

Chapter 5 - Corrode! The Basilisk

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.

"So their legs turned into this, eh...? Creating something so potent, nothing less of you."

After staring at the spearheads fixedly, she energetically scoops up one of them, brings the spearhead, which is filled with powerful curses, close to her eyes, and scrutinizes it from all sides.

"Barehanded! And moreover bringing it so closely to your eyes...!"

It's going to damage her eyes!

"Hmm? What's wrong?"

"Don't be so carefree! You're directly touching a cursed weapon, and are even bringing it close to your eyes!"

"This much is nothing special. Anyway, these look usable." While tightly grasping the spearhead in her right hand, Shea picks up another with her left hand.

She brings both close to her eyes, and checks them with her left and right eye in alternation. I think she's comparing the curse permeation, but...

"You're in danger of losing eyesight in both eyes!" I'm shuddering violently, but Shea is as calm as ever.

"I'm a yughul. We're used to handling curse-based weaponry."

Shea brings one of the spearheads close enough that it looks as if it's going to stab her red eye any moment. It gives me shivers that it could enter her eye by some off-chance, but Shea herself is completely indifferent about it, clasping it with her bare hands... An ordinary person would have received a terrible inflammation on their hands thanks to the curses by now.

Elemia has also drawn back a bit because of Shea's actions.

"Lady Shea, are all yughul like that?"

"Yeah, we get acclimatized to the nature of curses starting early in our childhood. Girls get their "Curse Initiation" at an age of three, and boys at five years old."

"What's up with that custom! That's totally scary!" Elemia completely draws back.

"A girl will process a poisonous snake called Deep Blue Snake with her mother's cursed knife on her third birthday."

"You're saying you also processed that blue snake at an age of three, Lady Shea?"

"The snake isn't blue. It's just called that because people bitten by it turn ultramarine."

"Come on, the more I hear about this, the scarier it gets! In the first place, that mask of yours is also friggin' frightening. Aren't people keeping their distance from you at the guild because you're wearing that thing?"

<Corpse Eater> which is clad in an ominous aura, and the Breaking Bone Mask. Both are definitely odd when it comes to their curses, but the same can be said about their designs. They're clearly nothing I'd want to use on a daily basis.

"It's frightening? I do like it though. It gives me a strong vibe of being a memento of the yughul."

"Memento?" Elemia asks with a puzzled expression.

"Very likely I'm the last survivor."

"I didn't know..." Elemia mumbles while looking awkward.

Come to think of it, the margrave also called her the "Last Yughul." So he wasn't just using a metaphor or such, but meant it at face value.

"The yughul are convenient, and thus everyone died after being put to use on battlefields. But, rather than rehashing such old stories, it's time for food. We were going to put the yacuzunorabbits into the soup, right?" Shea mentions with a tone that she didn't care about deepening this topic.

She briskly walks to the tent set up in a place slightly away from my workplace. My work has been forced into a break for dinner. I resign myself and walk over as well.

In front of the tent stands a simple stove built by piling up stones. A simmering can be heard from the pot as it's situated above flickering fire. Next to the stove lies rabbit meat with the skin peeled off and the head horn being cut apart.

"Lady Shea, you'll prepare the yacuzunorabbits, I'll take care of the veggies. It's going to be a yughul-elf-joint yacuzuno stew."

"What about me?"

"You rest, Teo." While saying this, Shea is skillfully chopping the yacuzunorabbits into chunks at the joints.

Her knife handling is truly remarkable. Without any hesitation at all, she cuts the rabbits into bite-sized chunks of meat at a good pace. On the other hand, Elemia is fairly remarkable as well. She retrieves sweet potatoes, broccoli, and carrots from her food bag, skilfully chops them into smaller pieces, and tosses the result into the pot.

It looks like making yacuzuno stew is truly a normal skill to have for hunters.

"Sir Teo, were you taught blacksmithing techniques from early in your childhood?" Elemia asks while continuing with the cooking preparations.

"Somewhat, yeah. Just the basics. I think it also started for me when I was three years old. At first it was day after day of Outer Attachment."

"Outer Attachment? Is that a magic blacksmith term?" Shea stops her work for a moment, appearing interested in magic blacksmith techniques.

The topic naturally shifts to enchantment techniques.

"Enchantments are split into the two categories Outer Attachment and True Attachment. Outer Attachment refers to enchanting weapons and armors after they were created, True Attachment is about creating weapons and armors out of materials which already got enchanted."

