

"Uwaaahh!" I scream out of reflex, surprised by the sudden turn of events.

The orc's head has already disconnected from its body as it flies towards me while screaming. The orc's neck, almost twice as thick as a hume's, still continues to spray out blood from the cleanly cut stump.

"Bugaaooooo!"

The orcs' screams have changed in quality. Their roars shift from voices full of sadistic exhilaration to what feels like wariness and heightened hostility. Of course, all of it should be turned towards the being that lopped off the head of their kin.

"Bogyaaaah!?"

Remarkably loud cries. Voices seemingly tearing through the throats, teeming with grief. The very definition of death screams.

Those cries occur in succession before the misty conifer forest falls back into its usual silence.

...We're saved? Is it over?

What slips out of the dense mist, the one who has rescued us from this nightmare — is an abnormal being. Our savior itself looks just like something out of a nightmare. An old rag as a mantle. A huge sword, no, I guess it's a hatchet, in its right hand. Bluish black blood as it's characteristic of orcs drips from its blade. Its face is hidden by a weird mask in the shape of a horned, animal skull. The right half of the mask is tainted by the blood spurt of an orc. Two holes have been artlessly drilled into the mask...with two bright, crimson eyes peeking out.

...A woman.

Although her face is hidden by the mask, the outfit cladding her body is rather revealing, allowing a clear look at her womanly parts. Two voluptuous breasts bulging, a tight waist, and thighs visible through gaps in her mantle. She has glossy, dark brown skin which you will rarely find in the capital, and her body is well-trained.

The abnormal swordswoman casts a glance at me, and then plants her feet in front of Mrs. Minera who's trembling inside the coach.

"U-Umm, thank you very much. Thanks to you, my son has also survived..."

"....."

Mrs. Minera gives her thanks, but the swordswoman doesn't answer. Despite standing in front of mother and child, the swordswoman's eyes remain fixed on the orc head laying on the ground.

"Pardon, you truly, saved us. My son..."

"Hey, boy, hold this." The swordswoman interrupts Mrs. Minera.

She bends down, grasps the bleeding orc head, and holds it out to Lune who's still clinging to the chest of his mother.

"Kyaaaaaaaaah! What are you doing!?! " Mrs. Minera screams.

"Be quiet. If you don't want to die, then don't provoke the orcs." Her voice betrays youthfulness. Its tone is calm, but carries a faint trace of dignity.

"But, a head all of a sudden is..."

"If you don't want your child to hold it, do it yourself. But, whatever you do, do it quietly." The swordswoman presses her index finger against the bone mask at the place of her mouth.

Somehow I feel like her beautiful voice sticks out like a sore thumb. The sound of her voice, clear like a bell, doesn't mesh with her eerie appearance and odd behavior. I have absolutely no clue just who she might be, but it still doesn't change the fact that she has rescued us...

"Good gracious, I thought that I would die here."

"No doubt. To be honest, I had already resolved myself."

The old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Franz, voice out their relief. Obviously overcome with emotions, they're rejoicing happily.

"You have my heartfelt gratitude, Ms. Guard. For me and granny to be allowed to enjoy our remaining years for a bi... Ms. Guard?"

The swordswoman doesn't listen to Mr. Franz at all. She nimbly whirls around and jumps off the coach. Then she dashes straight towards the shade of a tree, followed by a very powerful slash of her hatchet, aiming at a thicket from above.

"Burruruguuuuuuu!"

The orc, who has lurked in there, leaps out with blood gushing out of its shoulder. It rolls around on the ground while screaming in pain.

"A-Another orc was still hidden over there? You saved us."

"Thank you very much."

The elderly couple bows their heads again. However, the swordswoman doesn't pay any attention to them. She crouches down in front of the fallen orc, and swings her hatchet down once more, stabbing it deeply into the orc's back.

"Bugiiii!"

"I see, so it was still breathing. Carelessness is one's greatest enemies. Let me say it once more, than..."

The swordswoman pulls out the hatchet, and swings it sideways towards the orc's leg next.

"Bugigigiiii!"

The orc's lower right leg is vigorously blown away from its knee.

"...Orcs sure have a strong vitality...Carelessness is..."

"Bugigigiii!"

Immediately following, she also amputates the lower left leg. Having lost both lower legs, the orc writhes around. The swordswoman keeps swinging her hatchet indifferently, cutting off its right arm, and also its left arm.

Now the orc has lost all its limbs—

"Bugiii."

