

~ Day 104 ~

Gazing all around us, we moved into the massive archway framing the jaw-dropping fortification built directly into the wall of the city. As we took in the sights, we passed a series of very heavily armored guards, even more so than those who had been guarding the main entrance to the city. They towered over even the already eight-foot-tall Bob, plus they had stats to match their imposing appearances.

-Appraisal!-

| Appraisal - Krak | | | | | |
|------------------|---------|------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| Information | | Attributes | | Traits, Titles, and Skills | |
| -Name- | "Krak" | STR | 92 | Skills | ??? |
| -Race- | Grogger | VIT | 124 | Traits | 6 |
| -Sex- | Female | AGI | 31 | Titles | ??? |
| -Rank- | D- | DEX | 28 | Resistances | |
| -Level- | 28/50 | INT | ??? | | |
| Health | 899/899 | CHR | ??? | Physical Resistance | 12 |
| Stamina | 726/726 | WILL | ??? | Magical Resistance | 6 |
| Mana | 0/0 | MAG | ??? | Mental Resistance | ??? |

I had initially guessed them trolls, but in fact, I hadn't been far off the mark. Grogger was apparently a common evolution after troll, and they were basically just much larger, stronger, and meaner versions of that. With hearty bodies, insane regeneration, and strength, they were perfect gate guards that could sustain themselves while holding an enemy back.

Trolls, while actually not of the greenskin evolutionary lineage, could be considered a distant cousin as they shared many similarities and it was even possible that in rare occurrences that races of either lineage could switch over to either path.

As we made our way through the massive fortifications, we were suddenly called over by an annoyingly squaky voice that came from a nearby booth to our left.

"The toll is thirty-five rells." The large gremlin said absentmindedly, but the moment he laid eyes on Mia, he turned pale and sputtered. "I-I mean, 20 rells... my lady..."

Smirking, I merely cast a gaze at the harrumphing Mia. Ever since coming to this city, there hadn't been a single monster or entity daring enough to either attempt to scam us or take any actions against us with Mia around.

For each passing day, it just became that much more obvious that Mia's status as a drow was practically enough weight to throw around to even suffocate the minor nobles here in Ebongrave.

One such example had been the imperious little shit-stain that was a young Lycan nobleman that had accosted me and my mount for being in his path in the streets of the third ring. There had been more than enough space on the street for the nobleman and his entourage to merely walk to the side, so it was clear that he had decided to strike up confrontation for another reason entirely.

My money had been on the fact that our massive feline mounts made their little tiger-ish wolf mounts look like pups in comparison, and that must've somehow infuriated the Lycan's pride and arrogance.

I of course paid no heed to the noble, although I would've liked nothing more than ripping his head off his shoulders, but we had been warned more than a few times to not commit crimes in Ebongrave, especially against nobles.

But the clear display of disregard had only egged on the fury of the arrogant Lycan, but just as he was about to take action and escalate the situation, the figure of Mia coming out from a shop to join me on her own mount had completely shut up the nobleman.

Even through the Lycan's thin fur covering his body, you could see that he had turned an entire shade paler and that he was trembling ever so slightly from the unrestrained fear and regret he was now feeling.

We hadn't spared the pitiful nobleman another glance though, merely going on our merry way to the place we were now, the entrance to the Abyss. Although very ominous-sounding, it supposedly was a lot tamer than that - or well... that depended on how deep you went...

Done with the of recruiting extra hands, we needed only to find a way to sway the more experienced workers. But other than that, we essentially just had to wait for the recruitment market to finish with the applications. As such, Mia, Bob, and I had been left without much other to do than just exploring the city.

Although the city itself held endless intrigue and wonder, and I think I could've probably spent months just exploring it, I hated staying unproductive. Especially when I had already had gotten more than enough rest and relaxation in the past few weeks.

But luckily, our guide came with just the right suggestion - to venture into the depths of the Abyss.

