

Chapter 1 - Annihilate the High Orc!

Today is yet another day with the Forest of the Ancient God, spreading out in the Wildinne Region, being shrouded in a thick mist. It's dense enough to make you acutely experience the dampness, so characteristic of this region.

A line of stagecoaches is advancing along the narrow road cutting through the conifer forest with their wheels whirling up the mist. The visibility is almost zero.

The stagecoach I have boarded is in the middle of a three-coach convoy, but even as I strain my eyes I can't see the coach in front nor the one in the back. All my eyes perceive is a white, murky wall as if someone had spilled white paint onto the world.

The gray air clinging to my nape keeps stealing my body's temperature thanks to its cold humidity. Reflexively I raise the collar of my mantle with a shudder, curling up my body.

"How ye like Wildinne?" Mr. Favore, the beastman sitting across from me, chats me up after seeing my reaction to the coldness.

"Compared to the capital, the temperature around here is quite low."

Light chitchat is none of my specialties, but we've got nothing else to do on the coach over the course of the last four days.

"Wafufufu, it ain't just cold. As soon as the sun comes out, damn place gets hot as hell. 'Round this season, it's like summer and winter switch 'round as they please. The borderlands' weather ain't kind on humes. A thick coat worn over a sleeveless shirt seems to be the proper fashion 'round this time." Mr. Favore glances at the other passengers.

Five others besides me are traveling in this coach. The graceful elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Franz. The neatly dressed lady, Mrs. Minera, and her five years old child, Lune. And Mr. Favore, the beastman who's talked to me just now. He's a 'beastman of the grey wolf species' (werewolf), and my hired coordinator as well as bodyguard.

"Well, I've got tis fine, natural fur coat, so I've got less of a problem with it, I'd say," he says, fetching a piece of jerky out of his worn satchel, and biting into it.

A human (hume) like me can't guess a beastman's age, but according to him, he seems to be a "fairly middle-aged guy."

"Nonetheless, this is some amazingly dense mist."

"What, it's goin' to clear up in a whiff. Wildinne's weather is as moody as a woman."

"Really? It's my first time here."

"Going by yer look, ye inexperienced with women 's well, wanugahaha." Mr. Favore breaks into a vulgar laughter.

Going by the feeling of this conversation...he's definitely a "fairly middle-aged guy."

"Well, don't fret, I'll get ye through this with my reputation. Ye just need to follow me obediently, and we'll get yer desired "treasure" within a week. If ye want, I can get ye some women, too."

Mr. Favore takes out a crude knife, heartily cuts off a chunk of jerky, and brings it to his mouth.

The treasure mentioned by him refers to mithril steel. It's a super rare ore with the highest rank as crafting material for enchanted weapons. Of course it's nothing you can easily get your hands on. I've paid a fairly big sum of money to Mr. Favore to secure myself a route to get some of the steel myself.

"Ye, what was yer name again? Umm, Nia..." After chewing several times with his big mouth that contains conspicuous canines, he washes down the meat with the content of a leather bag.

I'm pretty sure it's liquor with a fairly high alcohol degree. If the drink of a beastman who eats his food directly from a knife were to be sweet tea, it'd be a complete let-down.

"Tea. Tea Korpi."

"Oh, that was it. Forgettin' the name of my employer, I gotta admit, that's quite bad of me. Right, Korpi. Korpi's a name tough to remember."

"I feel like you've made the same mistake before, though."

"So, I've heard from yer mother. Something about ye bein' a prodigal magic blacksmith, aight?"

"No, not at all. Those are just the words of my mother. Describing me in such an exaggerated way...I simply received training since childhood." I deny Mr. Favore's question, shaking my head strongly.

It looks like Mum has bragged about me to him before our departure. Doing something so unnecessary...

"I see. I mean, since ye goin' to buy expensive stuff like mithril, you gotta be the child of a good family, no? Yer family rich?"

"Absolutely not. I've got my own circumstances, so I'd be happy if you could somehow keep the expenses as low as possible..."

In fact, it's all over the news how my family is in the middle of going bankrupt. I heard that we were rich several years ago, but nowadays not a single trace of all that money is left. Well, our wealth goes as far as the pillars back home being somewhat thick and luxurious.

"Figures. Ye don't look a rich boy at all."

"Haha...right? As expected."

"How to describe it? Ah, yeah, the skin's gloss of rich folks looks tad more delicious."

"Eh? Looks delicious?"

"Aye. The skin of rich folks got a springiness that wakes the urge in ye to sink yer teeth into it." Mr. Favore exposes his fangs with a smug laugh.

"Eeehh!?"

"Wanufufu, 's just a joke. Humes ain't anythin' I wanna eat. Especially with their tendency to have fat meat." Pointing his knife at me, Mr. Favore laughs loudly, "Wanwahahaha."

To be honest, I don't get what's so funny about it. Or rather, why does he know about the tendency of humes to have fat meat...

