

~ Day 108 ~

The explosion of force that rocketed the surroundings as the Kroxigors' war clubs struck the blood puppets was deafening.

The Kroxigors possessed such strength that it was with an unstoppable force every time they flung their cudgels, but contesting that was the blood puppets who were like indestructible walls which simply caused the aftermath of them clashing blows to effect even the fight between Bob and Mai against the other nobles that was much farther away.

While the two blood puppets assigned to keep the two guards occupied were keeping them in check, the one sent after the lizardman noble wasn't so well off.

The damned noble, while not as purely physically strong as the Kroxigors, possessed immense speed, and not to mention that weapon of his could actually carve furrows into even the blood puppet's insanely durable body.

It was clear that it wouldn't last long in a one on one fight, so I had to do something instead of taking out the guards before I took care of the noble as I had originally intended.

As such, I stealthily approached the nobleman hacking away at my blood construct, waiting for the opportune moment to strike. But the second I saw an opening where a supercharged **Rend** would've surely left him vulnerable, the spell merely fizzled out in the face of his magical wards.

I cursed my shitty luck as this lizardman was essentially a walking magic deflector with all those damnable amulets, rings, and talismans adorning his scaly body. Casting three smaller charges of **Rend**, to test out if the protection was single-use, but to my annoyance, the, of course, weren't.

There wasn't any other way around it - I had to get in close and personal...

The sudden appearance of me beside the noble caught him off-guard, causing him to throw up a hasty parry with his weapon to block the crimson claws darting for his head. The screech of its ragged blades scraping against the tough and durable exterior of my claws was ear-piercing but it barely registered as I was engulfed in the heat of the battle.

In tandem with the hulking blood puppet, we assaulted the lizardman, but even so, I soon came to realize that we were still at a severe disadvantage. Before now, I had yet to pull out any of the noble's skills or trump cards besides his magical protection, so when the small rectangle blades of his weapon started vibrating and humming with an uncanny cadence, it became clearer just how dire a situation we were currently in.

With each succinct slash, block, and parry, the vibrations became stronger, and I finally realized what the weapon was doing. Like Garret the human general, he had a specific skill that made it so that his strike became stronger with each succinct strike. Similarly so here, the lizardman's weapons somehow absorbed the force of any blow, causing the weapon to become increasingly penetrative and piercing.

This effect became quite evident when my blood puppet moved to intercept a retaliating blow, the humming blade of the noble simply shearing its path half-way through the construct's bulky arm, continuing down to meet my body.

[You have taken 23 damage!]

The noble had clearly been confident in his strength and lethality with his weapon, so when he saw that his weapon didn't shear me in half, and merely skittered off my skin, leaving only a shallow scratch, his slitted reptilian eyes opened impossibly wide.

Although this skill of his, maybe some combination of how his weapon worked and some innate skill he had as whatever race he was, had initially shocked me, it was still not enough to make me fret about it - for now.

But it truly never got old seeing others' initial dismissal of my endurance and durability just because I was a mage until they ultimately realize I was anything but frail. The concept of a mage tank always went against their expectations, which was a valuable quality in a fight when you could turn their shock into opportunity.

[Axetl has taken 36 damage!]

Cashing in on the opening caused by the noble's slight of shock, I raked my claws across his chest, scoring inch-deep wounds into the meat of his flesh.

Although the wounds were neither deep nor fatal, eviscerating flesh wasn't the only purpose of my blood claws.

[Axetl has taken 84 damage!]

"GAH!" The sapient reptile gasped, a spurt of blood exiting his wounds as they suddenly worsened.

I grinned ferociously, seeing that my assumptions had been proven correct. Although the amulets and talismans adorning his body protected against any outside magical influence, they were wholly ineffective against those who come from internally.

In a shocking display of speed, he back-pedaled, clutching his chest as blood coated his clawed fingers. The arrogance that had still lingered in his eyes ever since the confronting party was utterly gone, replaced with unadulterated hatred and fury.

"Y-YOU MONGREL, HOW DARE YOU!?" He bellowed, for the first time seeming genuinely incensed. "A COMMONER LIKE YOU NEED TO LEARN YOU DAMNED PLACE - FILTH!"

It was obvious that this lizardman rarely ever got hurt, if ever. The complete shift in his cold and distant demeanor to one of hatred and haughtiness simply displayed his true nature that he had been hiding under the facade of innate superiority.

But to my astonishment, his eyes started burning with unadulterated fury as his body actually began undergoing a transformation.

"I'M GOING TO SHOW YOU THE TRUE POWER OF A NOBLE," He shrieked.
"WITNESS THE HERITAGE OF HOUSE NAHAUL-"

He was suddenly cut off as I used **Blink**, appearing directly before him, claws tearing onto the forearm he hastily pulled up to guard his face.

[Axetl has taken 27 damage!]

[Axetl has taken 42 damage!]

"Y-ARGH!" He bellowed.

I was rocketed back by the force he lashed out, but I landed nimbly a dozen meters away with the conjuration of my shadow wings.

