it’d be better for my health if I didn’t do that.

“Though I don’t know the exact number, people witnessed elves being brought into the feudal lord’s mansion about four months ago. However, three months ago the elves were seen being transported out of the mansion. Since I wasn’t able to sneak into the mansion, I don’t know if any are still being held in there.”

In short, elves had been brought here before, but it’s unknown if there were any left.

If the content of the sale contracts were accurate, five people should have been brought here. It was unclear how many of them had been sent away or how many were still imprisoned.

While thinking about all those things I turned toward Ariane for her opinion.

“If even a single of my brethren remain, we will rescue them.”

Ariane’s golden eyes were looking straight ahead as she resolutely announced her decision. I nodded at her expected answer before asking about our next step in our plan.

“When should we infiltrate the mansion then?”

“The quicker the better, right? How about tonight?”

When Ariane man held up a fist while declaring her intentions, Chiome quickly advised against the rash call to actions.

“Please wait. We still don’t know how many elves even remain in the mansion, we need to complete a full investigation. If we infiltrate now, we’d have to search the entire thing!!”

Ariane's eyebrow raised at Chiome's advice before asking her a difficult question.

"If we do as you say, wouldn't the risk of our current location and agenda be revealed to those we're working against?"

"..... Yes, that's why I only want you to wait five days."

It would be a tremendous task to gather the information we needed alone. For her to set a five-day limit just goes to show how confident she was in her own skills.

However, I still had one concern.

"Chiome we're in the middle of the Hiruku religion's territory, I doubt that we can stay hidden here for five days."

Chiome's ears drooped and she frowned when I voiced my concern.

The followers of the Hiruku religion had enough clout to build impressive churches throughout this country. Chiome was an expert in espionage, but Ariane and I stood out everywhere we went and it would be quite difficult to remain hidden for an extended amount of time.

To begin with, this wasn't a proper hideout just an ordinary inn. We could forget about rescuing the people held in the castle if Ariane and I were reported by those blindly following that religion.

Chiome listened to our opinion with a worried expression before sighing and setting another date for the infiltration.

"Then let's move the operation to tomorrow night. I heard that the third company is being dispatched from the nearby fort to Katsseck tomorrow morning. Because the fort is on a road adjacent to the castle, there will be less reinforcements to call upon if we're discovered."

Ariane seemed to have accepted Chiome's reasoning and nodded in response.

With the information Chiome had gathered, we began making our preparations.

Ariane and I would be the ones in charge of the infiltration while

Chiome would be stationed near the fort and offer support if we're discovered.

The next day, Chiome went out to do a final preliminary investigation, and Ariane and I decided to stay in the inn to avoid the fallout from that drunken officer incident. He may have been drunk enough to forget about us, but it's better to avoid unnecessary trouble.

That evening the weather had worsened, with low hanging, thick clouds covering the sky.

Normally, people trying to break into places would welcome bad weather since it blocked the moonlight, but **【Dimensional Step】** was supposed to play a major role in this infiltration and the effectiveness of the spell decreased along with visibility.

However, those were only my circumstances, since the darkness would be convenient for Chiome while she watched the fort.

As the veil of night blanketed the sky behind the gloomy clouds, Ariane and I left the inn to meet with Chiome to complete our preparations.

Even if I called it preparations, we only decided on a location to meet up with each other and went over the method of creating a disturbance at the fort if needed.

We parted with Chiome around midnight and made our way towards the Feudal lord's castle from the southwestern road.

We wanted to avoid the fort in the west and the church in the northwest, so we traveled the scenic route, guided by the residential walls that were visible from the alleyways we traveled.

At the end of the main road, there was a moat surrounding the mansion and I could see the occasional guard walking around.

It was already starting to drizzle and the surrounding area was darkening even further. As I looked for a place to transfer to I found a section on top of the nearest wall that was barely visible thanks to a lit bonfire.

However, the transfer inside the wall would be considerably more difficult after that one. The darkness was probably thicker thanks to the wall's shadow, limiting our possible transfer locations. At least we'd be able to make it back on top of the wall no matter how dark it became.

This first transfer in would be crucial.

"You ready?"

When I looked back and asked her that question, Ariane placed her hand on my shoulder and nodded.

“【Dimensional Step】”

When I invoked the magic me, Ariane and Ponta, who was wrapped around my neck, were instantly transferred from the alleyway to the top of the wall.

Ariane surveyed the area as soon as we transferred locations. As a dark elf, she was gifted with night vision which was perfect for seeking out enemies. The guards on the wall usually carried a torch with them, so she was actually on lookout in case something unexpected happened.

I could barely make out the shadow of the opposing walls even when I squinted and was also having trouble finding a location to transfer to.

There was a large building near the western wall, in shape of a \sqsupset symbol, with a large garden in front of it.

The garden was the darkest area with the only light source being the occasional torch flicker from passing guards.

In order to rescue the imprisoned elves, we would need to sneak into the main building in the back. However, there were several guards standing within the light that was leaking from inside that building.

It was a considerable distance to cover from the top of this wall and the shrubbery prevented me from grasping the number of guards and their patterns.

It was impossible to go to the main building directly, so the most reliable plan would be to transfer to the wing close to the southern wall

and then find a way into the main building.

While I was arranging my thoughts, Ariane suddenly tapped me on the shoulder.

