

Chapter 4 - Hack Apart! The Ground Spider

Leaving Nibrel Village, we return to the governmental seat of the margraviate without any incidents. Shea and I directly head for the guild to report the success of our wyvern subjugation. However, the report of a subjugation report feels unexpectedly thorough.

First we hand in the completion form signed by the village chief of Nibrel Village, the requester. Then we get interviewed by a guild staff member. The questions are quite detailed, revolving around the circumstances of the site after our arrival, the size of the killed wyverns, their ferocity, and the spawn condition of magic beasts in the vicinity. Of course, it's Shea who replies most of them.

"The wyverns were plump and fat. They had already eaten five people," and so on, she answered in a way showing that she's already accustomed to such questioning.

I'm stuck only nodding at her words.

The guild gathers information from the hunters it dispatched to various places, and draws up reports about the magic beasts' activity level, their ferocity, and their progress of invasion into inhabited areas. This allows them to comprehensively analyze the situation in all of Wildinne. I'm told that this is yet another important duty imposed on the guild.

"How was that? If there's something you don't understand, feel free to ask anytime." Ms. Sarah addresses me with a smile, seemingly having paid attention to me who has remained silent for the entire conversation.

Should I take her up on that offer? I mean, there's so much stuff I don't really get...

"I've been wondering about it before, but what are those six calamities you've mentioned the other day?"

"Oh, so that's where we've got to start. For a long time, it's been said that there are six big calamities in the Wildinne Region. Floods, thunderstorms, droughts, and in addition to those, three magic beasts. Magic beasts that reach a certain level are the same as natural disasters or calamities for humes. You could say, encountering them is bad luck as it means certain death."

"I see. So that's why calamities."

"Yep. The Undead Dragon which swallows entire cities by causing a tidal wave or explosively increasing the number of undead, and the Lion King which has never been injured by anyone so far. Then there was Bilrutong the Black Dog which was killed by Ms. Shea. It's said that Bilrutong bit 2500 hunters to death until that point...meaning, Ms. Shea is really amazing." Ms. Sarah explains while looking very happy.

However, Shea glares at her as if completely pissed off by her words.

"Stop it. It's not like I killed it by myself. I was just lucky enough to be a survivor among my party. I don't want this to be seen as my own achievement."

"Still, surviving in a huge party of 200 people..."

"Enough of this. Teo, we're going to choose the next quest." Arbitrarily stating this, Shea starts to walk off at a quick pace.

"So quickly?"

"It's not quick or anything. I've always had some quest going." Shea scrutinizes the currently available quests.

"How about it? See anything you'd like to do?"

"If possible, I don't want to do any of them..."

Of course she doesn't even listen to my plea. Almost all of the wall on the right side of the counter is covered by a bulletin board. That huge, wooden board is chaotically packed with pinned quest notes. She carefully scans the quests while standing on her tiptoes to stretch herself or crouching down, as required.

"Hmm...I see, I guess this one's impossible with our current numbers."

"Yes...this is a condition set by the client, and not the guild. I'm terribly sorry, but I can not do anything about it." The female guild staff, who's been called over by Shea, repeatedly bows while feeling sorry.

It looks like the quest, which has piqued Shea's interest, requires a certain number of people, and as it's only Shea and me in our party, we're lacking in that department... Apparently even a certified hunter like Shea can't overturn such conditions.

Ripping off several other quest notes in a somewhat rough manner, she comes back to where I am.

"None of those are really good. It's quite unusual for this place, but most recently it's been very hard to find decent quests here." Shea spreads the parchments listing the quest details on the round table.

The difficulty is all over the place, ranging from E to B. According to Shea, these are the only quests where we can expect some reasonable reward while being at a level where I won't die.

"The ditch slime cleaning in the Ikraho Water Channels...is an extremely safe option, but if you get touched by those slimes, you'll stink for around ten days, and above all, it's a tedious, boring job... Choosing a boring job or putting Teo's life at danger...I'm really wavering here."

"That's nothing you'd need to waver about, is it!?"

Because of the scarce changes of Shea's expression, it's hard to tell whether she's joking or talking seriously. Either way, I'd appreciate a boring job as I plan to survive at any cost, but Shea seems to regard boring jobs as intolerably 'worthless.' Pushing the parchments with boring quests aside, she's trying to pick up a quest where I could die!

"A better option than this one..."

"Exists!"

Suddenly a voice I've never heard before cuts into our conversation. At the same time, two wooden mugs are placed on our table with a rhythmical clanking.

"Those are my treats. Orange ale. The drink I can recommend the most among those available here."

