

The next day, I find myself in a private workshop set up on the grounds of the margrave's official residence. The margrave has allowed me to freely use this place as Shea's field smith.

"Just spit out if you need anything. I'll get the geezer to prepare it for you."

"Geezer, you say... Anyway, I'm alright, or rather, this place has way too many utilities."

Because it's the personal property of the lord, the workshop is oversaturated with all kinds of materials and work facilities. At a first glance, it looks like it's got a full array of tools, medicines, and crafting materials.

Shea quickly entrusts me with <Corpse Eater>. As I place the big machete on the workbench, I discover countless spots with rust and cracks on its blade. I feel my body becoming heavy from just checking its condition - despite most of its curse having already faded away over time.

And yet, I can't pull my eyes off <Corpse Eater>. To be honest, it's impossible to not be filled with curiosity about this sword as a magic blacksmith.

At once, I closely examine the blade's steel with a magnifying glass. It's a type of steel I've never seen before. Its consistency looks somewhat like a viscous fluid. Above all, it has characteristic, small holes in its blade. Those holes, which are so tiny that you wouldn't notice them without a magnifying glass, densely crowd the blade. Maybe it's absorbing the curses through these holes, kinda like the pores on tree leaves.

Next I shift my eyes to the hilt. This one's peculiar as well. It's been used for many years, but it has been made out of the best material. I dare say, the hilt is formed by gluing the bones of a water dragon together.

Moreover, the rivets are made out of mithril? Yep, indeed, it's black mithril. In addition, a simple seal has been applied to the top rivet.

"Is it okay for me to remove the hilt?"

"Of course. But, put it back as it was..."

"No need to tell me."

I wipe the rivet's runes with a cloth soaked in aqua regia.

"By doing this, I can temporarily weaken the seal."

"...As expected of a blacksmith."

Removing the hilt, I expose the tang.

"This is..."

It's a fairly unique tang. It's not unusual to apply a handicraft to the tang such as having a slot for a precious gem for enchanted weapons, but this one uses a style I can't really identify. A hole has

been drilled into the middle of the thick, massive tang, and a band of metal has been twined around it like a snake.

Does it possibly use a mithril alloy?

But, what draws my attention the most is the seal carved onto the metallic band. It's very mysterious, triggering an intense curiosity in me. It's a complicated seal using 'characters of the divine era' (Elder Runic Alphabet), and moreover multi-branch runes.

"Wow...this is a 'lost curse formula' (Lost Grammar), isn't it?"

Although it's a prayer that was used in the past, all those knowing of its meaning are already gone, and thus no one capable of employing runes like these exists nowadays. It's one of the major reasons why it's impossible to recreate the ancient swords of the heroic area, a technique that's been lost forever.

"Yeah. Even among the yughul, only my grandfather was able to read it."

"Wait a sec. It's got a seal with a curse formula resembling the Rapier of the Ivy's Flower. Umm, just a moment." I rush to the place where I've left my bag.

I take a single, rolled parchment out of my bag.

"What the heck is this?"

"A rubbed copy. It's a transcription of the seals on the Rapier of the Ivy's Flower."

Vincent Korpi had created a rubbed copy with ink of the seals applied to the rapier before he presented it to the king. This parchment here is a transcription of that rubbed copy, our family's heirloom. Many of the seals passed down within the Korpi family are based on this copy. You could actually describe it as something similar to a seal dictionary.

"Look, this and this place look the same, don't they?" I point at a spot on the tang corresponding with what's drawn on the parchment spread out on the table.

That spot shows a seal with a multi-branch rune of seven characters.

"So, what does it say?"

"Unfortunately I don't know its meaning... You need to understand that it's being jammed by the multi-branch rune."

Multi-branch runes deliberately increase the stroke count of the original rune, changing it into a complicated construct. Using such multi-branch runes prevents others from being able to read the seals.

"Hmm...I see. Too bad."

"If I had the genuine Rapier of the Ivy's Flower, it'd be a different story. But it'd be asking for too

much with a copy."

Multi-branch runes are added as camouflage after the correct runes have been carved into an object. Because of that it's possible to deduct the true rune going by the traces of the chisel work and the ruggedness, but a rubbed copy won't tell you anything about the depth of a carving.

"I see..."

"I'm devastated by it as well. I'd have loved to decipher it since it's a rare opportunity to actually examine a weapon with seals using multi-branch runes."

I haven't noticed at all since I've been immersed in talking, but Shea has been intently staring at my face instead of the seals on the copy I've shown her. Moreover, with a puzzled expression.

"Tea, how did you know that the shapes of the seals resemble each other?"