"Hoh, I see."

"Outer Attachment is cheap and relatively simple on the technical side, but the enchantments won't last long, and they also damage the items. In reality, you'd use it on disposable items. Magic blacksmiths, who are called enchanterers or field smiths in your circle, mostly use this style of enchanting."

"Hmm..."

"And I'm a cortege blacksmith, so I follow the idea of using True Attachment. It requires high-level magic materials, time, and it's technically quite challenging, but it lasts long, and possesses a huge margin in being a lot more powerful. Personally I'd always recommend True Attachment weapons."

"I have <Corpse Eater>."

"Well...that one's also a kind of True Attachment weapon. The kind that would get messed up if you fiddle with it, though. Anyway...I'm slightly baffled, seeing how most of the items in the borderlands had their enchantments attached after production."

"Isn't that because weapons and armors with a True Attachment are expensive to begin with? Hunting demonic beasts is kinda pointless if you go in the red all the time."

Elemia throws the rabbit meat she received from Shea into the pot.

Sure... As a craftsman I'm weak when it comes to economic matters.

"Hmm, Outer Attachment has limits in the enchantment power it can put out. Besides, if you consider it long-term, even economically..."

"In the end it's just for people who can spend time and money on it, right? The number of people, who'd be able to stay safe long enough to come to appreciate it, is low as well." Elemia retorts bluntly. "By the way, Sir Teo, is it possible to use anything for an enchantment with Outer Attachment?"

"Basically you can use it to enchant anything. But, you need to watch out for affinities such as endurance level."

"Even a simple wood stick?"

"If I feel like it."

If it comes to the question of whether it's possible to enchant the branches of the trees around here, the answer would be yes, but there's not much point in doing it since the material wouldn't endure

the offensive ability after the enchantment, and break apart after a single use.

"It'd work with this as well?" Shea smiles impishly, and passes me a certain object.

That, which looks like a small green tree, is one whole broccoli stump. It has an impressive size of being almost as big as Elemia's face. Its delicious-looking, green tuft spreads out, and the stalk feels solid and unexpectedly easy to grab.

It's not like I ever enchanted a broccoli, but it should be possible.

"Outer enchantment coats the weapon's surface with the magic material, and affixes it with a seal..."

I thoroughly mix Napta oil and the phosphorus powder of Morphos with a finger in the wood bowl used for salad, and soak the broccoli in the solution. Given that the bowl's shallow, I turn the broccoli around in the solution, making it properly permeate into the broccoli's tuft. Next I'm going to embed a prayer seal through runes into the broccoli, now plentifully soaked with fire elements, and enchant it.

The placement of the seal wording and its precision is where I can show my skill. The standard prayer of Fire Spirit Praise and Encouragement is a four-character seal extolling the fire spirit (Salamander) and a command to manifest the power sleeping within. Even with this standard enchantment, the skill of the person applying it largely influences the power it can later exhibit.

—Enchant Fire

The seal driven into the broccoli's stalk demonstrates its effect with the broccoli releasing a faint, red gleam.

"Here, Shea. It's done as far as it goes."

"Hoh, this is!" Shea hoists the broccoli she received from me above her head, and swings it down.

A belt of fire is created as if tracing the broccoli's trajectory.



"A broccoli with the fire attribute, huh? Fufufu." Shea squeals in joy while brandishing the broccoli many times over.

Her laughter goes so far that I can confidently say that it's the first time for me to see her like this. The part about it being an enchanted broccoli seems to play the main part here for Shea.

"Haah!" Shea jumps up high into the air while holding the broccoli up. She rotates once in the air, and swings the broccoli down at a fallen tree. The instant the broccoli comes in contact with the tree, explosive flames blow up, and the tree gets engulfed in a blaze.

"Fufufu, not bad, broccoli! Your destructive power is quite a force to reckon with."

I'll name it Vitamic Mace. For me it's also the first time to apply an outer enchantment to a broccoli, but the efficiency of its enchantment is much higher than anticipated. Maybe the moisture contained in the broccoli had some influence on it.

In that case...

I pick up another broccoli stump, applying the same process to it up to a certain point. Then I add a water enchantment to the fire enchantment. First the broccoli's moisture will be changed into steam by the fire enchantment, and then I'll have this steam scattered in one go by borrowing the power of Undine, the water spirit.