A single girl has shown up in front of us. She has beautiful, blond hair, a slender body build, and above all, characteristically pointed ears. Without a doubt, an elven girl. The age of elves is hard to guess, but I've got no doubt that she's still young. Her face and figure have traces of childishness left to them. I dare say she's younger than Shea and me.

And there's yet another aspect standing out like a sore thumb besides her youth...her charm. Fair-skinned, blond hair, slender, and emerald eyes - an orthodox, undisputed beauty as typical for elves.

"I'm Elemia. You're the newbie magic blacksmith? You look quite frail, don't you? Do you really have what it takes? Also, long time no see, Lady Shea." The elven girl selfishly goes on with her own story.

"An acquaintance of yours, Shea?"

"No."

"What are you talking about!?! Of course we're acquaintances! We've met at the guild many times!"

"Really?" Shea jerks her head to the side in confusion, apparently having no clue about Elemia.

"A promising archer who's been steadily gaining fame most recently, and a Rank B hunter rumored to possess an excellent taste among elves - Elemia, the Morning Mist Shooter. You must have heard of me, right?" Elemia throws out her chest once more with a triumphant expression.

However, in spite of her exaggerated introduction...

"...Umm, Morning Mist-what?" Shea looks puzzled.

"Morning Mist Shooter! The one said to possess a mind eye allowing her to shoot the head of a worm with just one arrow within heavy mist..."

"Yep, okay, no idea."

She's gone out of her way to explain her own nickname, and yet this reply. This gotta be quite embarrassing for her!

The elven girl's face becomes bright red, all the way up to the tips of her ears.

"Give me the ale back! I'm a pinchpenny after all! Anyway, I've come here because I heard that Black Dog Hunter Shea has finally formed a new party!"

"It's no such big deal. The party only got Teo and me."

"Yep, that's why I'm telling you to let me join you guys. If you do that, it'll allow you to accept a wider range of quests with better pay. This will give you another option you were looking for!"

"I see, but no thanks."

Just as expected, Shea readily turns her down.

"No way...an offer by the Morning Mist Shooter...why?"

"An olden yughul proverb says, 『You mustn't go with a stranger, if they talk to you out of the blue』."

"That's something very normal, passed down among all races! Or rather, we're hunters, and it's commonplace for us to join up for work. And just as I've told you over and over again, I'm not some stranger or anything like that! It's probably the eighth time that we've encountered each other."

"Sorry, but I don't remember you at all."

"Haven't you just forgotten because of the curse!? I've greeted you each time we met in the guild, and I should have made it pretty clear that I'm more than willing to form a party with you. Lady Shea, what's the point in you ignoring people who're giving you such signs when you're completely isolated inside the guild!?"

"It doesn't bear any meaning if you don't speak up about such things." For some reason, Shea responds in a tone, indicating that she's rather regarding this as Elemia's fault.

"Yes, I should have told you directly! But...but, it'd be just normal to realize...seeing how I offered you honey-soaked lemons whenever you looked exhausted, or quickly passed you a cooled towel when you came back from a job under the blazing sun!"

That's too obvious! She's been totally acting like a fangirl who's idolizing her admired senior!

"I was convinced that it was a service offered by the guild."

"There's no way that you'd get such a service in this savage guild, is there!?"

"Now that you mention it. Okay, I'm worse at dealing with other people than magic beasts, but I'll at least greet you from now on." Shea offers an apology that lacks any feelings, and returns to choosing the next quest.

For Shea this story is over with. At least that's what she might believe, but...

"Holy shit, Lady Shea, your communication disorder goes beyond my worst predictions. As I thought, I've got to join this party after all, else it won't work." Elemia tenaciously hangs on, without having learned her lesson at all.

"..."

"Really, Lady Shea, I've got no idea what to do with you. It's terrible that you're so isolated in the guild. That's why I'll help you..."

"..."

"Lady Shea, at least say something. Things will never work out with two people who got communication disorder. Going by your combat style, you definitely need someone to handle ranged attacks, Lady Shea! Isn't it fine to simply accept me as a member!?"

I feel like she casually involved me in there as well just now!

"Don't make me repeat myself. I..."

However, Elemia quickly perceives that Shea is about to turn her down.

"OK, OK, I got it! If you're going this far, I'll tell you my true feelings! I reaaally adore you, Lady Shea! I also want to become a certified hunter. Absolutely, by all means! No matter what, I'll become a certified hunter, even if I have to eat mud! And then I'll obtain a wealthy, decent life. Joining up with you is the best option for that sake. That's why, accept me as your party member!" Elemia turns her passionate look directly at Shea.