"Umm, intuition? Kinda like 'Oh, I've seen this one in the rubbed copy, haven't I?'"

"...Have you memorized all the seals in the rubbed copy?"

"Well, my parents kept telling me that it contains the best masterpieces of the Korpy family which serve as the origin of all our techniques, so yeah."

"So you memorized 30,000 characters without understanding their meanings? Dude, you're a freak, you know?" Shea lets a chuckle slip.

"Calling me a freak..."

Strangely, I don't feel so bad about it, despite the negative connotation of the word itself. Rather, I'm somewhat happy to have made Shea laugh a bit.

"Anyway, leaving the seals aside as you can't do anything about them, these chips in the blade here..." Shea picks up <Corpse Eater> once more. The blade is dully reflecting the madder red of the setting sun shining into the room through the window, revealing several places where it's suffered heavy damage. "Can you do something about them by honing the blade?"

"Just so you know, I won't be able to repair it perfectly since the damage is fairly extensive. Give me two days."

Unlike with the deciphering of the multi-branch runes, I have a clear idea what to do here. Sure, the chips are rather nasty, but if I carefully hone the blade, I'll be able to recover its sharpness, I think... As this is no disposable knife, I want to invest at least this much time and effort into it.

"Cursed swords corrode one's mind unlike holy swords. Feel free to take it slowly rather than trying to force yourself." Shea entrusts <Corpse Eater> to me once more, and leaves the workshop.

Only the cursed machete and I are left in the room. I feel how a mysterious excitement wells up in me over the prospect of facing off against this ominous sword that keeps releasing bloodlust.

"Alright...time to go for it."

Putting on thick gloves to completely protect my hands and arms, I begin with the whetting.



After finishing the work on the second day as planned, I use one day to take a break. And then, on the next day, Shea and I head to a hilly area east of the Nibrel Village.

"We've got to exterminate the wyverns before they enter their season."

According to Shea, hunting wyverns at the end of winter is a standard activity for hunters.

"Their season?"

"Breeding season. Wyverns are very agitated and active during their breeding season, and devour great amounts of prey." Even as she explains, Shea searches for thick trees, examining their trunks one-by-one.

"What are you doing?"

"Male wyverns rub their wings against tree trunks during this season, showing off the size of their territory to female wyverns."

"You mean the shaved parts on this tree?" I confirm while lifting a finger.

At a height of around three metril above the ground, there's a place where the tree's bark has been peeled off.

"Yeah, that's what I meant."

"So you're saying a wyvern's wings reach all the way up there...?"

Of course it'd mean that they have an overall length of six to seven metril since their necks should extend even further than that... I shudder at my own estimate which means that a wyvern is roughly four times as tall as I am.

Magic beasts also inhabit areas in the vicinity of the capital where I've lived so far, but it's exceedingly rare to encounter large beasts over there. I've never seen anything like a large wyvern.

"I think their size is something around that. Also, over there you see another male appealing." Shea lightly jerks her small chin, luring my eyes to look towards another tree.

It's a tree that's much taller than the one with the peeled bark. At it's treetop...

"Ugh..."

...hangs a rotten hume body. It's the corpse of a young child, around five or six years old. The flesh has decomposed and fallen off, revealing its white skeletal frame beneath the skin of its frail torso. Holy shit...

"Tea, you look quite pale. Is it your first time with wyverns?"

"There were none around the capital..."

"I see. At this time of the year, male wyverns demonstrate their hunting abilities to the females. It signifies the advent of spring."

"What a tasteless...depiction of a season's beginning."

"After tasting humes once, wyverns get addicted to the flavor. Especially wyverns, who've experienced pairing up with a female by impaling humes for later consumption, will attack humes every year. Moreover, humes resembling their first experience."

"In other words, will this specimen hang children here every year?"

"Not only here. At the height of spring, it will hang them on anything that can be called a branch. It's something I've seen often around the yughul village." Shea doesn't stop her feet while talking.

Passing underneath the corpse, she walks all around the tree.

"Say, can't we at least bury that child?"

"No. A female will come for it, and reacting to her, the male will follow. We'll hunt both."

Now Shea has gone away from the tree, and started to check the condition of the surroundings. It seems like she's looking for a place to bushwhack the wyverns.

Shea chooses a rock several dozen metrils away from the tree with the offering, and begins to prune the grass so that it won't obstruct her line of view. She wraps her work up quickly, with no wasted movements.

"Those beasts travel a preset route over the span of several days. Going by the decomposition state of the offering, the real hunt will take place in three days at the latest. Tea, you get ready as well."

Real hunt... my tensions shoots up as soon as I hear those words. Yep, we're going to hunt wyverns - flying dragons who possess a body build manifold as big as that of humes.

