

### **Chapter 3 - Poison to Death! The Wyvern**

T/N: The author uses for those subjugating demonic beasts the term "subjugation people." This works in Japanese, but not so much in English. I'll call them "hunter" as short for "demonic beast hunter."

After being pulled into accepting the margrave's request without being given much of a choice, I was treated to a luxurious meal as I've never eaten before, and then courteously sent back to the inn in a carriage. The difference in treatment was glaringly obvious, considering that I got dragged in front of the margrave like a criminal.

Even though I was full of anxieties and fear, my exhaustion immediately caught up with me and I fell asleep as soon as I got back to my inn room.

—And now, one day later, I'm waiting for Shea at the entrance to the central plaza, situated not far away from my inn. It's planned for me to accompany her to the guild. 『Guild』 refers to the association managing the hunters in the Wildinne Margraviate.

Many people trying to make a living from killing demonic beasts - in short, hunters - are staying in this area which is adjacent to the outlands, the habitat of the demonic beasts.

The guild handles many tasks such as paying the rewards and referring jobs to the hunters, managing the insurance money paid out in case of death or injuries, investigating the number of demonic beasts, and acting as intermediary between hunters and merchants wishing to purchase the looted beast parts.

I was taught all of this by the guards who had kidnapped me yesterday. Probably plagued by pangs of guilt, they treated me so politely that it rather got a bit annoying.

Anyway, I was told that even a magic blacksmith like me needs to register with the guild if I'm going to head out on demonic beast hunts. Otherwise, no insurance money would be paid out upon my death, nor would the guild be able to put up any relief requests in case I ended up isolated in the outlands. The guards informed me of these matters very courteously, too.

And at the end, I was even told, "Sorry for abducting you before..."

I wait for some time while reviewing all this information in my mind. Suddenly I spot a woman walking straight in my direction from the other side of the main street.

It's Shea. As always, she wears a getup drawing the attention of those around her. Moreover, it's an outfit heavily focusing on functionality. And yet, even though her revealing outfit should gain her enough attention from the men, strangely not a single one calls out to Shea.

Rather, the people open a path for Shea. Very likely not consciously, but instinctively. This phenomenon might stem from Shea emitting the aura of an expert fighter, palpable even by ordinary people.

Heading through the cleared path, solely focused on me, Shea comes to a halt as soon as she arrives in front of me.

"Did you have to wait?"

"No, not at all."

"Good. Let's go then."

With only those few words, Shea starts walking again, heading for the guild. Even in front of me, her companion, the crowd of people breaks apart, opening up a path.

"Wow. Is that what you call the "Ki" released by a master?"

"Hmm? What are you talking about?" Shea tilts her head to the side with a puzzled look.

"No, I mean, look. The people are naturally opening a path for us." I explain my impression to Shea.

"Oh, the reason is this." Shea picks up the rustic necklace dangling at her chest with a somewhat boastful expression.

Come to think of it, she had also worn this necklace during her battle against the orcs, hadn't she? Does she like it so much?

"This is?"

"A fang of the Black Dog. It actually contains a powerful curse, and just wearing it triggers a special effect that causes weak creatures to scurry away."

"Why the hell are you using something like that as an accessory!?"

"Yughul always carry a part of the demonic beasts they defeated so far with them. For me it's this one."

So that's why she looked so boastful moments ago!

"Still, isn't that something you'd equip on the battlefield?"

"Having this on me keeps annoying men away. It's an unexpectedly handy item to have inside a city." Shea blurts out calmly.

I see. So it can also be used as playboy repellent... However, its effect actually works against men and women of all ages.

Walking unobstructed thanks to the Black Dog's fang, Shea and I continue our journey to the guild.



The headquarters of the association managing all hunters is a square brick building. The columns of windows, systematically divided into three rows, indicate that the guild's building possesses three floors.

A stone gate is visible right in the middle of the building. The decorations are kept to a minimum. However, this construction, barring any unnecessary pretense, adds to the dignity instead.

