



In other words, the Shadow Tsunami will sweep down the river while swallowing various villages and settlements, just to hit the city once its power has grown.

"What are you going to do if you're not going to attack it ~nya?"

"They'll have the villagers along its path evacuate. The area around here is already lost, so the evacuation will probably start from around here, I'd say." Shea points at the vicinity of Oyred on the map.

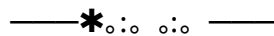
If a village gets attacked by a swarm of undead, its villagers will be integrated as undead. While swallowing villages, the undead will exponentially grow in numbers, and soon turn into a tsunami of death...

"The Shadow Tsunami will stop once it eats up all living beings. Though, that means everyone's going to die." Shea explains dispassionately without any hesitation.

Then again, Shea's simple way of wording might avoid people getting mentally cornered by this grave prospect.

"I think, the margrave is going to officially announce an emergency mobilization order within a few days. All of you, please make sure to participate in the rescue without fail. We're relying on you."

Ms. Sarah bows deeply to each of us while seeing us off. This serious attitude of Ms. Sarah, which isn't like her at all, makes the gravity of the situation even more conspicuous...



After coming back from the guild, I immediately head over to the smithy. The emergency quest due to the Undead Dragon's appearance will undoubtedly be my last job as field smith.

It's probably a good idea to prepare napalm arrowheads, claws of war rats, and augmented barrier bullets in advance. One required item after the other comes to mind.

The work on-site is mostly improvised, so I want to get everything ready I can prepare beforehand.

Oh right, I'll insert 'wave blades' (Serration) into the claws. 'Wave blades' (Serration) can preserve the sharpness of a blade even during times when you can't sharpen it... First, in order to create the claw parts, I'll start with forging steel.

Then—

"You're as diligent as ever, aren't you?" A dignified voice I've grown accustomed to hear nowadays.

Without me noticing, Shea has entered the smithy. Her skin glows bright red as it's illuminated by the fire in the furnace - a gloss as if it's made out of red hot steel.

"Rather than being diligent, I just want to get everything done I can do. I mean, it's one of the six calamities we're talking about, right?"

"The Undead Dragon is definitely one of the six calamities, but it's not like we're going to hunt it. Our mission will be to help the villagers with their evacuation. On the contrary, I'd assess this to be safer than all the other jobs we did together. Teo, you don't need to accompany us on-site. It'll be okay for you to wrap up things ahead of time."

Considering it's Shea, she's saying some soft-hearted stuff.

"But, I'd like to see this through until the very end."

I put down the hammer to rest my hand for a moment.

"Well, it'd be a big help to have you with me." Shea pulls her eyes off me as if she'd have difficulty to speak up otherwise.

Leaving aside her mannerism, it's my first time to hear Shea mention that she needs someone else. Despite her keeping up an attitude where she gives the margrave the cold shoulder.

"Haha, how unusual. I'm happy to hear that you seem to need me a bit."

"Not really...I mean it's not like I've needed you up until now. It's just that I thought it'd be wrong to not voice it out. Besides..."

"Hmm?"

"If we had gotten along too well with each other...I'd have become sad if you died, right?"

"How terrible of you! So you thought I'd die?"

"Obviously I did." Shea declares clearly while being dead serious.

Ah man, it's always the same with her. It feels like she's keeping me at distance with her cold attitude. This merciless realism honed in the borderlands is what Shea is about. Until the very end...she stays true to herself.

"Haha...Shea, I'll come here again if I have some time."

"Sure, come over whenever."

"I enjoyed those hundred days...is nothing I can really say with certainty."

Many gross scenes cross my mind. Just remembering them causes a light nausea.

While watching me, Shea giggles, "Teo, I've got one request."

"What's up?"

"Someday, when you visit again, I'd like you to release the seal on <Corpse Eater>."

"I've told you, that's..."

"I know. It's dangerous."

"The curse is suppressed to a level allowing the sword to be used by humes thanks to that seal. If I were to remove the seal for argument's sake, no hume would be able to touch the sword any longer, so..."

"I got that part as well. An unusable weapon is meaningless. That's why I said at someday. I'll ask you at a time when I mastered that power. And at that time I'd like you to release the seal. It's something only you can do, Teo." With those words, Shea bows deeply towards me.

For Shea to bow her head at someone else...it makes me feel an extraordinary determination from her.

"There's some reason for this, isn't there?"

"Yeah...when I was a child, Corpse Eater still belonged to my grandfather."