If we fail, only death awaits us! I must start getting ready right away. Preparing myself for field smithing.

Enchanted weapons created by magic blacksmiths drastically surpass the power of ordinary weapons, allowing feeble humes to oppose magic beasts. They shoot fireballs, create icicles, or heal wounds. However, each time mana is consumed, and at some point, the enchanted weapon runs out of mana, returning to being an ordinary weapon. In such a situation, it's necessary to refill it with mana, or switch weapons.

For this reason, magic blacksmiths take up camp at a spot slightly away from the battleground, creating replacement weapons or refilling weapons with mana over there. Having said that, I'm ultimately a cortege blacksmith, and have no experience working as a field smith...

"Is it really okay for me to be over here? Won't I be too close...? Wouldn't it be smarter to use the place behind the large tree over there"

The location designated to me by Shea is almost right behind the thicket where she's hiding herself. It's in the shade of a rock ten-odd steps away from her back. Still, she's told me to set up my furnace here.

Close...no matter how you look at it, I'm way too close.

"It's not like you're going to be safe just because you distance yourself somewhat. Don't use a hume's sense of distance. Even if you were situated behind that tree, it'd take a wyvern two steps to reach you. Instead you should focus on a terrain where it's easy to defend yourself." Powerful words backed by bountiful experience.

I've got no choice but to trust the professional on this. I concentrate on my job once again.

First I toss coals and a wind stone into a small furnace, then I ignite a fire within. The wind stone draws a great quantity of air into the furnace, enhancing the heat of the coals. The temperature within the furnace shoots up right away.

The base material is a sword from an ancient battlefield - a rusty longsword dug out at a several decades old battlefield. Shea had stored it after purchasing it from a magic material store.

The tattered sword easily crumbles apart with a few hammer strikes. I mix pieces of venomous snake scale metal into the sword's fragments, and toss the scraps into the furnace to melt them down. Next I remove a chunk with an iron pipe, and forge it with my hammer.

Shea's order is a 『Throwing Knife with a powerful curse that takes effect immediately』. Enchantments only hold onto cursed weapons for a short period of time when compared to other enchanted weapons. They'll wear off after a few hours. Moreover, all curses will be completely exhausted after several contacts. In other words, cursed weapons own a powerful offensive ability in exchange for a very short life span.

A short life span, and a high firepower, not to mention that it naturally damages the wielder's body. The difficulty of handling these factors is one of the biggest reasons why cursed tool users are labeled as endangered species. In reality, there exists no occupation that requires field smiths as badly as cursed tool users. Shea must have been forced to fight under considerably harsh conditions until now. That's why it's my turn to help her...

I take out the red hot steel clump, and strike it with a hammer that had its power boosted through an earth enchantment. Each time the hammer hits the steel, the clump changes its shape. First, two inwards-curved blades, then I weld those blades into a swastika-shaped blade. Immediately following, I heat the blade up in the forge once more, and then harden it in one go by putting it into a bucket filled with deer blood which contains plenty of curse elements.

"Great, I don't see any warps."

If I had made a mistake with the timing and temperature of the hardening, the blade would have deformed or developed cracks. I've outgrown these kinds of blunders long ago, but I'm currently working outdoors with a bare minimum of equipment. It'd be stupid to not be careful.

Next up is the polishing. It's a part that would take several days while frequently exchanging the grindstone as a cortege blacksmith, but right now I don't have such a leeway. I'll get it done in one breath, using a magic sharpening stone. I grind the knife blade against the stone which has been enchanted with the wind attribute. While causing sparks to scatter furiously, the steel slowly whittles. It's a rough way of doing this step, but this is the very reason why it's a test for my skill.

"Grinding it in one shot, huh? Quite the bold move."

Without me having noticed, Shea has moved close to me, staring at me doing my work. It's my usual, bad habit of completely forgetting about my surroundings once I start to concentrate on something.

"Yep. There's no time to be meticulous...but, it's okay. Look, it's done."

"Wait, wait, all of this took just a little more than two koku..." [efn_note]Koku is usually 2 hours, but the author hasn't defined it yet, just like metril.[/efn_note]

"Huh? Two koku have already passed?"

I've completely lost any sense of time.

"You were going at it too fast. Take a little rest." Shea tosses her water flask my way.

It's only now that I realize it, but my throat feels parching dry. I get too absorbed in work, which leads to accidents instead. I'll follow her advice and take a break.

"Ah, I feel rejuvenated..."

The water in the flask tastes abnormally delicious.

"It's just simple mountain stream water. It'll be a pain if you collapse on me from dehydration."

"Haha, don't worry. I won't make such a beginner's mistake."