It looks like she's the gutsy type of girl with a straightforward character, contrary to the gracefulness of her appearance.

"I've fully understood your feelings. I'm very happy and thankful about you admiring someone like me...but, it's still a no."

"Wait, wait! Lady Shea, let's sort things a bit, okay!? I'm well aware that you're often heading to dangerous places, targeting big game. I'm set on wanting to rise in the world, so I'll greatly welcome any dangerous quest. Also, since I'm an archer, we fit together perfectly. Since you're isolated in the guild, there are no other people that would join a party with you, meaning I'm your only choice. Now then, think it over well. The answer is pretty obvious."

What an incredible pressure! She's unbelievably pushy despite being a pretty elven girl! She's even making sure that Shea can't escape by secretly holding onto her arm under the table.

"I understood your feelings, but no."

"Hey, newbie! Do something about this! Lady Shea is acting strange!" Elemia draws close, suddenly turning the conversation my way.

"Strange, you say. Rather, I think that's the usual Shea."

"In such a case, isn't this now the perfect time for her to say, 『Good grief, it can't be helped』!? Why is she turning me down? Usually one would feel bad when refusing under these circumstances, no!?"

"I think so as well, but...it's Shea we're talking about here."

"No, no, no, even a cursed weapon user who's shunned and feared in the guild should show a bit more of a reaction after being told all this, don't you think!? Hey, come on, Lady Shea, I've told you that I adore you! Please!!" Elemia advertises herself by spreading her arms and overreacting.

"Umm, Elemia was it, right? Your appearance and behavior are completely misaligned."

She's right. Even among the elves with their many beauties, she falls into the category of being extraordinarily attractive. Her outward appearance is like that of a pretty doll, delicate, slim and elegant.

That elf is currently swinging her arms while ferociously appealing herself.

"I don't give a damn about my appearance. My family is poor. I must provide for my little brothers and sisters by making a career! For the sake of taking the shortest route, I have to party with you, Lady Shea! Please!" Her green eyes, shining like jewels, are directly fixed on Shea.

As expected, even Shea should find it hard to ignore her pure passion.

"...Hmm...Teo, it can't be helped. I guess we'll go for the ditch slime cleaning... I don't really feel like it, but whatever."

She has completely disregarded Elemia! Far from having difficulties with ignoring her, she actually denies her very existence!

"Shea, a bit more lee..." I try to interject as I can't simply watch this, but...

"No. Pity kills hunters. Forming a party and becoming all chummy is bad for everyone involved."

"Lady Sheaaa! I'm great at handling trouble."

"It's troublesome for me. Anyway, that's my final word. Teo, let's go with the slime cleaning?"

Forcibly closing this topic, Shea returns to the quest selection. She focuses on the parchments atop the table as if Elemia has vanished out of existence.

"Lady Shea, how about this then? A subjugation of a basilisk." Elemia quickly adds another parchment to the pile.

"Hmm? ...Not bad. There was such a quest available?"

"It was pinned at a conspicuous spot. However, you need to have three people to be accepted."

Now she's trying it from the angle that we'll be able to accept a greater variety of quests if we add her as a party member.

"Hmm, it's overwhelmingly better than the ditch slimes..."

"Hey, newbie! You tell Lady Shea, too! Basilisks are much better than ditch slimes, right!?"

"No, I don't quite understand..."

"Ditch slimes are hell. Thanks to their stench, you'll become unable to live normally in the city for a week. You'll be forbidden from entering restaurants etc. Lady Shea!"

"Hmm..."

With her arms folded, Shea is comparing the basilisk killing quest and the ditch slime cleaning quest with her eyes. She's obviously hesitating.

"Hunt! Give me just one chance! Pweeeaaase! Lady Shea! Hey, pwetty pweeease, Lady Shea!" Looking at Shea with upturned eyes, she pleads with the voice of a spoiled child.

This time she's going with the begging strategy. She sure hangs in there.

Eventually, Shea sighs deeply, "...For just this one quest."

Looking up at the ceiling, Shea has finally caved in!

"Thank you very much, Lady Shea!"

Elemia bursts into joy, hopping up and down like a rabbit. Going with that momentum, she even hugs Shea.

"...Teo, this is an irregular situation. Hunters must always make calm and careful decisions. Being swept along by emotions after having passionate pleading hurled at you isn't anything that ought to happen." Shea explains to me while tearing Elemia off her.

I'm pretty sure she's not talking to me, but to herself.

Hence a pushy elf was added to our party, with our next quest decided to be a basilisk subjugation.

