

DOROTHY'S FORBIDDEN GRIMOIRE

Chapter 9: Spoils of War

Night fell over Vulcan Town, and the western woods were steeped in bloodshed. The stench of blood permeated the air as the ambushed attendees of the rendezvous fell one by one, riddled with bullets. The sole survivor, their leader, had sustained multiple gunshot wounds and, in a futile attempt to counterattack, was intercepted by the hunter captain, Gregor, whose short blade was now lodged in the man's mouth.

"Ah... ah..."

The man's bloodshot eyes and grotesque face contorted with rage as he struggled to retaliate against Gregor. Yet Gregor moved faster. With a swift pull and slash of his blade, the man's lower jaw was severed entirely. Blood gushed from his exposed neck as he emitted an unnatural gurgling noise before collapsing, trembling violently.

Watching the man fall, Gregor shook the blood off his blade with a flick and cast a disdainful glance at the still-twitching body. Just as he prepared to

sheath his weapon, a faint disturbance in the nearby bushes caught his attention.

"Who's there?!"

Without hesitation, Gregor hurled his bloodied blade toward the source of the movement. The short sword disappeared into the foliage, but no cry of pain followed.

Did I miss? Or was there nothing there to begin with?

As Gregor pondered this, the man at his feet began to rise. Slowly, unnaturally, he lifted his terrifying face toward Gregor.

The man's lower jaw was gone, leaving a grotesque tongue dangling from the upper palate, and his severed windpipe was disturbingly visible. Blood continued to spurt from his exposed neck vessels, yet he remained alive—or something close to it. Instead of dying, he issued guttural moans and reached a hand toward Gregor's head.

"What the—"

In the split second it took for Gregor to realize the danger, the man lunged. Though Gregor managed to sidestep, the man's hand still caught his face, sending Gregor's iron mask flying.

"Rrrgh!!"

A guttural, inhuman sound erupted from the man's damaged throat as he raised his other hand to strike Gregor's now-exposed face. But at that moment, a thunderous gunshot rang out.

Bang!

The man's mangled head exploded, spraying its contents in every direction, splattering even Gregor. Finally, the man's mutilated body collapsed lifelessly onto the ground, unmoving.

Not far away, a female hunter stood with a smoking rifle, the barrel still trailing faint wisps of smoke.

"You're far too careless, Gregor. Cravers don't die so easily if you don't hit a vital spot."

"Ugh... My bad, Elena," Gregor said, exhaling deeply and glancing distastefully at the gore that had splattered onto him. "I wanted to take him alive for questioning, but I got distracted for just a moment... gave him an opening."

"Distracted?" Elena tilted her head slightly, curious.

"Yeah..." Gregor muttered as he made his way toward the bush where he'd noticed the earlier movement. Pulling the foliage aside, he found only his short sword stuck in the ground and nothing else.

'Was it just my imagination?'

Still unsure, Gregor retrieved his blade, the blood on its edge glinting in the dim light.

Sliding the short sword back into its sheath, Gregor turned to face the hunters scattered throughout the forest and issued his command.

"Clean up the site and prepare to head back to Igwynt."

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At the edge of the western woods outside Vulcan Town, a white-haired girl sat on a stone, her eyes closed in deep thought. Her expression was focused, as if immersed in serious contemplation or meditation.

Suddenly, there was a rustling sound from the woods behind her. Emerging from the dense underbrush was a large black dog, its body scarred and battered. It carried a briefcase firmly in its mouth.

The black dog approached and crouched by the stone. Dorothy, seated atop it, opened her eyes and gracefully leapt down.

"You've done well. Good boy," Dorothy said with a soft smile as she gently stroked the dog's head. The black dog obediently released the briefcase, dropping it at Dorothy's feet.

"Now, rest in peace..."

Gazing at the heavily scarred dog before her, Dorothy touched a ring on her finger and whispered softly. The dog instantly lost all vitality, collapsing lifelessly to the ground.

Indeed, the dog was a corpse puppet under Dorothy's control, originally sourced from Edrick's residence in Vulcan Town.

Earlier that day, Dorothy had located Edrick's house, using keys taken from his body to gain entry. Inside, she discovered an assortment of animal and even human corpses.

It was clear that Edrick, the former owner of the Corpse Marionette Ring, had conducted extensive experiments on it. His home was not only filled with numerous spare corpse marionettes but also contained detailed research notes about the ring's capabilities.

According to the notes, Edrick had stumbled upon the ring at a flea market and, through a series of coincidences, discovered its unique properties. He had since used it for various experiments to test its potential.

Dorothy learned from the notes that the Corpse Marionette Ring could simultaneously control up to two bodies within a three-kilometer radius. If the sensory organs of a controlled corpse remained intact, the controller could share its senses, allowing them to see and hear through the puppet.

Furthermore, the ring provided some degree of preservation for the corpses under its control. As long as the ring frequently influenced the corpse, it could prevent decomposition over long periods.

The black dog before Dorothy was one of Edrick's "collections." She had used it during the recent clash between the mysterious organization and the Serenity Bureau to reap her own benefits.

Yes, since Dorothy had orchestrated this performance, she had no intention of being merely a spectator. She had long set her sights on what she wanted.

The "reward" that the mysterious organization had promised Edrick for his success—a prize that, according to their letter, would allow Edrick to formally step into the so-called "realm of beyond" and qualify to join their ranks.

And now, that reward was within Dorothy's grasp.

However, the gains from this orchestrated chaos went beyond her initial expectations.

Lifting the briefcase, Dorothy's gaze fell on the lifeless body of the black dog. Her attention focused on a wound on the dog's lower back.

Unlike the other scars on its body, this wound was fresh—inflicted just moments ago. The injury was caused by a short sword that had flown into the bushes as the dog escaped.

"Well, it seems you've been doing quite well for yourself these past few years in the city, haven't you, Brother Gregor..." Dorothy murmured with a faint sigh.