When I glanced at her, she held up two fingers and repeatedly gestured to the left.

Two guards were approaching from our left. We couldn't stay here any longer.

I nodded, then invoked the transfer magic again.

The scenery instantaneously changed from atop the wall to the back of the small south wing. Even though I said it was small, it was still larger than the houses of the general public.

The two story tall mansion had a mosaic pattern built into it through the use of differently colored bricks, and the lights that illuminated the building gave the place a certain charm.

We clung to the wall, next to a large rectangular window which we could see into. Magic tools were set at regular distances along the hallway that we could see into, and the light they produced allowed us to see that the hall's floor was covered by red carpet.

While the furnishings were quite elegant there was no one in sight. There was also fewer guards here compared to the main building and it was so quiet I could hear the bugs chirping in a nearby bush.

While crouching beside the mansion, we moved to the edge of the south wing and took a peek at the main entrance and courtyard. Two guards were standing watch in front of the entrance, and several guards were patrolling the courtyard and multiple guards could be seen in the back of the main building.

As predicted, even though there were a few places we could hide in the courtyard, the encompassing darkness restricted our movements.

Since I couldn't find a way to transfer into the main building unseen we'd have to transfer back to the top of the wall and search for another

point of entry.

When I told Ariane she suggested that we search this wing of the mansion first.

“If we search an area where there aren’t many guards, isn’t it likely that we won’t find anything?”

I decided to give her my opinion of the matter.

“We currently don’t know how many people there are or where they are, isn’t it better to search the locations where we’re less likely to get caught first?”

She made a good point, this was a large mansion and it made sense to search where we were least likely to get discovered.

“Alright, lets search this place first.”

I peeked into one of the wing’s windows to confirm that no shadows were moving around and then used **【Dimensional Step】** to slip inside.

“I can barely detect anyone on the first floor..... something’s off.”

Ariane muttered as her ears twitched about while she listened for any movement in the area.

“I’d be convenient if no one was here. Let’s check this place out first, then the main building, and west wing last.”

I turned the knob of a nearby door and checked inside.

There was no light inside and what little seeped in from the entrance revealed a dusty room. The room hadn’t been this way for long since the dust was only lightly covering the furniture.

Normally dozens of servants would maintain a place like this, so this was something that couldn’t be ignored.

If the feudal lord’s economic situation wasn’t as good as it appeared to be, I suppose it is possible that he couldn’t afford to properly staff this place.

Ariane took a look inside the room before silently shaking her head.

Apparently, there was nothing of interest here.

We proceeded to search the rooms one by one with only the hallway lights as a guide. Before long we came to the corridor that connected to the main building.

There was only a set of double-doors at the end of the hallway that connected to the main building.

At Ariane's beckoning, I invoked **【Dimensional Step】** to silently move in front of the doors. The doors made a slight creaking sound as Ariane gently opened them.

We found ourselves in a large ballroom.

There was an expensive chandelier hanging in the center of the dome-shaped ceiling. The polished stone floor was lined with elaborate pillars, that had windows located between each pillar that made the room seem like a solarium.

However, there was a lack of light in this ballroom due to the bad weather preventing the moonlight from passing through the windows.

As result of the lack of visibility, it seemed as if I was staring into an abyss.

When I turned toward the night vision possessing Ariane, I saw her unsteadily walking into the abyss as if something was drawing her in.

"Ariane-dono?"

I called out to her in a low voice but she didn't react at all. As I debated over whether or not to call out to her again, I finally noticed something.

There was something strange floating over her head.

It was a fifteen centimeters tall black creature that was difficult to distinguish from the surrounding darkness. The creature looked like a small dwarf with two horns on its head, small wings on it's back, and a tail. When the creature noticed my gaze, it's red eye popped open and it let out a strange cry.

"Gekyu!?"

No matter how you look at it the thing was unnatural, so I didn't even hesitate to swat the devilish thing out of the sky.

“Jisuto!!”

After my chop knocked the strange devil to the ground the sound of something shattering was heard.

“Wh-What?”

When the devil hit the floor Ariane snapped out of her stupor and looked around in confusion.

“Ariane-dono, are you alright?”

“Sorry, my mind just drifted for a moment.....”

Ariane shook her head as she tried to make sense of what happened.

“Maybe that fellow is to blame?”

Her eyes widened when she looked down at where I pointed.

“An Imp!? What's this thing doing here?”

At Ariane's outburst, I decide to examine the thing on the floor. There were similar looking monsters called imps in the game, but they weren't as small as this one.

Though now that I thought about it, if the game's Imps were only fifteen centimeters tall, it would have been hard to target them.

“Imps possess a hypnotic ability, right?”

Ariane looked back down at the Imp before confirming the information about the monster from the game.

“Normally they only appear in dark caves densely packed with miasma.....”

Ariane's utterance reserved a reply from a someone in hiding deeper in the ballroom.

“It's my pet. Yet you did something so inhuman to it.....”

Ariane and I glance in the direction the voice originated from while

drawing our weapons and preparing to fight.

A single man stepped out of the darkness.

It was a man I recognized. He was the drunkard who had tried to wrap himself around Ariane yesterday.

Turned out he was connected to the feudal lord.

The tall man with the dreadlocks and stubby beard started to smile as he looked the two of us over. He then squinted a little.

“Ho, you bastards..... you’re the ones I met in the city.....”