With Shea in the lead, we pass through the gate, entering the building.

"Welcome to the guild. Oh my, what a pleasure to see you, Ms. Shea. And, young lad, nice to meet you. I'm the receptionist Sarah."

As soon as she recognizes Shea, the receptionist runs up to us. As typical for the people in this area, her hair has a chestnut-color. She's a lovely woman with a voluptuous chest. Her beauty isn't stingingly cold like Shea's, but rather, a soothing one... I'm pretty sure she's the guild's poster girl.





"I'm glad to meet you. I'm Teo Korpi, umm, a magic blacksmith."

"Oohh, a magic blacksmith. I see, I see. Magic blacksmiths with approved skills are definitely in high demand. Please do your best, oki?"

We're standing in a spacious, stone hall. A counter where requests are accepted lines up deeper inside. Round tables and chairs have been set up nearby, serving as a place to exchange information and to wait. One of the boards on the wall is plastered with many requests.

A dozen hunters are present in the hall, and some of them look our way after noticing our arrival... Furthermore, the looks of those strong hunters are obviously filled with hostility towards Shea.

"Hey, the Cursed Tool User got a man with her."

I can hear words appearing to be malicious gossip, accompanied by snickering. The bearded men smirk while holding their beers.

Shea ignores all of that while I'm confused, not knowing what to do. Even I can tell that they aren't Shea's buddies...

"Sarah, can you please register Teo?"

"Suuure. Please fill out these forms here. I'm really sorry for this being such a filthy place. You must feel disturbed with all those scary-looking, gruff guys around. But don't worry, they're all going to die soon anyway!"

Ms. Sarah has an unexpectedly nasty way with her words! With my heart racing as I'm worrying whether the other hunters have heard her, I fill out the blanks on the registry forms. There are surprisingly many passages I need to check closely such as the guild's basic rules, the exemption from responsibility, the penal regulations, and so on.

"I'll go and pick a suitable request." Seemingly having judged that the registration would need some time, Shea heads in the direction of the counter, leaving Sarah and me behind.

She walks in a way that invites her silver hair to sway. Once more the crowd clears the space around her while at the same time showering her with hateful gazes.

"Tsk, fuckin' barbarian race (Junk). She's creepin' me out."

"If she wasn't the margrave's lil' favorite, a bitch like her..."

According to the margrave, Shea is one of his certified hunters. She should be someone with top-notch abilities in the world of hunters, but it's pretty obvious that she's not welcome around here.

"Hey, what's a barbarian race (Junk)?"

"Barbarian race (Junk) is a discriminatory term for a small ethnic group mainly living in the west as nomads. The term itself means they're an uncivilized, lowly race living from selling trash."

I-I see. It was a discriminatory term... And yet, Ms. Sarah cheerfully explains in a way that's easy to understand while smiling brightly.

Ms. Sarah is quite peculiar in her own way as well, though.

Anyway, her being insulted with such a word means...

"Say, it may sound a bit weird, but isn't Shea somehow hated?"

"Yes, and it's not just 'somehow' either! Ah, but I'd like you to not misunderstand. It's not merely limited to her being hated. It feels like she's also feared at the same time." Ms. Sarah declares boldly with a cheery smile.

Though she doesn't really need to get all detailed on the nuances in Shea's ostracization.

"O-Okay. But, what's the reason?"

"That's because Ms. Shea is young, a woman, a Yughul, the one who killed Black Dog, an extremely skilled hunter, and the margrave's favorite."

"So basically all of her."

"Yep. In short, it's jealousy. Ah, another big reason you mustn't forget is her ridiculously gross and brutal combat style."

Ms. Sarah is also thorough in explaining all the reasons for Shea's ostracization.

"I see...Shea has a hard furrow to plough."

"Their bodies are tough, but they sure are sly and underhanded. Oh, wait, body build and character got nothing to do with each other. It's wrong to discriminate against others for their appearance." She resolutely and shrewdly tells me loud enough so that everyone around us can hear her.

