

~ Day 80 ~

< Xavier Tal'chor >

Walking through the dense undergrowth of the jungle that claimed a great part of the basin, Xavier had his senses on full-guard. After having met with the terrifying beautiful, and strong, bear beastkin woman, he had been instructed to the whereabouts of this great orc mage.

It was still mystifying why and how that beastkin ended up here, and why she had such an odd precocious personality, like she had never really seen civilization, or at least not in her adult years. He wasn't really sure what to make of it.

"Goddammit..." He muttered, his foot getting entangled in a ball of roots for the hundredth time.

Unable to fly because of the thick foliage and canopy of the jungle accompanied with the fact he wanted to stay stealthy, Xavier had to make his way by traveling across massive tree roots that ripped out of the ground, and the huge tree branches that made naturally-formed bridges high in the air.

But other than the ridiculously dense vegetation seemingly always out to hamper his passage, Xavier was marveling at the new sights all around him. This jungle was truly a beauty, no doubt about it.

Taking an already beautiful jungle, then scaling it up to massive proportions and succinctly filling it with alien and magical flora, you ended up with natural wonder that you would never be able to see back home on Earth.

But although Xavier enjoyed the view and the new discoveries of curious beasts, he was on high-alert. By now, he should've already entered the area of the jungle where the mage was hiding.

For some reason, even though Ursa, the monstrous woman she was, had destroyed and demolished his entire tribe, the great orc mage had decided not to escape the basin. Xavier was bewildered by that fact, to say the least. Staying in the home of someone who was out for your life and could easily snuff it out, there must be a reason why someone would risk that.

As such, Xavier was here to find out, and possibly extinguish both the mage's fire magic and life while he was at it.

[Batal Panther has taken 512 damage, a critical hit!]

[LVL: 32 - Batal Panther has been slain!]

[You have been rewarded with 2582 points of EXP]

With a swipe of his hand, Xavier slew the giant black panther that suddenly leaped at him from the shadows in one fell swoop.

Retracting the long claws of sanguine material, he admired his handiwork. Strong, solid, and positively deadly, the claw weapons on Xavier's hands were his new choice of melee weaponry. Since becoming as strong as he had, the beasts and opponents he faced grew continuously larger and sturdy.

That was especially so during their trek into the wastelands' depths.

As such, his small, slightly extendable, sharp nails wouldn't be up to snuff when faced with situations that required a more close-up method of handling them. Finally having taken it upon himself to make a weapon out of **Blood Shaping**, Xavier made the claws strapped securely onto his hands and wrists like gauntlets.

However, these blood-made weapons weren't like any of those he had made previously. As the creator of the weapons and the progenitor of the material used to create them, Xavier could not only hide the weapons within his own body at will, but they were also morphable to a certain extent.

With that, he could, for example, extend the three claws adorning the gauntlets to stretch out and form three long blades that would rip through pretty much anything below a 4th-tier like air. But that wasn't all, because these weapons packed an extra little *punch* than would otherwise meet the eye.

Setting off before other beasts would be drawn to the carcass he had just left, Xavier only off-handedly conjured the blood of the Panther to top off his hunger. The EXP was so negligible from the weak kill nowadays that if not for him being hungry, he probably wouldn't even have thought about taking its blood before leaving.

Since he wasn't able to use his aura to scare away weaker beasts as that would alert his foe to his presence, Xavier had to constantly kill off the opportunistic jungle creatures that saw him as a quick snack. However, it wasn't long before something changed in the surroundings.

Stopping, Xavier tried to figure out why he was getting such an unnerving feeling. Warily looking around, he quickly realized that there wasn't even a single beast in the vicinity. Even though the area and surroundings hadn't changed at all, this place was utterly devoid of the usually dense population of beasts that he had become so familiar with just the short trek through the jungle.

However, the sensation of unease wasn't something that stemmed from having noticed something, but it felt more instinctual. It almost didn't feel completely natural...

Trying to locate the feeling, Xavier let his sense unfold without revealing his aura. And there it was. He could sense threads of magic in the ambient mana of the richly packed jungle. It seemed that some magic was inducing unease and apprehension of any in this area, which would make sense of why no beasts were to be found here.

Deciding to follow one such strand, Xavier found a curious sight.

Carved into one of the huge oaks, a sigil -no, a glyph could be seen. The glyph radiated a subtle, but potent magic aura, clearly the perpetrator of the sense of unease. Xavier immensely wanted to study and prod the glyph further, however, he doubted it would be wise when wanting to stay stealthy.

Who knew? What if tinkering with the glyph would alert whoever put it there?

Leaving the glyph be, Xavier continued onwards, now even more cautious than before.

With his slow and stealthy gait, Xavier pushed through the thick undergrowth of the jungle for another twenty minutes before he finally found something. During his sneak, he had discovered various other glyphs carved onto trees, into rocks, and many other different places. Using them as markers, he moved inwards as they seemed to form a circle around something in the center, and he would bet his money on that what he was looking for would be there.

Stumbling upon a large opening in the usually dense vegetation of the jungle, Xavier was met with a peculiar sight.

