

~ Day 91 ~

< Ruela >

Standing on the open plains outside my clan, I scrutinized my opponent. The elf... wait, the *not* an elf... urgh -whatever, he seemed very confident in his ability. Although his aura was more than impressive enough, I couldn't help but feel that his physical strength wasn't all there though.

That could only mean that he either had an abnormally strong aura for his strength - or that he was a mage...

I had yet to actually see this hunk of oh-so-delicious mea... wait, I'm going off track again.. dammit.

I was dispirited to know that I hadn't a chance in taking this man for myself, but I couldn't have everything. The only true goal for me was to achieve the position of warchief.

If his words were true, then it might actually be possible, however, he hadn't earned my trust quite yet. As such, we were standing in the plains, my four champions flanking my rear.

I myself was a D+ ranked monster, while my champions were all D ranks. But I still couldn't understand or wrap my head around this Xavier's power. He presumedly defeated the great orc mage that had taken the basin to the north, but he definitely didn't give off the air of somebody with raw physical power like my own warchief.

He couldn't be anything more than a strong D rank or a weak D+ rank from his aura alone, but facing both me and my champions, he seemed utterly nonchalant.

It just didn't make sense...

"Begin." My second-in-command proclaimed, cutting through the suffocating silence stretching across the plains.

However, before any of my group could even get our charge up to full speed, my heart suddenly palpated under an oppressive and overwhelming magical pressure bearing down on me.

Only mages had such auras...

In front of us, Xavier swished his hand in an arc, and much to my confusion, a host of huge beast corpses suddenly appeared out of thin air to land with thuds on the grassy ground.

The scene was befuddling. Just how had he hidden those corpses?

Looking closer, I realized it had just been the corpse that had been thrown out. Rolling amongst the corpses were four crimson spheres that pulsed with an inundating primal presence that spoke to something... *deep* within me.

But even more disturbingly, torrents of blood started to stream out of the corpse, coalescing on the crimson spheres and quickly taking shape into tall and lanky figures that seemed like out of a nightmare.

Matching my height but lacking any discernable features or bulk, the blood monstrosities were chilling me to the bone. They gave off a presence that couldn't be anything less than D- or D ranks...

Not having stopped our charge, we were met with the blood monsters before we reached Xavier. To my horror, the blood monsters were so fast I barely had time to react before it struck out with its elongated arm that shaped itself into a deadly-looking spike.

Cringing at the ear-splitting noise of its weaponized arm screeching across my broadsword, I parried the strike and leveraged my momentum to cut a long slash against the monster's side. However, contrary to my expectations, no large gash was made by my weapon, rather only a scratch was left across its glossy red body.

I was simply shocked at the monster's durability even though it gave off the presence of a strong D-, as such a slash from my weapon would've easily cut a normal D- monster in half.

Defiant at the result, I activated **Bestial Rage**, a skill I had spent many years taming to my will and perfecting its use. As a deep surge of primal power suffused my body, I felt my muscles swell with potent power and rage, however, I didn't even waver in the face of the skill's attempts to take over my mind and throwing me into an uncontrollable rage .

In a blur of motion, I cut down in an overhead strike directly on top of the blood monster before me. Even though the monster was fast, it was no match to the speed of a great orc duelist at the pinnacle of its evolution. Shearing the monster in half, it fell into pieces. From the damage done to it, red magical mist dispersed into the air.

But before my very eyes and to my astonishment, the two halves slowly liquidated as they struggled to piece themselves back together. Before I could attack the monstrosity again, I suddenly realized that I was surrounded on all sides by the three other blood monsters.

It was first then I realized something very odd. Being so caught up with the strangeness that was this magical monster, I hadn't noticed the fact that I couldn't hear any noises of fighting behind me which was very odd as my champions should've engaged all these blood monsters by now.

And although the monsters were tough and fast, they still weren't quite enough to threaten champions. At most, they should only be able to hold my champions occupied with their overwhelming sturdiness and speed. Casting a glance, my assumptions were made clear as I saw the unconscious forms of my champions laying on the ground.

It was first then I realized I had lost track of Xavier. As if my mind had failed to grasp onto his presence, he had somehow completely evaded my notice and focus, as if he was a specialized stealth user.

Seeing him suddenly appear out of the shadows in front of the encirclement around me, I could only stare wide-eyed.

Duel magics!

Dropping my weapon to my side with the shake of my head, I simply bowed at the waist.

"I concede."

Although we could've definitely continued the fight as I had barely begun to use my skill or powers, it was more than obvious that this was a losing match. The immense power of magic, outfitted with incredibly sturdy magical constructs, and aided by the elusiveness of stealth magic, this fight was unquestionably one-sided.

"Your champions aren't hurt, they should wake before long, but I do hope this display was more than enough to prove my power and intentions." He said, recalling the blood monsters into his body in a maelstrom of blood.

"Thank you," I hesitated. "Is this the power you wish to give me? If so, I accept."

He shook his head, walking closer.

"Yes and no." He replied gently grabbing my wrist which shot tingling sensations of power up my arm. "Boiled down, you could consider the power I displayed was a result of my own potential having been influenced by the power of my blood."