Ms. Sarah seems to have a straightforward character that dislikes talking behind the backs of others... Still, her qualification as poster girl for the guild is pretty much non-existent.

"But you see, Ms. Shea is also a stubborn girl, completely unwilling to compromise the tiniest bit. Even though I've said that she's hated, it's not like no one wants to party with her, seeing how she's one of our best hunters. But, far from simply turning those people down. She goes as far as completely ignoring them! But you see, I'd love her to do her best in training some younger folks since she's a certified hunter."

And yet, Ms. Sraha doesn't hold back on talking loudly. At long last, her voice has apparently carried all the way to Shea, who's handling the formalities at the counter. She looks back in our direction, glaring at full force.

Ms. Sarah, the fake poster girl who picks fights at every front...

"Excuse me, but what does certified hunter mean?"

"Certified hunters are top-ranking demonic beast hunters who have been officially acknowledged by the margraviate's administration. Unlike normal hunters, they possess various, special privileges. Moreover, they're paid extra in addition to the regular subjugation rewards. Mo-re-ov-er, they're granted a rank equivalent to a knight and can call a small patch of land their own. It's the only path for commoners to enter nobility."

"Those are amazing special privileges."

"You can obtain status, money, and power. However, you need overwhelming abilities to do so. That's why those scarred, old ruffians wouldn't be a match for Ms. Shea even if they ganged up on her. Since they'd get totally trashed, their options of getting back at her are limited to speaking ill behind her back."

The grim men tremble with their fists clenched tightly. Ms. Sarah seems to be completely unconcerned, but...I feel like I'm in danger here.

"Don't worry. Even without you acting all jittery, they won't be able to make a move on Ms. Shea's partner. At most they'll spread some weird rumors. Please fill out the documents without paying any attention to them."

"Okay. Hey! Wait, I don't want any weird rumors being spread about me!"

"Still, for Ms. Shea to finally have partied up with a magic blacksmith. Nice, nice."

"Finally, you say?"

"It's normal for fairly strong hunters to target big game while getting supplied with enchanted weapons by hired field smiths. Even if you deduct the pay for a field smith, the income is on a completely different level. Almost all of the first-class hunters have exclusive field smiths working for them. I doubt those old misers over there got enough money for one, though."

"You're saying this deliberately, aren't you...?"

I concentrate on filling out the documents for the sake of not continuing this topic any further, and finish writing down everything in one go.

"This should be everything, right?"

I pass the three sheets back to Ms. Sarah after having filled them out completely.

"Hmm, let's see. Yep, looks good. Okay, please sign here."

"Okay."

"Also, here, here, here, and here. Afterwards, sign here, and also on the back of this paper."

"That's way too much signing!"

"Sure. Lastly, sign here. Okay, thank you. Now then, this number here will be your registration

number. Later you'll receive an identification card with this number recorded on it. If you have that, it'll be handy since anyone will be immediately able to tell who you are in case of your death. You also get a free body bag with the insurance you signed just now." The poster girl yaps about body bags as if it's plain, common sense. Moreover, with an innocent smile...

Once again I fully realize that I've come to an outrageous place. I didn't expect that it'd be easy to procure mithril, but for things to turn out like this...

"You done, Teo? I got us a job."

As I'm wallowing in self-pity, a notification preordaining yet another development arrives. It's a parchment that's brusquely thrust in front of me by Shea.

~ Request Acceptance Form ~

**Request Content:** Subjugate the wyvern that appeared in the eastern Nibrel Village

**Danger Grade:** Level C

Further down, it lists all the information currently known about the request. It's stuff like the count of victims, information about the target, the demonic beasts spawning in the area, etc.

"I'm going to accompany her on this one, right...?"

"Of course. This is why you registered with us. Besides, don't worry. The body bag is already covered."

"...Danger Grade Level C, what does that actually mean?"

"Eight out of ten hunters, who've received basic training, will come back. That's become the criterion for Level C." Ms. Sarah explains something terrifying with her usual polite tone and bright smile.

