



"Come on, Tea, forge some cursed weapons, will you?"

A nobleman and at the same time an oddball. The old man, who gives me that impression, pesters me about cursed weapons with a childish tenaciousness.

"No, umm, I'm...aiming to become the royal family's cortege blacksmith..."

"Who cares about the small stuff? Just give forging cursed weapons a chance."

"I'm sorry. Umm..."

"It's fine, isn't it? I'm personally asking you here. It's the request of a margrave. Do you know? I'm a relatively important noble."

"Yes...of course I know."

I'm troubled exactly because I'm aware of it.

The name of this old man is Margrave Alfonso. He's the lord governing over the Wildinne Region spreading in the western part of the Kingdom. His nickname is Count Capricious. He's ranking second in the noble hierarchy, right after King Robell.

For some reason I've been summoned by this big-shot, just to be continuously badgered about forging cursed weapons. If you ask how it came to this...

Of course, all of it stems back to that masked swordswoman. My encounter with Shea has drastically twisted the objective of my journey.



Meltart, the provincial capital and central city of the Margraviate, the Wildinne Region. Three days after the orc attack, I finally arrived at my destination, albeit now being completely tattered. Choosing a moderate inn, I got rid of the journey's dirt and the orcs' rotten stench with a hot bath, and immediately afterwards, slept like a log.

On the next day, I set out into the city once more. Stepping onto the main road for starters, I follow the street towards the city's center. As might be expected of the margraviate's center, this city doesn't lose out to the royal capital at all when it comes to the amount of pedestrian traffic. However, what's clearly different in comparison is the diversity of races here.

Hobbits, dwarves, elves, beastmen, and halves of all those races. Of course, humes make up the majority here as well, but still, the variety of different races is conspicuous. People draped in various garments you wouldn't see at the royal capital have spread out arrays of various folk craft at the roadside, selling these to the passersby.

I spot a knife with an inverted blade I see for the first time in my life. Very likely it's using the

margraviate's local specialty, a malachite alloy, as base material. I'm extremely curious about it, but my objective in coming here is mithril.

When we talked about the route of obtaining mithril, Mr. Favore told me that he'll get me through this with his reputation. But, as unfortunate it might be, his reputation has gone up in smoke with his face being smashed to pieces by an orc...

Now that it's come to this, I've got to handle it one way or another by myself.

Mithril steel, which is being mined in the Wildinne Region, has exceedingly high mana conductivity and storage capability. It's an indispensable steel for high-ranking enchanted weapons, and especially for weapons of the Light attribute.

Naturally, it's a super rare ore because of that. The amount of yield is minimal, and in particular, when it comes to mithril ore with a high purity, it almost never appears on the markets of cities. Its difficulty of acquisition is Special A.

That's precisely the reason why I had pinned my hopes on the connections of Mr. Favore, my coordinator...

"It's not like I can give up and go back home either..."

In the first place, this is not a journey I can wrap up by simply calling it off as impossible. The faces of my mother and father, who saw me off after entrusting me with their tiny, remaining amount of money, surface in my mind, making me shake my head. With the situation as is, I've got no alternatives but to go for broke.

I decide to first look for a Magic Material Store. Such stores are wholesalers, dealing with gems, ores, plants, raw materials of magic beasts, and all kinds of magic item materials. For starters, I'll search for the biggest Magic Material Store in this city.

"Umm, excuse me. I have a question, if you can spare me a moment." I call out to a middle-aged man who's about to pass in front of me.

A somewhat large hammer is affixed to his back, he wears tough gloves, and shoulders a big backpack. He has an appearance that screams blacksmith. I mean, if I'm going to call out to someone anyway, someone in the same trade would be the best choice, right?

"What's up? A traveller...or rather, you're somewhat tattered, aren't you? Ah, that knife with the inverted blade? It's better if you don't buy that. It's overpriced. Then again, it makes sense since that race usually doesn't use such a knife."

"T-Thanks."

"Sure thing. Bye."

"Ah! Wait a sec! I still haven't asked you what I want to know!"

"Oh really? So, what's up?"

"Is there any Magic Material Store around here? If possible, a big one with a large assortment..."

"A Magic Material Store? You're someone doing subjugations?"

"No...I'm a magic blacksmith."

"Hee. Still you look quite frail for someone doing magic blacksmithing. A Magic Material Store, eh? Well, there's plenty of those in this city. Moreover, their prices and qualities are all over the place. It frequently happens that they push magic materials of low quality on beginners. Anyway, you were right in calling out to me. Gaston's the name."

"Oh, thanks."

"So, a place with a decent assortment, right? In that case, you want to go with Mt. Gravel, I'd say. It's a store that's somewhat tough on beginners, but it enjoys a high reputation among pros like me. The store owner is a bit hard to deal with, but I think he'll give you a bit of a discount if you mention that I've referred you. Rane Magic Materials also has many amazing items, but that place might also be sliiightly too much for you since it's catered towards pros. They've got some nice stuff there, but likewise they sell junk items and illegal stuff. It's standard to start with Mt. Gravel first." The blacksmith rattles on without giving me a chance to interrupt.

