

Chapter 5 - Corrode! The Basilisks

Where is this...? I've completely forgotten. A strong wind is going on top of some hill. The trees are swaying. But, not because of the wind.

A huge dragon. Each time the dragon takes a step, the earth trembles...causing the trees to sway.

"Shea, you scared?"

"Yep. I mean, it's sooo huge, and its fangs are terrifying. Grandpa, you're going to be eaten!"

"Hahaha, me? By that one?" My grandfather laughs.

"Yep. Let's run away."

The young me does her best to pull grandfather's hand. But, his body doesn't budge at all.

"I cannot afford to run away here. You see, grandpa has been asked by the people of the town to kill that one."

"It's impossible! You're going to be eaten!"

"Shea, take a good look at the strength of the yughul. As long as we have our cursed tools, even a big dragon like that is no opponent for us."

The dragon slowly lowers its head towards grandfather, and opens its muzzle widely. The interior is bright red, and filled with dense arrays of fangs. Deep inside its jaw flickers a crimson flame.

"Grandpa!! It's dangerous!"

My grandfather stands in front of the dragon, his big machete at the ready. His huge, black, and yet eerie, machete.

"Shea, this is the power of <Corpse Eater>, a cursed tool of the yughul! Shea, don't look away! Shea!"

—Shea. ...Shea, it's about time for you to get up.

This isn't grandfather's voice. It's much younger and gentler...

"Mmh?"

As I open my eyes, I'm met with the kind face of a man who's worriedly peering into mine.

...Teo.

A flame slowly flickers in front of my eyes. Of course not the one of the dragon, but a far gentler flame. —The fire of a stove.

"Ah, so I fell asleep..."

"Looking at fire somehow calms the mind, doesn't it? I can totally relate."

This place is...the Mauser Village. On the way to our basilisk subjugation, we've accepted a request to kill ground spiders. And right now I'm in front of the stove in the village's communal workshed.

Most of the firewood inside the stove has already burned down, causing the intensity of the fire to wane. A big pot rests on top of the stove. The hot water within has small bubbles rising to the surface.

"Ah, my bad..."

Negligence during a quest is the greatest enemy for any hunter. Usually I've got the habit to sleep shallowly. But, just now my sleep was deep enough for me to see that dream.

"You've been tired, right? It's only understandable. You truly went at it out there, hacking the spiders apart all over."

The village chief, and an elderly woman, who's probably the village chief's wife, are present as well.

"Umm, dear hunter ladies and gentleman, we plan to hold a banquet for you, albeit a modest one. It's a village with little to show, but my wife is going to amaze you with her cooking skills."

Banquet...

The crimson sky outside the window is slowly darkening. The day is about to end without me having even noticed. It looks like I must have slept for quite a while.

"Shea, they're going out of their way for us, so let's accept their kindness here." Teo's face looks somewhat happy.

What an honest guy. I suppose he's simply delighted about being thanked by the villagers for the defeat of the demonic beasts. It's a nostalgic joy I've lost long ago.

"We still haven't finished our work. Please start without us. We'll join once we're done here."

"Oh my, let me help you then. We can't begin without you, hunter ladies and gentleman." The village chief's wife rolls up her sleeves with an amiable smile.

"No...this is my duty."

"Please allow me to assist you."

A kindness that feels somehow embarrassing. Looks full of gratitude at the one who's saved their lives and village. I might have been moved by Teo's frankness. Well, I suppose it won't hurt to rely on them for a bit...

It's not like I'm against working with other people. It's just, I'm not good at it.

"Okay, please do. I plan to put a spider's abdomen into the pot and boil it down."

"Huh? ...Okay..."

"Just outside the shed you'll find a spider without any legs."

"...Umm..."

"That abdomen is crammed with spiderlings. We'll boil them all down in one swoop by putting the belly and all into boiling water."

"A belly...filled with spiderlings...uguuhh!"

"Please bring the spider over, but make sure to hold it at the chest part so as to not agitate the belly. That's right. Now drop it into the boiling water. Alright. Now the lid, since the spiderlings will bustle around. Great! This will allow me to obtain nice curses."

".....Uguuh.....ofuuuh....."



"I've never seen such a depressing party in my entire life! All because of you, Lady Shea."

The banquet finished quickly, and thus we left the village early in the morning without sleeping in, following the road to the mine. For half a day we went as far as we could with the coach, and then switched to mountain climbing.

Currently we're starting to set up camp just before the mine.

"Hmm? Why would it be my fault?"

"You being the cause is pretty obvious! I mean, anyone would get totally unmotivated if they had to boil something so disgusting right before a party!" Elemia briskly prepares the camp while complaining to Shea.

Using a depression in the rock wall, she spans a tarp, thus creating a simple, impromptu roof.

"The granny who was supposed to make the food ended up feeling sick, resulting in the feast merely consisting of nuts, jerky, and dried food!"

A spider belly boiling slowly with a light bubbling on a low flame, and countless spiderlings rampaging within the seething hot water - a sight that killed any will to cook in the village chief's wife. She spent the night in bed, not even attending the banquet.

"By doing it this way, it's possible to have <Corpse Eater> devour powerful, fresh curses. Curses have the lowest durability among all enchantments. Therefore, the freshness of curses plays a big role." While objecting, Shea picks up moderately-sized stones, and builds a simple stove.

Just like Elemia, her movements show that she's fairly used to this.

"Lady Shea, you've completely registered as a dangerous person in their minds. They must be believing that you're working as a hunter for the joy of killing."