Chapter 23: 「Leibnitz Incident」 Part 3

Note: Holy Thunder Sword => Sword of Holy Thunder

Shield of Tituse => Teutates' Holy Shield apparently Arc's gear is based on Celtic gods

*

Apparently, he managed to remember us despite his drunkenness.

“You are the bastards I met outside the castle! Who the hell are you? Western spies?”

The stranger we met yesterday couldn't hide his excitement as he talked, even if he wanted to.

“We don't need to talk with you.”

Ariane offered that reply as she drew her sword.

“Hehehe, I suppose I have to repay you for last time!?”

The man was carrying a sword on his waist, but he didn't even try to draw it as he licked his lips, ogling Ariane.

“How about you serve me with those breasts once that helmet head behind you is dead?”

There was a lecherous smile on the man's face as he drew his sword and waved it around in an exaggerated fashion.

Along with his movements, two white beasts simultaneously leaped to the ground floor from the ballroom's balcony. The two beast were large, two-meter long wolves with slightly phosphorescent tails that we had last encountered at the base of the Annette mountain range. They were troublesome monsters to deal with due to their ability to create illusions of themselves that confused their targets.

However, there were dull colored shackles around the forepaws of the two in front of us.

“Haunting Wolves!?”

Ariane's and my shouts echoed simultaneously through the area.

As if they were waiting for that signal, the two beasts lowered their stances before pouncing at me with their fangs bared.

I immediately spun around to block one of the beasts with the shield on my back and clotheslined the other one.

I heard a dull sound as one of the Haunting Wolves was sent flying with a groan. My quick counterattack seems to have resulted in a critical hit.

"Huh!? So you're not just a decoration? Then how about this!?"

The man was momentarily surprised at my unexpected actions before he resumed his laughter and hand waves.

A group of two-meter tall Ogres were the next monsters to step out of the dark abyss. Unlike the ogres we faced near the border, these were carrying large metal axes and they had dull colored shackles on their legs just like the Haunting Wolves.

"A monster tamer?"

It wasn't a playable class in the game I played, but it wasn't an unusual support class to find in an RPG.

In general, monster tamers could enthrall a number of monsters to fight for them. Since I never saw a person with a tamed monster in this world, I assumed they didn't exist.

"I've heard rumors of humans in the north using black arts to enslave monsters!"

As I fixed my gaze on the man in front of Ariane, I saw him floating a smile as he positioned the ogres around us.

"Ohh, you're well informed aren'tcha!? My name is Funoba! Rozobanya's monster tamer Funoba Sudo Rozobanya!! What are you gonna do? No matter how good that armor is, how many blows from these ogres can that guy withstand!?"

"How about we find out?"

The man who called himself Funoba started to laugh when I drew my sword, grabbed my shield from my back and I cracked my neck.

At my provocation, the self-proclaimed monster tamer Funoba shot me a death stare.

“Once I kill you, I’m gonna enjoy that big titted woman’s body to my heart’s content.”

Funoba could not contain the anger from his voice as he licked his lips.

Ariane stepped forward and removed her own cloak, not only revealing her face but the contempt she felt towards Funoba.

“Regrettably, I was raised to not keep company with trash like you.”

Ignoring her sarcastic provocation completely, Funoba grabbed his stomach and started laughing harder once he got a good look at her face.

“Hihihi! Is that other bastard an elf too!? Did you come here to rescue the brethren that had been brought here!? Guess you should be congratulated for all of your efforts! But you know, they’re already gone!!”

As Funoba continued to laugh, a cold-blooded smile formed on Ariane’s face.

If this guy was to be believed, then there weren’t any elves left in this place.

“You wanna know what happened to them? Kukuku, were they experimented on with magic tools like the rumors say? What inhuman torture did they undergo? Were mothers separated from their children? How long did the men go before embracing the women? Kikiki.”

The flames of rage quickly consumed Ariane’s face.

“Youuu.....!?”

As Funoba continued to taunt us, flames erupted from Ariane’s sword once she was pushed beyond her breaking point, illuminating the ballroom in a crimson glow.

All Funoba did was lightly whistle and smirk at this spectacle.

“Rest assured, I’m different from the rest of the humans in this country, why would I reject the the holes of a big breasted woman simply because she’s an elf? Kikiki.”

“!!! Shut your mouth this instant!!”

Funoba’s continuous provocations caused her to lunge at the man in a fit of rage. The sword cloaked in flames left a trace in the air as it was easily deflected by Funoba’s blade. Looks like he was adept in swordplay as well.

As if that were the signal they’d been waiting for, the ogres and the remaining Haunting Wolves ignored Ariane and attacked me.

There was hardly any other person in the place apart from Funoba and his monsters, and he had yet to call for help. If we defeated this guy we could potentially escape undetected.

I tightened my hold on the 『Teutates’ Holy Shield』 while backing up to the closest wall. Believing this to be the best strategy for killing these monsters, I raised the 『Sword of Holy Thunder』 in preparation for battle. Fortunately, I’ve fought these types of monsters before and they weren’t much of a threat.

After I repelled a blow from one of the ogres’ heavy axes, I focused on the two Haunting Wolves charging me from the right, I noticed that two Haunting wolves were following behind them, so those in front must have been illusions.

“Perfect!!”