It'd be hard to get the joke if it was made by an old hume guy, but if the one making such a joke is a middle-aged beastman, it genuinely becomes impossible to understand the funny part in it. Moreover, it's beyond any hope when dealing with a beastman of the borderland region Wildinne. The Wildinne Region borders with the outlands, an area inhabited by demonic beasts.

—Or in other words, it's a frontier region.

It's a place that's somewhat tough on normal humes. However, for those trying to make a living by killing demonic beasts, it's the perfect place. A suitable habitat for those wishing to rise in the world through the power of their swords. Mr. Favore mentioned that he originally made a living as a demonic beast hunter, too.

"Wanufufufu, wanufufu...so, what was it again? Magic blacksmith or somethin'?"

"Yes...magic blacksmith. Among those, I'm hailing from a family of cortege blacksmiths."

"Cortege?" Mr. Favore is completely puzzled.

Of course I fully understand that it requires a proper explanation.

"Umm, cortege blacksmiths are smiths forging blades mostly used in ceremonies by royal families and clergy, demanding complex magic enchantments and sophisticated ornamental techniques. Traditionally..."

"..."

Mr. Favore licks his own snout.

"As I said, cortege blacksmiths are a type of magic blacksmiths, but unlike with commonly used items, our creations use high grade materials and high level seals. They are ceremonial items requiring a lot of time, effort, and money..."

"Okay, okay, I see, I see."

He's pretty obviously just agreeing there randomly. Mr. Favore devotes himself to his booze while nodding in a rhythm.

"...You're not listening to me at all, are you?"

"That's only natural, no? Look, I'm a beastman, and tis here is booze. It's pretty stupid to bother a drinkin' beastman with annoyin' explanations, aight?" For some reason he proudly shakes his snout lightly, before draining down another gulp of booze.

"Wasn't it you who asked...?"

I don't feel like explaining any further, but delicate and elaborate techniques are demanded of cortege blacksmiths. Those techniques are passed down over many generations in a few families. My family, the Korpi family, has once been the best of the five distinguished families...

But, even if I tried to tell all of this to this old dog, he'd definitely ignore me.

"I don't quite get it, but in any case, it means king's blacksmith's lookin' for mithril in the borderlands, aight?"

"It'd be great if I could agree with my chest swelling in pride, but..."

As a matter of fact, the Korpi family has lost its position as leading cortege blacksmiths, and doesn't produce any of the royal family's arms nowadays. I've been putting efforts into obtaining mithril for the sake of regaining that position, but...

...Even if I were to explain all those circumstances, there's no one here who would lend me an ear!

The old dog is drowning in booze, seemingly having gotten in the tune of getting himself drunk.

"In short, ye got special circumstances. Ain't nothin' unusual."

"Really?"

"All those comin' to Wildinne are burdened with heavier or lighter circumstances. Anyway, I wish ye all the best in tis land." Mr. Favore holds up his leather bag high in the air as if offering it to the gods, and then pours even more of the apparently strong booze into his throat—

"Gefuuhh!" He vomits the same amount of blood as he drunk booze moments ago, and falls flat.

I can't catch up with the situation due to its excessive suddenness.

"...Eh? Ehh!? Mr. Favore!?"

Mr. Favore has slumped forward, face down. A stone axe is very deeply stabbed into his gray, furry back.

What's going on!? Just what has happened here!?

"Kyaaaaaa!"

Next, the scream of a woman. It's Mrs. Minera. While being hugged by her, Lune's eyes are dyed with fear. Ahead of where Lune is looking, a pig demon running on two legs — an orc is quickly getting closer through the thicket at the roadside.

Orcs are known to be an extremely aggressive demon species. They live in packs, and attack humes in groups to pillage. The orc clings to the stagecoach, and crawls up. While gasping roughly, it climbs on the low wooden frame, installed as prevention against falling off.

"Bugurururu." While lifting its face with a threatening growl, it pulls the ax out of Mr. Favore's back, causing dark-red blood to spray out.

"Burugaaaa!"

Once more, the orc swings its ax down on Mr. Favore. Over and over again, it hits his back, shoulders, and head... Mr. Favore's head breaks open like a melon. The ax also strikes his long, well-featured snout, resulting in the snout being almost torn off, only held to the face by a single sheet of skin.

Finally, the orc sinks its teeth into the nape of Mr. Favore who has completely stopped moving by now. Thinking of him as freshly caught food, the orc rips out a chunk of neck flesh by furiously shaking its head, and chews on that piece with fresh blood dripping down its muzzle. The orc crunches on the flesh while shaking its big snout.

Its eyes...look at me. As if it's evaluating whether it should sample me as its next delicacy.

—Bang!

Suddenly the coach sways intensely.

"Buguaah?"

In response to that sway, the orc flies out of the coach. Very likely the coach's wheels have run over a stone or something. Either way, the coach has abruptly come to a halt within the dense mist.