"...Umm, it's relatively deadly, isn't it?"

Recalling the scenes of the day when we got attacked by orcs, I feel how my stomach becomes heavy all of a sudden. The guards, who had been slaughtered back then, were probably endowed with basic abilities, too.

"Please don't worry. Ms. Shea has hunted down Bilrutong the Black Dog, a Level S beast and one of the Six Calamities. Something like a Level C request is kinda like a picnic for her."

"Really?"

Somehow feeling that Ms. Sarah is exaggerating things, I check back with Shea. Shea nods in reply.

"However, picnics have fairly high mortality rates in this city."

"Come on. No way."

What's the point in using a picnic as a reference if you then raise the picnic's danger level!?

"Anyway, it's very rare for Ms. Shea to form parties. You'll draw the attention of everyone. Please do your best, oki?" Ms. Sarah encourages me with a lovely smile.

In the back, I can feel the rough guys' murderous stares on me. But, I'm still far from being experienced enough to tell whether I'm being observed with eyes full of fear.



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 Korpys 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 its 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 meters 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 cortège 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."

...To be honest, it was a tiny bit dangerous, though. And, as the tension in my body loosens up, so relaxes my mind. She's right. It'd be a really bad joke if I collapsed before we even encountered the wyverns.

I stretch my body lightly to loosen up, and sit down next to Shea. After taking another sip of water, I've finally managed to quench my thirst.

"Say Shea, have you always been hunting alone?"

"It's not like I've always gone solo. Sometimes I've also participated in quests requiring a big number of people."

Which reminds me, I first met Shea during the orc attack. Back then, several hunters had been hired as guards for the coaches.

"I don't mind temporarily joining quests consisting of ten or twenty people. I just can't be bothered to hang out in the same party all the time."

In short, Shea seems to hate joining parties.

"But, going by what I've seen of the guild, it seems like everyone joins parties."

"It's standard to form parties while balancing the various classes such as swordsman, archer, magic blacksmith, healer, and tracker."

"And you've been completely ignoring that standard..."

"I don't want to get chummy with the guild folks." Shea spits out, snatches the flask out of my hand, and puts it against her mouth.

She's acting as if she's trying to wash down her anger with the water in it. I'm reminded of the scornful words those rude guys used against the yughul race. And their eyes full of contempt as they glared at Shea...

"What kind of ethnic group are the yughul?"

"It's one of the smaller ethnic groups inhabiting mountain districts. For a long time, my race has had a strong resistance against curses. We've mostly created and sold cursed tools, hunted while using those tools, and even carried out assassinations during wars. Well, I guess you can call us a race that makes a living from dirty jobs. This mask here is something that's been passed down in my family over generations. It's called Breaking Bone Mask." Shea gently strokes her eerie mask like a pet.

"Breaking Bone...it's obviously cursed."

"Yeah, it increases one's physical strength by releasing the limitation in your brain, but it clamps

down on its wearer's skull as if trying to break it." She answers with a slightly braggy tone.

"...I-I see. That's curse tool users for you. So, what's the current situation with the yughul?"

Considering Shea's nicknames as last curse tool user and yughul survivor, something must have happened.

"For a number of reasons, our race was annihilated. I suppose you could call it a fitting fate for a race of curse tool users."

An explanation limited to the absolute minimum. Her scarce wording tells me that she doesn't intend to go into details about the history of the curse tool users who've been alienated and persecuted.

"It must have been a beautiful race."

"Huh?" Shea widens her big eyes even further.

"I mean, looking at you, I just somehow felt like they had to be."

"Teo, did you hit your head somewhere? Or do you want me to knock some sense into you?"

"P-Please stop. I just stated my honest opinion. You see, the stuff the guild folks were saying sounds..."

It kinda looks like I'm trying to flirt with her as I can't express myself well, but what I want to say here is something slightly different.

"If you're saying this out of consideration, don't bother. They're just running their mouths about me. There'll be no end if you try to stop them." Shea shakes her head lightly, telling me to not mind it.