While continuing to talk about the various Magic Material Stores in this city, he jots down the route to Mt. Gravel on a piece of paper, and presses it into my hand.

"Well, do your best, rookie. We might meet again somewhere if both of us survive."

Mr. Gaston ends up leaving without even listening to my thanks. Oh well. Relying on the map he's given me, I head over to his recommended magic material store.



Magic Material Store Mt. Gravel is full of shelves towering all the way to the ceiling. And all these shelves are tightly crammed with all kinds of magic materials. But, that's not all of it. Even the counter for serving customers has an array of materials lining up.

There's also Wind Stones, the basic item of any magic blacksmith.

"Hey, don't touch anything." The shopkeeper sits among all those magic materials as if buried within.

He's a small man with a peculiar beard, an old dwarf as it's common for Magic Material Stores.

While wincing from the sharp glint in his eyes, which I doubt anyone would use on a customer, I quickly broach the main topic, "Excuse me. Do you happen to deal with mithril steel?"

"Haah? You a magic blacksmith, or what?"

"Yes, a cortege blacksmith from the capital."

"Hee, a cortege blacksmith, eh? Then you should be aware that mithril steel isn't that easy to obtain. And even if I had some of it, I wouldn't sell it to someone visiting my store for the first time. But, assuming the unlikely scenario that I'd actually be willing to sell it to you, the price wouldn't be a sum of money someone like you could pay. I mean, you don't seem like a rich boy. What's your budget?"

"For the time being, I'll go with a down payment."

I pile up the silver coins I've taken out of my pouch on the counter. The fifty common silver coins are all I possess at present. For an ordinary commoner, that's quite a lot of money. It'll allow one to survive for three months if used sparingly.

"Hmm, considering your youth... But, anyway, what's impossible remains impossible."

"That's why this down payment, and I'll work off the rest."

"That's a no go. We don't do such deals."

I'm turned down by the dwarven shopkeeper.

"Can you somehow show some leeway in this? I need the steel at all costs."

"Listen, those looking for stuff like mithril steel are all folks needing it at all costs to begin with. And since they can't obtain it despite that, it's being called a Special A material. You understand?"

Mithril steel is mined at exceedingly low amounts, and because of that, it's ridiculously expensive. It's nothing anyone would be able to buy on a whim or just for show. Of course, I'm serious about this as well, but...

Now that it's come to this, I've got no choice but to persistently cling. This stubborn-seeming old dwarf is difficult to approach at first, but he'll become an old guy overflowing with helpfulness and chivalry, once we get along while being frank with each other. I've got to play up my enthusiasm here, tickling his sympathy as an old man.

"Can't you do anything about it...? I really need that steel. I'll come here every day until I get you to sell me some."

"Sorry, could you go back home? By the way, even if you stick to this routine for many times, my answer won't change. Moreover, it's going to be a pain if you get all enthusiastic about this. After all, I'm a dwarf with a dry personality. Also, I can't drink alcohol, and even if we were to drink the night away, I won't get along with you."

Ugh, how unexpected! So he was the type of dwarf shopkeeper who completely keeps others at a distance! Although he's got the typical dwarf-styled look going for him, he gives off a tough aura that doesn't allow anyone to get close to him, if you actually speak to him. Rather, he's the kind of guy who always maintains a distance. Even though I had resolved myself to open my heart to him

by drinking all night long with him...It's only reasonable, but there's all kinds of different characters among dwarves as well, I guess.

For him to be so crusty and hard to please is, honestly said, totally unexpected. Isn't there any other card I can play here?

"A-Ah, right, I came here after Mr. Gaston recommended this store to me."

"Gaston...who?"

He looks seriously flabbergasted!

"Umm, he's a veteran-looking blacksmith. He told me that it'd boost my chances if I mentioned his name."

"I don't know any Gastons, so who's that?"

Oi, Mr. Gaston! Even after mentioning your name, it's still a completely lost case, or rather, his displeasure has actually increased!

"A blacksmith carrying a big backpack."

"I told you I don't know anyone like that. Usually the bags of field smiths are big, and to begin with, most blacksmiths have names similar to Gaston."

"Anyway, can't you compromise somewhat!?"

"Trying to bring up the name of some random dude is an instant out either way. Also, you're going to buy the Wind Stone you touched earlier. We've got a rule that you buy what you touch."

"Ah, yes..."

This dwarf is really small... I'm not talking about his height, but his caliber... At this point, any further negotiations are a waste of time.

"I'll come back again." I turn on my heels and leave the store.

It's not like this is the only Magic Material Store... The other place was...if I remember correctly, Rane Magic Materials, wasn't it...?



"Mithril? We don't have any. And even if we did, there's no way we'd sell it to a first-time customer, is there?" The shopkeeper of Rane Magic Materials, a dwarf with an oval face, immediately replies to me with a shrill voice.