Bit by bit, like water dripping down in drops, Shea talks about her childhood memories. The stories about her grandfather which I heard in parts during these hundred days — the days of her having been raised by him since the time she became aware of the things going on around her. It was mostly a life of the two of them living alone together. Her grandfather provided for their life by hunting demonic beasts.

"He wasn't a hunter affiliated with the guild, but elegant-looking humes always visited grandfather, requesting him to subjugate demonic beasts. The margrave was also one of his acquaintances."

"He must have been a very competent man."

"Yeah...no adversary was beyond him. He was so powerful that someone like me can't even hold a candle to him."

"For him to be such a strong man in your eyes... Where's your grandfather now?"

"I'll tell you about this another time. Anyway, back then Corpse Eater was still my grandfather's weapon. And, the Corpse Eater I saw during my childhood...wasn't something like this."

"Meaning?"

"It was completely different. What's hidden beneath that seal...is the mouth of <Corpse Eater>."

"Mouth...so it doesn't simply absorb the curses through its blade, huh."

"That's something like breathing for it. It devours curses with the mouth on its tang, and changes its very appearance. That's the true form of <Corpse Eater>. Me always wearing the fang of the Black Dog is for the sake of feeding it to this guy someday."

The white fang ominously swaying at Shea's collar...so that's the reason why she always carries it around.

"It was my grandfather who sealed his mouth. He had judged that the true form of <Corpse Eater> would be too dangerous for me. ...He did it for the sake of protecting me." Shea clenches her fists in mortification.

"In that case, it's all the more of a reason to not release the seal. Just as your grandfather determined, it'd be too risky."

The mouth of the true sword was sealed by even using a multi-branch rune according to the Curse Dissipation Principle. I can clearly sense the creator's intent from this

"That's why I said, when the time comes. I have to improve my skills a lot more. I'll reach the level of my grandfather and show you that I can handle it, Teo. I'll rely on you at that time." Shea takes my hand and stares directly into my eyes.

Just how should turn her down if she does something like that...?

"I got it. ...But, I have a condition."

"What is it?"

"I'd like you to let me regularly do maintenance on Corpse Eater. At least once a year."

"That's the best I could have asked for, but...why?"

"I mean, if we don't make such a promise, I won't be able to meet you anymore, will I?"

"You can just visit me on your own accord...well, whatever. Okay. It's a promise then."

"It means I'm going to stay your blacksmith for a good while longer. Please take care of me." I laugh, and hold out my hand for a handshake.

However, Shea doesn't comply. She grabs my wrist, suddenly pulls on it, drawing my body towards herself. Just like that, she hugs me and firmly claps my back with both her hands twice. This is—

"Ouucchh!! This must be...if I'm not mistaken, the hug of a rough eagle..."

"It's the yughul way of expressing deep affection."

After stretching herself a bit, she matches up with the height of my shoulders, and strongly claps my back another two times, totaling it to four.

"The first is a wish for sound health, the second for good luck, the third for fame, and the fourth is purely a wish to destroy the shoulder blades."

"Hey, that fourth time...! What kind of custom is that supposed to be!?"

Though I feel like it's only natural for the customs of a minority group of cursed tool users to be queer. At any rate, those were four splendid claps. My shoulder blades are still tingling.

"Oh well, I'll accept the wish for sound health, good luck, and fame. Thanks."

Having become slightly embarrassed, I return to my work. Shea whirls around, and takes several steps, about to leave the smithy...but then stops all of a sudden.

"Is something wrong, Shea?"

"I lied earlier. Let me tell you properly... Normally you only clap thrice during the rough eagle greeting. The fourth time is reserved only for special people."

"What does it mean then? It's not about the destruction of the shoulder blades, right?"

"You clap while praising the other party's strength. The fourth clap is done while embracing respect and affection towards a warrior worthy of entrusting your life to."

"Does that mean you've approved of me then?"

"Don't ask the obvious. Otherwise, I'd left you in the lurch a long time ago. Damn it, don't make me say all these embarrassing things."

"Haha, for me to witness a day where you'd say something like this to me..."

"Well, never mind that. Since it's a rare opportunity, feel free to return the greeting."

Saying so, Shea approaches me once more, and enters my embrace. In short, she's telling me to do the rough eagle greeting as well.

"Got it."

Even while being slightly flustered, I wholeheartedly clap Shea's back. Sound health, good luck, a wish for fame, extolling Shea's strength — and lastly, a prayer for her to stay safe.