Come to think of it, back at the guild, Shea has completely ignored all the insults. But even so, it doesn't sit well with me to just watch it happening.

"Still, I hated it. From now on I'm going to be your partner, so I don't feel like overlooking mud thrown at you, Shea."

"I'm telling you, it's not an issue you need to bother with. In the first place, is this a good topic while waiting for wyverns?"

"Even if you tell me that, it's not like I know of any topics that would be suitable when waiting for wyverns!"

"Talk about some light gossip that's not so damn gloomy. Otherwise you're just going to distract me."

"You say that so easily."

"It's okay to alleviate the tension with some chatting, but it'd be meaningless if I were to miss the

prey's presence because of it. ...Like right now, for example!"

Suddenly, Shea jumps at my neck, pushing me down to the ground.

—A wyvern!

Immediately following, a huge body passes above us, grazing the trees. The fierce gust, created by its big wings, would have definitely blown me away if I hadn't lied on the ground.

The wyvern circles several times in the air before eventually descending towards the tree with the offering.

"Teo, where's the knife? Hurry! I can't use <Corpse Eater> against a flying enemy!"

"Eeehh!?"

Just a little while ago you've told me that it's okay to take it slow! pops up as a complaint in my mind, but I don't plan to voice out. It's pretty obvious that the situation has completely changed. Besides, I don't want to die either.

In reality I wanted to finish the polishing by using the grindstone, but there's no time left. I shift to the finishing step of a magic blacksmith, the seal. It's one of the secret tetragrammatons passed down in the Korpi family.

—Seal of Prosperity.

Ornaments with this seal retain their beauty and divinity for a long time. They last long past a century without rusting or decaying. After correctly and accurately carving the seal, I drive in another seal from above as if drawing a N, negating the prayer.

It's a Teo Korpi Original - a Negated Seal of Prosperity. I dub it — Cursed Symbol of Instant Destruction.

『Spit out everything, scorch the body, and haunt your owner』. It's an inversion of divine protection through runes. The ash black mana contained in the knife blade bursts out without pausing.

"Shea!"

At this point, it's nothing I can touch anymore. Each time the small bubbles boiling on the blade's surface pop, they cause rusty ripples. The knife has already started to break down.

"Interesting. This thing looks like it'll get the job done." Shea comments, and lowers her Breaking Bone Mask, covering her face.

Then she goes with the flow, grabbing the knife without any hesitation. The black maliciousness wrapping her arm up all the way to her elbow should trigger a terrible pain as common to especially dense curses.

However, Shea doesn't seem to be affected by it at all. She stoops down, and slowly approaches the

wyvern flexibly like a cat, with the bare minimum of movements. Then she suddenly makes a big step forward, bends her whole body back, and throws the knife.

The throwing knife flies like a bullet, revolving like mad. The swastika-shaped blade transforms its rotational force into penetrative power, stabbing deeply into the wyvern's right shoulder, at the root of its wing.

『Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaoooooooooooooooooo!』

A scream thunders across the trees. Surprised by the violent pain, the wyvern flaps its wings, trying to fly away. This allows it to somehow stay airborne with its huge frame. However, eventually, the right wing stops working, and the wyvern loses its balance, crashing to the ground, and impacting with a loud boom.

"The wing's muscles have been paralyzed by the curse, huh? Nice, it'll allow me to kill it."

"Though it's not a proper deed for a cortege blacksmith..."

I used a seal that's originally applied to preserve a holy weapon for a long time. Once I inverted the seal and carved it into the knife, it became a negated divine protection that corrodes the weapon and its wielder, or in other words, a curse. Based on theory it makes sense, but it's my first time to actually experience it.

It looks like the effect has been outstanding, but it's a technique that would make my ancestor turn over in his grave.

"Look, its wound is festering! Over there. It's hard to spot because of the blood, but the skin around the wound is falling apart after having turned into jelly."

