

## **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!"

"Bugaruuuuuu!"

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?

"Buugauaaaaaaahh!"

—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.

"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.

"Bugaaoooo!"

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.

"Buggyaaaah!?"

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 machete, 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 machete, 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 machete 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 machete, and swings it sideways towards the orc's leg next.

"Bugigiiii!"

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

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

"Bugigiiii!"

Immediately following, she also amputates the lower left leg. Having lost both lower legs, the orc writhes around. The swordswoman keeps swinging her machete 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 machete 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 machete 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 machete 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 machete 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 machete's hilt, and drives the orc head onto the hilt.

Now two orc heads line up vertically, skewered onto the machete. 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 machete that's decorated with orc heads.

It seems like that big machete is called "Corpse Eater." I'm just a petty magic blacksmith, but even I can tell at a glance that her machete 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.

Passing through the left and right body halves of the orc, she jumps while firing a sharp thrust at a new chest. She activates Gale, turning her attack into a wind thrust. The Gale keeps going, drilling a hole into the chest of an orc standing behind the first target.

—Eight charges left.

If those charges are used up, the enchantment will stop working, turning the short sword into an ordinary weapon. Once that happens, Shea won't be able to fight on. Isn't there some other weapon...?

I search the corpse of Mr. Favore.

"Oh, found it!"

I pick up the knife which Mr. Favore's corpse still held in its hand. The one he used to cut his jerky. It has a thick, sturdy-looking blade, and is way too long to be used for cutting food.

Having said that, it's nothing that can be used for fighting as it is. I'll fix this up with magic blacksmithing — right now and here! I mean, I've got no choice but to do it. First I need a crucible.

I rush to the place where I had tossed down my bag. Fortunately this is a business trip, and thus I've brought portable smithing tools with me.

After taking out a small crucible, I begin to dig up the ground with a random stone. My first task is to set up the crucible and properly fixate it. The mountain road, which has been tramped down in many years of use, is quite hard. Coupled with my habitual lack of exercise and the nervousness of being on a battlefield, my whole body gets drenched in sweat in no time.

"U-Umm, w-what...should we do?"

Without me noticing, Mrs. Minera is next to me. She looks all shook up, unable to even run away.

"Sorry, could you help me? A new weapon is necessary."

"O-Okay."

"Please dig a hole, place the crucible in it, and fixate it properly by securing it with earth."

Mrs. Minera picks up a hand-sized stone, and starts to dig. Following her example, her son Lune also digs full of eagerness.

Once again, the dry sound of a Gale. Seven more left—!

I have to hurry.

While Mrs. Minera and her son are digging, I remove the coiled leather strap at the knife's grip, exposing the naked blade. I'll use this as the foundation for my smithing.

"Umm, we've affixed it. What's next?" Mrs. Minera intently stares at my face.

Her expression looks a lot calmer than a little while ago.

"I'll enchant it as fast as possible with Vacuum Immersion."

"Vacuum Immersion...you say?"

Vacuum Immersion is one of the techniques of magic blacksmithing. Its goal is to make magic elements permeate uniformly and deeply into the surface of a weapon. Above all, it has the neat feature of needing little time for finishing the enchantment.

"Moreover..."

I rush over to the thickets at the roadside, and swiftly pluck some buds of chimera thistles. These thistles are in full bloom around here because it's early summer.

"Embryonic curses are contained in the ovaries of chimera thistles. We'll ground those in a stone mortar."

Running while remaining bent over, I return to the road.

"And this is what's needed next."

In front of me lies the headless orc corpse. Blood is still steadily gushing out of its neck.

"T-This?" Mrs. Minera looks confused.

"Yes, I'll use the liver of an orc. Can I have you hold its feet?"

I grab the orc's hands while asking for Mrs. Minera's help. Because its big head was chopped off earlier, both of us are somehow able to transport the corpse by dragging it across the ground. We move the corpse all the way behind the coach while leaving a bloody trail in our wake.

"Thank you."

"Don't mind it. If I can be of help, I'll do any-...ugh..." Mrs. Minera lightly throws up.

She has been assisting me bravely, but as might be expected, she must have felt repulsion towards carrying a corpse that's still warm as it died a little time ago. And to be honest, I'm at my limit as well.