It's a version change from the Vitamic Mace. Now it's a greenish-yellow throwing weapon, Vitamic Grenade.

"Hahaha, this is fun!"

Shea throws the broccoli with the new enchantment. The broccoli flies through the air, drawing a parabola, and hits a big, cow-like rock.

At that moment—

The water enchantment explosively scatters the broccoli steam which got reinforced by the fire enchantment. The composite effect of water and fire enchantments causes a 'rampaging vaporization' (Flarechistic Explosion). The broccoli bursts open while being well-done.

Alongside an aroma whetting one's appetite, a huge crack is visible on the rock.

"Look Elemia, it's become a proper weapon! Magic blacksmiths create interesting things!"

"Sure, it's a wonderful enchantment technique, but..." Anger gradually colors Elemia's face. "The broccoli that was supposed to go into the soup is all gone now! Broccoli is a must-have in any elven soup!"

Over here we've got an explosion as well - Elemia bursting into rage with a bright red face.

".....You can still eat it." Shea picks up the scattered broccoli pieces and tries to put them into the pot.

"Of course you can't!" Elemia slaps the back of Shea's hand away.

"Really? You can eat it, can't you?"

For some reason Shea looks my way, asking for approval.

To be honest, it's the first time that I've experienced enchanting broccoli, so I naturally don't know whether it's edible. Even my knowledge as a magic blacksmith doesn't hold an answer to that question.

"I don't have a clue, but wouldn't it be better to stop?" I have no other choice but to answer like that.

"Anyway, no elf would make a soup without broccoli. From here on out, you'll be in charge of cooking, Lady Shea."

Elemia has become completely mopey. She jerks her face in the other direction, and stops all cooking preparations. In any case, it looks like this is a red line for elves.

"Don't be such a pain over just some broccoli."

Taking over, Shea somehow manages to finish the soup while showing her usual skillfulness.

"Huh? It appears to be unexpectedly well done."

"What's with the unexpected. Yughul women are good at cooking. Immune against curses, and a good wife and mother - that's a yughul girl for you." Shea pouts at Elemia's comment.

"I-I see..."

"Also, I'll properly wash my hands, so you do the same."

No one has actually doubted that part, though. On the other hand, she touched the spearhead with bare hands earlier, so I'd be delighted if she could wash her hands.

After making sure that all of us had washed their hands properly, we ate the yacuzuno stew to sate our hunger. It easily turns into solid proof for Shea being truly good at cooking. It has a slightly salty taste, and a strange aroma. For me as someone who lived in the capital it's an unfamiliar taste, but it has a deliciousness that triggers the desire in you to eat more of it. I'm pretty sure the mixture of spices and herbs must be perfect.

"How is it, Teo? Do you like it?"

"Yep, it's great."

"I'm glad to hear that. I thought that it might not suit the taste of a city dweller, but I guess it worked out one way or another."

Shea loosens her mouth after sighing in relief, apparently having a load taken off her mind. It looks like she's been surprisingly worried about the taste of the soup, showing a cuteness that doesn't quite

fit her image as Black Dog Huntress.

"Well, I can reassure you that it's delicious without any flattery. It has a unique bitterness, but this might become addictive."

"Elves have tongues that are more sensitive than those of humes, so they are particular about taste, but...I think this could also become popular among elves."

Somehow it's an evaluation with a slightly condescending attitude, but Elemia seems to like it quite a bit. While dipping the bread in the soup, she spoons it with quite a verve.

Seeing her state, I also keep going with my soup.

"Leaving aside the soup, Teo, how's life going for you over here? How painful is it for you? So much that you want to die?"

Seemingly having relaxed a bit, Shea brings up this topic, apparently being worried about my well-being. ...But then again, she assumes that it's painful for me as an underlying principle.

"No, it's surprisingly okay."

"You don't need to act tough, you know?"

"She's right, Sir Teo. After all, this here is the worst workplace on the continent." Elemia nods repeatedly.

She's saying it as though it's already at the level of common sense, but...

"No, I'm telling you the truth. If I had to choose, I'd rather say that it's fun."

"Haah!? You serious?" Elemia looks as if she's going to drop her spoon any moment.

"Yesterday we were happily thanked by the village people after exterminating the spiders... Even the matter with the wyverns should have decreased the number of kidnapped children. Being able to save others with the things I created feels nice."