—and yet it's still crawling across the ground restlessly.

"Umm...overdoing it is..."

Mr. Franz's remarks are getting completely ignored. The swordswoman keeps brandishing her hatchet as if doing woodwork.

Back, abdomen, head — uncanny squishing and crunching sounds can be heard as bones get smashed and flesh gets cut. The orc's shoulders burst open, its belly is torn apart, and brain mush splatters into the surroundings.

"...Ugh." Mrs. Minera covers her mouth with a hand as she throws up lightly.

But that's only natural. I mean, honestly, even I'm on the verge of barfing.

At this point the orc is only convulsing faintly. The swordswoman roughly grabs the orc's head, and drags it in our direction. Then she leans the orc's body against the coach's wheel. The limbless orc completely entrusts its body to the wheel, having lost all power.

The swordswoman stands up in front of the orc, whirls her hatchet around, shifting her hold into a backhand grip, and stabs its blade into the area at the top of the orc's head. The big hatchet penetrates through head, neck, and chest, all the way down to the belly.

Shocked by that, the orc's eyeballs jump out of their sockets. But as they remain connected to the brain, they keep dangling around like pendulums.

—The hatchet has penetrated the orc's body vertically. Only its hilt can be seen protruding out at the crown of the head.

"I'm taking that one back." The swordswoman clutches the orc head in Lune's hands, heads over to the hatchet's hilt, and drives the orc head onto the hilt.

Now two orc heads line up vertically, skewered onto the hatchet. The upper face cries tears of blood, whereas the lower face still has its eyeballs suspended from its eye sockets. A perfect overkill. An act only describable as blasphemy towards the gods.



"Ueeehhh!"

I can't hold it back any longer. Unable to suppress what's welling up from within, I vomit next to the coach's wheel.

Why do something like that...?

Although they're demonic beasts, there's no need to kill them while making them suffer so excessively, and on top of that, toy around with their corpses. Is she someone with a completely deranged mind, or some evil heretic...?

Once I lift my face after having spit out everything in my stomach, the masked woman stands right in front of me without me having realized her approach. At close proximity, her mask looks even more ghastly.

Seemingly made out of some monster's skull, the big horns extending at both sides of her mask are covered by thick layers of blood spurts. Would you wipe those off, an eerie gloss would likely become visible beneath.

Her red eyes, dully gleaming within the two holes, are fixed on me. Intimidated by them, I reflexively ready the short sword in my hand.

"That's a nice short sword, you got there." A composed voice, lacking any emotions.

She brings her face close to my short sword, and fixedly stares at its blade.

"The 'enchanted element' (enchantment)...wind, huh? How many does it have?"

It's a completely unexpected question.

"Eh?"

"I'm asking how many enchantments it possesses." The beautiful, cold voice repeats her earlier question.

"Umm...eleven charges of 'Wandering Blade' (Gale)...I think."

"Hoh, a high-quality item. Are you rich?"

The swordswoman definitely doesn't beat about the bush.

"No. I've forged this myself."

"This one? You a blacksmith?"

"Yep, a cortege blacksmith."

"You're quite skilled."

"T-Thanks."

"I have to thank you." The swordswoman says with her usual, indifferent tone, and smoothly snatches the short sword out of my hand. "Yep, just as I thought. It's really a nice short sword. Its balance is great, too."

An astoundingly quick move. Moreover, I have felt almost no strength from it. It was a mysterious sensation as if my short sword suddenly vanished out of my hand...

Wait! Now's not the time to be surprised! My short sword was stolen from me!

"Wait a moment! That's my precious..."

"You carrying it serves no purpose. Even if you die while holding onto it, you won't be able to take it with you to hell."

"Ehh!?"

Leaving aside the question why it's set for me to head straight to hell, her needing my short sword means...

"More of them are going to show up. The pigs are tenacious, after all."

I check my vicinity in panic. There's no sign of the coaches which should be stopped in front and back. It's unfortunate, but I think they've been completely destroyed. I can't even see the corpses of the passengers. In exchange, the thickets further ahead are shaking faintly. Very likely the passengers have been dragged into those bushes. As food.

"Orcs again...no way... Still, why my short sword?"

"That one has run out of curse power. There were too many of them. 『Corpse Eater』 isn't suited for hunting small-fry." The swordswoman glances at the hatchet that's decorated with orc heads.