"No thanks, I'm not that eager to watch it..."

"Look and see the outcome of your work with your own eyes. The wound is expanding. A bone is already popping out. It'll become a fine crafting material..."

"I told you, even without you showing me...ooeeeh."

Rotting while still alive is disgusting, no matter how you look at it. Or rather, why has Shea been so gleeful about it? Is this some cultural issue with the yughul? Or is it Shea's personality?

Without minding me who's confused while barfing, Shea shifts to the next stage of her strategy.

"We'll circle into its back. Follow me."

Readying the ominous machete in her right hand, she forcefully pulls me along with her left hand.

"What are you going to do?"

"Wyverns can't spit their breath backwards since they'd burn themselves. When hunting them, you've always got to get into their back. That's the basics."

"Okay, and what's my part in this?"

"Stop dawdling around and hurry. Unless you want to be turned into ashes."

—Gaaaaahh!

Immediately after we've started to run, the wyvern releases a fireball from its muzzle alongside a roar. The spot where we've been moments ago goes up in raging flames. The wyvern keeps shooting one fireball after the other.

But, the only places being engulfed by flames are far away. It seems the wyvern has lost sight of us. Shea closes the distance to it quietly, but quickly. She approaches the wyvern's tail which thrashes around like an independent life-form.

"Alright, we're safe here."

The wyvern's tail smashes apart the trunk of a tree right in front of us. And yet she declares this area to be safe while watching it happening.

"Like how—" The instant I try to ask her, Shea swings <Corpse Eater> down at the tail.

Around two metrils of the thick, scaly tail are cut off.

『Gyaaaaah!』

The wyvern violently swings its tail around in pain. The blood gushing out of the cut end comes down at us like a warm summer rain, just in crimson. Shea doesn't even bother dodging the blood, and allows her whole body to immediately get dyed deep red.

She runs up to the rampaging wyvern, evades its tail by stooping down, and lets <Corpse Eater> graze across the ground.

What follows next is a nasty snapping sound, as if a thick cord has been cut. The wyvern's body loses its balance and topples over. Shea had slashed through one of its legs.

Now it's become unable to fly and unable to walk. At this point, the battle has been decided — or at least it should have been decided.

For Shea it's the start of the main show. She jumps atop the belly of the fallen wyvern, and drives <Corpse Eater> through the soft scales as if putting it to the stake.

『Gaaaaahh!』

As she pulls out Corpse Eater after stabbing it in very deeply, blood sprays out copiously. However, without resting her hands, Shea pierces the wyvern with <Corpse Eater> once again. Immediately pulls it out, and stabs it down again, rinse n' repeat...

With the belly's muscles torn apart, it's become impossible for the wyvern's body to hold back its intestines, resulting in them sliding out. And yet Shea continues to brandish her cursed machete. As

soon as she cuts up the stomach and bowels, a gooey fluid containing the wyvern's food spills out from within...

That's...hume...isn't it? The arm of a hume that's already half dissolved has...

"Uuuuhhh...ooooeeehhh."

I can't hold back my nausea anymore, and barf my stomach empty. Well, it's still better than losing everything in your stomach by having cut it open, but I still feel like shit.

I was already aware of it, but Shea's <Corpse Eater> increases its offensive ability by absorbing curses through slaughter. Making the targets suffer as much as possible allows the blade to suck up a lot more grudges. That's why she's thrusting the blade into the wyvern's body right now while skilfully avoiding hitting its heart. All for the sake of that machete with its bad efficiency to not run out of gas when it counts.

At this point I can't count anymore how often she's stabbed down with <Corpse Eater>. She's turned the wyvern into a bloody pulp of goo with only its head and heart left untouched. No matter how much of a life force a wyvern might possess, there are limits to everything. It's already stopped reacting.

"It's a wrap, I'd say." Shea stabs <Corpse Eater> into the crown of the wyvern's head.

She's finally given it a rest... I mean, even if I can understand it logically, it doesn't mean that my feelings are on board with this. Either way, I want to get away from this nightmare that has unfolded in front of my eyes. I close my eyes, and slowly take some breaths.