Previously, there were multiple Haunting wolves and they used their numbers to surround me, but there were only two here. Even with their illusions, I should be able to take them all out. As the two approached, I swung the 『Sword of Holy Thunder』.

After a pale blue light left the blade, one illusion dissipated and the floor was covered in the blood of a bisected Haunting Wolf.

I raise my sword again and refocused my attention, now calmer than before. While blocking every blow the ogres tried to deliver, I managed to

slay three of them.

When one of the ogres faltered I quickly bashed it with my shield. A dull metallic sound rang through the area as the ogre was flung against one of the thick pillars and stayed down.

The other Haunting wolf tried to sneak around and attack, but was only greeted with my sword cutting off a piece of its nose. When the wolf stepped back to avoid the danger it bumped into the last of the ogres, allowing me to bisect the both of them.

“This amount of ogres is nothing!”

When I shouted and shook the blood from the 『Sword of Holy Thunder』, both Ariane and Funoba were shocked even as they crossed swords.

“What!? That monster!! Is there a Minotaur inside that armor!?”

“I’m disappointed, it’d take at the very least a dragon to restrain him!”

The both of them said some rather selfish things.

Ariane thinly smiled as she burnt away bits of Funoba’s clothing with each shallow cut she inflicted. Funoba ripped his tattered shirt from his body in anger. His tattoo was emitting a strange light and appeared to rise from his body. Was it a medium for invoking his monster tamer magic?

Though Ariane could be considered a skilled swordswoman, Funoba wasn’t lagging far behind. Watching their sword techniques made me realize just how skilled the two were.

However, my total decimation of Funabo’s tamed monsters seems to have given Ariane the edge.

“Fuck!! I guess I have no choice but to show you bastards my prized possession!”

When the loud sound of some of the ballroom windows shattering reached us, Funoba took the opportunity to distance himself from Ariane as a group of bipedal fishmen dropped in.

Their hunched over bodies were covered in bluish-green scales and they had fish-like limbs. They all carried metal harpoons and let out a strange shout while shaking their dorsal fins.

It was a common aquatic monster seen in the game. Could they have been hiding in that garden pond?

“They’re not wearing fishnet tights……”

“Sahuagin!? These monsters aren’t even as strong as the ogres!”

Despite myself, I remembered the carefree character from a certain anime I watched, as Ariane laughed at Funoba after cutting down a stray Sahuagin.

Just like the ogres before them, I used the 『Sword of Holy Thunder』 to cut down the Sahuagin that grouped up on me.

“Hahaha! They’re here to stop you from escaping!! Soon my special pet will arrive! Then it’ll be the end of the line for you bastards!!”

What the Sahuagin lacked in strength, they more than made up for with numbers.

Funoba’s laughter and the Sahuagin’s cries echoed through the ballroom when screams and a roar could be heard from outside the castle. The vibrations that accompanied the sound of thuds caused the entire castle to shake.

“What!?” “What’s that?”

“You may have the strength to cut through ogres, but can you take on this guy!?”

Funoba triumphantly smiled when he said that. The thuds and the vibrations gradually became bigger as something large approached.

The idea of him actually possessing a dragon suddenly crossed my mind.

Ariane only glanced at what was causing the uproar outside before she weaved through the Sahuagin in an attempt to reach Funoba. His perceived victory had let him become careless

『—Infernal Flame, reduce all that you consume to ashes—』

A pale flame, whose heat was incomparable to anything before, engulfed Ariane's sword. With each of her swings, the Sahuagin that protected Funoba were set ablaze by the deadly flame.

“Shit!”

Judging that he couldn't take that attack directly, Funoba tried to retreat further behind his Sahuagin shields, but Ariane was one step ahead.

The wall of Sahuagin was set ablaze like a bunch of tissue paper the moment Ariane's sword connected, allowing her to quickly catch up with Funoba.

“You bitch!!!”

Funoba screamed profanities at Ariane as their swords clashed. Though he managed to block her attack, the pale flames wrapped over Funoba like a snake and mercilessly consumed his body.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!?”

Funoba's death wail echoed through the ballroom as the huge column of flame consumed the remaining Sahuagin and scorched the ceiling. The fire quickly spread over the entire ballroom ceiling before it was extinguished.

Ariane stuck her sword into the stone floor as she gasped for air.

The Sahuagin that had managed to avoid the flame quickly made their escape by jumping out of the broken windows. The few ogres that managed to survive followed suit.

“Ariane-dono, are you alright!?”

When I rushed to the panting Ariane's side, she held up a hand to stop me and even floated a small smile.

“I'm alright, I just used a little too much mana.....”

The Sahuagin that had been caught in the blaze had been completely reduced to scorch marks on the ground. That was quite a powerful magic.

From where I was standing I could see that Funoba's body had been completely turned into charcoal and collapsed in on itself.

"Can you stand?"

"Thanks, Arc"

I sheathed my sword and helped Ariane up. Ponta suddenly unwrapped herself from my neck, leaped to my head and let out a cry, just before a deafening roar and shock ran through the entire building. The shock was so great that the chandelier fell to the stone floor and shattered into pieces.

I covered Ariane with my body to protect her from the flying glass shards.

"What was that!?"

Ariane frantically looked around before grabbing her sword and jumping out a broken window. Not knowing what to do I followed her lead.

There was a garden and pond outside the ballroom with the castle wall not far off. Some of the guards atop the wall were raising a clamor as they looked towards something just beyond the wall.

