

Chapter 8: Destroy! The Undead Dragon

One month later, Shea, Elemia, Nao and me had taken on another two quests as a party - a Squonk subjugation with a difficulty level of C and a B-Rank quest to investigate and capture a Peryton variant - and easily succeeded thanks to the skills of our members and us having gotten used to it.

Rather, we've become so good that those requests don't even qualify for a special mention, allowing me to get a bit of confidence as well.

On the other hand, Shea seemed to be more interested in the investigation report of the trolls than the two quests we did.

"What happened to the follow-up investigation?" She questions Ms. Sarah after reporting the completion of the quests.

"There's been no news as of yet. The guild has dispatched new hunters and a tracker to investigate in detail, though."

"I see. Please tell me as soon as you learn why the trolls left their nesting place, and where they've gone to. ...Though it'd be great if you could find out within ten days." Saying just that, Shea takes Nao with her, and heads over to the quest board to search for a new quest.

—Ten more days.

That number holds more meaning to me than Shea. Yep, it's the remaining period of time on my contract as field smith.

"Oh, I just recently heard that you're going to head back to the capital soon, Mr. Teo." Ms. Sarah addresses me who's been left behind at the reception.

"Well, it was a contract with a fixed time period to begin with."

Ten days left, or in short, eighty days have already passed since I came to this place.

—Somehow I managed to survive.

That strong feeling occupies my whole mind. But, it looks like Ms. Sarah seems to believe that I've had an easy time...

"It's truly regrettable. Mr. Teo, you're totally suited to the life over here, and you also have the necessary talent."

She's been frequently acting like she regrets it in an exaggerated manner.

"No, no, talent goes too far... I just did my utmost to somehow not die."

"You definitely have it, talent. Aren't people calling out to you often these days?"

"No, not at all. It's a rare occurrence. Just by chance, every once in a blue moon."

Certainly, hunters have started to chat me up about requests for blacksmithing.

"No need to be so humble 'bout it. You're famous for being a newcomer who garners lots of attention. The "Cortege Blacksmith Dropout One-Man-Arsenal" is linked to your name Teo Korpi."

"What the hell is that nickname!?"

"Oh my, you didn't know? You've been finally given a nickname as well. The Last Yughul, Black Dog Huntress Shea, Morning Mist Shooter Elemia, and Cortege Blacksmith Dropout One-Man-Arsenal Teo."

"Ugh! What's up with that, please stop it."

It's exquisitely long and cringey. Moreover, who's a Cortege Blacksmith Dropout!? I haven't given up on it yet! I'm an active cortege blacksmith.

"Anyway, Mr. Teo, you're in the center of attention. You're going to be in great demand from now on as well, so you should remain here for a bit longer."

"No, I've got my own plans. Besides, you're just exaggerating. It's not like I'm being calle..."

"Yo, are you the Cortege Blacksmith Dropout One-Man-Arsenal?" A brawny hunter calls out to me as if having timed it - a man with an age of around thirty who carries a huge ax on his back.

He looks short and stout, but it's not that he's simply fat. Rather, you could say there's some fat on his well-trained muscles. Moreover, he got a beard reaching down to his chest. Maybe he's got dwarf blood in him.

"Umm, do you need something from me?"

"Nothing in particular. Just now it sounded as if you were talking about it. I've heard you can beat it quite well." The man gestures the hitting of steel with a hammer.

In other words, he's praising my field smithing.

"Thank you very much."

"Could you help me out next time as well?"

"T-Thanks...when I have the chance to do so."

"Sure. I'll rely on you. I'm basically using an ax, but you see, right now, this..."

—When I have the chance.

That's the absolute ruler when it comes to the world of diplomatic words. But, Mr. Beard-Ax doesn't withdraw, and instead keeps yapping about how great he is as a hunter and how picky he is towards

the weapons he uses. I'm grateful for his trust in me, but I'm fully set on going back to the capital. To be honest, it's slightly annoying for me to be in the center of attention.

Mr. Beard-Ax keeps talking for the sake of talking without having the slightest clue about my current emotions.

"Please take it into consideration for me."

Finally he's gone...

But, that wasn't the end of it.

"Umm, you're Mr. Teo, aren't you?"

"Yeah..."

I don't remember having seen that girl before. Ash brown hair. She uses jamadhars as weapons, one handed swords for thrusting, as visible from the two hanging at her waist. A dual-wielding jamadhar user...and rugged equipment that doesn't suit her small build.

"You have been very successful most recently."

"Oh, thanks."

The girl walks up to me with her jamadhar clattering as she speaks. Her getting closer to me than I've assumed makes me somewhat confused. This is a distance you'd use when dealing with a very close friend...