An oval-faced dwarf with a high-pitched voice. And even his beard has been cleanly shaved off...

There's all kinds of characters among dwarves, really. However, the all-important reply is the same as before.

"Can't you do anything about it? I don't mind even if it's going to take many days."

"Now listen up, it's absurdly rare for mithril to appear in any normal store to begin with as most of it ends up in the hands of wealthy folks and nobles. And even those rare occurrences require one to wait for several years, okay? That's why, if you want it by all means..."

"Yes..."

"You'll need to use illegal channels." The shopkeeper lowers his voice, whispering.

"Illegal...you say?"

"Stuff like melting stolen goods to get the raw materials and so on. You should understand as a blacksmith, right?"

"Well, after you beat it into pieces, you turn it into an alloy by adding mercury and a lot of heat, and then..."

"This ain't nothing you can openly yap about. You never know who might be listening, okay? Tell me, do you actually have the resolve to do illegal jobs?"

"That's...a bit too much."

"Well, you don't look like it anyway. And even if you had told me that you're all for it, it'd only be trouble for me. At the very least, we'd need to be close enough buddies, comparable to drinking for three nights and days straight."

This dwarf actually feels like a normal one! He's nice and easy to understand, but still, I cannot afford to dabble with illegal stuff. I mean, the Korpi family's revival hinges on my search for mithril. If it gets exposed that I've been doing illegal stuff, it might result in an irreversible situation.

Having no choice, I decide to give up on Rane's store as well. Afterwards I visit every material store one by one. However, the replies I get are the same wherever I go. It makes me fully understand that I won't get my hands on mithril steel so easily.

"It's alright. I've still got plenty of time." I mutter in an attempt to encourage myself.

Yep, there's still a lot of time left until the ceremony for King Robell's birthday. I'll demonstrate the name of the Korpi family by preparing the best item to present to the king as a gift. Let's keep at this without rushing.

"I guess I'll stop for today..."

The sun has already gone down, and the streets are brightly illuminated by Meltart's rectangle crystal stones enclosing worm oil.

With me having walked for three days, and paced around the city on the fourth, my stamina has reached its limit. I decide to go back to my inn and rest up in preparation for tomorrow.

Today I've come out empty handed. I suppose, I won't have any choice but to do illegal work, if push comes to shove. As long as it's something I can do without getting exposed...no, that's a bad idea.

Immediately denying the shameful thoughts tainting my mind, I fall asleep in the inn.



"Hey, wake up!"

The next time my consciousness shows any response is when my body gets jolted around. It's a powerful, merciless shaking, accompanied by the rough voice of a man.

What? What's going on!?

The conversation at Rane's store naturally crosses my mind.

『You never know who might be listening, okay?』

The shopkeeper's words revive inside my head.

—Don't tell me! Some guy from the underworld has listened in on that talk, and believes that I'm a newbie trying to mess with his turf!?

No, that's stupid.

"He's still not waking up. What should we do?"

"Force him up, arrest him, and take him away."

—Arrest!? Taking away!?

That's vocabulary no underworld guy would use. Once I peek my face out from beneath the blanket, I spot three armored guards around me. Two of them hold onto my sides, before I can raise my body.

"Wait a sec, what's going on here!?"

"Don't make a fuss."

My right and left arms are both held by burly men. They're heavily pressing down on them. I try to struggle, but it's very unlikely for me to free myself.

"What's it all of a sudden? Where do you plan on taking me!?" I glare at the man restraining my

right shoulder.

His superior officer, whom the man is looking at, answers in a whisper after pondering for a moment, "The margrave is calling for you."

With this being the only explanation, the officer turns around, and starts to walk off. In response to that, strong force is applied on my shoulders, and I'm ordered to walk.

At this point, it'd be dangerous to resist. I leave the inn while flanked on both sides, and get pushed into a carriage.

Still, just what the hell is going on here!?! The margrave is calling for me...?

Margrave Alfonso. Of course I know that name. He's the lord ruling over this Wildinne Region. His nickname is Count Capricious. He's ranking second in the noble hierarchy, right after King Robell. Yet another alias for him is Reclamation King.

He's actively inviting adventurers to Wildinne — the boundary line between the areas inhabited by people and demonic beasts. He's been repeatedly and constantly battling demonic beasts for more than 40 years, achieving a great expansion of the humes' sphere. Nowadays, his territory is the biggest within the Kingdom.

Why would such a person call for me?

While fervently brooding over the reason for getting arrested, I'm getting jolted around by the carriage for some time. Eventually, the carriage passes through a huge gate, entering the palace's grounds with me still having no clue why I'm here.

A neatly trimmed lawn, hedges with multicolored flowers in full bloom, a water fountain drawing complicated geometrical figures with its water streams, elaborate sculptures, and structures with novel designs - all of these should be things contradicting the alias of Count Capricious, but I'm not even granted to time to appreciate them while being forcibly moved.

Without a single stopover, I'm being taken deeper and deeper into the palace.