The Abyss was an endless network of cave systems beneath the entirety of Ebongrave and stretching far beyond that. In fact, the Abyss was the main reason why Ebongrave had even become as big and powerful as it was.

It was basically a farming paradise for any monster capable enough to brave its depths. Wild monsters and creatures seemed to be in a nigh unlimited supply in the Abyss as they would constantly repopulate any slaughtered area within just a few days. Occasionally, there would even occur monster hordes as the populations of the Abyss would come flooding to the surface, hence the extreme defensive measure that had been erected at each entrance.

The Abyss was apparently also the only thing directly connecting the city to the other two major monster cities in the area as it was simply just that vast.

I at first hadn't actually known that there were two other cities relatively close to Ebongrave, but apparently, there were two other major cities that had regions that all bordered each other. There was Ebongrave of the Ebonwoods, Tar'kath of the Dreadwoods, and lastly, Eldriac of the Elderwoods.

Essentially, the Ebonwoods I had thought nearly endless and expansive, were merely a part of an even bigger forested area. This colossal forest was split into three regions and had one major city for each.

Anyways - after paying the toll to pass through the massive gates of the Abyss, I was immensely thankful for the fact that we had the special privilege of using the restricted entrance.

From what our guide had explained; since the Abyss was such an important place of the city, there were literal swarms of monsters wanting to test their mettle in its depths each day. As such, we would've been extremely hard-pressed to find an opportunity to actually get down there in any reasonable time.

Also, we would've had to contest with many other monsters down there for space, resources, and wild monsters to kill. Plus, things could get pretty messy as there was nothing in the Abyss keeping others in check. That meant that committing murder, robbery, and such were rather common occurrences in the Abyss. However, that was in fact a welcomed thing as you couldn't just be good at fighting wild monsters - you also had to know how to fight against; actual monsters.

But with the privilege of using a restricted entrance, by the grace of my drow woman, we needn't worry about tedious things like that as I had more than enough experience in both departments.

Mia, Bob, and I marveled upon the sight that met our eyes as the gates swung open. In an absolutely huge tunnel, whose ceiling and sides expanded to allow enough space for whole armies to travel through, the Abyss already proved itself as I could see the figures of decrepit little monsters scurrying about.

The Abyss was generally sectioned into layers, the first layers being where the weakest monsters could be found and each successive layer after that would become ever more dangerous.

These were essentially the known layers.

| The Abyss | |
|--------------|-------|
| 1st-layer | F |
| 2nd-layer | F - E |
| 3rd-layer | E+ |
| 4th-layer | D |
| 5th-layer | D+ |
| 6th-layer... | |

Practically no one traveled to the 6th-layer as that was not only there you could find the strongest of the D rank, but there was even the possibility of encountering the calamities that were known as the monsters of the C rank.

There was barely any in the city of Ebongrave that was strong enough to venture into the 6th-layer and come out alive.

Although the Abyss monsters tended to stay on their respective layers, they would occasionally venture up which could prove very dangerous for the unprepared. So even just being on the 5th-layer could prove potentially life-threatening.

But that was essentially the whole point of the Abyss - to sharpen yourself on the life and death whetstone that it was.

I did briefly wonder if the Abyss went deeper than the 6th-layer, but actually, nobody knows how deep it goes, hence the name - The Abyss.

We didn't waste time as our group of four, Bob, Mia, I, and a second different guide specifically meant to make sure we didn't get lost in the Abyss's confusing tunnels and corridor, made our way through the layers.

The restricted entrance did have a mode of transportation that could take us between the 1st and the 3rd layer right from the get-go, but we decided against it since we wanted to explore and figure out the general gist of things here in the Abyss before we sprung headfirst into its depths.

As such, we slaughtered our way through the decrepit gremlin-looking creatures and a host of different large bugs that had made the first layer their home. We even met a couple of groups of civilized monsters, some were nobles, and others were just monsters that had entered from different entrances, but no conflict sparked as the strong auras we had intentionally let loose caused them to recognize our strength.