In a large pond of the jungle opening, a small island could be seen. However, instead of adhering to the dress code of green and other lush colors that the jungle's vegetation had, the island was a mix of dark and fiery oranges. The color seemed to even seep into the water of the pond around the pond as well, tainting it slightly red and orange.

Although the island itself was eye-catching, it was what sat on top of it that really caught Xavier's attention. Well, it wasn't really a matter of 'what' sat on the island, rather 'who' sat on the island.

With the large and lean figure customary of great orcs, opulent robes that screamed they didn't fit in with the rather wild surroundings, and the intense sense of magic radiating in all directions, it was clear that this was the target that Xavier had been looking for.

The fire mage.

Although the mage was clearly a great orc, he was unlike most other Xavier had seen before. The first thing of notice was the robes he wore. They were many times more lavish than anything had seen a greenskin wear before, its golden and fiery red linings and silky texture screaming wealth and status.

Another thing of note was the hairstyle he had. Again, unlike most other greenskins, this orc had long and jet-black hair that reached his shoulders whereas pretty much all the ones Xavier had seen up until now all just had short tribal hairstyles or were just completely bald.

Then there were the jewels adorning his face, such as golden piercings and earrings, which just boastfully told of how he wasn't like the other and that his status must be shown to any with eyes. All this helped Xavier's theory of where exactly this mysterious and powerful great orc came from.

"He must be of one the large monster-society cities outside the lowlands..." He mumbled to himself.

From Xavier's vantage point, he could barely see what the mage was doing, but he was still confused at the sight. The orc simply sat in a lotus position with closed eyes and his hands resting on his knees.

But he definitely wasn't just resting as Xavier could easily feel the surges searing hot mana that emanated from the mage, and following the streams of his mana, he spotted, in front of the mage, the small figure of an absolutely stunning flower.

Like the island, and the mage himself, the flower was the spitting image of fire, its fiery colors and tantalizing figure had Xavier wanting to just stare at it.

What the hell was that flower?

There was something extremely magical about the flower, and it was only now that Xavier realized the fact that the flower had an even more potent aura than the damned fire mage himself.

This stunned Xavier as the mage was no slouch.

-Appraisal!-

Appraisal - Gramian					
Information		Attributes		Traits, Titles, and Skills	
-Name-	"Gramian"	STR	45	Skills	???
-Race-	Great Orc	VIT	41	Traits	???
-Sex-	Male	AGI	53	Titles	???
-Rank-	D+	DEX	???	Resistances	
-Level-	50/50	INT	???		
Health	421/421	CHR	???	Physical Resistance	???
Stamina	208/230	WILL	???	Magical Resistance	???
Mana	365/822	MAG	???	Mental Resistance	???

His status might be underwhelming at first glance, but remembering he's a mage makes him many times more dangerous. Although his health pool was low and that a well-placed **Rend** infused with a great deal of mana could take out many with that kind of health, things wouldn't be as easy at that.

Like Xavier who's got an unprecedented advantage against this great orc since he's a mage tank, the mage similarly has a naturally very high magical resistance stat. It would be nowhere near as insane as Xavier's but it was still more than enough to severely hamper the effects of his magic.

Staring daggers at the challenge before him, Xavier began making ready for an all-out fight.

Sitting in front of the Flame Lily, Gramian continued to channel his mana into the flower in hopes of hastening its blooming. If he could attain its nectar, he didn't doubt for a second that he would finally be eligible for his next evolution.

For fifteen damn years, he's been stuck at this blasted bottleneck.

If just he could achieve the 5th-tier, then he and his magic would finally become known in Ebongrave. No longer would he have to cower at the disdainful gazes of the lesser nobles, as he would be able to carve his own house into the royal steele.

And who would've guessed, that after a decade of wandering, he would unexpectedly stumble into an **[Arcane Flower]**, and a god's damned **[Flame Lily]** at that!

Perfectly suited for his magic, it would allow him to skyrocket his potential and ascend it into the upper echelons of monster society.

But if not for that damned insane exiled enlightened having slaughtered all his clan's fire mages and made him use his last pouch of **[Minor Flame Essence]** to desperately escape, he would've already gotten the **[Flame Lily]**.

Who could've known such a fucking monster would be using this place as a home?

However, he could glour all that he wanted, it wasn't getting him anywhere. Cursing his own both terrific and terrible luck, he got on with the things at hand. Not *all* was lost yet; there was still the flower, the one thing he had been going to such lengths for.

As Gramian was about to stop channeling his mana to the flower for today as he didn't want to deal with one of the flower's outbursts at low mana, he was about to stand up. But as he stopped the channel, his danger sense flared like a siren going off in his head.

Instantaneously conjuring a wall of fire to his back, he blocked the crimson projectiles hurtling at him. But just as he was about to call out whoever dared to attack him with such

pathetic sneak attack, from the shadows to his side, three obscure blades shot towards him and impaled his shoulder; causing a searing pain to spread throughout his body.

If not for his quick reaction, they would have impaled his head...

"Tsk-" Was all that Gramian heard from the roiling shadows.