The Armorer's Challenge

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By

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Three hundred years ago, when Katariah became Empress, the first and only Dunmer to rule all of Tamriel, she faced opposition from the Imperial Council. Even after she convinced them that she would be the best regent to rule the Empire while her husband Pelagius sought treatment for his madness, there was still conflict. In particular from the Duke of Venghetо, Thane Minglumire, who took a particular delight in exposing all of the Empress's lack of practical knowledge.

In this particular instance, Katariah and the Council were discussing the unrest in Black Marsh and the massacre of Imperial troops outside the village of Armanias. The sodden swampland and the sweltering climate, particular in summertide, would endanger the troops if they wore their usual armor.

"I know a very clever armorer," said Katariah, "His name is Hazadir, an Argonian who knows the environments our army will be facing. I knew him in Vivec where he was a slave to the master armorer there, before he moved to the Imperial City as a freedman. We should have him design armor and weaponry for the campaign."

Minglumire gave a short, barking laugh: "She wants a slave to design the armor and weaponry for our troops! Sirollus Saccus is the finest armorer in the Imperial City. Everyone knows that."

After much debate, it was finally decided to have both armorers contend for the commission. The Council also elected two champions of equal power and prowess, Nandor Beraid and Raphalas Eul, to battle using the arms and armaments of the real competitors in the struggle. Whichever champion won, the armorer who supplied him would earn the Imperial commission. It was decided that Beraid would be outfitted by Hazadir, and Eul by Saccus.

The fight was scheduled to commence in seven days.

Sirollus Saccus began work immediately. He would have preferred more time, but he recognized the nature of the test. The situation in Armanias was urgent. The Empire had to select their armorer quickly, and once selected, the preferred armorer had to act swiftly and produce the finest armor and weaponry for the Imperial army in Black Marsh. It wasn't just the best armorer they were looking for. It was the most efficient.

Saccus had only begun steaming the half-inch strips of black virgin oak to bend into bands for the flanges of the armor joints when there was a knock at his door. His assistant Phandius ushered in the visitor. It was a tall reptilian of common markings, a dull, green-fringed hood, bright black eyes, and a dull brown cloak. It was Hazadir, Katariah's preferred armorer.

"I wanted to wish you the best of luck on the -- is that ebony?"

It was indeed. Saccus had bought the finest quality ebony weave available in the Imperial City as soon as he heard of the competition and had begun the process of smelting it. Normally it was a six-month procedure refining the ore, but he hoped that a massive convection oven stoked by white flames born of magicka would shorten the operation to three days. Saccus proudly pointed out the other advancements in his armory. The acidic lime pools to sharpen the blade of the dai-katana to an unimaginable degree of sharpness. The Akaviri forge and tongs he would use to fold the ebony back and forth upon itself. Hazadir laughed.

"Have you been to my armory? It's two tiny smoke-filled rooms. The front is a shop. The back is filled with broken armor, some hammers, and a forge. That's it. That's your competition for the millions of gold pieces in Imperial commission."

"I'm sure the Empress has some reason to trust you to outfit her troops," said Sirollus Saccus, kindly. He had, after all, seen the shop and knew that what Hazadir said was true. It was a pathetic workshop in the slums, fit only for the lowliest of adventurers to get their iron daggers and cuirasses repaired. Saccus had decided to make the best quality regardless of the inferiority of his rival. It was his way and how he became the best armorer in the Imperial City.

Out of kindness, and more than a bit of pride, Saccus showed Hazadir how, by contrast, things should be done in a real professional armory. The Argonian acted as an apprentice to Saccus, helping him refine the ebony ore, and to pound it and fold it when it cooled. Over the next several days, they worked together to create a beautiful dai-katana with an edge honed sharp enough to trim a mosquito's eyebrows, enchanted with flames along its length by one of the Imperial Battlemages, as well as a suit of armor of bound wood, leather, silver, and ebony to resist the winds of Oblivion.

On the day of the battle, Saccus, Hazadir, and Phandius finished polishing the armor and brought in Raphalas Eul for the fitting. Hazadir left only then, realizing that Nandor Beraid would be at his shop shortly to be outfitted.

The two warriors met before the Empress and Imperial Council in the arena, which had been flooded slightly to simulate the swampy conditions of Black Marsh. From the moment Saccus saw Eul in his suit of heavy ebony and blazing dai-katana and Beraid in his collection of dusty, rusted lizard-scales and spear from Hazadir's shop, he knew who would win. And he was right.

The first blow from the dai-katana lodged in Beraid's soft shield, as there was no metal trim to deflect it. Before Eul could pull his sword back, Beraid let go of the now-flaming shield, still stuck on the sword, and poked at the joints of Eul's ebony armor with his spear. Eul finally retrieved his sword from the ruined shield and slashed at Beraid, but his light armor was scaled and angled, and the attacks rolled off into the water, extinguishing the dai-katana's flames. When Beraid struck at Eul's feet, he fell into the churned mud and was unable to move. The Empress, out of mercy, called a victor.

Hazadir received the commission and thanks to his knowledge of Argonian battle tactics and weaponry and how best to combat them, he designed implements of war that brought down the insurrection in Armanias. Katariah won the respect of Council, and even, grudgingly, that of Thane Minglumire. Sirollus Saccus went to Morrowind to learn what Hazadir learned there, and was never heard from again.

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