"Umm, you see, I have these jamadhars, and I was wondering whether you could take a quick peek at them? I mean, just to tell me how I should go about it if I plan to strengthen them." She hands me one of her jamadhars, and edges her body even closer to mine.

"Ermm... They're quite big. Making them any bigger would make it difficult to handle them. Also, even if you were to raise their offensive ability..."

"You're absolutely right. I'm small. Look, I don't even reach up to your shoulder, Mr. Teo. I was wondering whether you could raise their power by enchanting them while keeping them small so that a woman like me, whose boobs are the only part you can call big, can still use them?"

"I-I think it's possible, but..."

"Oh, please let me hear all about it on a later occasion. If you're fine with it, we could also grab something to eat..."

The distance between me and the pushy jamadhar woman is basically zero now. She's so close that her prided boobs are squishing against my arm.

U-Umm, what should I do...?

Should I pretend to not notice how her boobs are pressed against me? Or should I distance myself? Somehow my head's not working well out of nervousness. I've been invited to join a party by brawny men in the past, but this pattern is a first for me. To be honest, it might not be bad to be in the center of attention a bit...

Just when I'm thinking something like that, "Could you move out of the way?" Elemia forces her way through the nonexistence distance between my arm and the boobs glued to it.

"Awww, Mr. Teooo, someone's getting in our way. Please heeelp."

"Haah? What are you? And what's with that sickening sweet voice while carrying jamadhars with you?" Elemia turns an openly displeased look at Ms. PushJama.

"W-What's the problem with that? I just thought that I'd like to get closer to Mr. Teo. I mean, you want to butter up like that as well, right? Oh, you've got no chest, so I guess it's going to be impossible. Soorry."

"I don't do such petty stuff like using my womanly charm, girly! I'll go for it a lot more forcefully and genuinely!"

Hey, that's nothing praiseworthy either!

Still, losing to Elemia's intensity, Ms. PushJama breaks away in low spirits...

"Sir Teo, you as well. Why have you been acting all lovestruck? Are you getting careless because we finished two quests?"

"Not really, look, she was the one..."

"Please be careful, okay? Capable field smiths are in high demand at the guild."

"Really?"

"Of course. If you join up with a decent field smith, you'll be able to go on quests going way beyond what you could handle yourself. The survival rate shoots up as well. That's why everyone wants one in their party, no matter what means they have to use. Something like seduction is one of the oldest tricks in the book. You'll never get a break if you fall for something like that." Elemia explains and glares at Ms. PushJama who's been glancing this way from further away, causing her to jump with a start.

Elemia knits her eyebrows even further, making them look like curved blades, and glares in the opposite direction, causing Mr. Beard-Ax to jump with a start.

That one tried to seduce me as well!? It makes me feel sorry for not having noticed it instead!

"Okay, I'll be careful..."

"Please, take it to heart. It's totally stupid to fawn over such a fake women."

"I haven't really fawned on her or anything, though."

"Sir Teo, if you get deceived by something like that, people will think that I've also approached you with seduction techniques. Please spare me from that, okay?" Elemia glares at Ms. Jamadhar once more.

"No, I doubt anyone would think so since you don't give that impression at all..."

"Haah? That's rude! I'm fairly popular, just so you know!" Elemia suddenly brings her face close to heighten the effectiveness of her glare.

Certainly, she's got great looks and proportions as typical for elves. Probably because of that as well, she appears to be especially popular among the guild's wild ruffians, and I often see how they make a pass at her or tell her some indecent jokes. Each time she kicks the asses of those ruffians, though. Their happy faces as they're being kicked are...

"I suppose you're right... I feel like you're popular among a special type of people."

"Would it be that hard for you to say, 'I'm sure you're popular because you're cute,' at that place? Are you some nit-picker? You're soon going back home, so you could be a bit more tolerant."

True, I'll only be able to experience this chit-chat with Elemia for a little while longer. Of course this also encompasses the days spent with Shea.

"It's hopeless. At last there's no decent quest left anymore. Only stuff like sewer slimes." Shea and Nao return from the quest board.

"Peace is great ~nya."

Contrary to Shea who looks ill humored, Nao is completely happy-go-lucky.

"Don't be stupid. A sudden decrease in demonic beasts is a much more dangerous omen than a sudden increase. Among the yughul it's called "Moonless Sky of Beasts" and even triggered our clan to move houses.

"Ahaha, what a weird fooshoo ~nya."

"Humph, you'll understand once the report of the investigation comes in. Teo, Elemia, we're done here for today."

"Huh? We won't get any quests ~nya?"

"We'll wait for a slightly better quest to become available. It'll become Teo's last quest, so we have to pick something fairly hard."

"Whoa, wait a sec! I'm fine with safety first. If you like, I'll even welcome doing the sewer slime quest!"