It seems like that big hatchet is called "Corpse Eater." I'm just a petty magic blacksmith, but even I can tell at a glance that her hatchet is anything but normal. Enchantment: Darkness. Moreover, with an ultra-thick density. It's what you'd commonly call a cursed weapon.

It might be a type that boosts its sharpness through a powerful curse. However, because it has cut through a great number of orcs, its darkness enchantment, or in other words, its curse has run out of power.

"But, that's just a short sword."

In the end, it's no more than a short sword for self-defense. It emphasizes an easy carrying and handling, and isn't catered towards genuine battle against demonic beasts. If you fight many orcs with it, its enchantments will run out quickly, transforming it into an ordinary short sword.

"You don't have anything else, do you? So put some trust into your own sword's balance."

"Believing in its balance to such an extent is..."

"I'm Shea. Shea Kyle. Get your money for the sword from the margrave. You'll likely get whatever you're asking for." With those words, Shea turns on her heels, and runs off like a gale.

In the blink of an eye, she arrives behind the completely destroyed coach that's stopped in front.

"Bogyauuu!"

Only the head of an orc rolls quickly out of the carriage's shadow. Another orc shows up while kicking the rolling head of its kin flying. The new orc is fiercely thundering this way. Its eyes full of rage and dread.

Chasing it, Shea nimbly leaps at it from behind, unleashing a fast sweep with the short sword.

The shrill sound of wind being cut, unique to Gale, echoes. It exceeds the blade's range, loping off the orc's head. The bleeding head is hurled up high into the air. It's such a flashy way of being blown away that it feels ridiculous instead, but this is the peculiar phenomenon created by Gale's space distortion.

The orc's head draws a clean arc, passing over my head.

"Hoh, sure let it fly nicely," Shea mutters while following the parabola with her eyes.

"T-Thanks..."

She's certainly right. This phenomenon is only possible because the sword has wind enchantments properly applied to it. The head wouldn't have been loped off so cleanly if the enchantment had been added sloppily. Certainly, she's correct about that, but still... It's my first time to receive praise for the flight path of a head. To be honest, I've got no clue how I should react to that.

"Now's not the time to act all bashful. Look."

At the end of Shea's line of sight I can see fresh orc reinforcements. One, two, three, five...they keep increasing.

Probably wary of Shea's strength, they don't try coming closer, but their numbers are growing on the road ahead. Moreover, situated in the back of the orc group stands a remarkably big orc. Its frame is huge enough that you can clearly identify it despite it standing at the very back. Far from being just one head bigger than the other orcs, its height towers twice as high. Very likely it weighs four or five times more than any ordinary orc...

"A high orc, huh? Tsk, how unlucky." Shea spits out while keeping her tone as dispassionate as usual.

—High Orc. It's a very rare, mutated orc variant. It boasts an abnormal appetite, an abnormal growth rate, and above all, an abnormal aggressiveness.

In other words...

"Unlucky is a complete understatement. It's the worst." Mr. Franz looks up towards the sky.

"Leaving us two old people aside, it sure is a pity for the young men and women here."

The two have completely concluded with their lives.

"Ms. Guard, don't try the impossible. Even if it's just yourself..."

However, Shea doesn't react to their words at all. With a quick shake of her head, she checks the orcs' movements, getting ready for her next attack.

I can't feel the slightest resignation or sadness from her state. However, the Gale contained in my short sword contains another ten charges. Once those run out, it'll revert to a simple lump of steel.

"You okay? The available Gales..."

"I know."

"Even if you can somehow handle the normal orcs with it, that sword lacks firepower to take on a high orc!"

Enchanted weapons are the sole means for humes to fight demonic beasts. They are the sole way of resistance for the frail humes who don't have big fangs, sharp claws, wings to fly, or scales to defend themselves. No matter how skilled a swordswoman she might be, she won't be able to fight against demonic beasts with a short sword not boosted by mana. Even if she cuts a high orc with a plain short sword, she'll only be able to add a few, small cuts. As a swordswoman in the borderlands she should understand as much.

"It's my job to hunt those pigs. You guys, hide yourself behind the coach."

Shea plunges into the swarm of orcs without any hesitation. Spotting her, an orc swoops down on her. Shea jumps lightly, exposing her lean thighs as her mantle turns over.

The orc's stone ax cuts through empty space as Shea has already circled around into its back. She drives the short sword into its head, activating the Gale enchantment. The orc is cleanly cut in two halves, starting from the head.

—Nine charges left.