The Axe Man

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A surprising way to become proficient with an axe



Of all the members of the Morag Tong I've spoken with, none disturbed me as much as Minas Torik. A quiet and reserved man who never drank, never visited a brothel or even uttered a curse, he was famous for his ability to make people disappear. Once a person was targeted by the Brotherhood and Torik was sent to them, they would simply cease to be. I asked him once what his weapon of choice was, and was equally startled by his answer.

"I only likes to use axes," he said in his typical, quiet voice.

The image of this silent, dour fellow attacking anyone with a weapon as inherently bloody and violent as an axe so frightened and intrigued me that I questioned him about it further. This is an inherently dangerous activity, for assassins are not typically keen to give out their stories. Torik did not mind the questions, though it took some time to get the full story out of him, as naturally shy and reserved as he was.

It seemed that Torik had been orphaned at a very young age and sent to live with his uncle, a saltrice plantation owner in Sheogorad in northern Vvardenfell. The man promised to show his nephew the business and eventually make him a partner when he was old enough. In the meantime, the boy was put to work as his uncle's house servant.

It was a grueling life as the old man was very particular about how things should be done. The boy was first required to give all the floors in the house a thorough scouring, from the attic to the cellar. Whenever the floor was not cleaned to the uncle's satisfaction, which was frequent, Torik was thrashed and forced to begin again.

The boy's second duty was to ring the bell that would bring the laborers into the house. This was done at least four times a day, once for each meal, but if his uncle had any news or additional instructions for the laborers - which he frequently did - the bell

might need to be sounded a dozen times or more. It was a huge iron bell in the tower and the boy quickly discovered that he had to throw his entire body into the motion of pulling the chain in order to have it sound loud enough to bring everyone in from the field. If he was tired and did not pull the backbreaking chain hard enough, his uncle was soon at his side to beat him until he rang the bell loud and clear.

Torik's third task was dusting all the shelves in his uncle's vast library. As deep and old as the shelves were, he was required to work with a long, heavy duster on a rod. The only way that he could reach to the back of the shelves was to hold the duster at his shoulder and then swing it out in a sweeping motion. Again, if the uncle saw any dust left over or felt that the boy was not working as hard as he ought to, the punishment was swift and severe.

After several years, Minas Torik grew into a young man, but his job responsibilities were not increased. His uncle promised to teach him the business, once Torik had demonstrated his mastery of his servile assignments. Divorced from any knowledge of any work other than his own, Torik never knew how badly in debt his uncle was and how poorly the farm's yield was.

In his eighteenth year, Torik was called into the cellar by his uncle. He thought that he had not done a good enough job scouring the floor down there, and was frightened of the beating to come. What he found, however, was his uncle packing his goods into crates.

"I'm leaving Morrowind," he explained. "The business has gone sour, so I thought I'd try my luck running a caravan in Skyrim. I understand there's good money to be made, trading fake Dwemer artifacts to the Nords and Cyrodiils. I wish I could take you with me, my lad, but there won't be much need for scouring, bell pulling, and dusting where I'm going."

"But uncle," said Torik. "I can't read, I knows nothing of the business you promised to teach me. What wills I dos on my own?"

"I'm certain you can find a job in some domestic capacity," shrugged the uncle. "I've done my best with you."

Torik had never stood up to his uncle before, and felt no anger only a sort of coldness

that gripped his heart. Among his uncle's possessions being packed away was an old heavy iron axe, allegedly of Dwemer manufacture. He picked it up in his hands and was surprised to find that it was not much heavier than his dusting rod. In fact, it felt very comfortable as he pulled it over his shoulder and swung it out as he had done so many times before. In this instance, however, he swung it into his uncle's right arm.

The old man screamed with pain and rage, but for some reason, Torik didn't feel frightened anymore. He propped the axe against his other shoulder, and swung it out again. It cut a swath across the old man's chest and he fell to the floor.

Torik hesitated before lifting the axe above his head. It was another natural position for him, like he was ringing a bell. Over and over again, he swung down as if he was calling the laborers in from the field. Except that this time, there was no sound except for a wet thump, and no laborers came in from the field. Of course, his uncle had sent them away hours before.

After a time, there was nothing left of his uncle that couldn't be washed down the cellar drain. The process of cleaning up came easily to Torik as well. Blood scrubbed up much quicker than the usual grime and saltrice flour that littered the cellar floor.

It was well known that Torik's uncle was planning to leave Morrowind, so his disappearance provoked no suspicion. The house and all the belongings were sold to the debt collectors, but Torik took the axe. It seemed that his uncle had given him some worthwhile business skills after all.

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