"It's a bit...disgusting, I suppose. But, it'll definitely help." I provide an explanation while opening up the orc's abdomen with a knife. "Orcs are omnivores with an intense appetite. They'll even eat living animals and humes raw. Thus their livers are stuffed with an abundance of 'curse elements' (Hate). Curse elements generally belong to the category of dark elements....uuueehhh!"

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, the stench is a bit... It's tough to describe as it originates from the intestines... Anyway, the curses which are concentrated in an orc's intestines are...uuueeeeeehh!"

"Mr. Tea!"

"Haa, haa, sorry. Usually I make weapons with the Light attribute as cortege blacksmith...that's why...such a darkness...uuueeeeeehh! No, I'm fine. Still... Ugh, it stinks! What a rotten stench! Uuuuuueeeeeehh! Oh, oh, haah...uuueeeeeehh!"

My nausea doesn't cease because of the intense stench. By now my stomach is empty. And even though there shouldn't be anything to vomit, I'm continuously assailed by a fierce urge to barf. As a magic blacksmith, I fully comprehend the necessity of this work which also wipes away all my

feelings of guilt. But, whatever I might do, it doesn't change the fact that I'm physiologically bad with the rotten stench of intestines. Even though I understand as much, my weeping doesn't stop.

"Pheew, excuse me. Haa...it's really gross...but, I must do it. The swordswoman..."

Another Gale sound, and two in succession at that. Shea has five, no, four more charges left, I think. Even a skilled swordfighter shouldn't last long without an enchanted weapon.

"Are you really alright?"

"I am. Mrs. Minera, please pulverize the thistle buds in the mortar."

"O-Okay." Mrs. Minera begins to mash the buds with practiced hand movements.

It's obvious that she knows how to cook.

In the meanwhile, I tear the liver out of the orc corpse, and carefully strip the veins attached to it. Each time I strip a vein, the liver jiggles like jelly.

"Here, I'm adding the liver to the thistle pulp. Please continue grinding...ueeh. Yes, that's right. I'm adding water to it, so mix it together thoroughly...ugh. And with this...do you have a piece of cloth on you?"

"Ugh, ueehh...if this handkerchief works...uoeeehhh!" Mrs. Minera is on the verge of vomiting, too.

"Thanks, uuuh...ooeeh." I soak the handkerchief in the finished, darkish goo.

After allowing the liquid to fully soak into the cloth, I thoroughly wipe the knife with it - slowly and evenly as if to allow the liquid to permeate into the metallic surface, and yet, quickly.

"Alright...not bad."

The knife glitters as its coated with slimy goo. The rate how evenly and thinly the element coating has been applied plays a major role for Vacuum Immersion. It's the part where one's skills show. Naturally, my concentration deepens. Without me realizing, the nausea has also disappeared at some point.

"Okay, I'm going to use the crucible. Take some distance!"

First I place the element-coated knife into the crucible, then I also add a Shadow 'Wind Spirit Stone' (Sylph Stone). A Wind Spirit Stone is a crystal with many micro-holes containing a considerable amount of wind elements. It has two types: shadow and light. A Shadow Wind Spirit Stone absorbs the surrounding air after reacting to heat.

In other words, if I keep it airtight on top of adding this small jar of will-o'-wisps...

I'm the type who forgets everything around him, once I start smithing. I completely immerse myself into the work at hand, even in the middle of an orc attack or even if there's danger to my life.

Removing the drawstring of the will-o'-wisp jar, I toss it into the crucible, close the lid right away, and turn it into an airtight container by stuffing the gaps with clay.

3, 2, 1.....

—Vacuum Immersion

The will-o'-wisps activate. The pressure inside the crucible rises steeply while the temperature drops drastically. The curse elements permeating the blade are affixed in one go. The ground vibrates alongside a snapping sound.

Nice, that's a good omen.

That dry sound is proof of the enchantment having succeeded. The curse should have completely attached itself to the knife.

I rush over to the crucible, rip off the clay, and open the lid.

"Alright..."

The knife, now having gained a new power, lies inside the crucible. A murky haze rises from its blade, now black. It's dangerous to touch this with bare hands.

After putting on my gloves, I pick up the knife.

Just as expected, the curse got stuck nicely. I'm going to affix it with a seal.

Using a graver, a tool similar to a chisel for metals, I carve 'Holy Characters' (Runes) onto the back part of the knife. For a magic blacksmith, seals are similar to spells. The wording of the seal, the attention to detail, the location of its carving - all of those have a big influence on the power of the Enchanted Weapon.