However, they were too distracted by something else to notice us.

"Arc! There!"

Ariane pointed out a corner of the castle's roof where we could get a look at what was going on. I invoked **【Dimensional Step】** to transfer to that location.

What we saw were a number of giant snakes lifting their heads up as they flicked their tongues. If the snakes were held straight up, they would measure about ten meters. When the five snakeheads attacked some nearby guards, I could see that they were all connected to one body.

The body the five snakes were attached to was a huge quadruped, it had been bending its neck over the city wall until the main body managed to smash through it.

“Hydra.....”

Ariane muttered that beast’s name as her gaze fixed in on the overwhelmingly huge monster.

Though it could differ from those I know, the Hydras in the game were high-level monsters with water magic resistance and high-level regenerative abilities. While mostly unaware of a Hydra’s standings in this world, it was clear from the castle guards’ panic that it was a monster too menacing and overwhelming for humans to deal with.

With every step, the monster would mercilessly crush anything in its path.

A pressurized stream of water was shot out from one of the head, and it was strong enough to cut into the ground in a straight line, even decimating a section of the castle wall in its path.

Screams rose from the city as the streams even managed to reach there.

Without a doubt, this thing was what had been Funoba’s trump card.

With Funoba no longer here to control it, the Hydra was going on an indiscriminate rampage. If a powerful monster made its way into the city beyond the mansion even if it was somehow defeated, the city would most likely be reduced to a pile of rubble in the process.

“What should we do, Ariane-dono!?”

“This is a hopeless situation that has nothing to do with us, right!? Or do you have a way of defeating that thing?”

“Nuu.....”

I could think of a few ways to defeat it, but...

If I confront such a huge monstrosity and won, I would no longer be able to remain out of sight since such a feat was bound to attract attention. But, this thing would become a problem if left alone.

The suffering that would surely befall the citizens caused me to hesitate in turning a blind eye to this situation.

The leadership of the castle guards had already broken down and they were simply trying to escape. It was only a matter of time before the Hydra entered the city.

There was no helping it, I'll stand out in a slightly different fashion and divert the Hydra's attention here so it could be slain.

"I'll settle this in five minutes!"

I declared that while holding my hands out in front of me.

A huge magic formation appeared on the ground below us and started to emit a dazzling red glow that illuminated the area.

This is the first time I used something like this since I came to this world, but there was no sign of any problems. As the skill completed its activation, I was confident that I could deal with this problem without standing out.

"Come forth, 【Ifrit】!!"

A huge torrent of flame rose towards the sky from the large magic formation when I spoke. As the rain started to disperse the flames, a large shadow started to appear as a mighty roar echoed throughout the area.

Once the flames completely died out, a five meter tall demon was left in its place.

Two large black horns protruded from its head and a mane composed of fire surrounded its face. Its upper body was covered in red, armor-like scales and it stood on two legs that appeared to be a mix between a human's' and an ox's.

Completing its terrifying visage was an open mouth filled with large fangs that exhaled fire.

"!? Wa-Wait Arc! What is that thing!?"

Ariane glared at me and demanded an explanation for the phenomenon that just played out in front of her.

It was one of the skills from the 『Summoner』 class I had obtained. As the name suggested, it was a class that allowed me to summon a support

beast for a limited amount of time. Basically, the summoned beast would attack anyone that I marked as a target. Though it was impossible to give it detailed instructions, it was rather effective in exterminating enemies.

『Ifrit』 was a summoned beast that you received early on after acquiring the summoner class, so it only possessed high physical attack power and one fire attribute magic attack.

However, since the strength of a summoned beast scaled with the mana pool of the summoner, mine shouldn't be inferior to a high-level monster.

As this was Ariane's first time seeing summoner magic or a summoned beast she naturally had a lot of questions about it, but I was at a loss for words as how to explain it.

“Eh~, it's a creature I called forth from another world, I guess?”

Avoiding eye-contact with Ariane, who was still unconvinced after I gave her my answer, I paid attention to the rampaging Hydra instead.

All five of the Hydra's heads were focused on the intruding 『Ifrit』 that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

As if instinctively knowing its target, 『Ifrit』 roared again before baring both of its clawed hands and leaping into the air.

Two of the snake heads opened their mouths wide and fired off the same beam attack from before.

『Ifrit』 was easily able to dodge the intersecting beams as they cut through the ground. Once it reached one of the hydra's heads, it grasped onto the monster's neck and used its flaming claws to tear it off.

“Gishaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!”

The Hydra cried out in anger before it withdrew the burnt remains of its neck. However, 『Ifrit』 didn't give the Hydra room to breathe, jumping over its heads and grabbing its tail.

One of the hydra's heads tried to bite 『Ifrit』, but the fangs couldn't pierce the armor-like red scales.

『Ifrit』 ignored the hydra's bite attempt and gave a courageous shout as

it began turning the beast around. The bulky body of the Hydra began to rise off the ground as the rotation speed increased.

Everything that the spinning hydra came into contact with was instantly destroyed. The guards were now even more desperate in their attempt to escape the castle.

The 『Ifrit』 I summoned in the game never had such a move-set though.....

“Ho-Hold on! That! Do something about that thing!!”

“Sorry. It won’t disappear until five minutes have passed.....”