"Demonic beasts and people can't coexist. I'm a person, so I kill demonic beasts. However, I won't waste my life. That's the way of the yughul."

"But, still, it felt gross."

"Feelings are unrelated to this." Shea isn't angry, but neither is she proud of it. She states it as a mere fact.

The yughul see their calling in the use of cursed tools. Very likely Shea has been misunderstood, and occasionally even shunned, in the same way, many times over.

"Look, it's not like I've got a particular problem with it. It just causes you to be misunderstood, Lady Shea." Elemia softens her tone a bit, seemingly having sensed that she touched upon a sensitive topic.

"It doesn't matter what people think of me. Elemia, you're also free to think whatever you like. Rather than going on about something like this, we should move on to the next quest. Teo, get ready for the basilisk hunt. Elemia, we'll take care of tonight's dinner preparations."

Dinner preparations - hearing those words, Elemia's long ears twitch.

"Okaay, dinner preparations, it is. I saw some yacuzunorabbits a little while ago. Let's hunt those and use them for a stew. With my bow it'll be possible to catch them in no time. You see, it was correct to take me along."

"Yacuzunorabbits?"

Shea stares at me in surprise, looking as if it's completely unthinkable for anyone to not know about them.

"They're the weakest and most delicious demonic beasts in the borderlands. How quickly you can catch them and how skilfully you can prepare them defines the standard of hunter's cooking. Right, Lady Shea?"

Shea nods lightly at Elemia's explanation.

"There are limits as to how much food hunters can carry with them. Yacuzunos are quite convenient in that regard."

"To be honest, I'm quite confident in my yacuzuno stew. The elven yacuzuno stew differs a bit from

the hume version. Lady Shea, how do you eat them usually?"

"Yacuzunos are best served in the yughul style. Tonight we'll go with yughul style. Let's go."

"Ehh? Elven-style would be much better."

For a change, Shea looks somewhat cheerful. Maybe she likes cooking.

Elemia and Shea split up, one going east and the other west, and began hunting. All I can do is to see them off.



Around the time Elemia and Shea started on their dinner preparations, I headed over to the bank of a nearby streamlet. In front of me stands a simple furnace built by using a Golem Core. Seven spears are lined up in front of the furnace.

The spears are dull black, and possess many protuberances similar to reversed fish hooks at their tips. They're light, sturdy throwing spears which are relatively easy to hold. In short, javelins. They've been made out of...spider legs.

I've planed the spider legs that we've procured locally, fixed their shape, and used the claws as spearheads. Of course it's not done with just fixing their shape. Rather, that's where the real performance of a magic blacksmith starts. Namely, enchanting.

Filling the crucible with a blue salt solution, I add Atolrahz roots and spider body fluids extracted from the spiders' bellies, and heat the mixture. It's an ultramarine liquid that boils vigorously at a much higher temperature than oil. I soak the claw spearheads in the boiling liquid. By doing this, the spearheads become hard and durable, and at the same time they get endowed with extracted magic power.

It's one of the basic techniques of a magic blacksmith, Liquefied Spirit Soaking.

The curses permeate into the spider leg javelins. Once the spearheads glisten with a wet, shiny gloss, I move on to the next step. While using pincers so as to not directly touch the javelins with my hands anymore, I carefully carve the curse's seal into them. It's a holy, noble seal, a hidden four-character seal (Tetragrammaton) of the Korpi family — but inverted.

—Stagnation Impurity Corruption Decay

Receiving the seal, the spearheads' black surface becomes viscous. The spread of this color is important. If any unevenness or scratch enters here, the flow of magic power will be torn apart, causing the enchantment's power to drastically decline. A slight mistake in the work makes for a huge difference — in other words, a difference in skill between magic blacksmiths.

This time it should have worked out well. Anyway, this wraps up the enchanting work for the moment. All that's left is adding a wooden grip to the spears.

I stretch myself after being freed from a long period of work at high danger.

"Good work, Sir Teo! Are you possibly thirsty?" Elemia readily asks after having intently observed my work progress from the side.

"T-Thank you, could I have some water then?"

"Of course, here you go."

"...T-Thanks. So, how's dinner?"

"No problem at all. I properly got us some yacuzuno. A delicious yacuzuno stew should be ready anytime soon now."

"O-Okay."

"What's wrong, Sir Teo?"

I mean, she's switched my nickname from newbie to Sir Teo, so yeah...

"Why are you so polite to me all of a sudden?"

"My archery skills and infatuating speed is the best in elven society. That yesterday instantly made my heart throb!"

"T-Thanks."

With her having changed in such a grand way, it actually feels refreshing instead.

"Come on, tell me, is there anything else you desire? Are your shoulders stiff? I'll massage them. I might look like this, but I do have confidence in my grip as I've been training with the bow. I'll massage your shoulders so thoroughly that they come apart." Elemia goes behind me, and starts to massage my shoulders on her own accord.

Completely contrary to her sweet appearance, she's driven by activism and spirit. She must have gone through quite the hardships. I hear that the elven villages are often set on fire in areas with bad public order. I'm sure, even Elemia's village...

"Hey, don't tear off his shoulders. I still have some use for Teo's shoulders."

Crimson eyes are pinned on Elemia and me. Without me noticing, Shea has drawn close.

Since when has she been standing there...? Well, that's an excellent hunter for you. I haven't noticed her presence or heard her approach.

Still, Shea doesn't appear as if she minds the exchanges between Elemia and me at all. Her eyes have shifted to the row of lined up spears.