Oh distant God, exorcise the ground, purify the sky, and cure the people.

Ken    Eol    Niido    Shigel  
<    M    †    4

It's one of the hidden 'Four-Character Seals' (Tetragrammaton) handed down within the Korpi family. The Seal of Kalpa Evil— [efn\_note]Kalpa is a Buddhistic term referring to Eon/Aeon aka a very long time[/efn\_note]

But this time I have mirrored it! A negation of the blessed rune, wishing for the pollution of the sky,

and the tainting of the earth by evil. In short, a cursed seal.

It's an impure technique unworthy of a Holy cortege blacksmith. But, thanks to this seal, the curse's power has been increased. And for this knife...

"Excuse me, I'm going to borrow this."

I lend the cane of Mr. Franz and tightly bind the knife at the end of the cane with the leather strap.

"It's done..."

I shall name it, Impromptu Cursed Spear 『Spear of Extortion』. Its cutting ability as a knife has been boosted by the curse. In addition, it should have the effects 「Dull Pain」 and 「Weak Poison」. Or to put it into simple terms, it's a spear that hurts damn a lot if stabbed by it while slowing down any healing.

It's said that orcs have a weaker sensitivity to pain when compared to humes. That's why they have such a firm, tenacious fighting spirit. However, the pain caused by this spear should dampen their fighting spirit.

"Way to go!"

Considering that it's been created with what was on hand in a short period of time, it's rather well-made. I'm a cortege blacksmith who forges Holy arms. I have trained crafting techniques to create weapons with the Light element. I have some knowledge about cursed weapons, but I never actually experienced making one...Hence, I must say, this deep black blade is pretty good for a first attempt.



Going by intuition, it's a very sinister blade...

"Hey, hurry up and hand it over!"

Suddenly, a slap against the back of my head! Thanks to the shock, I came to my senses.

Without me noticing, Shea has shown up. Her mask is dyed deep blue, after getting showered by blood spurts. Her thighs are also sticky with blood.

"Umm...what about the Gales?"

"Run out long ago." Shea casually tosses the short sword on the ground.

"A-Ah, right. I did keep count."

—It completely slipped my mind after getting absorbed in my work...but that's nothing I can admit here.

"It almost got me killed. Anyway, hurry up!"

"It looks a bit crude because it's a hurried assembly, though." I hand her the spear.

Grabbing it, Shea thrusts it at empty air once. After checking its feel, she nods lightly.

"Not bad."

"Just one thing. Please don't allow it to get damaged here."

"Mmh? A seal?"

"Yes. It's a negated Holy attribute which makes the enchantment unstable. Especially because the seal is very detailed, it'll go berserk if it gets scratched by something sharp or similar..."

Just in case, I've used the leather strap as protection by tightly binding it around the seal, but...the seal's technical grade is 5, a 'lower expert level' (Adeptus Minor). It holds a lot of power, but is unstable because of that.

"Your first time as a field smith, eh?"

"Well, I told you that I'm a cortege blacksmith."

Field smiths do their smithing near battlefields, and not at a blacksmith's workshop. The usage of Enchanted Weapons in battles against demonic beasts is a must. However, the enchanted magic power is consumed upon use of the enchantments. For this reason it's necessary to supply weapons on-site or re-enchant weapons.

"No one's goin' to listen to your pointers on a battlefield. Make the weapons with the assumption that they'll be handled roughly in the first place. Fast, sturdy, and no friendly fire. That's the job of a field smith." Having barked all that, Shea turns around, stabbing.

"Buugyaaaaaahh!"

The spear deeply pierces into the chest of an orc that had crept up upon us. As soon as she pulls it out, blood gushes out like a fountain.

She fixedly examines the blood-smearred spearhead, "The weeping of pigs sounds like music to my ears. It looks like this thing's usable for the time being. If it goes berserk, I'll make you weep!"

Leaving those words behind, she plunges into the pack of orcs swarming towards us. Contrary to its appearance of a cane with a somewhat small knife tied to its end, its sharpness is terrifying. Even light thrusts stab into their targets as if gliding through butter.

"It smoothly penetrates the thick skin of orcs. Yep, it's a spear capable of killing."

My creation receives a truly gruesome review. But leaving that aside, I must say that Shea's spearmanship is definitely at an exceedingly high level. While jumping and twisting, she transfers the power of her rotations to the spear, wielding it as if performing a dance.