I didn’t plan to start a monster brawl in the city. As I was worrying about the damage from the 『Ifrit』 vs. Hydra fight spreading into the city, a familiar voice called out to us.

“Arc-dono! Ariane-dono! You’re both safe!?”

When I looked back, I saw Chiome standing behind me in full ninja garb.

“We’re not having any problems. How are things on your end?”

“I didn’t have any problems either. However, a Hydra appeared from the fort. Its movements became disorderly for a brief moment before it proceeded to break through the city wall and started destroying the feudal lord’s mansion.”

Chiome gave us a brief explanation before she turned towards the 『Ifrit』 while it continued its battle.



“By the way, what in the world is that fire demon?”

Unfortunately, the situation changed before I could answer.

The 『Ifrit』 released its hold on the hydra’s tail. The bulky hydra was sent flying by the momentum, and then it bounced off the wall like a rubber ball, just vanishing beyond.

A large boom outside of the property that was accompanied by the the sound of something collapsing and a bell ringing as a magnificent dust cloud rose up nearby.

The 『Ifrit』 leaped into the sky as it chased after the Hydra.

This was bad.

“We’re going after the Hydra and 『Ifrit』! Hold on!”

At my order, Chiome and Ariane immediately placed their hands on my shoulder. I ran by eye over the wall until I found a place that hadn’t collapsed yet

When I invoked **【Dimensional Step】**, our surroundings instantly changed.

There weren’t any guards left. When I surveyed the city from the wall, I saw that the Hydra had crashed into one of the Hiruku church’s bell towers, and partially destroyed the main entrance.

Three of the Hydra’s heads rose from the wreckage of the church and let out an intimidating cry towards the sky. It was looking at the 『Ifrit』 that was slowly closing in on it from above.

I could hear screams from the surrounding buildings as the inhabitants fled the area.

When the 『Ifrit』 gave another mighty roar, its fire mane became white hot and spread over its entire body as it fell towards the Hydra like a meteor.

The three snake heads widely opened their mouths and fired pressurized water attacks at the flaming beast rushing towards it.

The collision of the meteor and white streams generated a large smoke screen that encompassed the whole area. Then something that sounded like a bomb going off created an explosion that blew the smoke away.

The 『Ifrit』 leaped into the sky while looking down at the remains of the church before it disappeared as if it had been a mere illusion.

“This..... has become quite a serious incident hadn’t it?”

Ariane, Chiome, and I were left staring at the scene in silence.

The smell of burnt meat drifted up from the smoldering pile of rubble that had once been a church. Without the roaring from before, the terrified screams of the citizens could be clearly heard.

“..... Well, the Hydra has been defeated.”

“Kyun Kyun!”

While I sighed and pretended to wipe my forehead, Ponta sensed that the danger had passed and moved to my head again.

Ariane immediately took Ponta from atop my head and tightly held her against her chest.

“Yeah, so let’s get away from this dangerous place.”

“Kyun?”

Ariane’s flat voice caused Ponta to look up at her in confusion.

“Wh-What should we do now.....?”

It was Chiome, with her half closed eye, that broke the awkward silence.

Ariane and I shared a single look.

“Let’s return to Raratoia.....”

“Let’s return to Raratoia.....”

The two of us sighed when we simultaneously made the same suggestion.

From now on, let’s be prudent with summoning magic. I made that decision as I stared down at the destruction before looking towards the heavens.

Even the heavy rain, that had been pouring since midnight, couldn’t drown out the pandemonium that had sprung up.

Epilogue

Raratoia, a certain elven village in the Great Canada Forest.

The village elder's residence was the fusion of a living tree and a mansion.

Just beyond the mansion's entrances was a large atrium that was surrounded by pillars that connected to the third floor of the building. From this floor, we could see multiple doors that lined the halls.

There were stairs on both sides of the atrium that led to the second floor. On the second floor, there was a large dining room that connected to the kitchen area.

Instead of her husband Dylan, Glenys was sitting at the head of the large wooden table in the dining room.

She was Ariane's mother and she had the same lilac skin and snow-white hair as her daughter, except that her hair was put up in braids that reached her shoulder.

Ariane was sitting opposite to her mother while Chiome and I were on each of the table's other sides respectively. As for Ponta, she was happily shaking her puffy tail under the table while being adsorbed in the apricot-like fruit Glenys had given her.

"I'm sorry for the unexpected visit."

Chiome was the one that broke the silence.

She even went as far as to lower her head in apology, thus revealing her downcast cat ears.

However, Glenys simply chuckled and waved Chiome's formal apology away.

"It's alright, Arc can directly enter the village with his magic after all.'

After the incident in the Holy Leburan Empire, I invoked my long-distance transfer magic **【Transfer Gate】** to transfer us right in front of the elder's mansion.

There was no need for Chiome to apologize in the first place since it was my fault bringing her here when I knew that the elves were wary of outsiders.

So I lowered my head and offered my own apology.

“Sorry, Glenys-dono. I’ll avoid doing this in the future.”

“I’d appreciate that, but considering that the visitor in question is a person of the Plains and Mountains, I can approve of it. Hehehe, we minority races have to get along don’t we, Chiome-chan?”

The mischievous smile on Glenys’s face as she said that caused Chiome to frown as she nodded in response.

“By the way, is father not home yet?”

After sipping a bit of tea and setting her cup down on the table, Ariane asked her mother that simple question.