So as all groups generally gave us wide berths, we quickly made our way through the 1st, the 2nd, and the 3rd layer. The second layer had been one of nocturnal creatures like huge bats and reptilian-like moles as we light-level were practically non-existent.

Being a mage of shadows myself and Mia one of darkness, this pitch darkness meant literally nothing to us as we could see almost as clearly as we could in the day by just circulating mana to our eyes, but Bob and our guide was another story. They needed to use torches to light up the tunnels just see a few feet in front of themselves, but they luckily needn't for long as soon as you stepped into the third layer, the sparse shrubbery of underground glowing vegetation showed itself.

The third-layer was just one big pot of every conceivable insect imaginable that feasted upon each other and the vegetation.

But it was at the fourth layer that things really turned interesting. Not only was the creatures many times stronger than what we had faced before now, but the landscape of the layer was also completely different from the huge tunnels snaking their way through the underground.

Instead of tunnels, the fourth layer sported huge open caverns connected to each other by smaller tunnels. But inside the caverns, the sparse shrubbery of the third layer had completely grown to take over the fourth layer.

From colossal glowing mushrooms drooping into the air to alien flora and fauna, the fourth layer was a mesmerizing sight that you would've never been able to see back home on Earth.

However, we didn't have much time to admire the fourth-layer as the hungry monsters residing here weren't going to patiently wait for us.

While the fourth layer proved much more difficult for our group to handle even though all the creatures were at most at the D- rank, the endless number of them did give us a bit of pressure. That was especially so when you factored in the guide accompanying us was only of E+ rank so he did end up becoming dead weight that we had to keep alive.

However, we couldn't really complain about it as the guide was essential for us if we wanted to get out of the Abyss. Although I didn't worry that if the guide actually died that we would be forever lost in the Abyss since with enough trial and error, we would definitely find our way out, the amount of time we would waste just doing that would cost us days if not weeks.

By now, we had used more than four days just traveling all the way to the fourth layer. We could've brought our mounts with us, but we had been advised against it as the tunnels were quite inhospitable to such creatures, and there were more who were in our group above the initially recommended of four we members we already had, that meant more we had to protect against swarms of creatures to make sure they didn't die.

Sitting in the entrance of a tunnel connecting two caverns, our group was taking a break to rest and eat.

Both Mia, our guide, and I were eating pre-prepared food we had bought before traveling, while Bob was just merrily gorging into the raw corpse of a particularly large and furry creature that reminded me of a mix between an anteater and a boar.

Since Bob could eat literally any corpse to mend his own body with his ability, it wasn't surprising that he preferred raw meat, but that might also just be because of his previous greenskin lineage.

Whilst enjoying our meal, I pulled up prompts from our incursion into the Abyss's depths.

[You have slain 896 different **creatures!**]

[You have been rewarded with 620198 points of EXP]

[**Siphon**]

[You have consumed the blood of 1565 different **creatures**]

[754022 points of EXP has been acquired and stats have been added]

[Congratulations! You've reached level 17-22]

[You've been rewarded with 6 skill points for reaching levels 17-22]

[Skill - **Appraisal** has reached LVL: 14]

[Skill - **Blood, Shadow Magic** has reached LVL: 13]

[Skill - **Ambrosial Senses** has reached LVL: 5-6]

[Skill - **Mana Mending** has reached LVL: 8]

[Skill - **Mana Control** has reached LVL: 9]

[Skill - **Stealth** has reached LVL: 4]

[Skill - **Silent Flying** has reached LVL: 10 - **Skill Advancement!**]

[Skill - **Swift Flight** has reached LVL: 10 - **Skill Advancement!**]

[Skill - **Infusing Slash** has reached LVL: 9-10]

[Skill - **Spell Formation** has reached LVL: 12]

[Skill - **Blood Born** has reached LVL: 8]

[Skill - **Lesser Eldritch Vitality** has reached LVL: 8]

[Skill - **Mana Condensation** has reached LVL: 5]