Even as I complain, there's a me who desires a quest that's a little more worthwhile than sewer

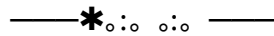
slimes. My daily life here has been tough, but to be honest, it's also been fulfilling. I'm pretty sure that I wouldn't be able to get such a fulfillment out of being a cortege blacksmith at the court.

The arms a king carries are symbols demonstrating his dignity and holiness. But they're never actually wielded.

However, the weapons I'm making here are no such decorations. Their quality decides over the life and death of my friends and me.

I don't plan to call them something as flowery as swords protecting my friends and all humes. My own creations are used to slay demonic beasts which are far stronger and bigger than humes. Superiority and inferiority is being flipped around by the magic weapons created by me. And honestly, the cruel, bloody sceneries they produce make me feel excited.

I wonder whether I've gotten influenced by Shea too much...



Nine days left until I've hit a full hundred days.

"You see, I finally got my hands on what I've promised you."

The place designated for us to meet was my usual workshop. The margrave showed up there while bringing a servant with him. The servant closely follows diagonally behind the margrave, respectfully holding a velvet bundle in his hands.

It's the proper conduct for granting someone a treasured item. He thrusts out both hands straight, without bending his elbows, and offers it reverently to me. His arms are trembling slightly. It seems to be very heavy. But that's only understandable. After all, the bundle contains what the margrave has promised me.

—Mithril Steel.

"If it's someone like me, it's no problem to obtain mithril steel, but I've been slightly picky about the quality. I didn't want to give you mithril steel with a quality that could make you doubt my sincerity as margrave. That's why, this mithril steel is of such a high purity as you'd only find it once or twice per year, if you're lucky..."

"Your Grace, your servant seems to be struggling with the weight."

He's standing at attention while holding out a lump of metal. His hands are clearly shaking. And his arms have now dropped, tilting quite a bit towards the ground, unlike moments ago.

"Ooops! Sorry, sorry, please take it Teo."

"Y-Yes, gladly!"

I receive the mithril steel at a height as if catching it just before it drops to the ground. It has a profound weight.

Once I remove the velvet cloth...a plate shining bluish-white appears. It's a unique color that combines deep blue and silver. And I can faintly see the silhouette of my hands through its transparent body. While being a metal, it also possesses a degree of clearness similar to that of jewels. This is the very definition of rarity, a Grade A mithril steel with no impurities.

"Thank you very much...!"

I go down on one knee, bow my head, and give my formal thanks while holding the plate above my head.

Finally! I've obtained it at long last. With this I'm one step closer to my family's dream.

"No, no, this is nothing so extraordinary that it'd require such gratitude. Having said that, is it your first time to see a plate of pure mithril, Teo? Every once in a while you can find a fake, where inferior mithril got melted down and combined with mercury, circulating on the market, it's easy to tell a fake and the real deal apart. The radiance when being basked in moonlight is completely different, you see. The real one absorbs the moonlight. It's a wonderful sight to behold..."

"Your Grace, excuse me, but it's heavy!"

That's not a story to tell when someone else is holding a metallic plate over their head. I'm about to lose all strength in my hands which will result in the plate dropping on my head. And I cannot afford to die from hitting my head with my reward after having managed to get through all these days of fierce fighting.

"Ah, sorry, sorry. I shall grant this to you."

Following etiquette, those words mean that the mithril steel has been officially awarded to me.

"...I-I shall gladly accept it with my deepest gratitude."

That was close.

Recently I feel like I understand why Shea disregards etiquette when it comes to the margrave...

"Hahaha. Well, I must still say, it's very regrettable. Are you really going back home? Won't you stay a bit longer? If you need a lodging house, you can freely use any you like."

"I appreciate your kind words, but in the end..."

To be honest, I also feel reluctant to leave. It's a place where I can amply exhibit my own abilities. Death is always around the corner, but it's still fulfilling. And the days spent with Shea—

"Well, no helping it. We'll at least hold a farewell party for you. I'll invite Shea and the other party members - an elf, was it? And another beauty. Let's grandly celebrate your departure, Teo. Oh right, I'll also invite the guild's receptionist. Sarah, was her name, wasn't it? I've heard about her. She's a

popular poster girl among the hunters. It'd make you happy, right? Hmm, oh, I see. Teo, you were only interested in Shea, weren't you?"

"No, umm, I...umm, t-thank you very much..."

It troubles me if he suddenly brings up such a topic. Of course I feel a sort of reverence towards Shea, but...

At this point, the margrave doesn't listen to my replies anymore. He's selfishly raving on about his plans like a storm, and after arbitrarily having decided that he'll hold a farewell party for me, he leaves the workshop with satisfaction written all over his face.

—*o:o o:o —