From an early age, I had implementation techniques for enchanted weapons as a cortege blacksmith driven into me. However, it all had the aim for me to offer my creations to the royal family. Just like the name cortege suggests, it was completely unrelated to practical use. Thus I'm definitely happy for my weapons to be used to help others.

Besides...

"In the end, it feels awesome for my weapons to overwhelm demonic beasts."

Those are my true feelings without any pretense. I'm someone creating arms, after all. Whenever I look at the power exhibited by the items I created myself, I feel a joy as if a shiver runs down my spine.

"It's good to be honest." Shea looks like she understands my confession.

"So, what about you, Shea? Why are you doing work like this?"

"To ask something like that of Lady Shea..."

Judging from Elemia's reaction, Shea is a super famous hunter. It might be weird for me to ask her for her reasons to do this work at this point in time.

"Yughul use cursed tools, fight, and die. That's what is expected of us."

"Even if that applies to the yughul as a whole, I think it should be possible for you to live normally."

There are many ways to lead your life without doing such a dangerous job. All the more if she's become the last yughul as a result of such a lifestyle.

"Don't misunderstand. It's not like I'm doing this while hating it. I like this way of life quite a bit. I'm also together with you, Teo. Besides..." Shea fixedly stares at her own bowl. She seems to ponder whether she should speak any further than this. She scoops up a spoonful of soup, and after eating that, she continues her words with a calm, dignified voice that makes you feel the strong will behind it, "Besides.....I made a vow to subjugate a certain beast."

Elemia latches on those words. She leans forward, and asks with fierily gleaming eyes, "A prey you've always been targeting...it makes me super curious! So, what's the target? I'd like to go with you."

"I can't tell you. Yughul will never tell anyone but their family about their vows to kill." She completely shuts out Elemia whose eyes are sparkling in keen curiosity.

"Eehhh! You meanie!"

"It's got nothing to do with being mean. If you loosely talk about your feelings, they'll lose weight. And if your feelings become light, your desires won't come true. That's why talking about it is limited to only those dear to you. Oaths of certain death are marriage tools, is being said among yughul."

"Marriage tools? I totally don't get it. Yughul are scary!"

"It's okay for you to be scared. In short, I won't tell anyone, and I won't allow anyone to follow me."

"I'll definitely come along! Western elves are famous for their tenaciousness."

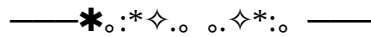
"『Forcing negotiations with a yughul endangers your health on the next day』 Don't you know this proverb?"

"As if I'd know anything like that! In reverse, Lady Shea, do you know the proverb: 『The longer the ears of western elves, the worse their hearing ability』?"

"Never heard of it."

"That's because I created it just now! But, anyway, it's wrong to be so coldhearted to an elf who's so devoted to you. I'm telling you, I'll definitely tag along!"

Even afterwards, the exchange between taking along or not continued. While watching those two arguing vehemently, I strongly felt that such a daily life wasn't bad at all.



Early on the next morning we head out to finally hunt the basilisk. Taking only the most necessary equipment with us, we're going to walk up the mountain all the way to the mine's entrance.

On the way Shea gathers some grasses and flowers she found.

"What are those, Lady Shea?"

"Chrysanthemum. Elemia, you gather them, too."

Grasses that can be used for medicines, and conversely, grasses that can be turned into poison. The yughul apparently possess a bountiful knowledge about plants.

After climbing for half a day, the vegetation around us has decreased and changed into a rugged, rock face. For a while we advance along the mountain path which seems to scale a rock, just to arrive at the Gilshoot Mine.

A square hole supported by a wooden framework; that's the entrance into the mine, but right now not a single person can be seen around here. The mine has stopped working. All that's left are abandoned wheelbarrows and pickaxes, as well as the humans who had used those and are now hollowly looking up at the sky, as the skeletons they've become. All survivors have already evacuated the area, yielding this place to the reign of a basilisk.

With Shea in the lead, we enter through the mine tunnel into a ravine with a somewhat steep, descending cliff.

"This should be the place." Shea's eyes are directed at a crack in the rock wall ahead of us.

It leads into a huge, triangle cave, formed as if rocks had been piled up on each other. Unlike the dry, bare rock in the surroundings, the rock here is overgrown with moss and undergrowth, probably because water is seeping in somewhere. The wind blowing out from the cave feels chilly. It seems to be more than spacious enough as a residence for big basilisk.