"Bugaaaah!"

"Bugiii!"

A scream echoes across the road each time she thrusts out the spear. The orcs are slowly retreating. Each time she turns the spear in the direction of an orc, it flees backwards as quickly as possible.

—They're obviously scared of the spear.

But yeah, that spear hurts. Just receiving a scratch likely makes them wish to never get touched by it again.

"Buggyuu..."

"...Buguruuu."

The orcs have suddenly lost all will to fight. They've been withdrawing while making sure to not expose their backs, but at long last, fear overwhelms them, and they start running after turning around. One orc after the other scurries away, heading into the forest.

—Finally they've been repelled.

At least that's what I thought, but...

"Buggyaaa!"

An orc, which should have escaped, screams in death agony within the thicket. What shows up as the scream's echo fades is...

A High Orc!

In its right hand, the corpse of an orc that had its head crushed. It slowly trudges towards Shea with its overwhelmingly huge frame swaying.

"Bunuooooo!" The High Orc roars deeply, and flings the corpse at Shea.

Shea flexibly bends her upper body, dodging the corpse. Then she charges at the High Orc without any hesitation, unleashing a flurry of spear stabs at it. Shoulder, thigh, arm - a combo of three stabs, so fast that it's hard to follow with the eyes.

A severe pain should assail the High Orc's entire body thanks to the curse enchantment, but...the High Orc doesn't stop. Very likely it doesn't even feel the pain in its rage.

While screaming throatily, it picks up a new orc corpse and brandishes it like a hammer. Setting Shea as its target, it slaps down the corpse.

However, Shea evades the blow.

The corpse mows down a tree while having its skull smashed into a soggy goo. The High Orc wields an orc, which used to be its underling, and once it has served its purpose, it grabs the next orc.

The High Orc rampages around while creating a nightmare-like scenery all around it.

If a hume were to be hit by its attacks, their body would likely turn into splatter. And yet, Shea continues to dodge within a whisker. She evades the corpse of another orc, which is slapped down with a violent force, with a side jump, passing through fallen trees.

"Haa!" Suddenly Shea closes the distance, stepping into the High Orc's bossom.

Immediately following, she stabs the Spear of Extortion at the High Orc.

"Buguuuuuuuuh! Oooooohhh!"

The High Orc goes berserk while holding onto the spear handle. As it twists its body, the spear tip snaps off while still stuck in its body.

It's the flaw of a hurried creation. In the end, it's no more than a cane.

With the spearhead embedded in its belly, the High Orc goes completely nuts, recklessly thrashing and raging around.

Because of this, Mr. Franz has no choice but to go without a cane for the time being. But, the more pressing issue is Shea having become unarmed.

I must do something... Having said that, there's nothing I can do at this point. All that's left is my short sword that has run out of enchantments. But, I won't have the time to re-enchant it.

Still, there has to be something I can do!

I pick up the short sword with its slightly chipped blade, and start preparing for Vacuum Immersion. There's no way for me to be in time, but I cannot afford to give up here.

"Don't worry. It's over." All of a sudden, Shea stands next to me.

"But, the spear..."

"No problem."

Shea pants heavily, exhausted from the fierce battle. While calming her breathing, she heads towards the orc corpse leaning against the coach's wheel. The orc corpse that has been transformed into a ghastly monument after getting skewered by the machete. [efn\_note]I called it hatchet earlier since that's the rough TL of a nata. But after reconsidering, I've opted for "machete." A Nata is generally a Japanese sword with a short grip and a wide blade. A hatchet in English is more like an ax iirc. So I think "machete" fits better.[/efn\_note]

She throws away the orc head covering the hilt, and pulls out the bloodstained machete in one swoop.

The big machete which has been extracted with a nasty smacking sound — "Corpse Eater".

"It should have eaten enough for one blow." Shea mutters while gazing at its blade that's covered with brain fluid.

One blow—

Even a lowly magic blacksmith like me has immediately understood what Shea wants to say. That machete, Corpse Eater, has sucked out the curses from the brain fluid of the orc corpses.

It's also the reason why Shea went for such an overkill. It's not like she has a particularly cruel personality. It's just that her own weapon wished for it. A cursed machete that kills brutally and slurps out the lifeblood of its victims. That's "Corpse Eater."