“He departed for Maple the same day you left for the empire and he has yet to return. Just in case he calls, I would like to hear your report.”

Glenys turned towards her daughter and answered her.

Ariane agreed to that and proceeded to fill Glenys in on everything that had happened in Leibnitz.

After silently listening to the story, Glenys sighed and placed her gaze on me.

“I have a grasp of the situation. Were you able to find where the five remaining people were sent?”

“No, the city fell into pandemonium after the Hydra appeared. A bit of time will need to pass before the search for clues can resta—”

When I began speaking of future plans, Glenys raised her hand and shook her head in protest.

“There is no need. Arc, the rescue mission will be brought to an end here, your role has been fulfilled.”

When Glenys said that with a slight smile on her face, Ariane quickly

objected to the decision.

“Wait a minute, what are you saying!? Are we just going to abandon the remaining people!?”

Ariane violently stood up and slammed her fist against the table.

Glenys fawned at her daughter’s outburst and shrugged.

“There have been disturbing rumors concerning the eastern empire. It has been deemed too dangerous for any elf to travel inside that country under any circumstances. Please understand that this is an order coming from Maple.”

Whether Glenys’s words managed to soothe her anger or not, Ariane nevertheless returned to her seat.

Though her golden eye were not visible, her tightly balled up fist made it clear how she was feeling.

Chiome glanced back and forth between the two in confusion.

“You also have a new mission. Would you be so kind as to lead Arc to the spring that he was promised for helping in the rescue mission? It would make me happy if you could.”

Ariane rose her head and stared at me as Glenys cheerfully explained the mission.

Ariane’s mission had been to travel the country and rescue the abducted elves. The reason that I accepted the job as an adventurer was to be told the whereabouts of a mystic spring located near the Dragon King’s tree.

According to Dylan, the elder of Raratoia, the spring was rumored to remove all curses. By locating that spring I could potentially undo my apparent curse that reduced my body to a skeleton.

When I focused my attention on Ariane I saw that she was sitting there motionless with a strange look on her face.

I was about to say something to her, but Ariane spoke before I could open my mouth.

“That’s right……. Thank you for all of your help, Arc.”

Ariane’s shoulders drooped as she half closed her eyes and began chuckling.

“It would be fine if you simply told me its location, right?”

Though it would be regrettable to part with her, I didn’t want to trouble her anymore by having her guide me to the spring.

I had that thought in mind when I made my suggestion but Ariane immediately rejected it.

“Arc, if we left someone as directionally challenged as you alone, would you actually reach it?”

I was slightly shocked at her cutting jab.

Glenys, however, clapped her hands together with a smile on her face.

“Then It’s decided! Because the spring is close to the Dragon King’s tree, having an elf with you should open up room for negotiation. Though the location is special, are you prepared for the dangerous journey?”

It sounded like she was talking about quite a troublesome person……. Whatever the case, it’s best to pay attention, lest I miss something important.

“So, where is this place?”

“Just north of Raratoia, it lies between the Wind Dragon mountains, Ice Dragon mountains, and the Fire Dragon mountain Range.”

When Glenys answered my question, the mostly silent Chiome practically leapt out of her seat, with her normally emotionless face in a state of shock as she stared at Glenys.

“Glenys-dono! You know how to enter that place!?”

Most likely being carried along by the flow of the conversation, Glenys answered her.

“Y-Yes. The Wind Dragon mountains are home to a large number of wind dragons, thus its name. It is separated from the Fire Dragon

Mountain Range by a large valley, which is only accessible by a cavern located at the base of the mountain.”

“That place! May I accompany you when you go to that place!?”

Chiome turned from Glenys to me and held her hands together in front of her chest as she pleaded.

Ariane’s confusion at Chiome’s behavior was clearly shown on her mystified face.

While puzzled by her behavior myself, I tried asking Chiome the question all three of us were thinking.

“Is there something in that area you’re after?”

“Yes. Arc-dono, do you remember the request I wanted to ask you in Kesseck?”

I nodded in response to that question. If I’m not mistaken she had been searching for me in Kesseck to ask for my help.

“I actually wanted to ask for your help in finding the entrance into the valley between the Ice and Wind Dragon Mountains..... The first head apparently had a hideout in the area, and I wanted to use Arc-done’s transfer magic to find it.”

Glenys looked rather interested in Chiome’s explanation.

Ariane looked towards me as if leaving the decision up to me about how to proceed.

Somehow our travels as a trio would continue for a while longer, and for some reason, I was rather pleased with that.

While trying to contain my joy, I looked down at my own cup of tea and sighed as I realized that I hadn’t taken my helmet off yet.

Placing my helmet on my table, I attempted to take a sip of my tea..... however, Chiome suddenly yelled in astonishment.

“Undead!!?”

Oh..... I forgot that I hadn’t told her about my body yet.....



Along the major highway that connected Olav, the capital of Rhoden Kingdom, to the Rinburuto Archdukedom was the city of Hoban.

Enough tents were pitched to house the three thousand soldiers that were currently encamped near Hoban.

Inside of a tent larger and more remarkable than the others, the country's first prince Sect Rondaro Carunon Rhoden was sitting in an expensive chair as he inattentively listened to the most recent report.

Sect's tall and regal figure, complimented by his light brown hair and eyes, was adorned in a luxurious military uniform. He showed next to no interest in the results of the Haunting Wolves subjugation as he waved away the officer that reported it.