"We're going to smoke it out. That's why I gathered chrysanthemums earlier. If you burn them together with mugwort, it'll produce a unique smoke. It's something us yughul call "Snake Smoker." Shea adds mugwort to the chrysanthemum, and ties a rope around them

I suppose Shea had this part of the plan already worked out on the way to the mine.

A ball of chrysanthemum and mugwort is finished in no time. As white flowers are visible here and there, it looks kinda cute.

"It's going to come out right away. Elemia, Teo, take some distance and get ready for combat." With those words, Shea sets the "Snake Smoker" on fire and throws it into the crack in the rock.

A thick smoke and a peculiar stench billows out through the crack. I dare say the inside of the cave is teeming with it by now.

Readying one of the javelins I made yesterday, Shea concentrates her eyes on the cave's interior. I stab the remaining javelins into the ground, and withdraw behind them.

After a short while of waiting, we can hear heavy lumbering. Rhythmical vibrations begin to reverberate through the cave. And those vibrations gradually gain in intensity.

—KYAAAAAAAAAAAAA!

A powerful, shrill noise as if the air has been torn apart. Suddenly a bright red cockscomb and a gigantic beak break out through the smoke.

No doubt, it's a basilisk!

The basilisk's eyes are dyed in a cloudy dark red out of anger over having been smoked out of its den. The huge bird, which possesses a serpent-like tail, thrusts its beak at Shea. The beak very quickly comes down at her, many times over. It continuously gouges out the ground with a sound as if a hammer is quickly hitting an anvil.

Even the slightest graze by the beak will lead to death thanks to its lethal poison, but...it'd need to hit Shea for that to happen.

Shea drives the javelin very deeply into the neck of the basilisk just as it's about to raise its head after gouging out the ground for the umpteenth time.

—GYAAAAAAAAA!?

The curse, which I used a lot of effort to embed, activates. Flowing through its blood veins, it spreads across its whole body, causing its speed to drop.

At once Shea comes back to me to pick up another javelin.

"The curse has kicked in quickly. It looks like this will work out well." That's all she says to me after lightly lifting her mask, and then she pulls out one of the javelins.

A black mist coiled itself around Shea the instant she grabbed the handle of the javelin made out of the big spider's fourth limb. Strong curses are currently covering her right arm. The curse doesn't only activate against its target, but also its owner - without mercy. It penetrates into her body through tiny openings on her skin, making her blood vessels shrink.

Without the slightest hint of her caring about this, Shea pulls out another javelin with her left hand.

Now darkish curses cover both her arms. Any normal person would be unable to lift their elbow at this point.

But, Shea nimbly shoulders the javelins, and gives it a running start. Then, she throws the jet-black javelins at the thrashing basilisk. First one, and then after changing her hold, the other one. One javelin deeply stabs into the basilisk's right leg, the other into its broad back.

Three javelins. Had they been without enchantment, they'd register as scratches for a basilisk. But, all of them have been filled with curses by me. The curses should circulate through its body, gradually causing it to feel sluggish.

"Honestly, my turn won't even come with things going like this..." Elemia has put back the arrow, which she had already nocked, into her quiver, only staring at the situation.

Shea's way of fighting is so efficient that it even makes Elemia think that she'd become a bother if she were to assist. Such an overwhelming suppression against a basilisk which is actually an extremely dangerous demonic beast.

The basilisk drags its stabbed right leg along painfully, and then stops walking.

"Teo, Elemia, back off a bit."

Even now that the victor has already been decided, Shea doesn't lower her guard. After having us fall back, she pulls out another javelin, and advances. She readies the weapon, aiming at the basilisk's head. If she hits, it's going to be the finishing blow.

—GAAAAAAOOOO!

As if having realized as much, the basilisk abruptly goes on a rampage. It repeatedly charges while widely brandishing its tail. A final resistance while mustering all of its remaining strength.

But, Shea doesn't get flustered.

"This is the dangerous part during demonic beast hunts." Shea explains, as if teaching Elemia and me.

While evading the basilisk's charges, now even more carefully than before, she throws one javelin, and then the next. She keeps slowly whittling down its remaining stamina.

Being stabbed by a fifth and then a sixth javelin, the basilisk continues losing power. Eventually it lets its thick neck hang.