The lizardman seemed beyond offended that I had attacked him before he could finish his sentence - but as if I was going to let him monologue during the middle of a fight.

I was not only fighting for my own life but also the lives of those who were dearest to me. Mia and Bob.

Not letting my onslaught down, I commanded my blood puppet to continue peppering the lizardman down whilst I attacked from the shadows, increasing the intensity as I had no

intention of seeing whatever was going to happen once he did finally complete the transformation.

A couple of hundred meters away the fighters of the other heated battle were still going strong, but it was clear the other two nobles had gotten their own footing, beating back Bob's constant onslaught and Mia's crowd controlling magic.

While Bob was bloodied and wounded, Mia was still unharmed, but she was clearly exhausted from the constant use of mana. She needed not only to control the still five living guards, but she also had to counter the other plant mage so he didn't bog down Bob as the big brute was fighting off the Lycan noble and his overgrown lion-wolf mount.

I was suddenly pulled from my thoughts as an air shuddering roar escaped the maw of the lizardman who had been slowly accruing wounds under me and my blood puppet's flurry of attacks.

In a blur of motion, his macuahuitl shot up with a ringing tempo, to then descend with such force that it split the blood puppets all the way from the top of its head to the base of its chest.

The shocking display of power had caught me completely off-guard as I now stared warily at the hulking-up lizard.

He had finished his transformation...

Almost doubling his previous size, the lizardman noble had become much more primal and dinosaur-looking - almost like the Kroxigors. Enlarged muscles, long and taloned fingers, an extended snout that had a maw lined with razor-sharp teeth, and eyes that somehow had turned even more predatory, the transformation had clearly not only changed his appearance but also given him unquestionable strength.

I doubted it was any normal skill that could do that, so I guessed it must've been a trait relating to his family house and noble lineage, but whatever it was, it had just made him that much more dangerous.

Although I had no real frame of reference, I wasn't so entirely sure that he was just ranked at the D+ rank anymore in his current state.

The now hulk-like lizardman's let loose of the weapon still embedded in the blood puppet's torso. Although such a wound wasn't fatal to it as it was already beginning to stitch itself back together, the lizardman's hands shot up to grasp both sides of the cleaved head. In one fluid moment displaying his insane strength, he tore the entire construct in two...

Even from such an injury, it would still be possible for the construct to re-constitute itself, however, from all the damage it had already taken previously, it no longer had the mana to reform itself so the magic holding it together simply fizzled out.

"I'll tear your fucking skull from your body." He growled predatorily, turning his attention towards me.

"Oh, shit..." I muttered.

Blinking away and disappearing into the shadows, I easily escaped the enraged lizardman charge. I wasn't worried that he would be able to catch me, even in his new transformation since I could also take to the air. And maybe, if I could stay out of his reach for long enough, he might revert to his weaker self if that transformation of his was a time restrained, which I deeply hoped it was.

But as he realized that too, he did something that had my blood run cold. He looked towards not the two other blood puppets still fighting his guards, but the other battle with a savage glint in his slitted eyes. Towards Bob and Mia.

There was nowhere in the seven hells I would ever allow this overgrown lizard turd nugget to lay a finger on those dearest to me, so with the firm resolve deep within my chest, I charged

Like a tidal wave of black inky ghosts, the shadows coalesced all around me as I rapidly closed the distance, the flapping of my shadow wings violently stirring up the air.

Seeing this, the cocky noble smirked arrogantly, clearly having intended to force me to attack. But my charge was a feint. Using **Blink** to flash to his blindspot, letting his claws punch through a mirage of smokey shadows instead of me, I struck down to only meet the parry of the lizardman's weapon.

It was no question that this damned noble was experienced in wielding his weapon, so no mere feint was going to take him down.

From there, an onslaught of attacks, parries, and dodges ensued between us. By now, we had begun to go full out as he scored deep wounds on my body while I continuously racked his body with **Rend** any time I managed to get a successful hit off.

With my inane amount of defense and regenerative ability, I was no easy opponent to try and win in a fight of attrition, but this lizardman seemingly had an endless reservoir of health himself as I chipped away at his pool which each succinct attack.

The fight was turning desperate on my side, both of us realizing that my body wasn't going to last even with all its advantages with his increasingly deadly weapon attacks. But there was one other trick I had yet to be able to use.

Using my shadows to form a bubble around him to dampen his senses and obscure my figure like I had done with Garret the human general, I disappeared from sight. But as he waited for the sneak attacks he was sure was going to come, he became confused as even after a handful of seconds, nothing happened.

That was when his eyes widened. With a thundering roar and charge, he managed to break through the spell of shadows with pure brawn alone as his talismans had already failed to dispel it since it wasn't a spell directly targeting his person. But the moment he got out, his worries were realized.

Standing over the corpse of one of his guards, I was drinking in the sweet and powerful blood of the Kroxigor. With **Blood-Born**, my regenerative abilities got a potent recharge and strength once again started flooding my veins.

"Sorry, but I'll be the one to tear that pretty head of yours off your body." I grinned with a smile of crimson.