"You okay? Your face looks pale."

When I open my eyes, I find Shea peering into my face. She's already removed her mask, exposing her shapely face that has been spared from getting tainted with blood stains.

"Anyone would feel bad, right?"

"Don't worry. You'll get used to it sooner or later."

"Though it's nothing I want to actually get used to in the first place."

I feel sorry for Shea, but to be honest, it's a bit scary to be completely cool with all of this.

"Considering it's your first job, you pass. I had planned to hang you from a tree as bait if you proved to be useless, Teo."

"You're terrible!"

"It's great that it didn't come this far, don't you think? For now, you've stayed alive." Shea talks as if the hunt has succeeded. "But, there's more to come."

The male wyvern...

"It's about time. After all, we've made her scream nicely." With those words, Shea looks up to the sky.

White clouds are lightly floating in the sky. Among them, a small, black dot which is steadily growing in size.

『Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!』

An angry cry that seems to burst my eardrums. Not just the trees, but even the ground seem to tremble. And, leaving such noise in its wake, a wyvern shoots straight down.

Shea relaxedly pulls out <Corpse Eater>, and confronts it right from the front.

The wyvern glides through the air while mowing down the trees in its path, targeting Shea. It opens its huge muzzle, baring its sharp fangs with a glare full of hatred.

One flash of <Corpse Eater>, and the huge muzzle is horizontally torn apart and blown away with a fierce bang. The machete, which has collected plenty of curse power, has demonstrated its astounding might. The upper jaw whirls up high into the air while still connected to the head. The lower jaw and everything below bids an eternal farewell to life.

Having lost its head, the wyvern crashes into the ground, causing trees and shrubs to be smashed while whirling up a cloud of dirt. After tumbling around thanks to its quick momentum, the body comes to a stop in a place slightly away from us.

"Now we're done." Shea blows the blood off <Corpse Eater> by swinging it with a buzzing.

Dense, black steam rises from its blade. This sinister curse is the root of its power.

"As always, it packs quite a punch."

"Sure does. However, this one immediately uses up the saved curse power, so it's not suited for taking on many enemies. That's why I've decided to use you, Teo."

"Then I hope I can be of help to you."

"The items you forge are superb, but you've got many openings for a field smith. Act so that you don't die. If my field smith dies on me, I'll also be in danger as soon as the enchantments are used up."

"...Haha, I'm just happy that I've managed to finish this job safely."

"Finish? What are you talking about? We're still in the middle of it."

"Huh!?"

We've killed two wyverns. This covers the guild's mission...at least it should do so.

"The scales, fangs, and keels of wyverns are all precious materials. Not to mention the nitric sack

and the flame stone in their throats. As a magic blacksmith you should be aware of that, right?"

The flame stones and nitric sacks of wyverns are high-grade materials used for fire enchantments. I've handled them in the past as enchanting materials, but I've never directly procured them from wyverns.

"That means we're going to loot them by dismantling these, right...?"

"Is it possibly going to be your first dismantling? Wow, that's a city boy for you. Okay, I'll teach you the ropes. The head has been blown off, but its throat should still be okay." Shea happily rushes over to the wyvern's corpse.

At once she thrusts her arm into the throat through the lower jaw that's lost its upper jaw and the head.

"It's here. The hard lump you can feel when you push your arm into its throat all the way up to your elbow. That's the flame stone. Teo, you give it a go as well."

Shea pulls her blood-smeared arm out of the throat, forcibly grabs my hand, and thrusts her arm into the wyvern once more while holding onto my hand. It's a mushy, indescribable sensation I feel from my hand...

"Ugh..."

"Something wrong?"

"Something wrong, you ask!? ... Oeeeehh."

Tears burst out of my eyes, completely unrelated to what I want. Fortunately, I've got nothing left in my stomach. From the bottom of my heart, I feel that it's great for me having earlier barfed like a madman.