As characteristic of Darkness weapons, an eerie aura is being released from its rough blade. Darkish and dense. It's as if the concept of death itself billows up from the blade.

One blow...with this!

"Buruguaoooooh!"

The High Orc charges in our direction.

Shea turns around in a smooth, natural motion, and leaps towards the High Orc's nape, unleashing a high-speed slash. However, the slash abruptly stops just before its neck.

The High Orc has slipped its fist between neck and blade. A weathered, leather gauntlet covers its arm - an arm as thick as a log that had countless folds of tanned leather wrapped around it.

It's simple, but a major pain in the ass. So far it must have brushed away many hume attacks with

this gauntlet.

The machete's blade bites into the gauntlet.

"Feast on it!"

Corpse Eater emits a jet-black gleam with its curse suddenly being released. Clad in a thick shadow of murderous intent, the blade devours the High Orc's arm.

*\*splat\* \*snap\* \*splat\**

The massive blade servers the thick arm...or rather, violently tears it to shreds! And, without killing its momentum, Corpse Eater reaches the thick neck, shredding through it.

"Buga...ru...gu."

The High Orc's head is lopped off, dropping down with a plop.

—This has been one blow.

Having lost its head, the High Orc's body stands stock still as blue blood furiously sprays out of its neck, pouring down on Shea.

"Eek..." Watching that scene, Mrs. Minera shrieks lightly, and tightly hugs her son to protect him.

She acts as if she's seen a monster that's far more fearsome than the orcs.

"You're wrong. That's unavoidable."

For Mrs. Minera, who has no knowledge about cursed weapons, Shea must look terrifying and cruel. But to me, her appearance looks rather sad, if anything.

"For the sake of using that weapon, she must kill atrociously even if she doesn't desire so herself."

It's the fate of any woman who uses a cursed weapon. Tears might be streaming down her cheeks, hidden behind her mask.

"But..." Mrs. Minera's eyes are still full of fear.

At the end of her line of sight...Shea is kicking the High Orc's corpse! Passionately, with all her might!

"Nevermind it. It's inevitable. Her wish...I'm sure she's actually a gentle person."

"Really...? She's tenaciously kicking away at it, though."

Shea keeps kicking the corpse over and over again. It's a tremendous difference compared to her gallant figure a little while ago...

"This isn't completely unavoidable, but...basically, a brutal nature is a necessary trait, or rather...I guess she's flown into a fit of rage."

For some reason, I'm stuck defending our lifesaver... Anyway, the battle is over with this.

Shea comes back this way, and leans her body against the coach. As expected, she must be worn out.

"Pheew." Shea breathes out deeply, and removes the mask covering her face.

Long hair gently spills out. Silver hair possessing a velvety gloss like ivory.

I see Shea's face for the first time now that she's removed her mask, but...

"What're you looking at?" Shea looks suspiciously at me after noticing my stare.

"Well..."

To be frank, I've been charmed by her beauty. The face that had been hidden beneath the mask is absolutely gorgeous. However, her facial features aren't simply limited to being good-looking. She has a shiny, dark brown skin, and somewhat almond-shaped, big eyes which are casting a crimson gleam deep within. A beauty you could describe as mysterious and exotic.

Coupled with the tragedy that has befallen us so far, she seems like someone not existing in reality. A strange figure that appears to have escaped out of a dream or legend.

"Stop staring, idiot. I'll drill a hole into your head if you get on my nerves."

Shea lightly lifts her nicely-shaped eyebrows, baring her anger.

"No, it's not like I..."

"I'm going back. That spear was a big help."

Shea picks up the bag she had thrown on the ground, dusts off the dirt from it with her hand, and shoulders it.

"By no means. We have to thank you for having saved us."

"You, what's your name?"

"Err, I'm Tea. Tea Korpi."

"Tea, huh? I'll keep it in mind." Saying only that much without looking back, Shea starts to walk along the road in large strides, with her old-rag-like mantle waving. As if she's going home after having finished her usual, daily job.

I still don't have the strength to walk. Even after the retreating figure of Shea vanishes out of sight after rapidly becoming smaller, I blankly stare down the road.

An attack by a large army of orcs. A lot of deaths. A masked swordswoman wielding a cursed weapon. And a mysterious beauty hidden beneath the mask. All of it seems like a dream — of course, a nightmare, that is.

I needed a little bit longer to wake up from that dream and recover my sense of reality.