Shea doesn't miss that moment. After a beautiful jump, she thrusts the finishing javelin into the back of its head.

The basilisk's huge frame trembles once with a start, and then stops moving.

A truly perfect victory. The eerie bird with its lethal poison, which had murdered a few dozen miners, has been defeated from the middle range.

Taking off her sinister Breaking Bone Mask, Shea takes a breath. She looks like the tension has finally left her. It appears she's unhurt, but...

"Are you okay? You're not injured or anything, right?"

"If you get wounded during a basilisk fight, you'd immediately know since your body starts to decay from there." Shea holds out both her arms to me, turning them around so that I can look at the upper and under side.

Next she flings off her cloak, checks her legs, and also shows me that she hasn't any injuries from her thighs down to her calves. Afterwards she stretches the cloth at her chest, checking for wounds around her breasts.

"Teo, please take a look at my nape."

Shea lifts her silver hair, revealing the area from her shoulders to the back of her neck. Since she's wearing rather revealing clothes to begin with, I can fully see her whole back, let alone her nape.



"Teo, you see anything?"

Not a single wound blemishes her smooth, dark brown skin.

"I-It looks like it's...alright."

Shea might be fine, but I took a rather heavy emotional hit. My heart is currently racing.

Ultimately, this is a serious job. It's absolutely wrong to look at her with such eyes.

Yep, I mustn't look at her with such eyes.

I expel my evil thoughts, and properly reconfirm that her skin shows no rotten spots. Still, confirming whether a body is rotten...

"Teo, show me your back, too. The basilisk's poison makes a body decay painlessly. There are times where people rot without knowing about it." She grabs my shoulder and turns me around.

After looking at my collar and peeking at my back, she lightly taps the area from my back down to my butt.

"Alright, you're clean. Elemia, you're up."

Next Elemia goes through the same check with the same result as me.

"W-What a relief..."

For her to feel so relieved after being told that she isn't decaying...

This is an actual hunting site. I had intended to stay very vigilant, but this makes me notice how naive I still am. Being shown a nape isn't the time for derpy grinning. I must be more careful from now on. Every mistake can lead to death.

"Why are you looking as if we're done with the job?" Shea interrupts the recap of my own work.

"Eh!?"

"Don't space out like a moron. We're going to drain the basilisk's blood, remove the beak, and also, not to forget, dismantle the gizzard." Shea says in a tone as if telling me, "You know what I mean as a blacksmith, right?"

"...So it comes down to this, as expected, huh?"

It's definitely true that a basilisk's beak serves as great material for cursed tools. And the same can be said for the blood that seems to be boiling with poison.

"First, the beak. Be careful to not cut your skin. It's going to rot."

Shea walks up to the corpse, and stabs <Corpse Eater> into the root of its beak. The big machete

digs through the basilisk's body.

—GAAAAAA!

Suddenly the basilisk comes back to life!

It doesn't have the power to raise its body, but its thick neck is still twitching repeatedly.

"Nnh! It's still alive, huh...? That's perfect!" While strangling the basilisk's neck from behind with an arm, Shea furiously stabs <Corpse Eater> between head and beak, over and over again. "Ah, it's a waste of blood. Elemia, bring a wood bucket."

"Huh...? Sure." Elemia obeys Shea's instruction, despite having drawn back from this cruel scene.

"Teo, you too. Gouge out this place here with your knife."

"O-Okay."

"Stab the blade forcefully and in one go. Right, that's good. Put more strength into it. Twist it around."

With the basilisk being gouged out of the face, it starts to slowly dangle. The pink, brain-like mass beyond the hole left behind by the beak...gives off an indescribable stench each time Shea pries and overturns a javelin into it.

"Fueeeh, hooou, noeeeh!" A weird voice escapes Elemia's lips.

"What's wrong?"

"What's wrong, you ask... Lady Shea, aren't you rather way too calm about this, noeeeh..."

"Hmm? About what?"

"Nothing...whoa, how disgusting...ngooh..."

"Gouge it out from the left side next. It's one final push now. Once we're done with this, we're going to take a lunch break." The silver-haired beauty continues to drill through the basilisk's face without a single change on her expression.

Changing the viewpoint, you could think of her as a hardworking, good-natured girl...

—Immune against curses, and a good wife and mother - that's a yughul girl for you.

...but, I cannot help feeling hesitant about the idea of taking her as a wife.