Soon after the officer left the tent, another man entered.

The man's brown hair and mustache, along with the personalized military uniform he was wearing, emanated a strict atmosphere.

He was one of the nation's major generals Setorion De Olsterio.

Before, he was simply one of the country's normal generals, but during a recent incident in the capital he personally killed his own father, Marudoira De Olsterio, and took over his position.

When Setorion silently kneeled before prince Sect, he asked with his eyes for the other people to be removed from the tent.

It was only after prince Sect gestured for the other people to leave that the two of them started talking.

"Is it urgent?"

At Sect's brief question, general Setorion nodded after a quick scan of the area.

"We've received word from lord Tiosera, princess Juliana's corpse was not found among those that have been recovered."

Those words caused prince Sect to stand up and angrily glare at the

general.

“Are they fools!? Didn’t we receive her memento along with Cox’ report!? It has been a few days since then, could her body have been devoured by some of the monsters that inhabit the forest!?”

Cox was the one who had been in charged of the princess’ assassination.

Cox Carlo De Brutus was also the first born and rightful heir to the Brutus Dukedom.

He had personally delivered Juliana’s memento, along with news of the mission’s success.

The prince looked down at general Setorion and wondered if he had been lied to.

“There were traces of monsters feeding on the corpses, but we were still able to identify several bodyguards and the fake bandits. Juliana’s carriage is also missing.....”

General Setorion spoke in a low tone, with his eyes downcast, as he reported what he had learned earlier.

Prince Sect felt so irritated by this turn of event that he had to turn away from the man who simply fulfilled his duties to gnash his teeth.

“Send a message to the capital, and have Cox recount his story again! Have lord Tiosera search the surrounding area again! Things will become troublesome for us if Juliana somehow managed to survive.....”

In response to his order, general Setorion saluted the prince before leaving the tent.

Looking at him departing, prince Sect returned to his seat and began to review his current situation.

“I need to cull the rebellion in Hoban quickly and return to the capital..... It’s like a noose is tightening around my neck.”

The prince looked in the direction of Hoban as he spoke.

He was well aware of the situation there, since he was the one who had supplied the money and weaponry that had fueled the rebellion. The territory was now in a state of chaos and the king's army had been dispatched along with the prince to return order to the land.

Prince Sect continued to talk to himself as he stared off into the distance.



The Holy Leburan Empire, which united the eastern region of the northern continent. The city of Kesseck was located near the southern border.

A mine that dug into the Annette mountain range sat in the backdrop of the city, while the large forest that acted as the border marker with the Great Leburan Empire laid to the west.

Rhoden Kingdom, situated in the south, bordered both the Western and the Eastern Empire. Kesseck was surrounded by a towering city wall that gave it the appearance of a fortress.

A hastily built fort stood just west of the city.

Inside the garrison, there was a single man sitting in a certain room beside a pile of documents

The room's interior was sparsely decorated to maintain appearances. The Holy Leburan Empire's national flag was raised in the back of the room and sitting in front of it was the fort's commander.

Someone knocked on the door before briskly entering the room.

"You called, Commander?"

The man that entered saluted the commander seating at a large desk, who had a wild look in his eyes and a battle-hardened body.

The commander, who had the rank of lieutenant colonel, put a wooden box on the table before responding to the greeting.

"Major, our current mission pivots on the magic tool in this box."

The man with the rank of major straightened his stance at the commander's comment.

"Excuse me!"

The major blurted that as he received the box from the lieutenant colonel and opened it. However, the major frowned when he saw the box's contents.

It was hard to describe.

It was a polished crystal ball that gave off a beautiful luster as its surface reflected the commander's face. However, there was a grotesque orb floating in the center of the crystal ball that appeared to be a green eyeball.

"When you turn the ball in any direction, the eye will be able to detect the level of miasma up ahead. This tool was created by the Magic Institute. The crystal ball should darken in response to the level of miasma."

Upon hearing the commander's explanation, the major turned the weird object in his hand.

"Does it work?"

"Yes, you can safely traverse the western forest....., from what I've heard."。

The commander shrugged as he stood up and walked to the window that faced the forest he had just mentioned.

The major that held the crystal ball in his hand giggled a little when he heard the commander's statement.

This was a nervous reaction to this weird magic tool created by the Magic Institute that was doubted even by his commander.

When the man in question heard the giggle, he turned away from the window.

"However, don't forget that it is only a tool the guys at the Magic Institute made. I'm entrusting the overall success of this mission to you."

The commander stared directly at the major as he said that.

“Yes! I shall take my leave now!”

After returning to the crystal ball to its box, the major saluted the commander before leaving the room with it.

Many soldiers were seen standing in formation in the open field outside the garrison. Behind those soldiers was a group of ogres lined up in a similar formation.

The ogres each had a two-meter tall battle axe strapped to their backs and a dull colored collar around their necks. Behind even them stood a small group of three-meter-tall, bull-headed monsters known as Minotaurs.

It was a strange sight to see monsters and soldiers standing together without incident as the rear entrance of the fort was opened and the company moved out.

Illustrations

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*Skeleton Knight,
going out to
the parallel universe*

只今 異世界へお出掛け申
III

「あーくの癖にじゃま意気なおよー！
わらしじに酒がちぬげならんのおー？」



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