I'm saved...is nothing I can say in this situation. If the coach doesn't get going right away, we'll be attacked and turned into food by the orc right away.

"Driver! Fly the horse! ...Aaahh...ugh!"

The driver has already been captured and turned into food. His right arm has been roughly torn off its shoulder alongside the bone, so he can't whip the horse any longer. Moreover, even the all-important horse has been caught by orcs.

One, two, three...

An orc clings to the thrashing horse's neck with nimble movements you wouldn't expect from its short and stout physique, and stabs its sharp fang into the horse. Another two orcs hold onto the

horse, pulling it to the ground.

"Buguuurraaaaa!"

While threatening each other, the orcs bring down their stone axes, bite into the horse's throat, or beat the horse's head with a fist-sized stone. With a last pitiful neighing, the horse stops moving altogether.

"Uguh, guh!" While feeling sick from watching that spectacle, I return to the center of the coach.

"Excuse me...what...what is happening?" Mrs. Minera tightly embraces her child with her eyes blurred in anxiety.

"I don't have a clue what's what either...a-anyway, making any rash moves is..."

We're in a simple, covered wagon made out of nothing but a cloth canopy and iron braces. There's nothing here to defend ourselves with. However, if a woman recklessly tries to run away with a child in arm, it'd become even more dangerous for her.

Fortunately, the orcs are fighting over the food — the meat that used to be Mr. Favore and the driver — they've already procured. If the guards protecting the coaches in the front and rear use that time to come running...

"Our wagon is in the middle of the file. I'm sure the guards defending the front and back of the convoy are going to rescue us."

"Y-Yeah, you must be right."

"I wonder. It would be great if you're correct."

It's one part of the married couple who gives such an ambiguous reply. He's an elderly man with a magnificent, gray mustache. This composure under these circumstances...that's the experience of many years for you. While combing his prized mustache, the old man gazes at the front.

"Buguuura!"

"Bugaruuuaaa!"

The orcs are kicking something round around between each other. They must be messing around. That iron ball-like object is...the head of a guard!

The orcs are playing soccer with a severed head that still wears its steel helmet. The guards have already lost the battle against the orcs. The guards escorting convoys are professional demonic beast hunters belonging to the guild. If those guards have already been killed off, a fairly high number of orcs, exceeding any estimations, must have attacked us.

"Bugaruuuu!"

The orc, who has kicked up the guard's head, loudly roars out something similar to scorn.

"I guess a pack of orcs has hidden itself within this mist..." The old man watches the tragic scene with a blank face as if it's someone else's problem.

It feels as if he's completely given up on life, as if it was a great life despite all its various troubles... Just when I thought that he's quite calm about all this, I find out that he's already made his peace with this life!

I'm very sorry, but I can't reach that mental state yet. Same applies all the more for Mrs. Minera who's got a small child with her.

—I've got no choice but to struggle to the utmost.

I pick up the short sword I have with me for self-defense. Of course it's my own creation. It uses Damascene steel. Its blade has a 'four-character seal' (Tetragrammaton) of the Wind Spirit Joint Prayer. There are two small slots at its hilt, both filled with a Curse Gem of Gale. While having been made compact to make carrying the sword easier, it boasts an enchanted durability and a sharpness that can withstand genuine battle. With its outstanding handling, it's my prized sword that can be used against demonic beasts, if they're small, but...

I'm rather unskilled at the swordsmanship needed to wield it properly.

I've been educated to become a magic blacksmith ever since I could understand what was going on around me. Therefore, I've got absolutely no clue about swordsmanship, even if I can forge a sword. Normally, I'd love to entrust this to someone who seems capable at swordplay, but...Mr. Favore has sadly passed away. Only a grandpa, a grandma, Mrs. Minera and Lune are left.

A hopeless group of non-combatants... As expected, I've got no choice but to fight myself.

"Fuck, fuuuck! I'll show you! I can do it!"

I get off the coach, which has stopped within the mist, and ready my sword with a wheel in my back. At least I won't need to worry about getting attacked from behind.

Orcish roars can be intermittently heard through the mist in front. It looks like they're still fighting over the food, but they'll likely come back attacking this place very soon.

When are they going to come? From the right? From the left? The hand holding my sword is trembling like a lone leaf in a storm. That trembling travels from my hand to my spine, and then to my knees. The most I can do is keep standing.

Fuck! It's no good, the trembling won't stop! It's very unlikely that I can fight like this. You kidding me!?! The trip affecting the fate of the Korpi suddenly comes to an end after getting attacked by orcs...!?

I won't give up like this...!

I put myself on guard, and frantically observe the shadows squirming within the mist.

...From where? ...When?

"Buugauaaaaaaaaahh!"

—Directly from the front!

An orc face suddenly appears, cutting through the fog. A big muzzle with its fangs bared. It snaps its muzzle shut in front of my nose's tip twice, biting at empty air—

And then it slumps down at my feet, falling to the ground with a thump.