Turning my palm upwards to show the torn tissue which bled slightly from hastily blocking the blood monster's attack from an awkward angle, he pinched his index finger with a sharp nail and dripped a drop of blood onto the wound.

To my shock and awe, a surge of ecstasy shot through the before slightly aching wound, and before my very eyes, the small wound visibly stitched itself together.

"With my blood in your body, you will be able to tap into both its and your latent potential." He explained, smiling with a row of pearly white canines that looked so charming it made even my heart flutter. "But know this, I have absolute power of my blood, which will mean I will have power over you."

He paused, looking into my face of conflicting emotions.

"Would you pay that price?"

A long silent moment stretched out as the many spectators looked on at the scene with bated breath.

Steeling my expression as determination blossomed in my heart, I looked into those alluring crimson eyes of his.

"I do."

Smiling, he bit into his wrist which began flowing freely with glimmering crimson blood. Lowering myself, I gripped his wrist and drank in the divine liquid that made every hair in my body stand on end, sending surges of pleasure throughout my body.

Never had blood tasted so good before, neither had anything for that matter. It felt almost like sacrilege to waste such pure deliciousness, but that didn't stop me from sucking greedily on the wounds. Not in the slightest.

Although I knew I wasn't actually getting instantaneous strength as he explained, I could already feel the blood re-invigorating my body and strengthening my muscles. It was an intoxicating feeling that made me feel like I was on top of the world. I felt Invincible.

Feeling the flow of blood stop as the wound abruptly healed itself, I had to use a moment to re-orientate myself I had both track of time and what I was even doing.

Grinning at me, he patted me on the arm consolingly as if he was used to this.

"Do I... call you Master now...?" I asked hesitantly, a deep blush tinging my cheeks.

He just laughed heartily.

"No need. This is a gift," He said smilingly. "And once you've properly utilized and merged with it, you can decide at that time if you wish to follow me."

Looking to my side, I caught the gaze of Mia and Bob. Mia the outlandish drow was drunkenly hanging off Bob the chief who tried to keep her standing upright so she wouldn't fall face-first down in the grass, but they both gave encouraging smiles.

Sighing with exasperation at the weird and eccentric guests I had let into my clan, I smiled back.

This was a new chapter in my life.

Becoming a warchief was no longer merely a dream, and now I could only blame it on myself for lack of hard work if I didn't achieve it.

"Thank you, Xavier, I will never forget this," I said wholeheartedly before turning to the crowd of clansmen still observing with bated breaths. "From now on, Bob Xavier, and their tribe are sworn allies of the clan!"

Roaring in approval, all were ecstatic at the prospect of allying with Xavier after witnessing his might. Such was the life of a greenskin.

< Xavier Tal'chor >

"Why did you have to drink so much...?" I shook my head with pity in my eyes as Mia was groaning in pain as we rode through the plains.

She was nursing a massive hangover. And even though I had offered to set up camp for a day, she had refused to delay the journey, so we continued onwards.

"It-t tasted so good t-though..." She whined, causing me to chuckle mirthfully.

The capricious drow I originally thought only had two sides, her stern and commanding side, and her shy and bashful side, apparently also had a third side. This one could apparently only be awakened by her drinking absorbent amounts of magically enhanced spirits, causing her to become overly adoring and lustful.

I knew the drow could be feisty at times, but that was only in private. However, with alcohol in her system, all walls were torn down, and if not for me restraining her, she would've jumped my bones right in the open before we could even get to our tent.

After my duel against Ruela, we rested in her clan for the night, although I barely got time to sleep as Mia kept me awake most of the night. Then early in the morning, we said goodbye to five of our orc entourage as they led the laborforce of five thousand strong orcs to the basin on foot.

Ruela had also sent word to Frenn to broach the subject of an alliance, but she was already confident that Frenn would also send help if Ruela herself already had.

After being briefed by Ruela of some things that we had to take caution of while riding through the lowlands, we finally set off. But there was something specific that she mentioned, which she was very adamant about that we had to steer clear of.

It was that the two neighboring warchiefs to Ruela and Frenn's territories were in a heated conflict against each other, both trying to absorb each other into their respective factions.

Because of that, many regions of the lowlands would suddenly have battlefields spring up within a moment's notice as vassal clans challenged each other. It was very important that we didn't intrude, either drawing attention to us or landing a whole lot of trouble by breaking rules.

As such, we rode along the route given to us by Ruela which would lead us to Ebongrave the quickest and steer clear of the conflict as best as possible. But even so, we did get to see one of these battlefields from afar as we rode past it. The massive destruction and death going on were mind-boggling. Seas of green bodies charging at each other. There were hundreds of thousands laying dead, staining the battlefield crimson.

The battlefield made not only my battle lust flare but also my lust for blood as there was a veritable sea of EXP spilling into the ground. However, I, unfortunately, couldn't go about taking the blood since it would not only mean I would intrude on the spoils of war of the victor, but I would also be flagged as a violator of the rules, causing the lowlands to hunt me down.

Something I'd rather avoid.

As such, it took a whole three days before we found what we were looking for. The Ebonwoods. Magical and endless were the only two descriptors that could properly put the scope of the forest into words.

It was an endless expanse of forest that radiated a palpable amount of ambient mana, and inside its core, lay Ebongrave. We were closing in on our journey's goal.